‘Our ANZACS’ – PBL Activity Year 7 2015 (Term 1) EVALUATION

This is an overview of the data collected. It is based on feedback from staff, students and parents. This report is divided into two parts:

What did the parents tell us?

Not very much at all. About 60 people visited the school on the showcase day. Of these 55 were related to the students in some way. This does not mean they represented 55 students. Many came as couples or small family groups. However, those that did attend were very positive about the things they saw and the way students were engaged.

Many stuck around for the morning tea and stayed for quite a while discussing the project in a positive way. This event gained some good PR for the school, if nothing else.

The parents of year 7 were asked by an email to respond to four questions:

To make this straightforward I would like you to email me your response to the following four questions.

1. Did you attend the parent showcase?

2. What educational benefits do you think your child got out of completing the project?

3. What concerns/issues do you have about the project?

4. What direction would you like the school to take in planning future PBL type tasks?

Some responses as follows:

1. Did you attend the parent showcase?
   - Yes

2. What educational benefits do you think your child got out of completing the project?
   - team work/organise an event/research a topic/public speaking

3. What concerns/issues do you have about the project?
   - Not all students have the opportunity to speak publicly. Hope more opportunities for more students.

4. What direction would you like the school to take in planning future PBL type tasks?
   - public speaking
     1. Yes
     2. Learning to work in a group, information about WWI
     3. [redacted] seemed to think it dragged too much time away from his ‘regular’ subjects, which he was very keen to study as a new Year 7 student. PBL has a place but maybe too much emphasis was given to it in this instance.

I thought the questions asked should have included the great ambivalent issue in Australian history: by today’s standards how could anyone ever justify the disaster of Gallipoli and the hopeless slaughter of WWI?
4. It might be better to run the projects within individual subjects, instead of cross-curriculum allocating such a big slab of time.

Overall, Tuesday’s presentations were a credit to the school, the students and the organising teachers. The above comments are offered as constructive suggestions.

1. Did you attend the parent showcase? Yes. We were blown away by all the amazing detailed presentations & actually learnt a few things ourselves.

2. What educational benefits do you think your child got out of completing the project? A deeper understanding of the journey that our Anzac’s undertook. Learning to look at something from many different angles to evaluate (the driving question). The importance of Teamwork on big projects like this.

3. What concerns/issues do you have about the project? Nil.
4. What direction would you like the school to take in planning future PBL type tasks? We absolutely love the concept of PBL! Further PBL tasks in the future would be great. In moving forward to the next PBL task the only constructive criticism as "Boarder Parents" would be that we did have to come down to Sydney a few days earlier to end of term pick up date to attend - this may have stopped a few boarder parents from not coming to the presentation?? We were so pleased that we changed our plans & made the effort to attend. Possibly a Year 7 email to parents to keep us posted on what the kids are doing during their PBL task or a section on the school website named “PBL” with photos & general information/progress.

   Thanks you so very much for all your work John - greatly appreciated!

1. I attended the parent showcase
2. Educational benefits are students understand and have more knowledge on wars and how to make a trench.
3. I have no concerns about the project.
4. More creative ideas like this project would be lovely.

**What did the staff tell us?**

All up I received 24 responses. At first, I thought this was a little disappointing, but they were very detailed and told me a lot. Some of the main points are summarised below:

Overall the staff who responded were very positive about the whole project with some suggestions for improvement. These are the main points made:

1. The ANZAC topic of the PBL and the driving questions were seen as a big plus. Engaging open ended and thought provoking. Intriguing was a common word used. The questions were generally seen as encouraging deep thought and provided some surprising and unpredicted results. Some staff felt that the students would have benefitted from a more structured question that gave them a lot more guidance. It was common for the staff who responded to comment that the questions sparked creativity because they were so intriguing. Another typical comment was the allowance for student voice and choice in the driving questions.
Some staff thought that it would have been more manageable if the students all worked on the same driving question so that it was easier for staff who dropped in and out to get a handle on what was going on.

