Y Community School – Vision, Philosophy and Educational Approach.

At the Y we believe in the power of inspired young people and the vision of the Y is to build a better world with and for young people.

The Y Community School is established to respond to the needs of young people who are disengaged or at significant risk of disengaging from mainstream education.

We enact our belief in the power of inspired young people by providing a safe, supportive environment for young people to engage with education, attain skills and qualifications and begin not just to survive, but to thrive, become inspired, and an inspiration to others.

1. Y Community School Philosophy:

All young people want to learn and do well and should have the right to achieve their full potential regardless of circumstances and the barriers that have prevented them engaging fully in education. The development of the whole person is of utmost importance. We are guided in developing this through the YMCA's philosophy of valuing a person's body, mind and spirit. We believe this holistic approach is best delivered through a flexible individualised learning program and environment to maximise positive outcomes for every student.

We strive to deliver a high-quality educational program focussed on the whole person and on supporting individualised education in the academic, wellbeing and vocational domains. Our approach is to reengage students through specially tailored programs, curriculum and structures focussed on supporting students to explore their interests and passions and thereby progress to employment and / or further education and training.

Students engage with the school and the wider community and develop positive relationships and connections, enabling them to function and contribute effectively to the wider community, supporting them to thrive emotionally, socially and physically.

Our philosophy seeks to contribute to the goals of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration and in particular:

- *Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.* We will provide a specialist setting demonstrating excellence in reengagement and trauma informed education, thereby promoting equity for some of our community's most disadvantaged young people.
- *Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.* We will provide an individualised learning program built around each young person's interests and needs to build engagement, develop confidence, address gaps in learning, and develop learning skills and competencies to equip young people for their lives beyond school.

Y Community School supports and promotes the principles and practices of our Australian democracy including a commitment to:

- An elected government
- The rule of law
- Equal rights for all before the law
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech and association
- The values of openness and tolerance.

2. Student characteristics:

Students disengage for a wide range of personal and social reasons. The students most likely to experience significant disengagement and benefit from the environment we provide include young people who:

- Have a disability or additional learning needs (e.g. ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Mild Intellectual Disability, Dyslexia, etc.)
- Have mental health conditions, both formally diagnosed and undiagnosed.

- Have been exposed to trauma, including abuse and / or neglect, or witnessing or being subject to family violence.
- Have experienced homelessness either as individuals or as part of their family unit and / or high levels of transience.
- Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Identify as LGBTIQ+ or are exploring their gender identity.
- Have had contact with the justice system.
- Reside in Out of Home Care.
- Have current or past issues with drug and/or alcohol use and dependence.

Students with one or more of the above characteristics require a safe learning environment where they feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. Additionally, they require a flexible and highly individualised learning program to effectively meet their developmental needs. Every student has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) with specific learning goals set each semester and reviewed at least each term. Over time students build trust, regain confidence, and learn to thrive and grow into active and engaged young adults.

3. Approach to learning and engagement:

The Y Community School approach to learning is based on recognising our students' strengths and the barriers that confront them, and using educational approaches based on research and evidence to support them to experience success, regain confidence and reengage in the learning process. The key drivers of this process are:

- strong supportive relationships with supportive adults and their peers,
- an environment and approach that reduces triggers, provides flexibility and supports student to develop self-regulation strategies,
- identifying, developing, and working with interests and passions to build engagement, stamina, and success,
- using applied learning and inquiry approaches to build context, meaning and engagement for deeper more sustained learning.

These drivers are supported by:

Trauma-informed Practice (TIP)

A significant proportion of students that attend the school are likely have a background of trauma including complex trauma and therefore require a specialised setting with staff trained in this area. This guides daily practice and the prioritisation of activities and the ways in which curriculum is approached. Students with the characteristics above will benefit from the application of trauma informed models even where they may not identify as trauma impacted.

