Chapter 2
A Chronological History of the School

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Abstract This chapter introduces the Alpine School and its original purpose and goals before leading into the story of the historical development of the current School for Student Leadership (SSL). It outlines the extensive political background behind the creation of this unique Victorian school and the search for an appropriate principal. The development of the school from a single campus to the current three campuses is detailed, with photos of each included to illustrate the diverse environmental contexts that are represented. Also presented is an outline of some of the major differences in the curriculum and overall experience that students receive through a term spent at the SSL, compared to that offered via traditional mainstream education. The different learning opportunities resulting from a program that focuses on providing a rite of passage for adolescents and includes experiential learning, reflection and a Community Learning Project are discussed, illustrating the contemporary approach used at the school to meet the cognitive, physical, social and emotional needs of the attending Year 9 students.

Introduction

An introduction to the development of the Alpine School, situated in Dinner Plain in the Victorian Alps, in Australia, which eventually became the SSL, has been presented in earlier chapters. However, it is important in this chapter to make it clear why the school was initially created and its main focus as it became established and subsequently evolved. Due to the establishment of two further campuses—the Snowy River campus near the mouth of the Snowy River at Marlo in East Gippsland

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and the Gnurad Gundidj campus, which is adjacent to Mount Noorat near Camperdown in Victoria's Western District, the life and operating programs of the school have metamorphosed.

The Alpine school could be said to have been established as a way for the Department of Education in Victoria, to address the growing concerns in the late 1990s about the lack of educational provision in Departmental schools (State secondary schools in Victoria) for Year 9 students. A number of independent schools were attempting to address the needs of Year 9 students, and had done so for some time, through the provision of outdoor education programs at places such as Timbertop and Marshmead. There was a perception by a number of senior staff in the Department that the provision of a different kind of support for the middle years of schooling in purpose-built residential accommodation could be beneficial to adolescent development for state school students.

The school was established to provide a 9-week residential program for Year 9 students with a major focus on developing leadership and enterprise through a community-learning model. A holistic approach to learning was seen to be central to the program and was founded on the building of positive relationships between staff and students as well as between the students as a group. This in turn was supported by a non-traditional curriculum that utilised the principles of cooperative learning to assist the development of self-understanding and environmental awareness. The Alpine school, and subsequently the SSL, was never perceived to be an outdoor education camp. The main focus has always been on offering a blend of purposeful learning opportunities for Year 9 students that meets their needs in terms of personal and interpersonal skill development, moving towards emotional maturity and recognition that they are in control of their own lives. The narrative below unpacks the story of the development of the school and reveals the wisdom of the founders.

History of the School for Student Leadership (Formerly the Alpine School)

The School for Student Leadership (SSL) largely owes its existence to the determination of Phillip Gude, the Deputy Leader of the Kennett Government following the Victorian state election of 1989. Gude seized the opportunity to create an alternative form of schooling at the Alpine School, the precursor of the School for Student Leadership. Gude's early life reinforced his ministerial resolve to provide alternative forms of schooling. Polio had made his expected attendance at Geelong College untenable, because it would have involved continual movement from one room to another during each period of the day. He therefore attended Geelong High, where students remained in the one room for the entire day.

In his role as state Minister for Education, he made a number of shrewd key appointments. He drew on the enthusiasm of John Castran, and Dr. Ron Bassett,

who were both property developers and keen to contribute to a unique state school at Dinner Plain, a town in the Victorian Alps. Gude also recruited Bruce Hartnett who worked in the community sector, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and the National Australia Bank. Hartnett was active in pro bono work and later accepted the role as President of the Alpine School Council. As Education Minister for Victoria, Gude believed in the notion of the Alpine School and the promising fresh face to education that it would represent. In 1998, he put forward to the Victorian Parliamentary Cabinet a bold funding proposition for the school as part of the 1999 bid process. Although Premier Kennett rejected it, Gude decided he would pursue the concept further and formed a taskforce led by Don Tyrer, an Education General Manager. Other members of the taskforce included John Margetts, the Principal at Rubicon, an outdoor education school. Two members from Victorian Department of Education were also included in the taskforce, namely Jeanne Norling from the Goulburn North-Eastern Region and Ben Cuillo representing the Finance Division, who remained neutral and very helpful. Don Tyrer believed that the provision of a different kind of support for the middle years of schooling would facilitate growth in individual students, and enable them to recognise that inter-dependence could also lead to greater personal effectiveness. He considered that the creation of a visionary Alpine School would bring this about.

By December 1998, Gude had assessed the progress to date. It had been agreed by the taskforce that Year 9 students were to be the target group and that a purpose built school, with accommodation, should be built at Dinner Plain. However, by the first quarter of 1999, little actual progress was apparent. Gude turned this around by directing Geoff Spring, the then Secretary of Education, to sign off on the school's creation. Gude also founded the Education Trust to encourage philanthropy and insisted on the conceptualisation of governance procedures for the Alpine School. He also arranged for a public ceremony to reinforce awareness that the creation of this school would happen.

