From the practitioners

2: Access, retention & participation – a model of best practice

The Cyril Jackson Senior Campus' Youth Program was established to improve the access, retention and participation of the Swan River District's most alienated students in meaningful education. **Rod Mapstone** *describes how the program does this by offering direct support to students at educational risk, by facilitating off-campus intervention programs, by providing outreach and family interventions and by offering consultative support of the district, its schools and program staff.*

AS PART of its ongoing review of schooling, the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) has released its Plan for Government Schools 1998–2000. Its purpose is to "ensure that all government school students develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve their individual potential and contribute to society" (EDWA 1997).

The plan focuses on six major strategies for implementation: curriculum improvement; students at educational risk; improved learning, teaching and management through technology; strengthening professional excellence; delivery of schooling; and quality assurance.

Strategy two, Students at Educational Risk (SAER), has received particular attention and is the subject of its own initiative called Making the Difference. It recognises that 20% of compulsory school-aged students:

- are "at risk" of not achieving the major learning outcomes of schooling;
- have achievement levels, rates of progress or behaviours noticeably different from their own past performance or that of their peers;
- are under-achieving; or
- are not participating in schooling (EDWA 1998).

The Making the Difference strategy is designed to:

- develop a policy to support SAER, and develop guidelines for its implementation;
- develop guidelines and procedures for teachers to assist in identifying and intervening;
- strengthen accountability processes thus demonstrating SAER needs are being met;
- disseminate good practice and support for the extension of good practice models;
- coordinate services to ensure improved service delivery and provision of appropriate programs; and
- provide professional development.

Swan Education District

The Swan Education District covers an area of 2,370 square kilometres across northern and eastern Perth, providing administrative support and leadership for 113 schools (including 16 secondary schools).

The district has embraced Making the Difference and implemented its own Students at Educational Risk Plan 1998. Its aim is to promote a "shared vision and commitment to a coordinated and collaborative approach to empower schools to significantly improve the educational outcomes of students at risk" (Swan Education District Office 1998).

Students are placed in four categories: mainstream, under-achievers, at risk, and alienated. The alienated students exhibit attitudinal and behavioural difficulties involving a sense of isolation and estrangement. They are known to government departments such as the police and Family and Children Services, and to community-based agencies dealing with such issues as homelessness, domestic violence and street violence. These students have specific problem behaviours such as truancy, offending and substance abuse as well as health and

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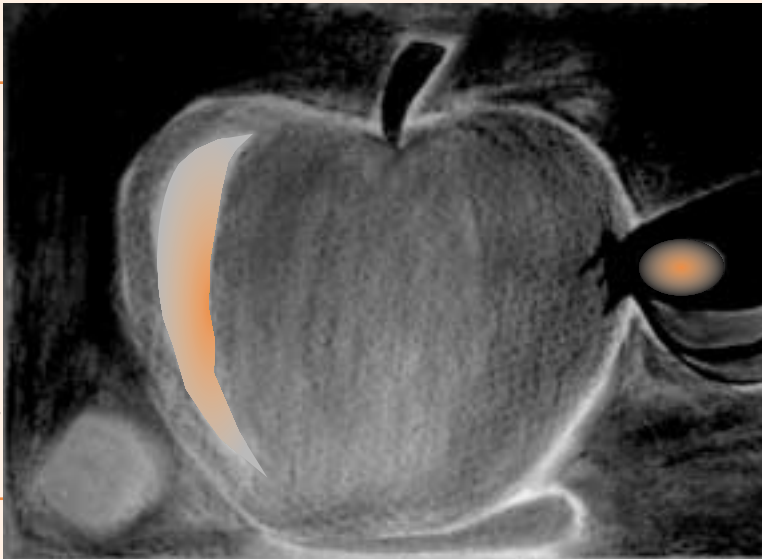
The philosophy of the program is to provide students with opportunities for change by creating a non-threatening, caring and supportive learning environment, and by developing their sense of belonging and encompassing their total well-being.

social problems and are unable to attend mainstream secondary schools.

Cyril Jackson Senior Campus

The Cyril Jackson Senior Campus is an adult college within the Swan Education District catering for post-compulsory students by offering a learning environment especially designed for older students. The campus operates four streams in education: Access and Bridging to achieve WA Certificate of Education, Tertiary Entrance to achieve entry to universities, Education Support for disabled students and Youth Program for alienated students.

Youth Program

The Youth Program is the practical application of the aforementioned strategies and plays an integral part in the Swan Education District's SAER plan. It was established to improve educational access, retention and participation for the Swan Education District's most alienated students.

Three teachers and a team of three support workers (Aboriginal liaison officer, psychologist, youth support worker) are employed to individually case-manage the students. Two classes operate with a maximum of 15 students per class. Enrolment in the program is via an intake committee consisting of Education Department, Family & Children Services and Ministry of Justice personnel.

