

## Ballarat High School



Figure 1. Front face of Ballarat High School

### **Aims of Innovative Learning Environment, nature and history of innovation: holistic picture of organization**

Ballarat High School (BHS) was established in 1907 as an agricultural college and was located at its current site on the Western edge of historic Ballarat in 1910. The school is adjacent to the Arch of Victory and tree-lined Avenue of Honour that was erected/planted after the First World War. Like many of the older institutions in Ballarat, the school is proud of its history. In the mid-1990s when many Victorian High schools were amalgamated and most Victorian Schools changed their names to Secondary Colleges, Ballarat High School fought to keep its name because of its historical significance.

BHS is a Year 7-12 State Secondary school whose learners are mostly in the 12-18 years age range. There is a capped annual intake of 250 students at Year 7. In 2009, the school had a total enrolment of 1395, 744 girls and 651 boys. There are 105 teaching staff (98.3 FTE) and 30 non-teaching staff (22.8 FTE). The school has a long tradition of academic excellence and former pupils include Geoffrey Blainey. In Year 7-10 students take a range of core subjects from the VELS, with time-tabling to give teachers extended opportunities to work with the same group of students. Typically each class group will have the same teacher for English, Humanities and Personal Learning and the same teacher for Maths and Science. For LOTE the school offers German and Japanese. The school has been a Specialist Sport School since 1996, and has an outstanding Music Program with Year 7, Year 8, Intermediate and Stage Bands. Both sport and music are well supported by parents, and the parents in the Music Support Group recently raised over \$50,000 to purchase a grand piano. The school is the only government school that is a member of Ballarat Associated Schools, so it participates with the Independent and Catholic schools in the rowing competition (Head of the Lake) and the sporting leagues and debating competitions.

While the school is located only two kilometres from areas of high poverty, the school caters to a predominantly lower to average middle-class demographic. The school ICSEA value is 1027, with 15% of the top quarter, 11% upper middle, 62% lower middle and 9% bottom quarter. The school is zoned, and like many such schools, living within the zone increases property prices (which are significantly cheaper than in Melbourne) and many middle class families have moved into the zone to attend the school. In the Ballarat Local Government Area, the median yearly individual income for persons aged 15 years and over who were usual residents was \$21,008 per annum. The median yearly household income was \$43,628 (ABS, 2006).

### **Overview of the Innovative Learning Environment (ILE)**

The innovation at Ballarat High School (BHS) has been around whole-school change with the aim of increasing school engagement. This ILE is broad and operates across pedagogy and practice, through school management initiatives, and the integration of organisational, learning and core values frameworks. The centre of the ILE (and first innovation to be developed) is the Year Nine ARCH program, an extremely successful program that the school has been running since 2006. There has been a building project (a new Year 9 facility and some building upgrades) as a part of this renewal project, but the exciting aspect of this whole-school innovation has been the ways in which the leadership team have worked with other staff to refocus the school frameworks and structures to focus on relationships and the personalisation of learning for all members of the school community.

### **Aims of the ILE**

The Principal is also a researcher, and his research informs his approach as a principal. He explains:

*my research is about how you actually shift large organisations. And the way that you do that is to build the capacity of every individual within that organisation, which comes back to personalisation of learning.*

The building of capacity of every individual at BHS has been a central aim of the school leadership team, and the programs that have been developed and put into place over the last 4 years have all been around achieving this. The Principal also believes in the importance of building strong relationships between every person in the school, and this has been a focus of the leadership team. Relationships that they have specifically focused on have been between staff/student; staff/staff; staff/ management; student/management and school/community.

Through this whole school approach, the school has been aiming to achieve increased school retention, the promotion of diverse educational pathways and improved staff/student attitudes to school, teaching and learning. Year 9 was identified as an area of particular need just before The Principal came into the school, and an innovative program for Year 9 has been developed, broadened and sustained. The success of the Year 9 program, facilitated by the development of the Learning Framework, has enabled the development of other successful new programs at the school. These programs will be later described in more detail.

## Background and Context

### *Leadership changes*

2006 was a low point for BHS. For the first time ever, the school did not reach their Year 7 numbers, which were capped at 250, and only 240 enrolled. In the same year the survey data was very low. The Principal<sup>1</sup>, who began then, recalls:

*The Year 8 student assessment of teacher effectiveness was at 2%...The staff opinion and the student satisfaction were probably in the bottom 10th percentile and the parents were very low as well. In most areas things [were low, but] extra-curricular was always very high because of after school sport and music.*

This lack of self-esteem was despite the fact that the school was doing reasonably well overall and had some pockets of excellence by any measure. The Principal explains:

*When I say that there were some terrific practices in the school. I mean, our music here is just absolutely sensational. Our sporting and phys. ed. programs are exemplary...What I saw on the ground and what I saw in the survey data didn't match. And it was more of the gut feel of the place that, yes look, there were issues, but they weren't insurmountable issues. It could be achieved pretty quickly.*

The Principal observes:

*when I reflect back, I reckon the school suffered from low self-esteem and had lost its confidence as an organisation. And I think that was felt through the students, through their learning. I think it was felt through the staff and the dynamics of the staff was low and the school community could sense that too.*

At the same time as this, the leadership team changed radically as people retired and moved on to other jobs. The Principal himself was appointed as the Principal in 2006 (having been in an acting capacity before that). He describes the way that the school responded to school leadership when he first came:

*It was a very traditional – I'm the Principal, I'm the boss – amongst the leadership team and the philosophy was...very much about management and control. Discipline – let's discipline the kids – if you don't like our way – go! Get out of here. The school, within the Ballarat schools, had a reputation of having a 'Clearance Sale' round about September every year, get rid of those kids who [pause]. I also come from a very – a background of – you do the same things you get the same results, so part of my interview as Principal I presented something different to what they would have had in the past. I was the first Principal to be appointed from outside the school in forty years. All the other Principal class have come through the school. Ok so, they took a risk in appointing me from outside the school. So I've come with a different perspective.*

The Principal was in the fortunate position where he could configure and appoint to a number of new leadership positions within the school and build up his own leadership team. In this process he recruited people who shared his vision for the school (around relationships and personal learning) but who had different skills and abilities to himself, so that the team would be more effective. He describes:

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<sup>1</sup> The Principal at the time of interviews has recently resigned from BHS to take a position at the Grampians Regional Office, DEECD. An AP3 at the school has been appointed Acting Principal until Term 2, 2011.