Staff will be selected and trained with a focus on their knowledge and ability to work in a trauma informed manner. The school leadership is responsible for ensuring current information regarding trauma informed education and ensuring that a range of resources are available and readily referred to by staff. Use of training resources such as those provided and available online through TIPBS (Trauma Informed Positive Behaviour Support), through organisations such as Berry Street, and through professional reading will be an integral part of the training provided to staff and form the basis of professional practice conversations for staff and team meetings and in student consults.

Neurosequential Model in Education

Key concepts that inform the school's approach to learning are taken from theory developed by Dr. Bruce Perry, a leader in the field of child trauma and neuroscience and are predominantly based on the Neurosequential Model in Education (NME).

The diagram on the following page illustrates the key concepts of the Neurosequential Model in Education.

All rights reserved © 2007-2018 Bruce D. Perry
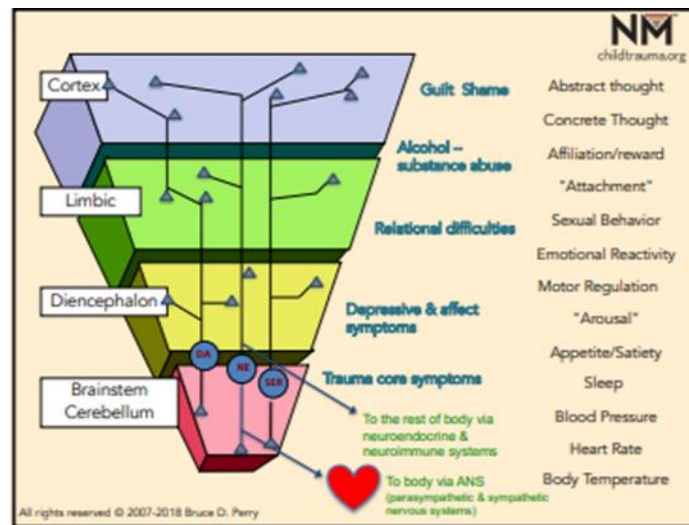
The most relevant and critical points are as follows:

1. The brain develops and is organised from the bottom up. Children who have suffered from early childhood trauma are likely to be compromised in the lower regions of the brain. This means that these students often struggle to access the higher regions required for thinking and learning.

2. Students can access the higher regions of their brain for learning in the right environment and with the right support. Students need to feel safe, get regular sleep, have a good diet, be exposed to many positive relational interactions and engage in regular doses of patterned, repetitive, rhythmic movements. All of these components support calm and order in the brain.

3. Expecting students to immediately engage in learning will be unsuccessful if they are dysregulated and disconnected from others. Students can be supported to think, learn and reflect via a simple sequence that works from the 'bottom up'. This illustrated in the following diagram.
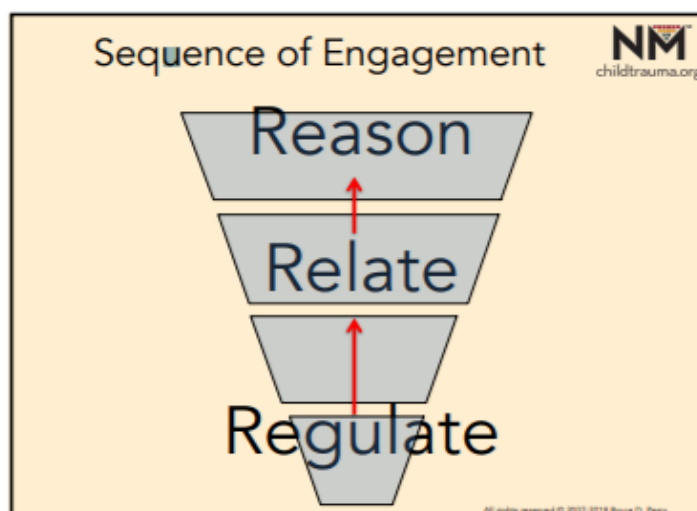
- First, the student must be helped to 'regulate' their fight / flight / freeze responses.
- Second, teachers and support staff must connect with students in an attuned and sensitive way.
- Third, the student can then be supported to learn.

