

Shadows of History

Commonwealth History Project

Broadford Secondary College

Public Records Office of Victoria

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Background

About Broadford Secondary College

Students in the Broadford Secondary College community are strongly encouraged to:

- respect each other and the immediate environment
- get involved and participate
- strive for excellence.

The College aims to enhance in students qualities and life skills such as:

- responsibility
- communication
- independence
- inquiring minds
- problem solving
- creativity.

The College aims to assist students to reach their full potential and depends on cooperation with people in the student's the home and community to reach this goal. Students are expected to become able to accept responsibility for their own learning and to learn to be their best.

Providing a caring and safe learning environment for students, staff and parents is also central aim for the College. Students are supported through a welfare network of Home Groups and Home Group Teachers, Level Coordinators and the Student Welfare Counsellor.

Staff are encouraged to undertake professional development and participate in a broad range of school programs for their development and the benefit of their students.

Location

Broadford is located a short distance off the Hume Freeway, some 70 kilometres north of Melbourne. Broadford Secondary College (Broadford SC) was established in 1960 and moved to its present location, a former pine plantation site, in 1962.

Buildings and grounds

The present building complex reflects a variety of construction styles that have emerged over time. It is situated in an attractively landscaped setting which provides a pleasant and functional learning environment for students. The extensive grounds include a full size oval and hockey fields.

Demographics

Currently, 690 students are enrolled, having risen from just over 500 at the beginning of 1999. There were around 750 students enrolled in 2005, with growth due to housing development in Broadford itself as well as in the nearby centres of Kilmore, Wandong and Wallan. The recent establishment of a secondary college at Wallan has led to a slight decline of the student population.

Broadford and surrounding townships are now within commuting distance of Melbourne, which is proving to be an attractive alternative to suburban living for many families. The area on which the school is located is predominately rural, however only a minority of school families are involved in agriculture.

Broadford Primary School is the main feeder school for the college. However, around 60 percent of students travel by bus to the College, and originally attended primary schools in the surrounding area including Wandong, Kilmore, Wallan, Darraweit Guim, Pyalong, Tallarook and Willomavin.

Competition for students is provided by government secondary colleges at Seymour, Wallan and Whittlesea as well as a large coeducational Catholic college and an International School at Kilmore. Overall there is a reasonably even gender balance in student population.

Broadford SC is classified in Like School Group 4. This classification reflects a low proportion of students for whom the main language spoken at home is not English and a medium proportion of students who receive the Education Maintenance Allowance or Youth Allowance.

History at Broadford SC

There is no explicit College policy related to the experience, beliefs and understandings about history and history teaching that are evident in the school curriculum and teaching practices. Inevitably, there are implicit views that have not been discussed to the degree that they need to be.

History is one part of a subject called Humanities at Years 7, 8 and 9. It stands alone as a subject at Year 10 where it is goes under the heading of "History that's Modern".

Twentieth Century History units have been the usual subjects in Year 11. At Year 12, students have usually studied Australian History, although Revolutions was the subject this year. Next year the students have elected to study Australian History.

In the Year 7 structure, one teacher takes a class for English and Humanities. This has meant an uneven approach to the teaching of History, as several staff members who have taught EHU have not had any appropriate training or experience.

The subject has suffered a little as, on occasions, it has slipped into being a type of exotica. Conversely, the subject has also benefited from people bringing a fresh approach to a number of topics. This pattern has been repeated to a degree at Years

8 and 9, although more of these units have been taken by staff with some History training.

The implicit belief seems to be that anyone with English or some Humanities background is able to teach History. This 'belief' has also developed because only a few people on the staff have History training.

Fortunately, there are now enough staff members to provide specialist teaching at Year 10, 11 and 12. Variation of teacher background has led to a tendency at Years 8 and 9 to focus simply on content prescribed by the statewide curriculum guidelines, rather than on developing skills through use of the content.

There is a need for more coordination within junior History teaching. The high quality of the websites provided by the Public Records Office of Victoria will be helpful in this respect.

Numbers of students selecting History at Years 10, 11 and 12 does indicate a degree of success in the appeal of the subject. Year 12 results have generally been strong, particularly in 2005.

About the host organisation

Some information for this profile has been taken from the website of the Public Record Office Victoria.

The Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) is the archive of the State Government of Victoria. They hold records from the European settlement of Port Phillip district from the mid-1830s to today.

PROV manages these records for use by both the government and people of Victoria. As the archival authority for the State of Victoria, PROV undertakes a number of interrelated activities relating to:

- records
- standards
- training and advice.

PROV cares for and provides access to a vast and valuable collection of Victorian government records that date back to the establishment of permanent government services. Most forms of access to the collection are free and include our Reading Rooms, publications, and physical and online exhibitions.

PROV helps people in the Victorian government create and keep better records through the development and promotion of record keeping standards. They help government agencies to achieve compliance with standards through training and advice.