*It's hard to appoint people who are not necessarily like minded, I'm very conscious of not employing people who think like me...people who have a very similar philosophical base, but don't think the same way as I think. Because I think there is a danger in that.*

He feels that having this whole new team in place has been instrumental to the successes that the school has had, and states that he believes that they are doing the wrong thing in Britain by bringing in new Principals; rather, they need to bring in new leadership teams. The school had a focus on discipline; the extant leadership team reflected that in terms of the types of positions and how they were framed. The Principal noted that previously:

*The 3 AP3s and the 2 AP2s were all about discipline as well. I had almost 5 management, 5 disciplinarians. Get rid of them, nothing about learning. Because when I looked around the school, as I said, the kids were terrific and we didn't need that focus.*

The Principal also notes that when he first came, these structures shaped the ways in which the staff thought about their relationships with the students:

*And the language here was about disciplining the kids, and I would get up in front of my staff and say 'I discipline my dog, I work with my children' and I said, 'that's how I will approach this school'.*

Things have changed so that now it is not very often that you hear the word 'discipline' in the school. Even teachers who have been at the school for a long time have shifted their language usage. The Principal believes that the ways language is used is very important.

With the new appointments the leadership team and their roles were re-structured so that the 3 Assistant Principals (AP3) focused on different areas of teaching and learning: School Improvement (focusing on learning environments and staffing); Later years; and Middle years. The two AP2s are attached to the AP3s (Middle Years and Later Years). The school also reworked the shape of teaching and learning in the school:

*The other change is most schools that I have been in have a welfare slant that it's about management, it's about controls, it's about welfare. It's not about learning at all and unless you can sit still in the classroom and be a passive learner then we'll put all those supports in place for you, or we'll suspend you or we'll throw you out. There's nothing about how can we personalise your learning...We threw the code of conduct out when I first got here. Now, thankfully the State Government calls it an Engagement Plan, which I think is far more effective than the code of conduct.*

In terms of the staff, generally there were poor staff dynamics, with an influential group of staff leading negativity. Democratic processes at the school were divisive and stifling in how they were enacted. Every decision was voted on at school meetings (and if a motion got 51% it would be carried out, despite almost half the staff disagreeing). All of this took away from a staff focus on teaching and learning. The school now appoints staff based on an assessment of their capacity to articulate teaching, learning and their own learning.

These initial structural changes that The Principal made to the shape of the Leadership team and school processes were important for him to enable larger school wide change with a new executive leadership team and extended leadership team, which included the new business manager. The Principal described that:

*In many respects we had to change the whole paradigm of the school, because the school was based on:*

- *We have passive learners.*
  - *We'll have chalk and talk – this school had in 2006, this school had in most classes blackboard and chalk – I just couldn't believe it. The school had significant funds in reserve but they would not spend the money.*
- And it was, by and large, 'You'll sit still. We'll go through this book, and by the end you should have learned it.'*

One of the AP3s described her first impressions of the school in a similar way:

*It was clean, quiet, the kids were in classrooms. I don't know how much learning was happening but they were compliant and they were in there. There were learning pods that weren't being used. It was just that it was a completely different environment, quite cool as you walked around and people never looked you in the eye, wouldn't engage with you.*

## **The Re-visioning Process**

The re-visioning process was shaped by this new leadership structure. This was a school-based top-down led reform, with strong and devolved leadership from all members of the leadership team and with external funding support from the department for the Year 9 program. The first area of key focus that was identified was the development of a Learning Framework based upon shared core values that would be used to inform every aspect of the school. The Values and the Learning Framework that were developed are now displayed and used in every learning space in the school.

### *Defining Core Values*

The school motto of BHS is 'Duty Always', a product of the time when the school was established. Under the leadership of an Assistant Principal who is now development coach for the Western Bulldogs football team), the school set about developing a set of core values that could be used with the motto to reflect a 21st Century vision for the school, encompassing the areas of student engagement, learning outcomes, and social/emotional development at BHS. Initially staff workshops and consultation led to the development of around 8 values, and these were reduced through further consultation to three core values: Pride, Respect and Responsibility.

Using these values, the leadership team set about developing a Learning Framework with the staff. The AP3 (Middle Years), who was described by several of the interviewees as 'passionate' about teaching and learning and not afraid to question the school's practices, 'came in with a real depth of knowledge around learning and a real passion for it [and] a million questions about why do we do it this way', took the leading role in this development. The AP3 is also a researcher, and is working on her PhD. She has effectively used her academic skills in the development of the Learning Framework. She used a range of appropriate data gathering techniques to develop the framework such as staff forums, student focus groups, staff interviews, classroom observations, parent interviews, leadership team meetings and staff professional learning meetings. She also guided an extensive reading program that the leadership team embarked on, and this framed much of their thinking.

The development of the framework was shaped by the Principal to have personalisation of learning at the centre because of his research which demonstrated that the way to shift large organisations is through building the capacity of every individual within the organisation. The Principal explained:

*So with our framework that is why you'll find that the learner is in the centre of our framework. Whether it's the gardener or girls in the office, the teachers, students, the Principal, I'm in the centre there, and that's how we came up with that Learning Framework.*

The concept of 'Learning for Everyone' is an important part of the Framework. In numerous interviews we were told that previously there was a focus on the academic side of schooling only, and that this left many of the kids at the school out of the equation. One of the AP3s summed this up:

*a big part of the change... is that we really do believe as a school community that it's our responsibility—our responsibility to provide an education for all kids and not to just sort out the, in some ways, the easy ones to work with from the not so straightforward...I don't think it's about any drift away about academic standards, I think it was more about not catering enough for the diverse learners that were around.*

This framework now informs all school decision-making, and is visible throughout the school on posters and in practice (see Figure 2). All decisions, from resource management to staffing and student leadership, are made by considering where they sit within that framework. Teachers use it to frame their teaching and their conversations about learning with the students. The importance of the framework is that everyone participated in its development, so the meaning of it is shared and revisited constantly. New members to the community, whether they be new parents, staff or students, are introduced to the framework and it makes the learning goals of the school community clear and central. It is owned by the school community. In 2007, the school won the School Leadership Team Award (under the direction of one of the AP3s for this initiative) from the Department for their work in developing the learning framework.

