

The Bogong Experience

The Bogong experience has been a program developed for Year 9 students to create our future makers. It has been established to challenge our students and to develop strategies to build resilience, independence and personal strengths. As part of Personal and Project Based learning, students embark on a 12 day adventure that allows them to demonstrate a range of qualities and strengths. As a teacher, it is so valuable to observe the students personal and social growth. Jim Gillies highlighted the VIA character strengths in an article about students representing the school and I wanted to discuss the value in the Bogong experience and what strengths are demonstrated and developed.

Perseverance is a foremost strength developed and students learn to embrace stepping out of their comfort zone. Each individual may have different challenges they face, whether it is high ropes, climbing, handling reptiles, not having technology or going on a 5 day hike without the creature comforts. Students (and possibly their parents) face the major challenge of being away from home for 12 days. We see the students persevere through home sickness to carry their own pack, food, tent, sleeping gear as they enjoy the environment of the high plains. Student come back knowing one step (and sometimes one day) at a time will get you to your destination.

The program is designed to focus on the personal and social capabilities within individuals and how they operate in teams (developing **Social intelligence**). Students are part of Journey groups where it is vital to understand and accept how others operate. Individuals may also need to reflect on how they are feeling (**self-regulation**) and talk about what they need for support. It is truly fantastic to see students help others out by encouraging them if they are struggling, resolving conflicts if they arise and supporting each other to function as the best group possible. It was great to see each and every student develop their **teamwork** skills. When working in teams, **kindness** was truly demonstrated. It may have been just sharing a piece of slice, helping someone abseil over the edge or assisting in packing up a tent. We have very caring students at Yarrawonga College who demonstrate this strength regularly!

As part of the program there are also many opportunities for our students to take on **leadership**. On the journey, job roles change each day to include leading and navigating, taking on responsibility of hygiene, cooking and group morale. Some students took on the opportunity to demonstrate **leadership** qualities during Bogong activities, presenting the weather forecast or speaking on the local radio station.

As the Bogong experience comes to an end, it is great to overhear students talk about the beautiful sights they have seen, swimming in the freezing cold waterfalls and appreciating the spectacular views the Alpine area had to offer (**Appreciation of Beauty**). As they reminisce over the photos, it is obvious that many are very **grateful** for the experience they had and are looking forward to further opportunities our school provides.