Through these activities and by ensuring all Victorian people have ready access, understanding and appreciation of the State's records, PROV accomplishes its mission in assisting Victorians to have an open and accountable state government.

From the organisations and people I know, I would say that PROV is well known by some and virtually unknown by most.

About the experience

I was greeted warmly by Diane Gardiner, was given a tour of the premises and met Daniel Wilksch and Colin. All of the people I met were generous with their time and took the exercise seriously.

During my visit, I had the opportunity to visit a range of facilities and resources, including:

- elements of the archive
- the reading room
- the photo digitising office
- a section on Koorie records
- the amazing repository
- the volunteers section
- the conservation room.

I also discussed, principally with Diane and Daniel, issues of conservation and archiving, exhibitions and the websites.

Asa was given the demanding task of taking some photographs of my tour. It is a credit to his skill that he managed to take some pictures, which included me, that still showed off the repository, offices and public areas to their best aspect.

The presentation of history at PROV is done in a variety of ways. Travelling exhibitions on such topics as “and your petitioners humbly pray ... 150 years of petitions in Victoria” bring history directly to the public. This is a considerable progression from the job of keeping artefacts in a museum.

An exhibition about the town of North Melbourne in 1905 draws in visitors not only to learn, but also to think about the artefacts, documents and photographs in front of them.

The appearance of the exhibition and selection of material indicated that the curators were acutely aware of the importance of clear communication and the intended audience.

Part of the learning and teaching environment was a small exhibition space where a section of the exhibit on the town of North Melbourne in 1905 was displayed. The key area devoted directly to learning and teaching was the Reading Room. It was of a fair size and important information about the use of it was clearly displayed.

Facilities for the visitors were adequate and comfortable. However, the office space and facilities provided to the education and online sections of the PROV seemed to be inadequate for their needs.

New knowledge and practice

I have been a subscriber to this organisation's magazine ever since I selected a PROV seminar at a History Teachers Association of Victoria conference. I was therefore aware, to a limited extent, of their work.

I have used material about the Native Police from the magazine and the website for my Year 12 Australian History class in 2005.

The key professional outcomes for me were a better realisation of:

- the value of the exhibitions, actual and online
- the complexity of the work
- the range of materials held by the PROV.

Students are increasingly reliant on the Internet to find information. Despite teaching my students methods for checking the veracity and worth of information found on websites, there is still a tendency for them to accept all that they read online. The current debate about the worth of Wikipedia is a reflection of this concern.

It consequently a relief to be able to refer students to websites that you can rely on. More importantly, the activities within online exhibitions such as "Eureka" are much more than a means of collecting information.

I asked some students to examine this exhibition and they found it to be a challenging yet accessible series of exercises. It reinforced the need for websites that engage students in tasks related to the topic.

The Year 9 class found the Eureka site prompted real research, as distinct from the 'photocopying' that they often undertook when they looked up sites and downloaded information without engaging their brains.

I also learned about the History Council of Victoria from Diane. I was able to attend their Annual Lecture, which was given by Robert Manne. His topic was provocative as he discussed the connections between the Anzac landings and the Armenian genocide. It was a fascinating experience and I was able to use it in our Year 12 orientation program.

On a personal basis, I was overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of the staff at the PROV. It was thrilling to examine some of the articles held by the archive, to have a tour of the facilities and to be shown some of the vast photograph collections.

More than that, I enjoyed the quality of conversations about the nature of archiving, the difficulties of selection of items, the approaches to History education and future topics for exhibitions.

Following my visit, I discussed my experience at the PROV at:

- a staff meeting

- a curriculum meeting
- a faculty meeting
- School Council.

I also mentioned the experience at the local Historical Society and with many of my colleagues in other schools.

Each time I discussed my experience, I commented on:

- the value of the exhibitions
- the worthwhile nature of the website
- the importance of the PROV's work
- the wonderful day that I had
- the commitment, professionalism and generosity of the staff.

In class, I asked my Year 7 and 9 classes to investigate and evaluate the website and the activities. The value of the sites was shown repeatedly. Students of a wide variety of abilities reported favourably on the ease of access to the site, ease of navigation and the value of the activities.

The Year 7 students were particularly impressed by the criminal career of Frederick Deeming. Other popular sites were the ones on Ned Kelly, Eureka and the Native police.

As mentioned above, I can recognise real benefit in using websites that are reliable and challenge the students to think. By pursuing these activities, the students could see the superiority (and pain, according to a few) of sites that set tasks for completion, in comparison with those sites that are only providers of information.

I would like to thank those who organised the Shadows project and selected me to have the opportunity to visit the PROV. Again I would like to thank the PROV staff for being so kind and helping me to gain a fresh perspective on the history of Victoria and on my teaching. Last of all, I thank the students who investigated the website and the staff who supported me in this project. I am determined to help the PROV by continuing to publicise its work and to help its staff to evaluate its programs.