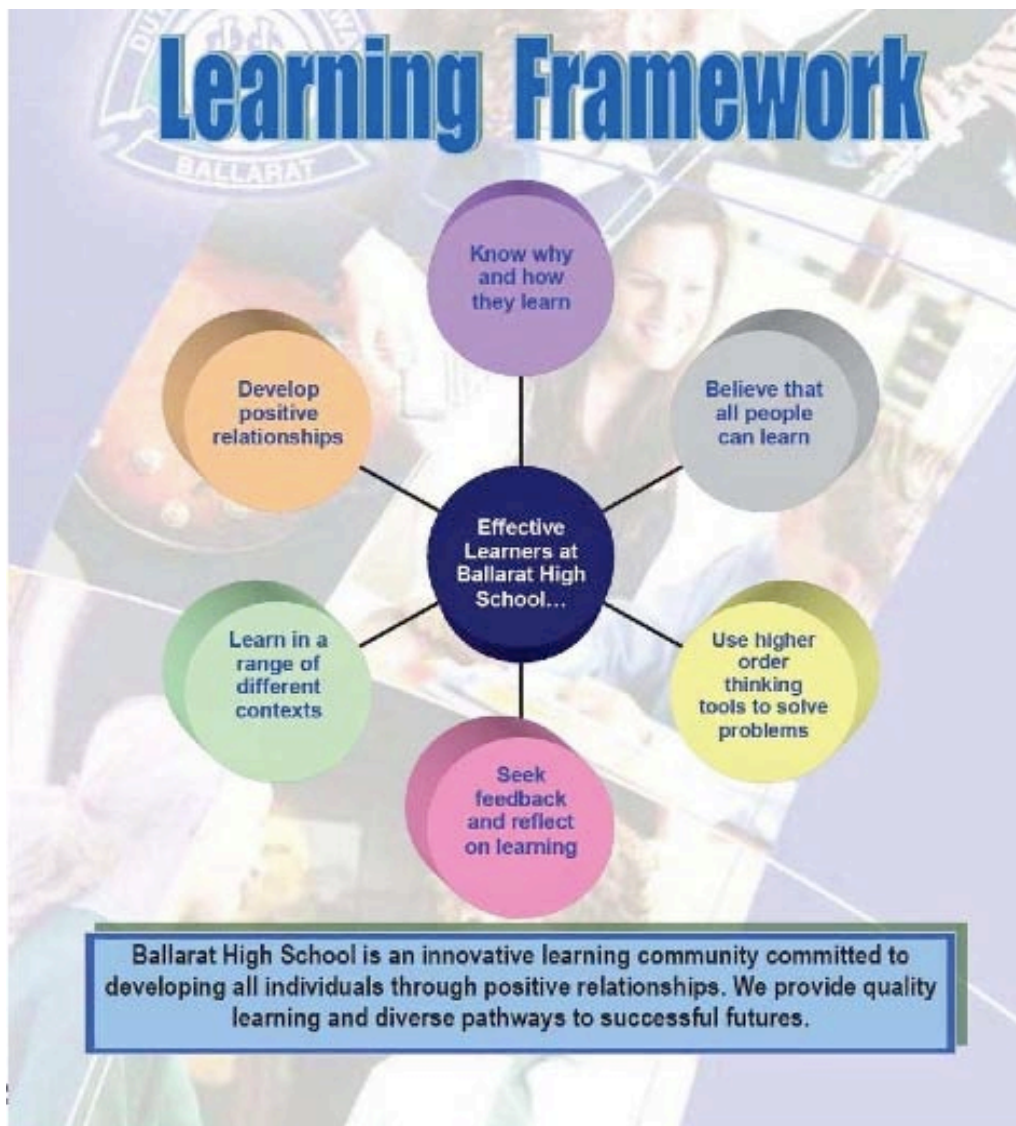


Figure 2. The Ballarat High School Learning Framework

The six core components illustrated on the poster are further explained in the documentation in the extended version of the framework (see Appendix A)

### **Developing a Culture of Professional Learning**

Another feature of change at BHS was the development of a culture of professional learning. Again this was a top-down model and not predicated on an assumption that nothing was already happening. However the two hours of meeting times per week were handed over to professional learning and the everyday 'nuts and bolts' of the school was done by email. A constant question that staff were asked to keep in mind was to challenge themselves again and again: 'Why do we do it this way?' The Principal explains:

*...It's not about structures as such, or buildings as such, or whatever, it's about internalising it with people, within an organisation and moving them forward. The actual programs and things we've had in the school, we've internalised that – we didn't get any outside help at all for the first couple of years because we had some very experienced teachers within the school. All our professional learning was in-house. Our meeting schedule was all about professional learning; our staff meetings every three weeks; we had professional learning.*



The leadership team engaged in professional reading and the reading was discussed at the beginning of the meeting. As mentioned earlier, the AP3 (Middle Years) is a PhD student, and an avid reader and she took a leadership role with the professional reading. Authors studied included David Warner, David Hargreaves, Michael Fuller and Roland Barthes.

### **Changing Relationships**

In order to change the relationships throughout the school, the Leadership team decided that they needed to lead the way. One of the AP3s described how the Principal asked them to get out on the gates in the morning (Ballarat weather permitting) and greet kids. BHS has 5 entry points, so the team wanders out to different gates and greets students and staff as they enter. They look at the students, smile, and say, 'Good Morning, how are you going?' He describes:

*When kids first came in, they'd never make eye contact, they'd be looking at the ground, they'd be avoiding eye contact and you'd say 'g'day', and you'd get a grunt as they walked two metres past you because 'what's he doing, saying g'day to me?' And over a period of time..And now they are realising that it's a friendship thing, it's not...a discipline thing.*

He goes on to express the way that such a simple act actually changed the ways in which the students related throughout the school to the leadership team.

*... so that was a simple thing but what it did was it made kids get their eyes up, you know, after 3 weeks of it or something – 'God, those bloody blokes will be on the gate, I have to say something', you know? But they've actually [changed], and they'd be making eye contact before they got there. And they would, I mean sometimes I'd be talking to somebody else and they said 'G'day Mr Homburg' or...just yell something, you know. But always respectfully. And so, then what happened was when you go round the school people would say g'day.*

The Principal also described how no one would make contact with him personally when he arrived, and he did a similar thing with staff and students and this turned things around for him in terms of how people related to him. When we filmed the Principal Tour of the school, the AP3 (Middle Years) took us around. The way that she greeted and smiled at the students as she walked around and in turn the ways that they greeted her was notable. These simple acts by leadership, regardless of being orchestrated, set the tone for the entire school.

