

DORRIGO HIGH SCHOOL 50TH ANNIVERSARY GARDEN

overview of the project

Dorrigo is a small town located in northern New South Wales. In 2006 Dorriggo High School celebrated its 50th anniversary and to mark this special event the students designed and built a garden and pathway that reflected the concept of remembrance and invoked school pride.

The anniversary garden was built on an eroded and unsightly area of the school grounds that was causing problems with dust and mud.



Pathway, garden beds and time capsule

how the project was carried out

The garden design was created by Year 10 students and was presented to the Student Environment Council for consultation and approval. The Student Environment Council is made up of four students from each year group and was established in 2000 to give the students a say in the environmental management of the school. When designing the garden the students considered three main issues:

- the area has high traffic flow
- it is used as an outdoor recreational space for students
- it is used for formal events at the school.

The anniversary garden design incorporated a paved pathway passing through raised garden beds of dwarf bottlebrush, grevilleas, lavender and rosemary. The lavender was incorporated to stimulate relaxation and the rosemary in association with remembrance of the ANZAC tradition, while the grevilleas and bottlebrushes were planted to attract native birds. Students from every year group were involved in the construction of garden beds, the addition of soil, planting and mulching the gardens, as these activities were incorporated into the school curriculum.

The pathway was professionally laid with funding from the local Parents and Citizens' Association and incorporated approximately 50 pavers that were inscribed with past and present students' names, these pavers were donated by current and ex-students.

A time capsule — which included a current text book, a newspaper and current school photographs — was buried in the garden, with a plaque to commemorate the anniversary and to mark the time capsules location. Seating for students to use the area at lunchtime was also installed.

outcomes now and in the future

This project has provided the students with practical skills in garden design, which they have used to conduct further on-ground works at the school. The project has increased the students awareness of biodiversity conservation.

The anniversary garden has become a focal point of the school and will be used for the Remembrance Day services, whole of school functions and as an outdoor learning area. The plants established through this project have provided additional native habitat to attract birdlife, reduced erosion and the amount of dust and mud being trampled into the school.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The project has provided students with practical skills in garden design. The result of student involvement from all school years in the construction of the garden has created a sense of ownership over the area, as well as a commitment to the environment. This project successfully demonstrated the strength of having students at the centre of on ground activities to make a difference to the environment. This project has built relationships within the school, across faculties, existing groups and classes.

In order for projects like this to succeed, schools need to recognise that a coordinator is required, not to do the work, but to tap into and support the interests of others and to provide support to the students. This requires the school to be prepared to commit time and resources, which Dorriggo High School has done.