Students may require a significant amount of time and support from staff to regulate and relate before they can access their 'thinking and learning' brain in the classroom.

Applied Learning Theory

"Applied learning incorporates the teaching of skills and knowledge in the context of 'real life' experiences. Students will apply what they have learnt by doing, experiencing and relating acquired skills to the real world. Applied learning teaching and practice ensures that what is learnt in the classroom is connected to scenarios and experiences outside the classroom and makes that connection as immediate and transparent as possible.

Applied learning is about nurturing and working with a student in a holistic manner, taking into account their personal strengths, interests, goals and previous experiences to ensure a flexible and independent approach to learning. Applied learning emphasises skills and knowledge that may not normally be the focus of more traditional school curriculums. It also recognises individual differences in ways of learning and post-educational experiences. Real-life application often requires a shift from a traditional focus on discrete curriculum to a more integrated and contextualised approach to learning, as students learn and apply the skills and knowledge required to solve problems, implement projects or participate in the workforce." (Source: VPC Literacy Curriculum Design 2022)

The principles of applied learning (below) are well aligned with the key drivers of engagement and learning identified above and the Trauma Informed and Neurosequential approaches to learning.

Principles of Applied Learning:

1. Start where learners are at.

2. Negotiate the curriculum. Engage in a dialogue with learners about their curriculum.

3. Share knowledge. Recognise the knowledge learners bring to the learning environment.

4. Connect with communities and real-life experiences.

5. Build resilience, confidence and self-worth – consider the whole person.

6. Integrate learning – the whole task and the whole person. In life we use a range of skills and knowledge. Learning should reflect the integration that occurs in real life tasks.

7. Promote diversity of learning styles and methods. Everyone learns differently. Accept that different learning styles require different learning/teaching methods. But value experiential, practical and 'hands on' ways of learning.

8. Assess appropriately. Use the assessment method that best 'fits' the learning content and context.

Taylor and Parsons in the Curriculum Leadership Journal (October 2012) report that "classroom practices reported to engage learners are predominantly inquiry-based, problem based and exploratory". By drawing on students interests and developing individualised learning plans where student's interests abilities and needs can be catered for, students are supported to engage, explore, challenge themselves and grow back towards a learning and productive mindset.

Filling the Developmental Gaps

Students attending the Y Vocational school will typically present with significant gaps in their social, emotional and/or cognitive development. There will often be a very wide range of developmental achievement between students in one classroom.

An important part of the early stages of a student's engagement is an assessment of strengths and areas where there are developmental gaps. A range of tools will be used at the stages when students are settled enough to undertake assessments. Key tools include:

- Adverse childhood experiences index – used identify areas of social and emotional support which may be relevant to the student.
- BKSB testing – used to determine reading and numeracy levels within the Australian Core Skills Framework.
- Burt reading test – can be used to attain a reading age for students not yet able to undertake BKSB.

'Filling the developmental gaps' is essential for each student in order to maintain engagement and have them advance successfully with their learning. This requires a specific approach to the development and design of curriculum. The following factors are prioritised in this process:

- The need to enhance student's self-efficacy by building on significantly low levels of student self-efficacy after experiences of repeated failure in the classroom and/or social isolation.
- Providing a program and targeted interventions to improve low literacy and numeracy levels.
- Flexibility to deliver a highly individualised and differentiated curriculum.
- A strong emphasis on social and emotional learning (SEL) with explicit teaching and ongoing skill development required in this area.

The staffing ratios, individualised and interest-based nature of each student's learning plan and the opportunity for small group and individual tuition are all designed to identify and provide support for students being held up by gaps in their learning.

4. Curriculum Structures:

Students entering the school will be at year 10 or above and may be somewhat above the normal age level for their year level of intake, either because of significant periods of nonattendance, and / or as a result of repeating year levels earlier in their schooling.