Sue Tait, the newly appointed Regional Director for Gippsland had the opportunity to speak privately with Minister Gude on the mountain before the ceremony. They agreed that the proposed school was on Tait's side of the mountain and that the Gippsland Region would accept responsibility for the proposed school. Gude appreciated Ms. Tait's talents and saw her as someone who could provide a high level of enthusiasm and quality interaction, in both Melbourne and in her region. In the same time frame, Tyrer's team focused on a curriculum model with community at the centre. A key component of the curriculum was to be a Community Learning Project (CLP), which linked learning at the Alpine school to the home community, to ensure links continued when students returned to their home schools. John Margetts and Sue Tait formed an effective working team and Margetts agreed to undertake acting and interim Principal duties until the position was finalised. There was a school to be built, budgets approved, staff appointed, curriculum established, learning technologies installed, student selection procedures defined and a Principal to be found.

A state election was to be held in September of 1999 and Gude's political career was almost over, for he had decided not to contest this election. Therefore, finding a

school Principal became a priority. It was Gude's vision to establish the Alpine School and he believed it would provide different learning opportunities for students, especially those with no prior experience of the country, who would now have an opportunity to broaden their knowledge.

Opening of the Alpine School

A tied State election result in September 1999 put numerous plans on hold. Personnel such as Sue Tait and John Margetts had to distance themselves by sitting on the fence until the impasse was resolved. Prior to the election, Gude had appointed Hartnett as President of the School Council for the Alpine School. As there was no static parent population for the school, Gude approved the appointment of 'Ministerial Nominee's or 'community members', drawn from corporate and philanthropic backgrounds. Foundation members were Dr. Ron Bassett of Mount Hotham Ski Company, Richard Bluck Executive Director of Leadership Victoria (Williamson Community Leadership Program), Janine Kirk CEO Committee for Melbourne, Michael Liffman Research Fellow Myer Foundation, Annabel Shears Carter, and Chairperson Bligh Voller Neild. Figures 2.1 and 2.2

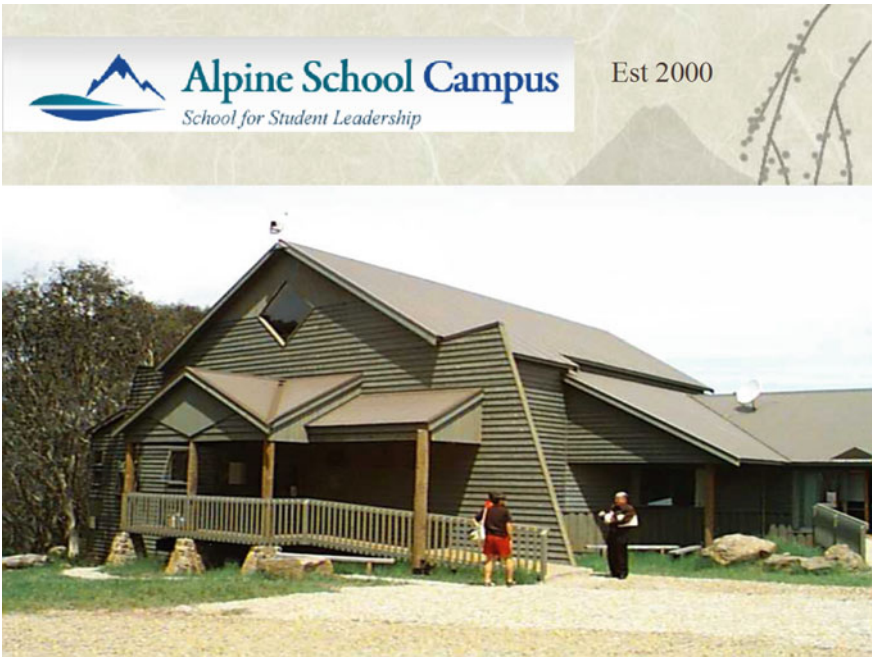


Fig. 2.1 The Alpine School campus. Photo used with permission from M. Reeves, Principal. www.alpineschool.vic.edu.au/photogallery (2001)

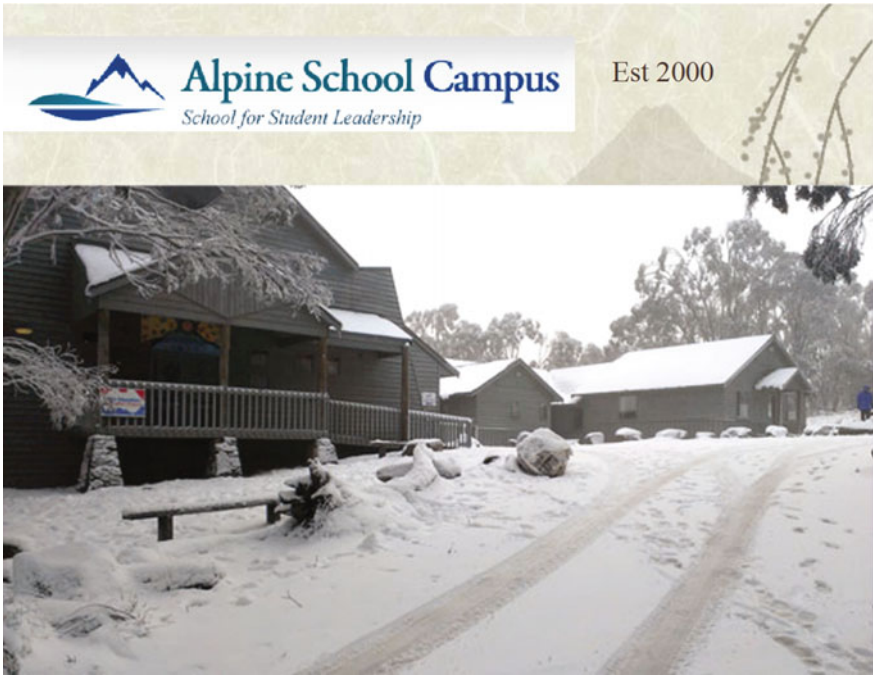


Fig. 2.2 The Alpine School campus. Photo used with permission from M. Reeves, Principal www.alpineschool.vic.edu.au/photogallery (2001)

show what the Alpine School Campus at Dinner Plain looks like in both summer and winter. It is the only campus to experience the very different seasonal changes.