### **Structured patterns and characteristics of ILE: layout, sequencing and mix of learning activities**

#### **Year 9 ARCH program**

The Year 9 ARCH program is the centrepiece of the development of Innovative Learning Environments at BHS. The positive outcomes from this program have influenced changes made to other years of schooling, as students have exited the program to complete their schooling and staff have moved back into the mainstream of the school. The development of the program began in 2005, with a consolidated effort to reform teaching and learning practice at Year 9 with resource and management support, initiated by the fortuitous and timely overlap of the Leading Schools Fund.



## Motivation for Changing Year Nine

The motivation for the development of a new program was that there was very high absenteeism (22 days) in Year 9 and the students were disengaged. In the Attitudes to School survey, the Year 9 cohort ranked teacher effectiveness at 3%. Before the changes, the Year 9 students had eight different teachers all around the school, and the students felt disconnected, from school, their peers and their teachers. One of the AP3s explained:

*nobody thought that whatever you did would make it any worse, in a nutshell, was my view. That it was that bad, that we had 60 plus teachers teaching year 9. So everybody had a little bit of year 9, nobody had a lot of year 9. There were lots of disengaged kids... so the bottom line is that nobody saw it as a high stakes environment. 'If you want to play around with it, yeah all right.'*

This strategy of sharing the pain by splitting up the Year 9s so that 'everybody had a little bit...nobody had a lot' marks the low-point for the school in their dealings with Year 9. The Principal at the time was committed to making the school a place where everyone could learn, so initiated the investigation into a new approach for Year 9. Financial support was obtained from the Leading Schools Fund for the initiative.

## Sequence of Development of the ARCH ILE

She sent a team of four teachers on Professional Leave for 10 weeks in 2005 to develop a program for Year 9. Their brief was very open: to come up with something new for Year 9 to be implemented in 2006. As part of this leave they visited other schools and looked at other programs, including the Kinross Middle Years Program in WA, benchmarking practices and researching models of schooling. They were given *carte blanche*, and this process and task was extremely energising and reengaging for them. Two of the teachers interviewed described this process as 'the best thing I've ever done', and clearly for these teachers this opportunity refocused them on teaching and learning and gave them new enthusiasm for their work.

From the beginning there was a sense that this change might lead to whole school reform. One of the teachers involved in this process explained that:

*During the course of that we talked about whether Year 9 was the most appropriate place to start. Probably thought that in some ways it wasn't. So we put the biggest band-aid on the biggest problem. And started from there and now from retrospect it probably wasn't a bad place to start.*

He cites that the greatest impact could be had on Year 9, and no one was a stakeholder, whereas with other year levels teachers were protective of their programs and there would be much greater opposition by teachers to any kind of changes.

By the end of the year, this team came up with the first iteration of the model that is in place and worked it through with the broader staff until there was agreement about it. They had been inspired by the Middle Years of Schooling Model that they had seen at Kinross School, and this visit gave them the vision to develop their own ARCH model.

## Description of the ARCH Program

The program is based on four principles of building Active Resilient Connected Happy (ARCH) students. With the aims being that the ARCH students are:

Active in their learning  
Resilient, prepared to meet new challenges  
Connected to their learning peers and community  
Happy about being at school

The ARCH Program in its current form is centred on the school Learning Framework, and the program has the aims of both building relationships in Year 9 and to improve student independence and connectedness to learning. Obviously these aims are interconnected.

To help the students to understand and focus on how and why they learn, 150 minutes a week is devoted to Thinking, Learning and Connecting (TLC). This class, predicated on the assumption that all people can learn, investigates students' learning preferences and the students study different models and ways of thinking about learning. For example, the students learn about Hermann Brain Dominance Theory and study different learning types and styles. The students also complete 30 minutes of journal writing time in which they reflect on their learning throughout the week. Teachers in the program, some who were unsure about the advantages of this initially, were positive about this reflection. All of the students also have personal learning plans (PLPs), which they develop in conjunction with staff.

The use of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator has been an important part of the program. The AP3 (Middle Years), who runs this section of the ARCH, described how this year, in completing the Myers Briggs diagnostic at the end of the year, rather than in the beginning as done previously, the students benefited more from these sessions as they were able to focus more on how they might use it as they move into the senior school:

*We use it very much to drill in, it is not that you are this, it is about a preference...Doing it at this time of the year their reflections have shown much deeper connection with it and how they are going to use it to guide them in the future...We do a lot of stuff about if you are a P (Perceptive) a multiple choice test might not be the best way (which would suit a Judgmental) but you have got to make a decision. (Teacher)*

Each year level at BHS has around 250 students, so the students were organised so that 10 teachers worked with the 10 groups of students at Year 9 level. Each group of students has two teachers that delivered the majority of their program: one English/Humanities specialist and the other a Maths/Science specialist. They mostly teach the 50 students together with the two teachers, one leading and one supporting. In addition to this they also do some electives and interest-based learning around arts, technologies and sports. The two teachers team-teach the curriculum, taking the lead in their own subject areas.

One teacher spoke at length about the affordances of the flexible timetabling. It enabled excursions to be taken more easily.

*Because we have big chunks of time we could...structure it the way [we] wanted to and so it was nothing for me to have half an hour in the classroom, rip them over to the lake, do an activity over there, rip them back into the classroom.*

It also enabled teams to shift around the subject order so that the students used their time better. For instance,

*...my last 18 months was with a fantastic maths teacher and we worked out really early that our crew, our team, wasn't working in the afternoon on maths. We just restructured them and said, 'Well let's do maths in the morning and then we'll do English or humanities or TLC or whatever it*

*is in the afternoon'. Instead of having maths in the afternoon, so we could do that; we could make it that fluid!*

The benefits of this to the team in restructuring the program, even on the day if the students were not focussed, were enormous. This change of timetabling structures gave these secondary teachers the opportunity to focus on the students throughout the day in a way that is rarely seen outside of the primary setting.

### **Changes to the Physical Environment: The Year Nine Learning Space**

For the first year, 2006, the program ran at BHS in a set of rooms teachers refer to as 'the old chicken coop', which was a very difficult space to work in. One teacher described:

*The first year was different because we were starting a new curriculum working with different people, working in teams, and managing students in a different way. That was all experiential, that was a learning year for us...The kids worked really differently. You could just see..We managed to keep kids at school who wouldn't have been at school otherwise. That's the thing that brought it home to me.*

In the second year of the program (this year's Year 12s) the students went offsite to the old Loretto Dawson St Campus while BHS upgraded and redeveloped the Year 9 facility. Halfway through 2007, the Year 9 program came back onsite and has been running onsite in the Year 9 facility ever since.