They initial need for all students is the development of trust and relationships with the school staff. Student groupings will be based on a primary relationship with a teacher and youth worker (their core group) and students will work in mixed age core groups. The teacher responsible for each core group will have the responsibility for developing monitoring and reporting on the progress of each of their students and will do so in partnership with the student and family. The core group teacher will be responsible to gather assessment evidence from other teachers where relevant and combine this with their own evidence in making judgements as to student progress.

Students will spend a significant amount of time with their core group teacher and will also attend tutorials and interest-based activities with other teachers and staff as well as vocational training and structured workplace learning. This facilitates the strong relationships required for success, utilises teachers' difference and expertise and supports students to progress towards being comfortable to work with more varied groupings and a range of adults as they grow in confidence. Each student core group teacher is responsible for:

- Developing, monitoring, reviewing and updating a student's individual learning plan.
- Ensuring a student's learning plan enables them to achieve the qualification they are enrolled in (VPC or VCE VM.
- Monitoring and reporting on the progress a student is making towards their ILP and the relevant qualification. Other teachers may contribute to this where students are engaged in projects or tasks with them and will provide evidence to the core teacher.
- Liaising with youth workers wellbeing and school leadership to ensure a effective support for and oversight of each student's progress is maintained.
- Facilitating meetings, discussions, and reviews regarding a student's progress.
- Managing the student engagement and wellbeing on a day-to-day basis and seeking assistance and support ort referrals as required.

The core groups are planned to have an average size of less than 17 at the school's maximum capacity. In practice these may vary with a mix of sizes at varying times as students undertake tutorials, core work time, project work or are involved in Vocational Training or Structured Workplace learning activities.

A detailed outline of the curriculum structure is contained in the document *YCS Curriculum Overview*.

5. Individual Learning Plans:

All students will work to individual learning plans and the key roles of teachers include:
- Exploring each student's interests, strengths, future goals, current ability levels and barriers to learning.
- Using these to identify areas in which the student can engage in practical applied learning tasks that will develop the student's skills and allow them to demonstrate their learning.
- Guiding students in the development of tasks that are appropriately challenging and achievable to build confidence and a growth mindset around learning.
- Documenting these in the individual learning plan which can be used by the teacher(s) and student to guide their daily activities.
- Identifying students with similar interest to facilitate collaborative learning and skill development.

- Mapping the tasks identified by students to the various strands of the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) or VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM) and providing students with clear guidance as to what they need to do to achieve the learning outcomes specified in these.
- Guiding students to engage in skill development tutorials and activities to support them in developing skills required to achieve tasks and demonstrate the outcomes in the VPC and VCE VM.

The key characteristics of the individual Learning Plan are that it will identify:
- Key information about a student including their interest, skills, barriers to learning including any disability, supports and adjustments required to enable them to engage as fully as possible in learning and any social or behavioural challenges or triggers the student needs help with.
- The qualifications a student is working to achieve (VPC, VCE VM, VETis courses etc).
- An overview of the conditions under which this student is likely to be most engaged and learn best (based on prior experience and trailing various approaches).
- Any triggers that may cause the student to become dysregulated and the strategies the teacher, student or others will use to assist the student to re-regulate.
- The learning goals for a student for the coming semester.
- What major tasks a student will be undertaking to achieve those learning goals.
- The knowledge and skills a student needs to learn and / or will develop through doing those tasks.
- Any adjustments or other supports a student requires to be able to engage in these tasks and when and how these will be provided.

Each student's individual learning plan will be developed during their induction and settling in period and is a living document that is used, revised and adjusted on a regular basis by school staff working together with the student. A formal review will be held at least twice / year at the beginning of each semester involving the student their family and the teacher and the revised plan will be provided to parents after that review.

6. Curriculum and learning task and assessment development and moderation:

The approach of using individual learning plans designed to cater for the individual needs and differences of each student does not mean that all students will be working in isolation. A key function of teachers will be to support their classes and students to identify areas of common interest and need and develop group activities in which different students may take different roles.

In addition, a cycle of regular tutorials which support students to be taught and acquire skills is included in the curriculum structure along with the Mind, Body, Spirit Curriculum which focuses on wellbeing and the social and learning skills required for students to succeed.