The selection of a Principal on 26 September 1999 was permitted despite the stymied political situation. Mr. Mark Reeves, formerly the Director of Marshmead, Methodist Ladies College was selected. Panel members believed Reeves clearly understood his new role and appeared to be delighted by his appointment. However, there were unexpected ramifications for both Reeves and Margetts. Methodist Ladies College, where Reeves then worked, insisted that employees gave a term of notice of resigning, within a term. This delayed Reeves' arrival at Dinner Plain because he had to resign in Term 3 in order to leave at the end of the year. He was supported during the delay by the continuing work of John Margetts, the acting Principal who kept Reeves informed of all developments. Further staff appointments followed with the appointment of Rod Hill as the Assistant Principal. Hill worked closely with Margetts in promoting the development of this unique school within Victoria and indeed Australia. Alice Hess, also from Marshmead, was appointed as the Curriculum Coordinator in October of 1999. During a selection panel discussion, Hartnett was surprised to hear that the Merit and Equity panel representative had raised that Alice Hess was married to Mark Reeves, the Principal. This was not considered an issue and following Hess's appointment, she established curriculum elements based on Enterprise Education, problem-based

learning, thinking styles and student-focused learning, all of which was underpinned by a focus on cooperative learning.

The stymied election dragged on for weeks until eventually the Labor Party became the Government of Victoria, with Steve Bracks as Premier and Mary Delahunty as Minister for Education. Tyrer now began working closely with Delahunty, who confirmed her commitment to the concept of the Alpine School by signing off on the school in mid-November 1999.

Hartnett finalised the full complement of school councillors. He added Alison McClelland (Australian Council of Social Service, Victoria), Bill Shorten (Australian Council of Trade Unions), Captain David Eldridge (Salvation Army), and Sue Tait in her role as the Gippsland Regional Director. The full council first met on the 12 December 1999 in Melbourne and was introduced to Mark Reeves. Recruitment of new staff continued with Reeves also on the selection panel. He emphasised the importance of being mindful of whom they employed and was wary of candidates who appeared to impose their own values on young people. The innovative panel aimed to recruit a balanced staff by employing a team management system as well as a trained psychologist, Chris Davies. Chris understood leadership and enterprise through direct experience and is claimed to have said, "You do something and you look at it and you reflect on it and you make changes".

The Alpine School did not accommodate students in Term 1, 2000 and it remained an empty shell requiring a fit-out. Officially, however it had opened on February 2000, with Bracks, Delahunty and Tyrer in attendance. Delahunty is claimed to have said to Tyrer, "…this is terrific—we're giving kids a chance". Premier Bracks also acknowledged that without Gude, the school would not have come into being. Margetts, who had been the Acting Principal, stood down on 23 March 2000 and Reeves assumed his position as Principal of the Alpine School.

A Busy Principal, Regional Director and School Council

Mark Reeves was a teacher as well as a Principal. While students appreciated Reeves' teaching, they were less knowledgeable about his other responsibilities as a Principal. His role as Principal required both a big picture view of possible improvements, yet close attention to detail. In working with the various Ministers of Education, he recognised that the school was a very political project, particularly in the eyes of some critics. Both Reeves and Tait dealt with some opposition to the newly opened Alpine School at a range of different levels. Some early critics resented the prominence it had been given within the region. It was therefore particularly important to neutralise critics and assemble key supporters, particularly in the area of finance.

Due to his background in private schools, Reeves saw certain elements of the Victorian Education Department as intimidating and at times difficult to understand in terms of its structures, veiled culture, mores and line management. However, Tait well understood that Reeves was the Principal of a very different kind of state school and worked well with him.

As Principal, Reeves had to deal with the student selection process, which in some ways has been a point of contention since the very beginning, and is discussed

in more detail in Chap. 1. A further major issue in the early days was the logistics involving the overnight supervision of students by teachers. It was soon evident that teachers were becoming exhausted by this exacting demand on their time. Reeves finally convinced the Department that the employment of separate 'Over Night Supervision staff' was essential. An Equal Opportunity Exemption was sought from VCAT and once obtained, gender-specific non-teaching staff were appointed in these overnight roles. Another major change occurred in 2005 when in-house cooks were appointed as school staff, replacing the contracted external caterers.

A further concern raised in the early days was that the demand for places at the single campus of the school vastly exceeded the positions available. Up to 80 secondary colleges in Victoria vied for the 45 places available to students each term. This meant that the total number of places for a year was only 180. On this basis, there was a 1:200 chance of gaining Alpine School selection and this seemed unfair.