The philosophy, or mission statement, of the program is to provide students with opportunities for change by creating a non-threatening, caring and supportive learning environment, and by developing their sense of belonging and encompassing their total well-being.

The pupose is to ensure that all students develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve their potential and contribute to society.

Target group

The program targets students deemed "alienated" from their school and community due to attitudinal and/or behavioural difficulties. Typically, alienated students are:

- 14 to 15 years old;
- chronic non-attenders due to truancy, suspension, exclusion or phobia;
- low academic achievers;
- offenders (i.e. convicted);
- substance abusers (solvents, cannabis, amphetamines, IV);
- victims of abuse and neglect (physical, emotional, sexual);
- socially isolated (homeless, from dysfunctional families);
- Ministry of Justice, and Family and Children Services clients; and
- sufferers of health problems (physical, mental).

Aims

The specific aims of the Youth Program are:

1 Increase the target group's access, retention and participation in education, vocation and recreation by:
- increasing attendance;
- improving numeracy and literacy;
- improving social skills;
- improving employment- and training-related skills; and
- improving access to appropriate recreational and leisure options.

2 Improve the target group's access, retention and participation in society by:
- ensuring basic needs are met;
- ensuring emotional, financial and health care needs are met;
- reducing substance abuse; and
- reducing offending.

3 Assist parents/caregivers to develop skills and strategies to:
- successfully relate to their child within the family context; and
- assist their child's transition to independence.

4 Provide professional development within the Swan Education District.

5 Collaborate with government departments and community agencies.

Strategies
The strategies employed by the Youth Program are designed to:

1 Provide meaningful education for SAER through:
- identification of previous academic achievement by diagnostic testing that will identify gaps in learning;
- individual education programs (IEPs) focusing on numeracy and literacy;
- various educational experiences allowing students to demonstrate learning;
- outreach teaching and support to enhance student access to education;
- student directed learning; and
- portable education programs for students unable to attend the campus due to custodial sentences or phobia.

2 Offer direct support for SAER through:
- anger management and conflict resolution skills development;
- social skills training;
- relationship skills development;
- goal setting and decision-making skills development;
- individual behaviour modification programs;
- counselling (formal and informal);
- Health Education programs (e.g. PASH, Drug Awareness); and
- transition/reintegration to mainstream education.

3 Facilitate off-campus intervention programs such as:
- vocational, employment and work-skills training;
- recreational skills development involving community facilities;
- collaboration with government departments and community agencies;
- family interventions;
- wilderness-enhanced interventions; and
- TAFE and other off-campus programs.

4 Provide outreach and family interventions such as:
- assessment of family functioning;
- family therapy, counselling and mediation;
- negotiation of respite arrangements;
- parenting training and education;
- referrals to other agencies;
- provision of information;
- collaboration with government departments/community agencies; and
- transport.

5 Offer consultative support for the Swan Education District, its schools and other SAER Program staff by assisting with:
- the development, implementation and evaluation of school-based SAER programs and outcomes;
- teachers' professional development and training;
- the development, implementation and monitoring of individual education and behaviour modification programs;
- the development of skills in administrators to initiate and manage change in attitudes and practices which will result in the successful accommodation of SAER in mainstream education;
- the development, implementation and monitoring of student reintegration programs;
- government and community collaboration;

- the provision of information on SAER at a wide range of forums; and
- the development of crisis response plans.

Performance indicators
The Youth Program uses protocols to demonstrate that all expected outcomes, stated and implied, are achieved. The performance indicators are described in detail below.

1 Diagnostic assessment for numeracy and literacy occurs:
- at induction to determine gaps in learning; and
- during regular reviews to plot progress.

2 Student outcome statements ensure that:
- students are placed on a continuum of skills and knowledge;
- students are able to demonstrate their learning as testing is non-prescriptive; and
- all activities are monitored, including work placements, camps, outdoor education, excursions and sporting competitions.

3 The curriculum framework:
- empowers and encourages the Youth Program to develop, implement and monitor its own curriculum; and
- is responsive and dynamic.

4 Attendance roll:
- monitors patterns of non-attendance; and
- is used for comparative purposes.

5 Anecdotal notes:
- record critical incidents;
- log outreach efforts; and
- maintain accurate personal and agency details.

6 Baseline data:
- is collected at enrolment;

- monitors recidivism, drug taking and non-attendance; and
- is used for comparison during quarterly reviews.

Structure

The program operates Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The day is split into 45-minute work sessions interspersed with 15-minute breaks.

Every Monday the students are given their work for that week. The main components are numeracy and literacy. Each student works at their own pace and at their own level of participation. The staffing ratio allows for intensive supervision and development of student-centred individual education programs.