Recommendation:

Continue using open ended, intriguing questions that spark creativity but allow student groups more time to explore the question and give them a structure or scaffold to do this more effectively.

Base the PBL on regular class groupings and the students in a class, while they may be in sub-groups, are all working on the same driving question.

2. Organisation of PBL in the timetable. This is the aspect that attracted a deal of comment and suggestions for improvement. A significant number of staff who responded felt that the PBL would have had a better outcome if one or a small group of staff were on the whole project. They felt that the allocation of staff in the timetable and the random allocation of staff in the afternoon created issues of continuity and adequate supervision and made it difficult to provide adequate guidance.

3. The organisation of PBL in the timetable also raised another issue. Staff had difficulty with the fact that teaching time was inequitable distributed across KLas and classes. Some staff spent time on PBL at the expense of their normal teaching program creating issues with covering content, assessment tasks and reporting. While this was not a big concern in the responses I received, from talking to staff as I went around the traps I know it was something that did concern people.

Recommendation:

In Term 3 the PBL projects are organised on a class basis. While this negates one of the strengths of the ANZACS project i.e. students operating outside normal class groupings, it would make it easier to distribute the time allocated to PBL more equitably through the curriculum cycle. It would also make it easier to allocate PBL periods to those staff who have an expertise/interest in designing and running projects.

I have put together a more detailed plan for term 3 at end of this report.

4. 21st century learning. Creativity, collaboration, complex problem solving and communication (the 4 Cs). It was fairly unanimously reported that the real strength of this project was the delivery of the 4Cs. Teamwork and collaboration received a big tick with quite a few respondents reporting that there were positive spill over into their ‘normal’ teaching of year 7. The buzz created seemed to spread across the day. Staff reported that the PBL model was the best way to teach some of the 21st century skills.

Staff commented that the PBL was a good way to get year 7 working independently on a collaborative task early in their high school years but they needed further opportunities for development.
Recommendation:

Future PBL projects need to ensure that all students are developing these skills not just the leaders in each group who have them already. There needs to be a greater emphasis on the C of communication. This was the one seen as weakest in the PBL. Closer monitoring and a closer alignment of staff to projects more consistently should assist with this.

5. Student resource booklet. Staff reported that the booklet was an excellent resource but was used to varying degrees by students. Staff felt that it was a good starting point.

Recommendation:

Change the student resource to make it more like a learning journal where students reflect on the things they have learned. The resource has probably served its purpose and the students could work with less the next time around.

6. Adequacy of the professional development of staff. Staff were challenged by this there is no doubt. Staff who were involved learned a lot – I know I learned a lot more than the kids – from the kids. However, some staff reported that the development was quite adequate and it’s the type of thing you can only learn by doing anyway.

Recommendation:

Take opportunities to further develop staff skills in PBL by sending cross faculty teams to in servicing and engaging as many new staff as possible in subsequent PBLs so that the experience and joy is spread around. To this end there is a 3 day course on 14-16th June 2015.

7. Further comments. A common comment was the need for structure and planning if PBL is to become a part of what we do. Teachers saw the ANZAC project as a beginning and were asking about future directions and further development. A typical question that arose was “How will this fit into the way we do things?” Staff really saw the ANZACS PBL as a good start. In my opinion we have ploughed a field and built some awareness. What happens next determines whether or not it has been worthwhile.

Recommendation:

A cross faculty PBL team is established that meets regularly to plan and evaluate tasks. This group needs to meet under the direction of a member of the senior executive of the school.

What did the students tell us?

Lots. We have gone through 144 student evaluations including a capstone writing task. There is a lot of information and a lot to report but it is 90% very positive. He students report consistently that they were challenged, frightened, scared, had a lot of fun and want to do it all over again to get it right next time. I have a little power point to show you.
These evaluations are just amazing. In so many ways they are the best things I have read in my teaching career and brought home the value of just asking students to tell you what they know, what they think and what they have learned. AMAZING.