The loyalty and common sense of Bruce Hartnett, the ongoing leader of the School Council, and his council members, provided invaluable support to the school and in particular to Mark Reeves. Hartnett requested that the Department double the school's facilities and proposed that by 2011 there should be a further ten similar residential leadership focused schools for Year 9 students across Victoria. This request to the Department was the beginning of further change for the Principal, School Council, staff and students. Hartnett appreciated the ongoing trust that continued within the School Council. Even when there was disagreement, members disagreed politely. All sides of politics were represented and even though councillors may not have had similar political ideologies or educational philosophies, they all made a pro bono contribution to the school. Hartnett was comforted in the knowledge that the council he chaired sat beyond whims and fancies and performed their duties with due diligence.

Eventually the Alpine School, under the instruction of the Victorian Department of Education, joined the Hume Region (formerly known as the Goulburn North-East Region) where it had previously been part of the Gippsland Region. This was viewed positively because Hume was recognised as a very progressive region with a willingness and experience in working with alternative educational programs such as Rubicon and Bogong, which were outdoor education schools and the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, which was a youth circus school.

Tait's Gippsland and Regional Directorship role ended in 2002 and she was subsequently appointed as a School Councillor in 2005. She particularly enjoyed the sense of community the Alpine School had initiated and acknowledged that further campuses would strengthen the educational offerings available for Year 9 Victorian students. In reality, it became a long haul to establish additional campuses but Hartnett and Reeves were determined that the creation of further campuses for state school students would increase student opportunities.

The School for Student Leadership: Snowy River Campus

The determined lobbying by the School Council for two more campuses was finally successful. A Ministerial Steering Committee was formed in 2003 to find

appropriate sites. Every non-metropolitan shire was contacted and invited to nominate a place for a school. Of the 52 potential sites, two were considered appropriate with the first one chosen near the East Gippsland town of Marlo. Those involved in establishing the school wanted the campus to feel like a home for the students. Architect Peter Sandow favoured an environmentally sustainable design with hierarchies of space in twin bedrooms and specific common areas for each gender. There was symmetry in the way two identical gender-specific residential buildings radiated from a central hub, which contained a kitchen, dining hall, reception, learning centre and staff facilities. The overall effect was a feeling of openness with an invitation to explore.

John Lenders, Labor's Minister for Education, opened the Snowy River Campus in March 2007. Whilst the Alpine School was 'quintessentially Alpine', this new campus was 'quintessentially beach', with opportunities for surfing at Cape Conran, canoeing on the Snowy River, caving at Buchan, hiking at Cape Conran National Park, learning about the Indigenous history of the area and interacting with local communities. With the establishment of the Snowy River campus, Reeves left the Alpine School to Russell Shem, as the Campus Principal and made Snowy River Campus his home base. Figure 2.3 shows the Snowy River Campus.

Gary Boote was the first Campus Principal at Snowy River and left in 2009 to take up another appointment. Robyn Francis became the Campus Principal on his departure. She described her campus role as dealing with the day-to-day operations of the school whilst Reeves' had an overseeing role as Principal in administration, regional requirements, annual reports and finance, as well as engaging strongly with students on the ground. Francis recognised and appreciated the consistency on her

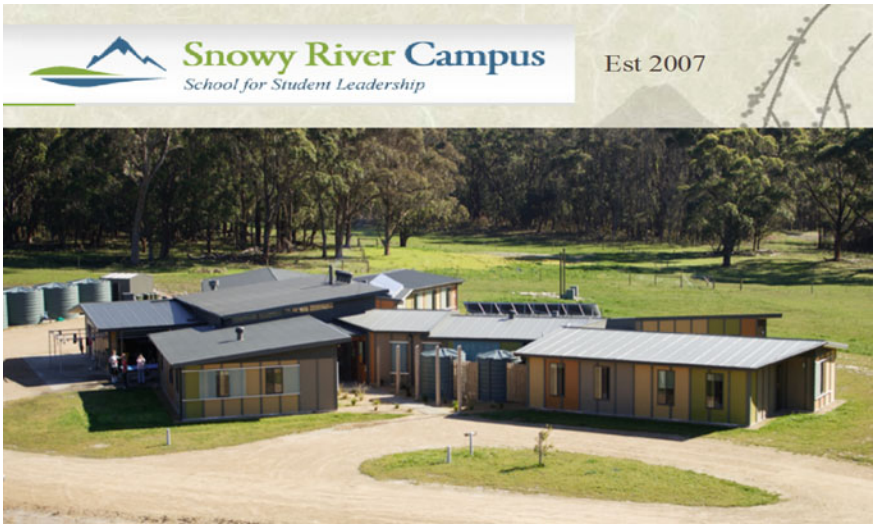


Fig. 2.3 Snowy River campus. Photo used with permission from M. Reeves, Principal. Available at: http://www.snowyriver.vic.edu.au/photogallery (2007)

campus regarding the accountability of students, teachers' knowledge of where individuals were at, celebrating students' success outwardly, and continuing to communicate with previous students when they re-entered their home school. As a result of the additional campus having being built at Marlo, and another in the pipeline for Glen Ormiston in the Western district, a name change with these extra campuses became important to establish the single identity for the one school—with three campuses. This name change is thought to be the only matter to ever divide the School Council. After some resistance, Hartnetts' Council name change was passed in 2008. The two existing campuses, and the other yet to be built, would become known as the School for Student Leadership (SSL), with its three campuses: The Alpine School, the Snowy River Campus and the yet unnamed school planned at Glen Ormiston.

