

What makes MYDA a success for Bundarra Central School

As the teacher of Design and Technology I encouraged my Year 8 students to become involved with The Minister's Young Designers Awards the first year they were introduced. As Bundarra Central School is a small country school, I saw entering the competition as a means of proving that small country schools could achieve success at both district and state level as satisfactorily as students in larger country and city schools, who have easier access to industry and resources. Declining numbers in the secondary section of our school also provided motivation to show that, although small, we were still able to be competitive.

After our first success in 1994 I could see that to continue entering would be real promotion for our school as well as a great means to enhance the self-esteem of the students. Success over the years has given our students an exposure to experiences they perhaps would not have had otherwise, for example, flights to Sydney for the presentation ceremony, overnight accommodation in a city, and an opportunity to see at first hand and to discuss what other students around the state are designing.

Strategies

As the Design and Technology teacher, I have used MYDA as a means to consolidate the design process for Year 8 students.

Like many students doing Design and Technology for the first time, my students thought that a solution to a brief was easy, and that near enough was good enough as a solution. On most occasions they took the first idea that came into their head as a solution,



Krystal, Tania and Amanda with Steve Auld (Principal), Peter Gifford of ICAC, and their teacher, Pam Doak

without thinking too much about the actual design process, unless they were continually reminded. They also tended to be wasteful with resources once they realised an idea would not work, e.g. they would cut into a new piece of timber and throw it in the bin when they realised it could not be shaped.

As a result I devised a first-up unit, *These boots are made for walking*, for Year 7 students. This gave them the opportunity to experiment with many ideas while at the same time becoming familiar with the design process. Because of budget constraints, this unit uses recycled materials, which students can provide.

This introductory unit gives me the opportunity to really drill home the design process while the students are having hands-on fun as well as learning fundamental skills and gaining knowledge. Having reinforced the importance of researching, planning and experimenting carefully, I then move on through other design projects (for all Year 7 and Term 1 of Year 8), where more sophisticated materials are used than those in the unit, *These boots are made for walking*.

To come up with ideas for MYDA the students brainstorm ideas. I actively join in these sessions. Some of their ideas are great but I know that they are impossible to proceed with, mainly through a lack of access to industry. For example, one student really wanted to recycle bottles and make small furniture. However, this was impossible, as he could not get access to a smelting kiln suitable for the process.

When students find an idea that they can develop to meet a defined need, they take it on individually, and from then on the decisions are up to them. As individuals they look at possibilities and research to see if the resources they need in order to produce their idea are available. Living in a very small community is one of our biggest hurdles.

After this preliminary research students decide whether to go ahead with their idea or go back to the drawing board for more brainstorming.

I encourage my students to discuss their individual ideas with their peers and seek comments and advice. This, I feel, encourages student commitment without creating a feeling of isolation.

To be competitive in the awards, I encourage the students to aim for perfection in both their folios and presented task (whether it is a product, scaled plans or a model). As access to computers is not always convenient during class time, students often elect to stay behind after school in order to catch up on folio presentation work.

Small schools also have their advantages when preparing for the awards. As I am the only Design and Technology teacher in the school I have all students right through the course and therefore have the opportunity to get to know them as individuals and build up rapport. It is obviously easier to guide them along a path you know they are more likely to have success with.

Having had considerable success over the years, a culture has emerged within the school: there is an expectation that students really want to give it their best shot. I have noticed since the awards have become an important inclusion in our Year 8 school diary that students in Year 7 often have exposure to what Year 8 are doing. The Year 7 students start talking early in the year about what they would like to design when they are in Year 8. Year 6 know all about the awards too and some of them ask regularly if the awards will still be going when they are in secondary—another small-school advantage.

As the Year 8 group is of mixed ability, continual prompting and guiding are required so that an acceptable standard is achieved by individual students for the in-school judging. I really work at having all students present their completed project on a “high”, feeling confident they could all be winners.

I ask two people with design expertise, from outside the school, and one teacher from the school, to form a judging panel. I set them up with the MYDA Judging Guidelines, beverages and snacks and I leave the room. The judges inform me of their decisions and I provide their feedback to the students at the next lesson.

The desire to be competitive, within their own class and then at district level and hopefully state level, is passed on to those who are following, building on what they have seen and experienced. The present students are keen to achieve at that level. It has become part of the Design and Technology culture of the school.

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Thanks to Pam Doak for sharing these insights into how she works. The unit of work, These boots are made for walking, is available from Bill Blake by telephone on (02) 9886 7542 or e-mail bill.blake@det.nsw.edu.au