Teachers will work together in scheduled weekly 'meeting' times to collaborate on the development of tasks and assessment techniques and standards they are using to determine whether students meet the requirements of the VPC and VCE VM.

Teachers will develop a portfolio approach with their students to record evidence of their learning journey and capture the evidence that they have demonstrated the learning required for their relevant qualifications. This could include, hard copies of work, student reflections, photographic, audio or video evidence, peer feedback, teacher assessments and any other information relevant to the task being performed. Students will be supported to record regular reflections on their work and progress to assist them to build confidence and to develop a conscious understanding of their learning.

At least once per term teachers will undertake a moderation activity guided by the Teaching and Learning Leader. They will view the portfolios being developed by students from another teacher's class and explore the levels of task and assessment being used by other teachers to measure student progress on outcomes. Teachers will provide feedback to each other, and the Campus Principal and Teaching and Learning Leader will oversee the process and identify areas for improvement either across the campus or for individual staff.

7. Curriculum Review Cycle:

The individualised nature of planning and task development at the school mean that a cycle of continuous review and improvement is the best means to ensure learning and curriculum meets the needs of the students and the requirements of the VPC and VCE VM.

In the final weeks of each school year teachers will undertake a review, over several sessions, of the learning progress of students and the ways in which curriculum has been developed and delivered for various students / groups of students. The focus of this review will be:

- Is the Individual Learning Plan process meeting the needs of planning for and monitoring the needs of students?
- Are all students managing to progress towards their goals?
- Are all students being given the opportunity to achieve the requirements to receive a certificate?
- Are the tutorial sessions in particular skills meeting the needs of students for explicit teaching and skill development?
- Is the Mind Body Spirit Curriculum meeting the needs of students for social, emotional and wellbeing development?
- Based on the above what would we do differently?

This process will be led by the teaching and Learning Leader and supported by the school leadership team.

At the beginning of each semester, and as opportunities arise, teachers will identify the opportunities that exist in the community for projects that will support the applied learning focus, and which can be mapped to the VPC and VCE VM. These projects will be publicised to students and offered as curriculum projects to be incorporated in each student's individual plans as relevant.

8. Reporting on student progress:

Student reports will be produced and provided to students and parents twice each year at the end of each semester. Each semester's report will include:

- Information regarding the student's progress towards the goals recorded on their individual learning plan.
- Information regarding the student's progress towards the qualifications they are undertaking and what they are required to do to complete that qualification.
- Information regarding the student's ability levels as recorded on any standardised tests and where relevant any statewide testing.
- Information regarding the student's social and emotional skills and relationships with other students and staff.
- Information regarding the student's participation in any extracurricular activities.

9. Reporting on school outcomes to the community:

The school will produce an Annual Report which will include the following information:

- A brief description of the school's learning wellbeing and community programs for the year.
- A description and analysis of student results on any statewide tests undertaken through the year and comparison to previous year(s) results where applicable.
- A description and analysis of student outcomes in achieving qualifications and their pathways on leaving the school through the year.
- A description and analysis of student attendance data for the year.
- A description of highlights and achievements through the year

The school Annual Report will be:

- Present to and endorsed by the Board YMCA Whittlesea Youth and Community Services LTD.
- Published on the school's website.
- Provided to the VRQA for publishing on the register of schools.
- Provided to any other government agency(s) or statutory bodies who make a lawful request to receive this.

10. Related documents:

- YCS Student Learning & Curriculum Overview

11. Document Control:

Review of this framework is the responsibility of the Executive Manager Y Schools and will be undertaken every 3 years, or prior as required, in consultation with appropriate People.

Document available on Y-MAC>Communication>Manuals and Files>Policies and Procedures

This document is due for review on Click or tap to enter a date.

Version:	Description of Amendment	Amended by	Approver and date	Release Date
1.0	Document created	Paul van Breugel	Executive Manager Y Schools 15/6/2023	1/11/2023