The School for Student Leadership: Gnurad Gundidg Campus

Reeves worked with a succession of State Government Ministers of Education, including Lynne Kosky, John Lenders and Bronwyn Pike during the planning stages for the third campus at Glen Ormiston. These changes in leadership became a challenge but were gradually worked through.

Kosky, as the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, dealt with one of the early challenging issues which arose at Glenormiston when the local Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College put forward the notion that they had been part of the original local nomination. Kosky believed the best course of action was to build a purpose built new third campus, in a similar way to the other two campuses, rather than establish it in conjunction with TAFE, which dealt more with technical education, rather than secondary education. It was her understanding that they each needed their own space.

The name of the campus was settled after much debate and through consultation with the local Gunditjmara Aboriginal community. The campus was to be called Gnurad Gundidj following the community custodians' recommendations. The name Gnurad Gundidj represented the Indigenous name of the local area 'belonging to this place'. The word 'Gnurad' was the Indigenous name for the area and 'Gundidj' was the tribal name for the local area meaning 'belonging to this place'. This campus was given an Indigenous name in order to signify that this campus would have a particular emphasis on addressing the needs of Indigenous students throughout Victoria and place a special importance on the traditional owners of the land and their culture.

Soon after the naming of the campus, Dr. Mark Rose, the Head of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., was appointed to the School Council. Michael Casterton was appointed Campus Principal and took up his appointment at



Fig. 2.4 Gnurad Gundidj campus. Photo used with permission from M. Reeves, Principal Available at: http://www.gnurad-gundidj.vic.edu.au/photogallery (2009)

the school in Term Four, 2009. His first task was to be immediately engaged in the recruitment of the teaching and non-teaching staff positions.

The building began in May 2008. FMSA Architects were engaged and Andeco Builders began the construction in April 2008, creating the living, learning, recreational and dining spaces. The building design chosen fitted well into the surrounding countryside with it circles of corrugated iron and open spaces, as illustrated in Fig. 2.4.

Minister Pike opened the Gnurad Gundidj campus in 2009. It appealed to her that students attending this campus would gain a good understanding of this place and that the Indigenous community was well represented.

In the early days, the campus differed from the others in its bareness, lack of furniture, makeshift tables with only worker's chairs and crates to sit on, no carpets laid, no laptops, no phones or Internet, and experiencing the hot, smoky and dusty atmosphere following recent bush-fires.

Activities and Learning Approaches at the SSL

Each campus had a range of experiential activities that were specifically tailored to the local environment of each of the diverse landscapes. As pointed out earlier, the Alpine campus lent itself to skiing, bush walking, white water rafting and snow sports. The Snowy River campus lent itself to surfing, water sports, caving, beach camping, rock pooling and hiking. The Gnurad campus, which it became known as,

had to look for its own identity in this regard. From the very beginning students did cycling tours and visited new places including the Mt Noorat crater, and the surrounding lakes and creeks. Panmure was of particular interest as a volcanic sink where the earth had been sucked away leaving seventy metres of water straight down. The students built bridges and rafts and also saw calves being born. Locals showed them Lake Keilambete on a private property, where fossils were embedded in the rocks around the lake. The water in this lake is four times saltier than the ocean and believed by some to have healing powers. The students enjoyed sharing meals with families in the area and appreciated local support at their Community Learning Project night.

On all three campuses, some school duties were seen as less popular than others. Students were unused to living in a community with a range of responsibilities expected of them, including doing their own laundry and cleaning up after themselves and others. Limitations on resources, such as water, made students face responsibilities they may have ignored at home. Those fond of long showers learnt that colder showers for all would be the result. Some disliked cleaning up the Common Room, bathroom and toilet cleaning, washing dishes, serving food to others and tidying their bedroom. The cleaner was always pleased to remind them what had to be done. Though this engendered some resistance occasionally, no opportunity was given to shirk their duty. All students were expected to take responsibility for their actions both indoors and outdoors, which Principal Mark Reeves saw as part of a rite of passage for adolescents.

Each term, students enjoyed a refreshing pause as they took an allocated break with their family on a mid-term weekend. This was the only time in the 9-week school term that students reconnected physically with their families and most enjoyed sharing this family time, with parents generally very interested in the area where their Year 9 student had been placed.

By the end of their term, many students felt they were leaving their second family at the School for Student Leadership, although friendships were often maintained after they left.

The approach to learning was underpinned by encouraging students to speak up and push themselves forward. Ethical tensions and a degree of confusion were created in the minds of students so they would take risks and explore new boundaries as they differentiated their learning. A punitive view was seen as demeaning with the focus on redirecting negatives—for instance, rather than saying "don't do that…" When a ball is being used in an inappropriate place say "…it's great to see you throwing the ball, why not come over here and bounce it?"

A Purposeful Program

Reeves, over many years has studied the topic or concept of 'Rites of Passage' in a number of cultures and recognised the importance, yet lack of recognition of it in today's western culture (Reeves presents his ideas on 'Rites of Passage' in Chap. 9

of this text). He values the concept in his school and recognises that in the SSL it is relevant because students are separated from family, involved in physical challenges, fulfilling expected and unexpected school duties and routines, solving issues, working with others, and learning with elders, all whilst at a significant stage in a students' emotional and psychosocial development.