In the planning for the new classroom spaces, the AP3 (Middle Years) described how:

*the team grappled with what the furniture would look like, what would be in the building, the walls, all that sort of thing. People wanted all the walls that could be moved in, but no-one uses them (the walls) now.*

She puts this down to the fear of change: 'and when you have been doing things the same way for so long, to do it differently is quite challenging. They wanted the walls in the buildings—but they never shut now'. The changes in pedagogy and approach were so different that it was a difficult mind shift for some teachers to make. Even the decision not to have a maths textbook was difficult for some teachers. The time allocated for discussion and working through the new ideas for the space and how to use it was important. The AP3 (Middle Years) considers that, 'What works is the time allocated to plan, discuss and talk together...to share [with] kids, not content and learning.'

The Year 9 (ARCH) dedicated space is called the Transparent Learning Centre (TLC) building, which plays on the origins of the building as an LTC (Light Timber Construction). Year 9 core subject staff work collaboratively in the dedicated staff room within the TLC building, which is self-contained and at the front of the school. The TLC has a large open space with some beautiful windows looking out onto Victoria Street. There are some classrooms down one end, and larger teaching spaces across the centre.

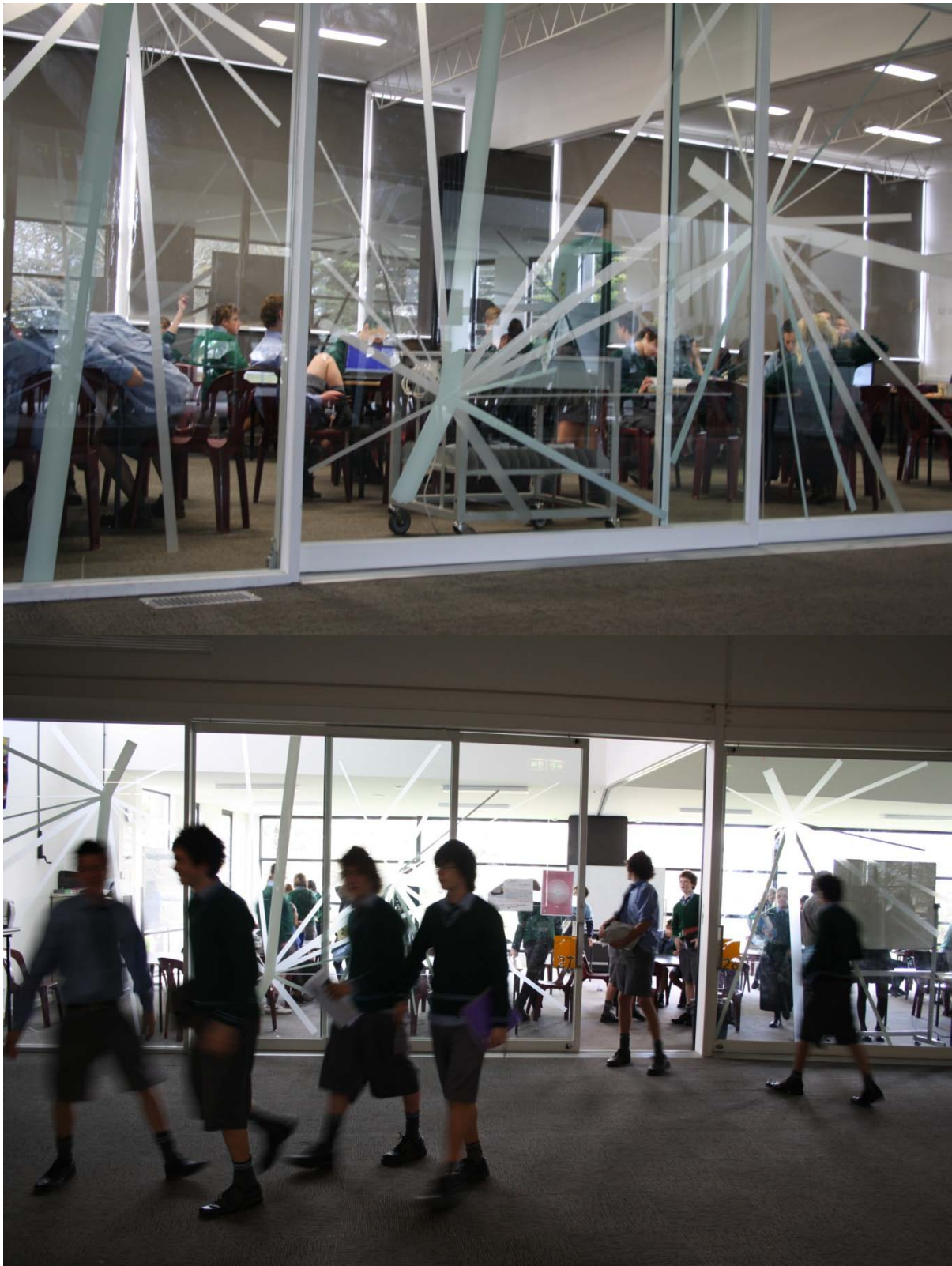


Figure 3. Images from the Transparency Learning Centre

We observed two classes of 50 Year 9 students in the first large teaching space. The two teachers described above were participating in team-taught core subjects (maths/science). In the second large teaching space, 50 other students were working with their pair of teachers in team-taught core subjects. In both of these areas, students engaged at tables in student-selected small groups, and all were using laptops for individual use. Four female students in R1 were sitting comfortably on and

around tables at one end of the room. The teachers were moving fluidly between groups in R1. At one stage one of the teachers was accessing information on laptops at the side of room, then shared this with students. A set of resources (stationery and some text books) occupied one table for free access. At the end of this lesson time, all laptops were collected on trolleys and wheeled to storage area in central open learning space.

Other individual classes (20-25 students) of elective units were being conducted in smaller classrooms at either end of the TLC. All of these rooms were in use at the same time. We noted that the atmosphere was friendly and the students were relaxed and seemed engaged. There was on-task focused discussion and the students we spoke with were happy to discuss their learning with us. We were impressed by the openness and friendliness with which these Year 9 students engaged with us, strangers in their space.