Because many of the students are isolated or estranged from their community and peers, those work sessions designated for social and life skills training are conducted jointly thus improving the "socialisation" of students.

Mondays and Fridays are designated "alternative" days. In the afternoons the students participate in recreational activities or work experience in the broader community. The mornings are devoted to guest speakers and/or health education, such as adolescent sexual health or drug awareness.

The students' main academic programming plus social and life skills training occurs on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Examples of subjects include cooking, model making, art/craft and grooming.

Due to the geographical size of the Swan Education District and patterns of non-attendance of the students, the program operates a limited pick-up service to which students contribute.

Core business

The education team dovetails with the outreach team by virtue of the particular needs of the students. Core business is conducted in two distinctive contexts:

- the education setting – where the design, implementation and evaluation of individual education programs covering behaviour modification; numeracy and literacy; social and life skills training; physical, health and vocational education; and cultural awareness occurs; and
- community setting – which supports and facilitates students in dealing with issues impinging upon their education such as homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence and school phobia.

The education team's primary responsibility is the design, implementation and monitoring of the academic component of students' individual education programs. The outreach team's roles are to facilitate recreational and vocational opportunities, and address welfare issues in the education and community settings. This is achieved through:

- quality support – by providing information, support and advocacy to students;
- collaboration and coordination – by working with government and community agencies and their services;
- quality information – by reviewing research and practice in areas affecting "alienated" students; and
- leadership – by developing policies, guidelines and models of best practice in line with the department's Making the Difference strategy.

Overview of best practice models

The Education Department of WA's Making the Difference strategy involves school staff accessing and participating in relevant professional development to promote successful practice, prevention, early identification and intervention for students at educational risk.

One of the strategy's four projects is the identification and dissemination of successful practice models that address the needs of students at educational risk. Models developed by the Cyril Jackson Senior Campus Youth Program focus on access, retention and participation as the keys to successfully engaging alienated students in meaningful education.

Access

The Youth Program focuses on the process of engaging alienated students in meaningful education, in other words "getting them there". It acknowledges the importance of recognising factors which prevent or exclude alienated students from accessing education. It is well documented that alienation is a process to which schools contribute.

Students become alienated from education for many reasons including because they feel:

Powerless
- they feel they have no control over what occurs at school.

Meaningless
- schooling is irrelevant and does not relate to their experiences;
- their poor academic achievement adds to these feelings; and
- they cannot relate to the material.

Normless
- they feel they do not fit into classroom or school norms;
- they have difficulty conforming to rules and codes;
- their values and goals conflict with those of the school and teachers; and
- these norms are culturally inappropriate.

Isolated
- they feel no-one cares or pays attention to them; and
- there are cultural differences.

Estranged

- they feel they do not belong in school;
- they feel they are not accepted at school; and
- they have poor self-image in relation to their abilities.

Referral process

The Youth Program's rigid procedures and selection criteria ensure schools have exhausted all other options before they enter the program. This ensures further alienation does not occur and that schools have not hastened and contributed to students' alienation.

The Youth Program has limited resources, both human and material, and therefore only alienated students can access the program.

Outreach Teaching Project

In the case of students who are reluctant to attend school because of negative experiences, the Youth Program goes to them.

The Outreach Teaching Project is designed to establish rapport between staff and students outside the education setting and promote students' positive academic and social success prior to their joining the Youth Program. Students will start the Youth Program with a positive attitude, reduced anxiety and a developing sense of belonging.

Attendance

The Youth Program has identified the three main reasons for student truancy, as geography, negative school experiences and established patterns of non-attendance. The Youth Program operates a limited bus service to get the students to the campus. Some students choose not to use this service and so wake-up calls are made and a student-developed incentive scheme to encourage independent transport has been implemented. A four-tiered follow-up procedure ensures they continue to access the Youth Program.

Unless the students actually access the Youth Program they will not be able to make informed decisions about the benefits of participation.

Retention

Retention, or "keeping them there", is an ongoing process that requires particular attention to factors that might cause alienated students to leave school. These factors are often related to feelings of lack of control or a voice. For alienated students, issues of potential conflict between schools themselves include:

Formality

- dress and behaviour codes.

Authority

- lack of power to voice or express their opinions; and
- lack of input into their own learning.

Rigidity

- lack of opportunities to negotiate; and
- punishment for non-conformity.

Academia

- schools do not recognise talents in other areas, e.g. arts or sport;
- intelligence is assessed through academia; and
- schools are achievement orientated and not learning or participation orientated.

Streaming

- labelling and gross herding of students due to age or academic levels;
- no allowance for different skill levels; and
- individual needs not catered for.