Lynne Kosky, in her role as Minister of Education, appreciated the capacity of the Alpine School to take adolescents beyond their comfort zones whilst offering no soft options during their expeditions. These expeditions, largely managed by the students, with the support of staff, are referred to as the 'Expos'. Below is a brief outline of how two students described their Expo experiences.

> I'm excited about the Expo cause I like meeting new people and getting to know them better. We had two overnight stops on this Expo: the first day consisted of a seven kilometre hike; the second day was about eight kilometres. We saw Dock Inlet on the coast, cooked in groups and camped out on beds, canoed on the Snowy from Frenches Narrows, paddled up the Brodribb River and hiked up to Mt Raymond. From there we walked back to the Snowy River campus. What a great Expo and such a great way of getting to know other people by doing things with them and working together (Stu).
>
> We headed for Mt Loch through freezing conditions, eighty kilometre winds before erecting tents near 'Derricks Hut' despite the blizzard. We needed protection and I was scared and homesick, but I realised the situation was not life threatening and that I was in good hands with the staff. When I woke up next morning twenty centimetres of snow covered the ground and it looked so awesome and I was alive. We left in the continuing blizzard and on our return to Dinner Plain, I felt proud of what we had all accomplished (Grace).

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a subset of experiential education and refers to a philosophy which places experience or 'doing' something at the centre of learning (Itin 1999). John Dewey was one of the first educators who wrote about experiential education in his book, *Experience and Education* in 1938.

An example of experiential learning is the work the students were engaged in with photography. David Tatnall, a photographer and previously an artist in residence at Marshmead for six years was employed at Dinner Plain soon after the Alpine School opened for students. Since, that time he has worked in a part-time capacity at the three campuses of the SSL. At Tatnall's request, the school purchased 'Single Lens Reflex' (SLR) manual cameras, even though most students had brought their own digital cameras to the school. He saw the exercise as one of seeing rather than being about the technology itself. He knew that everything the students learnt from the operation of a manual film camera was relevant to modern digital photography. Although it meant going back a couple of steps and explaining how the shutter and aperture worked, the exercise with these cameras meant that they could physically see the action as it was taking place. Tatnall provided examples of different photography styles. He started students off with landscapes by

showing them a big picture landscape, a slightly more closed image and then a macro-photograph. He expected students to think about the photograph they wanted to take. Students soon realised that they needed to hone their eye in order to take the photo they wanted. The SLR slowed them down and they were excited when they saw more. For example, some students commentated that they had seen a lichen or a mushroom that they not seen before they 'really looked'

A second important part of experiential learning was the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which was an integral part of the curriculum and life of the school. In what was a very innovative practice at the time, all students were issued with a laptop on arrival at the school and one of the tasks each new cohort of students were responsible for was the updating and maintenance of an interactive website. Extensive use of the Internet was encouraged and expected of all students who were also expected to use email to maintain communication links with family and friends. Students were constantly seen walking around the building with their laptop under their arm and using technology that conformed to their needs rather than conforming them to the needs of technology.

Generational Theory

Generational theory has received attention through the work of social researcher McCrindle (2006, 2010), who claimed that each generation have their own particular characteristics, directions, wants and needs. The baby boomers are those born after the war and are now for the most part enjoying retirement. Those born between 1980 and 2000 are known as Gen X and this generation was followed by those born in the early 1990s and known as Gen Y. Gen Y is followed by the current generation who inhabit the SSL and known as Gen Z or the 'millenniums'.

Hesse, as the curriculum coordinator at the then Alpine School recognised that the traditional education system was still geared to production line work of the industrial age yet in a world that had substantially changed forever. What suited earlier generations as learning styles no longer suited the current Gen Y students. She and her colleagues redirected the curriculum to be focused on developing students' ability to be autonomous learners, show initiative, use information technology, identify connections between different styles of learning and recognise the importance of relationships

Dr. Robyn Zink and Dr. Michael Dyson from the Education Faculty at Monash University, Gippsland wrote about *Educating Generation Y in Alternate Settings* as Gen Y students attended the school in the first decade of the new millennium. Although described as the most formally educated generation ever, they were also seen by some critics as difficult to communicate with, poor in forming relationships with others and in functioning effectively in communities. This theme of generational theory is also covered in Chap. 4 of this text.

Koorie Education

The first Koorie (Aboriginal) program was initiated at the Alpine School in Term 2, 2006 and occurred after three years of negotiation with the Victorian Aboriginal Association. The term Koorie, which derives from the Indigenous word for 'people', is commonly used to describe Aboriginal people from Victoria and parts of New South Wales (Broome 2008). The Federal Government offered funding of $60,000, to fully subsidise a program of 6-week duration to be conducted during a shortened Victorian first term prior to the Commonwealth Games. Reeves and the staff welcomed 35 Indigenous students. They were supported by embedded Koorie staff including Aunty Faye Lynam, and Uncle Phil Murray; Russell Mullet, a Gunnai elder who assisted with the expedition and cultural component with Colleen Nagle, a Koorie Ranger; and Jason King a Koorie student mentor, who as the students' 'cus' (cousin) helped bridge the gap between students and the staff.

The school staff at the Alpine school, but in particular Reeves, Hesse and Shem was keenly interested in Koorie education and sought ways of working the curriculum to better suit the needs of Koorie students. They also saw this initiative as an opportunity for both the staff and the students attending, to learn more about Koori culture.

