

# Shine

December 2010 | Issue 11

Every  
child,  
every  
opportunity

**Why home-based  
learning is vital  
for children**

**Creating inclusive  
special schools**

**Who is Australia's  
brainiest kid?**

**Giving students  
a stronger voice**

New support for student  
representative councils

**Golden days of education**

Bill Hannan reflects on his career

# A new wave of engagement

Doncaster Secondary College has found a new way to motivate one of the most challenging year levels, writes **Eamon Evans**.

IF YOU want something done properly, you've got to do it yourself. If you want something done educationally, leave it up to the kids.

For over three years now, Doncaster Secondary College has been doing just that. For one day each week, the school's 'Myself' program is not about "Year 9 students going into a class and having their learning predetermined for them," says teacher David Busted. Instead, "they come into a class and work with the teacher to determine what it is they're actually learning. They drive what's happening in the classroom and the teacher acts as a facilitator."

Divided into multiple units – 'My Camp', 'My City', 'My Film' and so forth – the program lets students venture outside the classroom to research a particular area, provided they organise the trip. In the community service unit, for example, students decide how they want to help the community, then contact a community provider, write a letter of introduction, and arrange the times they are going to visit.

"They can't leave the classroom until they've completed an OHS certificate, filled out an excursion form, printed off a bus timetable and so on," says Mr Busted. "They have to work independently and interdependently to make sure camps and excursions happen."

Essentially, the program is "designed for students to develop key skills that will assist them for the rest of their lives, like planning, organisation, analysing and problem solving," says one of Mr Busted's fellow facilitators, teacher Russell Lee.

"Students have loved the program so far," Mr Lee adds. "It has been very successful. All the



Students learn how to perform CPR as part of the Myself program at Doncaster Secondary College.

comments at parent teacher interviews have been about how much their child is enjoying themselves and the activities they do."

**"The student who likes to be told: 'Do this question out of the textbook', can find this program very confronting."**

Not all teachers agree, however. "Kids don't like 'Myself' sometimes because so much onus is put on them," points out a third facilitator, teacher Michelle Gaudion. "The particularly driven student, who likes to be told to 'do this question, do that question' out of the textbook, can find 'Myself' very

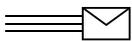
confronting. And I love that! I'm really pleased when that happens."

When those students finally "take ownership" of the class, Gaudion explains, they finally "see that they are only going to get out of this program what they are prepared to put in. And that's just such a different mindset to the way they approach their English and their maths – when they're used to everything being prepared for them, down to the minutiae of: 'Get this question done by the end of the period'.

"I think the value of self-directed learning is really about students realising that they can't just sit back and be sponges. Their creativity and drive really needs to come out. The second main benefit that we really hang our hat on is that the program is all about teamwork and working with other students and different personalities. The learning that happens through that is just phenomenal.

Things always take more time than we think they will, but the relationships that come out at the end of it are a really valuable component of the program.

“I think that there’s scope in our everyday classrooms for more self-directed learning. The amount of information available to students these days has just exponentially grown, so we’re never going to as content-driven as we used to be.” 



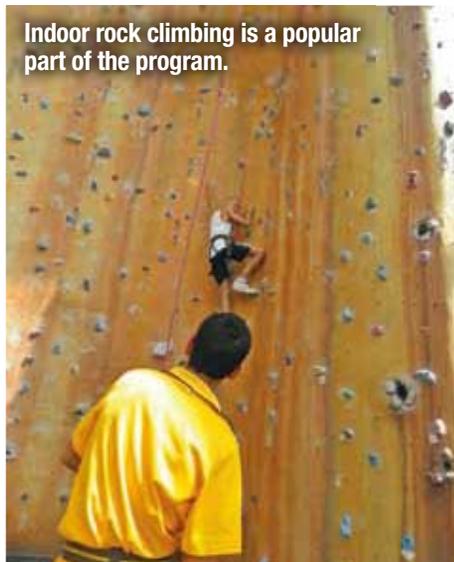
To find out more, email David Busteed at busteed. david.m@edumail.vic.gov.au



Many students opted to learn how to surf as part of the Myself program at Doncaster Secondary College.



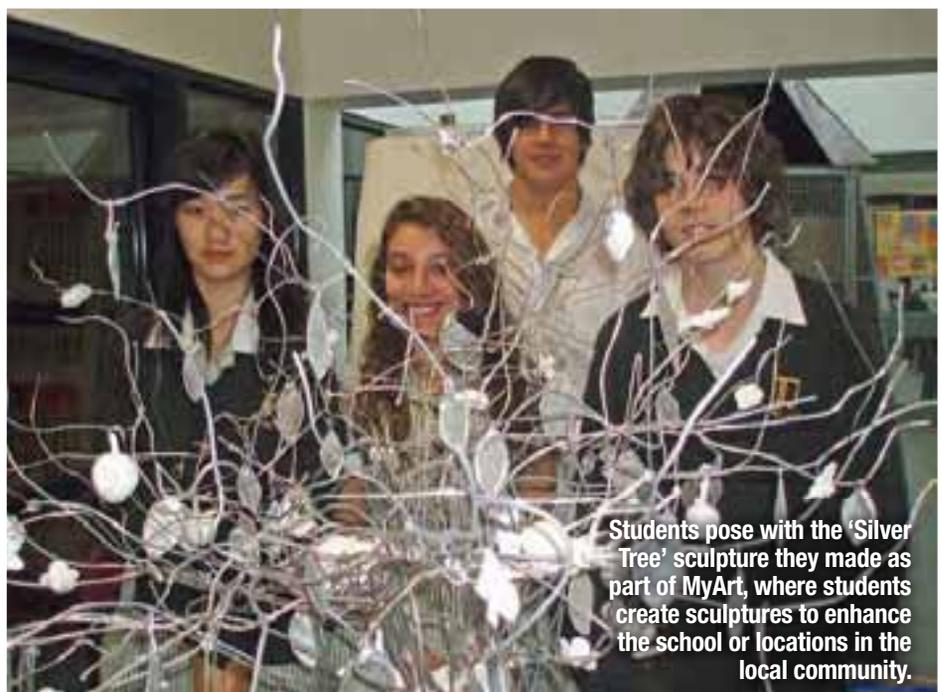
A student packs up after completing a brain dissection as a part of MyCSI, the popular forensic science component of Doncaster Secondary’s Myself program.



Indoor rock climbing is a popular part of the program.



Teachers have commented that students’ creativity and drive has really come out as a result of the program.



Students pose with the ‘Silver Tree’ sculpture they made as part of MyArt, where students create sculptures to enhance the school or locations in the local community.