Negotiated agreements

As much as possible, the students are consulted and involved in the decisions that affect their education,
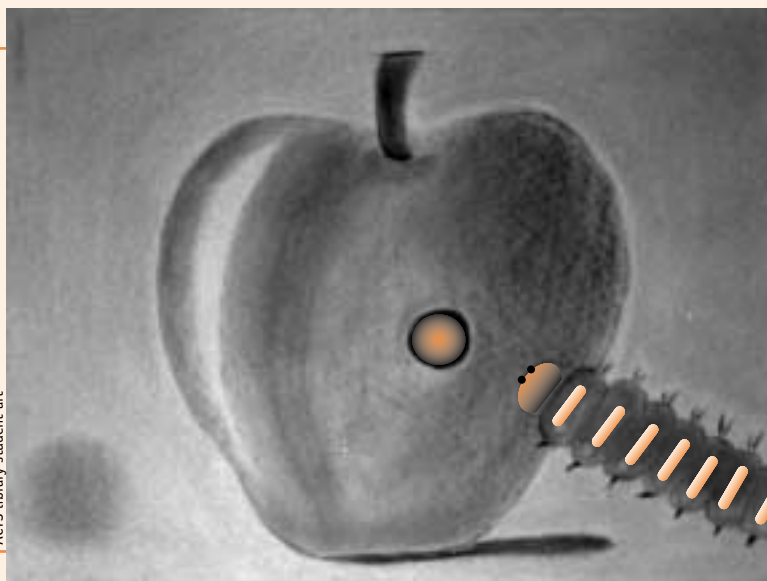
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If access and retention are the processes which get and keep alienated students in meaningful education, then participation is the goal of this process.

including subject material and recreation. This empowers them with negotiating skills and lessens the rigid and authoritative feel often associated with places of education. As a consequence of this involvement, Youth Program staff have found that students have an increased motivation to work, a greater willingness to resolve problems and a commitment to accomplish set goals.

Portable education packages

If the Youth Program's engagement process is unsuccessful because of school phobia or custodial sentences, the program retains "ownership" of the students by providing ongoing support and portable education packages. This maintains continuity and builds on the sense of belonging being developed. Whether on home study or in custody, the students negotiate their return to the Youth Program and continue on without disruption.

Follow-up protocols

The established patterns of non-attendance that alienated students exhibit are often difficult to shift, so constant and tiered follow-up protocols ensure the students do not "disengage". By maintaining open communication with students, their parents and associated agencies, the Youth Program supports the students to address the issues affecting their retention and participation in their education. This collaborative approach shows students that the Youth Program values them as individuals and is prepared to support them.

Frequent reviews assist in the reflection of progress thus empowering the student to make choices regarding education and influence outcomes.

Participation

If access and retention are the processes which get and keep alienated students in meaningful education, then participation is the goal of this process. The aim is to promote a sense of belonging and foster a love of learning.

The Youth Program has developed two broad models to assist this: individual education programs and behaviour management programs. Both of these incorporate the idea that a flexible, collaborative and student-centred approach will result in participation in the learning process and in society.

Individual education programs (IEPs)

Each student is tested and interviewed upon entry to the Youth Program to determine academic levels in Maths and English and to ascertain areas of special interest. IEPs encompass numeracy, literacy, physical and health education, vocational education, and life and social skills. Each student works on their own package pitched at their own levels and interests. In effect, their learning is self-managed.

The IEPs are designed so as to encourage the students to explore learning using activities of high value. Regular follow-up testing and negotiating occurs to ensure participation continues.

Behaviour management programs

Historically, managing student behaviour from a whole-school perspective has involved punishment that removed the student from school rather than addressed issues.

The Youth Program has one rule to encompass its Behaviour Management Program, that being respect. Each student is encouraged to explore this "rule" and is empowered with the responsibility to ensure that others have the right to feel safe and be respected.

The tiered system used was developed with the students and involves verbal warnings, cooling off periods and, in extreme cases, informal suspension for the day. The students choose their consequences and so embrace these as fair and equitable. They actively participate in the deciding and administering of consequences.

Conclusion

The Cyril Jackson Senior Campus Youth Program takes an innovative approach to its goal of improving the access, retention and participation of alienated students in meaningful education. It is able to do this because it features:
- attention to the whole person;
- a focus on practical learning relating to the student's experiences;
- encouragement for students to take responsibility for their learning;
- high expectations of students;
- challenging programs and activities;
- positive reinforcement;
- a caring and supportive environment;
- organisational and operational flexibility;
- outreach support;
- appropriate assessments and evaluations of student progress;
- careful selection of staff;
- integrated school and community programs and activities; and
- collaboration with parents, government departments and community agencies.

References

Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) 1997, *Plan for Government Schools 1998–2000*, Education Department of Western Australia, Perth.

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