The program was tough going for some staff and it was apparent that some teachers were anxious about the way the program was conducted and were tested by it. It was of interest to see how the program took staff out of their comfort zones, and although uncomfortable about this challenge, they maintained their professionalism.

Reeves invited Dr. Michael Dyson and Dr. Robyn Zink to undertake research into the program. Through interviewing students at the school, two main themes emerged in relation to different perceptions of the Alpine School compared with home schools. At the Alpine School, students felt they learnt more about themselves and how they learned, partly through understanding of brain dominance theory (Hermann 1995), and they enjoyed the learning progress it provided. Another interesting outcome was that students reported a greater understanding of and pride in being Koorie. They missed their family but appreciated the attention that teachers gave them. Some students also remarked to staff that they felt more confident about themselves in knowing their strengths, understanding themselves better and volunteering to undertake necessary tasks. Further details of this research project will be discussed in a later chapter in this book (Chap. 4).

Later, in 2010, Bronwyn Pike, the Minister for Education, offered Wannik Scholarships to fully fund the inclusion of Koorie students with non-Koorie students. Where possible, Koorie students were nominated to enter all three campuses of the SSL. Michonne Van Rees, the Gippsland Regional Director, saw Koorie programs challenging a perception that the SSL was elitist or a school for middle-class students. In fact, the three campuses were incorporating students from very disadvantaged backgrounds, which included Koorie students. She also noted that Indigenous students clearly understood 'rites of passage' as part of their

culture. Their understanding helped non-Koorie students to also understand more about 'rites of passage'. Teachers at the Snowy River campus also made connections with Woolum Bellam Koorie P-12 Campus at Morwell to establish trust and rapport—qualities highly necessary because parents needed to be absolutely sure that their children would be safe.

Gnurad Gundidj also began preliminary preparations for the first Koorie intake during 2009 and benefited from the assistance of Wayne Harradine, a Koorie Education Officer. It was evident to staff and students that the Koorie population wanted to be respected for who they were and the SSL was a place that could assist this to happen.

Seeking a Significant Other

Chris, a student at the Alpine School in 2006, remembered the role one of the teachers, Miss Hayward, played during his stay at the Alpine School at Dinner Plain. Writing to her years later, he expressed thanks for teaching him about the skills of leadership, organisation and making the most of opportunities. She had become a significant other to this student.

Often individual teachers received a letter or email of thanks from parents. Families wrote in appreciation of how the teachers related so well to teenagers and were often pleased to see a daughter overcome some formidable physical challenges as a result of her attendance at the SSL. One family in particular was nervous about how their son would manage the campus experience but soon realised that his teacher understood him well. She told his parents that their son was capable and skillful. If he wanted to try something she would normally say no in the first instance to encourage him to work it out first. She hoped that this would help him understand whether or not his idea was achievable. His parents regarded this as the best piece of advice they had been given about parenting. They saw him put his teacher's thoughts into action. After 2 weeks of research, he began flying lessons, which could be undertaken at his age. His parents told him he could have a lesson a month. When he reached fifteen he worked part-time and put all the money he earned into flying. He passed all exams and on his sixteenth birthday flew solo.

However, it was also understood at each of the campuses that in some instances, situations or issues arose that required the external support of regional psychologists. For example, at the Snowy Mountain Campus, Robyn Francis and other staff helped some students understand that they did not have to try to deal with their problems alone and that it was okay for them to receive professional guidance and support. Indeed, this was part of the 'loco parentis' role-played by staff at the SSL.

Overnight supervisors also contributed to the students' sense of well-being. Supervisor Marg Brown believed that accomplishment wears many guises. For some students, it may be learning to do their own washing, knowing how to do the washing up or serving at the table. Becoming comfortable with cleaning the toilets

or keeping their shared bedroom tidy was quite a challenge and an achievement to master for some students.

Reflection

Middle Years reform practices incorporate the encouragement of reflective practices (Kemmis 2011). The process promoted in all the programs of the SSL was learning by doing, then reflecting on the practice, followed by making some changes. It is the classic Action Research model as promoted by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). Often this critical part of the program was a component that students struggled with as they had never been encouraged to do it before. It many ways this notion of reflection is what Mezirow (1997) refers to as Transformative learning, a concept that is referred to in a number of chapters in this book.

Students at the SSL are always provided with a variety of opportunities to reflect on their journey. One student likened her experience to reading a good book with no blurb:

> Sometimes I couldn't put it down; other times I lost track of the plot for a little while. When I finished it, I realised it was worth regularly going back to reread or refresh my mind through the different chapters. I believe the book will stay in my mind forever. The book was my recorded journey and my reflections on this journey (Kelly 2001).

Guest speakers have at times provided the impetus for reflections by the students. For example, Gordon, who attended the Alpine Campus in 2009, described the impact of a visit by Deb Gray, a woman born without arms and with shortened legs. She showed them a movie about her life, explaining how it was for her to grow up with people staring at her, the complications she experienced at school and her success in life after school. She emphasised the value in reflecting on actions and beliefs and then if possible making adjustments in the way we view the world in which we live.

As part of the reflection process, all students attending the SSL participate in a 'Personal Progress Interview' with their liaison teacher. Through this reflection, they are encouraged to identify their own learning style, hone their presentation skills, speak spontaneously, get along with others in the community and apply new and relevant knowledge to a program.