Every time we visited the space in the course of our visits we observed students using computers. The Acting Principal explained that ICT usage is more effective at Year 9 because of changes to the way it is supported:

*This year they have located a young trainee to the Year 9 building. And they love him. Of course they love him. He comes over and they say, 'this is a problem', and he fixes it up. Because he's perhaps more receptive, more willing, and perhaps better people-skilled compared to the others.*

Being able to communicate directly with the IT support encourages the students to extend their usage, and this is another very valuable outcome from the project.

### **Team Teaching in ARCH: A Case Study**

The following case study is of one of the teaching teams. A young female, a first year out teacher is team teaching with a retirement-aged male teacher who was on the original Year Nine team. He is the English specialist and she is Maths/Science. These two teachers, at different ends of their careers, both have a passion for what they are doing. The male teacher, who admitted that he had lost his passion for teaching before the ARCH program has described the ways in which this program has revitalised him and made him enthusiastic and excited about teaching again. The female teacher has described at length her excitement at the potential of this model, the benefits for her as an early-career teacher of working with an experienced teacher. She describes:

*Yeah (he) has been fantastic and at the end of last year...I knew at the end of last year I was going to be in this program, I knew I was teaching with him...I came in for a couple of days, talked about it and planned what our first week would be, so we wouldn't have to worry at the start of the year as there's a lot of 'get to know you' activities and things.*

He has been mentoring her both into the program and into teaching more broadly. They are very different people, and yet their teaching partnership is successful and they are both communicating extremely well with the Year 9s. On the day we observed their class, we saw her leading a maths class and him helping out some groups with their work. She used this lesson as an example in her discussion with us, citing both the space (its openness and flexibility) and the team teaching (there are so many different ways you can break up the class) leading to so much more.

She recalls:

*Yesterday because we were doing triangles, doing Pythagoras, we got the measuring tapes and we were just trying to find any right angle triangles we could see anywhere. Not that you can see them. Any window that's square, you know, halve it diagonally [to a] right angle triangle. So they*

*were up measuring everywhere and using the space here to measure it. And in a normal classroom, you've got that restricted, you really can't get them up and get them about and it's great you've got two teachers so some kids wanted to go outside; so half the kids went outside and half the kids stayed here. Still got the teacher/ student ratio.. so out they went and found as many as they could and it's better for maths while kids say, 'well, when are we ever going to use this?' So they are outside actually doing it and I can explain, especially as we are doing Pythagoras, that builders use it all the time.*

In the beginning however, she was scared of the space and the approach. She says:

*I hardly remember now why I was so scared. And I think I just had images of myself, my own little classroom somewhere and not being in a place like this where it's so open and so I think that what I had in my head of me being a teacher 'this is not what I wanted, this is not where I wanted to be' but no, don't take me away from it! No one's having my spot, I'm staying here.*

Another teacher who has since left the Year 9 Program talked at length about how much he missed the program. He recounted a conversation he had recently had with his wife, who suggested he should try to go back to the ARCH program:

*and I said 'yeah, I probably will one day but at the moment I miss team teaching, miss having another person in the classroom, I miss the teamwork, that's what I miss'.*

### **Costs of ARCH**

The Acting Principal at the time of interviews described how the program is costed. Under the agreement, teachers have to teach 22 periods. Because of the additional demands of teaching in the ARCH program, the Year 9 teachers teach 20 periods—the 2 period extra allowance for looking after their 25 kids, 'call home, help them with their locker, sort them out, all those sorts of things'. With ten teachers in the program, it is 20 periods a week. He explains that:

*we've got the equivalent of a teacher to run the program. Normally no other area of the school has that much. So we made a commitment, when Leading Schools Funds finished, to continue with the program in its structure, even though we knew it was costing us.*

*He figures that this is realistically 'three electives less we run for the bigger kids. So we've actually sustained our Leading Schools funding model, into our structure, at a cost.'*

### **Local Problems, Local Solutions**

Like the development of the Learning Framework, much of the success of the ARCH program is that it was developed by the teachers at the school to meet the needs of their students. While they drew on the work of a variety of other schools and research, the self-sown nature of it has been vital in its continued success. The teachers interviewed from the project all identified this as an important component:

*I've got a fair suspicion that we are doing something different because we made it ourselves, we took the best from what we saw and invented our own things that fits High School and we've had staff come in and just go 'wow, we can't do anything like this', because we got to designing our own building and design everything around. You know. Us. This program is not going to work if you try and do it in a gym. I know (one school) tried to do it in a gym and that was a bit of a balls-up!*

Another factor teachers ascribe to the success of the program is the teamwork:

*Well I think what was different about it was that we had the people working together, the teachers and by extension the students. But I think the teachers working together is the innovation. Which doesn't sound very innovative but it hadn't happened before.*

One of the biggest outcomes is improved relationships between staff and students. One staff member noted that:

*The teacher/children relationship is my biggest thing because they see you for the whole year. Not just 5 periods of the week for maths and they might have a different teacher for science, and someone else to see for 20 periods of the week.*

We were struck by the ways in which teachers found it difficult to adapt when they went back to other year levels. Some teachers we spoke to in the program were reluctant to move back into teaching other year levels as they were gaining so much on both a personal and a professional level from working in such a collegial way. The Acting Principal spoke about the importance of the open space itself for achieving some of the outcomes in Year 9. He felt that, 'even struggling teachers would, to me, cope better in the Year 9 program because of the collegiate nature of it', and the collegiality is certainly a strength. The collegiality between the teachers spreads to the relationships between teachers and their classes and between students. He also feels that the regular meetings and feedback from others helps, but the space itself is important:

*Because they're in the space together, there's no notion of walls, it's a really open space. And I reckon they're more receptive as teachers, when I walk into the classroom versus other areas of the school. And our music area is probably the next area in terms of a team of teachers working collaboratively together. They've got their space, because they have instrumental teachers who come and go a bit, they're very comfortable in working together in and out of each other's classrooms, they might be in together with 50 kids running a band, all these sorts of things. So your two areas of the school where it's really strong, is our Year 9 program, in music, and we're trying to go down that path with VCAL. We've got to a point we're not perfect, because it's a big jigsaw, a high school.*

### **Other Programs that have been developed at Ballarat High School**

The ARCH program in conjunction with the development of the Learning Framework has prepared the teaching staff for other innovations at the school that would not have been possible five years ago.

