

School Drama™ Case Study: Regional

At Yackandandah Primary School, 30km from Albury-Wodonga on the New South Wales-Victorian border, professional learning opportunities for teachers are few and far between, without travelling to a major metropolitan centre. However, a revolutionary partnership between Sydney Theatre Company, Murray Arts and HotHouse Theatre that has changed all that, with the School Drama program delivered to teachers, right in the heart of their classrooms!

“When there was the opportunity to actually have someone come to our school, I jumped at the chance,” says Kelli Beddgood, teacher at Yackandandah. “I thought I would love to have someone come into my class and teach me with my grade.”

Attracted by the co-mentoring relationship which is at the heart of the School Drama program, three teachers at Yackandandah participated in 2016. “The great thing about School Drama is that the support is built into the model. Having the Teaching Artist working with you across seven weeks gave me the opportunity to really develop my skills,” says teacher Brendan Hogan.

The teachers at Yackandandah found their students embraced the use of Drama during English lessons. “It’s fair to say that drama quickly became the highlight of the week for both the students and myself,” says Brendan. “One of the most gratifying things for me was to see the children change the way they looked at stories and analysed characters.”

The program is having lasting effects, well beyond the initial seven week teaching program as Brendan describes: “School Drama has changed the way I look at every single picture book I pick up or see on our classroom shelf. It gives you the skills, tools, support and confidence to effortlessly meld drama into an enriching English curriculum which builds comprehension and oral literacy.”

Since completing the program, all three teachers are continuing to use drama as a teaching method in their classroom, supporting each other by sharing lesson plans. “I’ve been continuing doing drama each week since the program finished,” says Kelli. According to local Teaching Artist Alyson Evans, the enthusiasm of the teachers is vital to the success of the program. “What makes School Drama work so well is the commitment from the teachers, and at Yackandandah Primary School, the teachers were willing to push themselves outside of their comfort zones and fully embrace the program,” says Alyson.

The principal of Yackandandah Primary School, Michael Edwards, also saw the benefits of the School Drama program. “As both the principal and parent of a child in one of the classes I was very pleased to see the students’ eager engagement with literature. The teachers were committed and the children were able to use drama skills to enhance their English learning and enjoyment.”

For teachers in the Albury, Wodonga, Federation, Greater Hume, Indigo and Towong Shire regions, School Drama is a unique opportunity to experience a leading literacy program in their own

classrooms. Brendan recommends the program “to any teacher who feels that there is a more engaging way to teaching literacy [or] who wants to incorporate more drama into their teaching, but doesn’t know where to start.” In Kelli’s words, “It’s been fantastic that we’ve been able to participate in something so high quality that’s come to us, to regional areas... I loved it.”



Images: School Drama at Yackandandah Primary School, 2016