Most teachers encourage students to write reflections in their journals every night. During both lessons and on expeditions, some students find it easy to reflect about what they could achieve, identify ways to improve and set new goals for themselves. Others struggle with it. When students return home, they take with them the 'passport' they have created. This passport includes items they have generated such as web pages, PowerPoint presentations, visual diaries, folios and a Curriculum Vitae. It also contains a record of their reflections during their SSL experience. Many continue to reflect on their learning on return to their own home school.

Teachers are also encouraged to reflect on their own teaching practice. Often this consists of reflection after Expos or lessons or about the adjustments and transitions faced with changes in leadership roles and taking up new positions of responsibility as staff move on.

The Community Learning Project (CLP)

Student teams, generally consisting of up to six students from each home school, are responsible for planning and implementing a Community Learning Project (CLP) of benefit to their home community, following their term of attendance at the SSL. Prior to arriving at their campus, students are expected to have developed an idea for their project, which is further developed in consultation with the teaching staff at the SSL. The role of the staff is to help the student team develop useful skills to equip them to successfully participate in CLP management skills, teamwork, leadership, self-evaluation, and taking responsibility for the final outcome. Over the term, team members realise the different learning styles within their group and that perceptions often differ, so the trial run through a separate smaller campus-specific learning project at the SSL helps them address the CLP with more confidence.

While CLP completion is the responsibility of the students upon their return to their home schools and communities, it is helpful if home schools take an interest in the projects. Dr. Cheryl Glowrey, a previous Principal of South Gippsland Secondary College (SGSC) at Foster, found that her school's existing 'Challenge Unit' became an effective vehicle to assist in completing the CLP project on the student's return. Dr. Glowery realised that some of the student team might not draw on their experience until they came back to Foster and needed further time for reflection. She acknowledged that the SSL was a platform for launching their CLP, but the students had to embrace and own it to ensure completion. Suelyn Watterson, the Professional Learning Coordinator at Foster worked with the SGSC team once a week as the students began to make decisions about what their project might be prior to their attendance at the SSL. They tested their ideas by asking if their project ideas were attainable? How it might be implemented and how they might make links with other community members? They made their preliminary decision about the project that they hoped to develop further at the SSL. The project involved a role-play based on the history of their local area and connections with gold mining and the natural environment of their place. On the students return to school, Watterson and two school councillors watched the role play presentation and were most impressed.

Although all campuses saw Information Communication Technology as invaluable, Gnurad Gundidj students took it to new heights by trialling their CLP through Wiki sites rather than a word document. Students embedded Excel GANTT charts into a Wiki and then used project management tools, like those a project manager would use, to build a new skyscraper. Students also developed a vision, a business plan, a rationale and a purpose.

Students at Dinner Plain were introduced to RUMaD at their campus. An outside group visited the Alpine School students and helped them to become engaged in a CLP project that meant something to them. One team's CLP involved working with the Melbourne City Mission which was building a youth precinct for homeless youth. There CLP involved raising $1000 to support the precinct.

A Snowy River team decided to improve their home community environment by organising a beach clean-up at Rosebud from Chinaman's Creek to the Rosebud boatshed.

The Birchip CLP team at the Alpine School was supported strongly by their community. They chose to revamp their fitness track when they returned to Birchip. When they returned home they implemented their planning and completed the task they had set for themselves. They graded the track with the help of parents, cleared trees, put in stations and filled in sink-holes. The Birchip Committee received a $6000 grant and the Birchip Land Care Group paid for grading the track and fixing sink-holes.

Despite some excellent results, CLP completion by all teams across the board remains a challenge. A reintegration day in the last weeks of term helped some teams to refocus on their team project, and the teaching staff make contact with the home school, to help them understand why some students struggled with the implementation of their CLP. The staff were always pleased when students themselves suggested some ideas to salvage their team's CLP to enable it to get completed to their satisfaction. Teachers at the SSL ensure the notion of taking responsibility for action was built into the entire CLP program.

Conclusion

Gude, Castran and Bassett's support, together with the influence of Reeves and Hartnett and the individual and collective learning of all staff and students over the life of the SSL has resulted in purposeful action. Connection with, and understanding of what community is, has become better understood by many students through their experience of living, perhaps for the first time, in a residential school. New learning for the students has come about through team engagement in the Community Learning Project as has living and working together in a new context generated new awareness. Students come to understand the value of tolerance, cooperation and openness, and respect for the rights of others. The exerting of unfamiliar pressures through the Expos and the expectation that students will deal with limitations, are some of the challenges presented during an SSL experience.

Such learning has occurred as the result of the vision of the leadership team at the SSL for educational reform that embraces the particular needs of Year 9 students and a contemporary interpretation of the 'rite of passage'. This involves a paradigm shift to address Year 9 students personal and social needs through a contemporary interpretation of psychological research about adolescents.

Summary

This chapter introduces the SSL and outlines the history of the development of the Alpine School, which eventually expanded into three campuses and became the School for Student Leadership. Many politicians, educators and community members have played a part in developing the school into what it is today, but the one constant has been the Principal Mark Reeves. His mission to provide an enriching and in some instances life-changing alternative educational experience for Year 9 students has underpinned his approach to leading the school to become a beacon of Victorian state education.

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