#### *Learning Advisers*

At Ballarat High school every student has a Learning Adviser. Most teachers participate in this program acting as learning advisers for one group of 25 students (Years 7-9) or 13 (Years 10-12). The learning adviser stays with the group of students for three years. The role of the adviser is to get to know their students well and to improve student learning, motivation and achievement. Once a week advisers meet with their students for 45 minutes, and their role is to assist each student to develop and maintain challenging learning goals. During that time the school often run different lectures and workshops, such as getting ready for exams.

#### *Learning For Living*

Year 9 has facilitated the restructure of Years 7 and 8. The school developed a model where the teacher that takes Year 7A will stay with those students for English, Humanities and Personal Learning to the end of Year 8. The AP3 (Middle Years) explained that when they first discussed this:



*We had staff stand up and say, 'I only want to teach Year 7 and 12. And I only want to teach English'. Well, you know. 'So, we're providing learning that is not meeting the needs of our kids, our parents and students are aware of that, and we're aware of that, because the data says so, but, because this is what you want, we're happy to serve it up again?'*

The Year 7-8 team teaching model is based on ARCH principles, but it is early days yet for this model. These year levels do not have suitable physical learning spaces, so the teachers and students are working within what they have. However, the staff specific to Years 7-8 are located in same physical space as the core subject classrooms. We observed two Year 7 teachers bringing their two classes of students into the TLC (ARCH learning space) to take advantage of the vacant large classroom space for team teaching. While team teaching is encouraged in the Y7/8 'block', the physical functionality of that teaching and learning space does not easily facilitate merging classes in a single space.

In Year 7 students undertake *Learning for Living*. This subject helps students develop cultural competency and supports the pastoral care program. They also have an orientation program for Year 7 transition into high school. A feature of the program is that it includes an opportunity to work with peer support leaders from year 10.

#### *Later Years 10 – 12*

BHS has structured a transition program for students who are moving from Year 9 into Year 10. They began this in 2009, due to the difficulties that some students faced moving back into the more standard structure in Year 10. While the senior curriculum is bounded by VCE, VCAL and VET, the Year 9 program has led to the staff reworking their approach and the possibilities for Years 10-12. The Later Years Curriculum is structured in such a way that students are able to move through to completion of the VCE, VCAL, VET or even all three at a pace which suits their individual needs, interests and abilities. At any level you may choose subjects from another. For example, a Year 10 student may choose to study a Unit 1/2 sequence or a Year 12 student may choose from the Year 10 range of subjects or to undertake a first year university subject.

The school has drawn upon the flexibility that now exists in the Later Years Curriculum and their extensive Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) program, to enable students to tailor a course that best meets the needs of their individual learning pathway. The range of options available to students and attention to meeting the learning needs of every member of this diverse group of students is impressive.

#### *MIPS (Managed Individual Pathways)*

The Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program helps all students, aged 15 and over, from compulsory schooling into further education, training and employment. Extensive career advice is available for all students for their pathway planning. In Year 10 students are expected to complete work experience during an allocated week in Term 3. This coincides with the Ballarat High School Pathways Expo and course counselling/subject selection program in which all students from Years 9-12 are involved.

MIPs staff assist with career advice, pathway planning, course counselling, subject selection, university and TAFE applications (VTAC & SEAS), apprenticeships and traineeships, casual employment, scholarships, GAP year and student exchange programs, enhancement studies, resumes and application letters, career testing, alternate pathway options. The MIPS office holds all of the resources that may be required for pathway planning. Staff distribute a MIPS and Careers newsletter, via email, to all students each month to which parents may also subscribe.

## Impact and effectiveness of ILE

### Teacher Engagement and Reinvigoration

One of the AP3s described the changes that he can see in the relationships around the school.

*If I went back to 2002 when I started here, I – lunchtime, particularly when you were an enforcer-type role around the school. Lunchtime was a horrible time. One you'd go out in the yard and it there was always a sense of tension, there was low level taunting and stuff and you'd look at your watch and it was 25 past one. God, I hope we can get through this without some sort of blue. Because you'd spend an hour and a half, two hours sorting it out. And was never really violent but it would be some sort of scuffle on the one hand and somebody would end up being suspended. That's an enormous change. What people would say, the Assistant Principals, need to be out there on yard duty, you need to be seen and backing up the – not because it was particularly violent but there was a low level tension and it often resulted in a scuffle. So, we don't ever go out at lunchtime. But back in 2002 and 3 and 4 you were expected to be out there and look there was a bit of a culture of dependency amongst staff.*

He describes that every now and again there is some sort of 'blue, scuffle', but this is very rare now. When he walks around the school people say hello to him and on sunny days the kids sit around talking and playing and everything is very relaxed. He says:

*I just look at that and I think 'wow, what a different place to what it was and what a pleasant place, just relaxing between classes.*

### Student Responses

The students that we observed and interviewed all had a strong sense of identity with the school, and a feeling that the school was excellent. A profile of a Year 12 student, below, is constructed from our interview with her, and typifies the responses we had from other students. It is constructed to show the experiences through some of the programs. This is an interesting case also, as this student was at the previous school where the Principal and Acting Principal were based.

#### *Profile: Year 12 student*

*I'm so proud to be part of Ballarat High School...I think if I could leave the school knowing that I did maybe one thing that helped improve it, or influenced another student below me to feel the same passion and pride that I do, then I'd be happy.*

The Year 12 student and school Vice Captain describes herself as 'a bit of a traditionalist' who self-identifies (and presents) as having developed self-confidence and strong leadership skills during her time at Ballarat High School. She attributes this social-emotional progress specifically to having 'changed schools' towards the end of Year 9 when she relocated to Ballarat High School from another local secondary college.

She is committed to academic success, and has developed a strong community service interest through extra-curricular opportunities provided by Ballarat High School. She is able to clearly articulate her role as a student leader and shows strong support for, and involvement in, student mentoring and student/management consultancy within the school structure.

She was a student in the ARCH program in late 2008. Reflecting on this experience, she considers that the curriculum was not academically challenging for her, and that learning was 'relaxed', but concedes that when she entered the program, the academic year was 'winding up'. In her view, the ARCH curriculum has become more challenging since her Year 9 experience, which she attributes to the staff better adapting curriculum to student needs:

*I think they're doing more challenging work for the students who want more (for example, by making Year 10 maths available to Year 9 students).*

However, she believes that her easy transition into a new school and the establishment of new connections was facilitated by the upgraded Light Timber Construction (LTC) building, reconfigured as the Thinking Learning Connecting (TLC) environment in which the ARCH program is physically located, and which frames a supportive and collegiate social-academic ethos that provides a sense of ownership of space, strong connections with a core group of teachers, and a caring and nurturing social environment.

She says of the ARCH program:

*I found it good in a way moving into a big school and having only two teachers...and I stayed in the one building, which was one of the...problems my parents found moving to a big school. They were like, oh no, you're going to get left behind in the crowd; you're not going to be able to shine through and do what you want to do best. But I found that I stayed in the one building, and pretty much had all of my classes in that building. And I had one teacher for Maths/Science and one teacher for English and Humanities. And I got to know the teachers really well. And I was only there for a term and it gave me a chance to get to know a few people fairly well. It was a sort of relaxed style of learning. Personally...I strive to do the best I can and I want to achieve top marks so maybe I would have liked a bit more challenging work but I moved there at the end of the year so it was starting when the year was starting to wind up. From hearing about it, people have said that [the ARCH program] didn't prepare them well for Year 10 but I don't know if that's a bad thing because Year 10 prepares you for VCE so you've still got that year before you go into VCE so I'm not sure whether it's necessary to have so much preparation for Year 10 because then you'll work backwards: is Year 8 preparing for Year 9? and is Year 7 preparing for Year 8?*

Laura has keen insights to share about the way that Ballarat High School is structured and managed for learning. She is an ardent supporter of the Learning Advisory program at Ballarat High School. She feels that she has become more aware of her own skills and needs as a learner and appreciates the ongoing relationship with the Learning Adviser:

*Some people aren't really for it, they're against it or people don't really care about it...It started last year when I was in Year 11... We worked out how we learn and those sorts of things, which I found really helpful because I'd never done anything like that before and it was good to know the ways that I should learn to get the information in my memory for Year 12. I learnt that I'm very much a visual learner so I learnt the ways that I needed to make posters and do this and then that to be able to learn the information.*

She recognizes that the 'power base' in the school is at the top of the school structure, with the Principal and Assistant Principals, but perceives a direct link from the Student Leadership team to the Principals team through consultancy processes:

*We've had numerous meetings where the Principals come into our leadership meetings and they'll say: What do you think of this? Do you think this will work? I think the students have a lot of input at Ballarat High School and I think that's so important. I think the teachers here actually listen to what the students want...Mr Palmer and Mr Dredge, when he was here, are absolutely amazing. Like, they ask for the students opinions on everything.*

She regards the school as having a 'tradition of excellence', but as also supporting alternative pathways through VCAL and VET, and through excellence in music and sport programs. She views the school as having 'something for everyone. [There is] so much to do at the school that you'll never run out of things to do.' She considers community involvement through the school in both personal and public perspectives. The Student Leadership team is, she says, 'involved in things that will affect the school in years to come'. She leads a group of students in a Clean Up Green Up project.

She has a strong attachment to the school's core values – Pride, Respect, Responsibility – and is able to articulate how they filter through the academic and social functions of the school. She is an articulate advocate of innovation at Ballarat High School:

*I think that Ballarat High School tries a lot of new programs. They're always trying new things to make students happier at school, always trying to keep students at school. They work around different students in the way that they learn so that...students who...don't want to do VCE but they want to go on and maybe do a trade or something, they try and keep them in school long enough and give them the skills required to do that training.*

She champions the work of the Principal and Assistant Principal (2), directly associating their management style, public intentions, and innovative practices with her positive judgements of the school and its environment:

*Mr Palmer and Mr Dredge used to be the principals of my old school. I sort of followed them across. Once Mr Palmer left at the end of Year 8, I started Year 9 at Wendouree and I just sort of found that I wasn't being challenged. I sort of found that I'd hand work in and never get a mark back for it and I just sort of felt that I wasn't getting the rewards I wanted.*

*They're a bit of a team...They bring so much to a school. Since they've been here, I think the Robinson Centre was built, and the whole ARCH program and that building being built, and this year, the North Wing, the Year 7 and 8 corridor up there, that's all being refurbished and all the classrooms are being redone. Both of them have just brought so much to the school. And I think they did the same thing at Wendouree. We had a lot brought in when they were [there]. I think they just bring so many new ideas.*

*They definitely are very proud of Ballarat High School and I think that's what makes the difference. They're the sort of principals who want to make a difference. They want students to be happy. They don't just come to work every day. They come to work to change things.*

She sums up their approach to life and learning at Ballarat High with a quotation that has stuck in her own mind: 'Mr Dredge would always say: At the end of the day, I don't go to school here. It's not my school; it's your school.' It is clear that Laura has adopted this social ethic in her commitment to academic success, community projects, and mentoring through student leadership.

### **Improved Relationships: Playground**

One of the AP3s discussed at length the changes that he has observed on the playground. From his perspective of student relationships prior to the ILE, he is able to assess how the feeling of the playground has radically changed:

*Not that it is perfect, there is still the odd scuffle, but, you know, look out my office window, not in this weather but you see enough to walk out of my office from the desk, you glance out the window and it's a sunny day, look onto that little grass mound there. It just reminds me of a*

*university campus. There's probably 100 young people visible, they are sitting around in mixed groups yakking away, you know, couple of boys ragging each other, messing about. I just look at that and I think 'wow, what a different place to what it was and what a pleasant place, just relaxing between classes'.*



Figure 4. Library



Figure 5. Art Room



Figure 6. Images from the A.H. Robinson Centre

## Concluding Comments

BHS, committed to further and continuous improvement, has achieved a great deal in a relatively short amount of time. Key factors have been the re-envisioning of Year 9 and development of the ARCH program, the financial support to do this through the Leading Schools Fund, the new leadership team and the strong focus on relationships and learning that has been implemented throughout the school.

The team teaching in the ARCH program and the physical spaces that support this have been one of the drivers for other changes in the school. It is significant that teachers working with Year 9, an area that no one was committed to previously, dread themselves leaving the collaborative and collegial environment, and the spaces that support co-operative learning and team teaching. We see that the staff commitment to other changes (in Years 7-8 and in Year 10) can largely be attributed to the success of the ARCH program. The data supporting the changes in this program is extraordinary. In 2006, the Year 9s rated Teacher Effectiveness at 3%. In 2010 this figure had risen to 70%. Year 9 absenteeism in 2006 was 22 days. In 2010 this had been reduced to 10.2 days. Another indicator is the attendance by parents at the parent teacher interviews. In 2006 there was very low attendance. However in 2010 under the new format of student-led interviews, there was 100% attendance.

Another important factor was the leave given to the teachers, and the trust put in them to redevelop Year 9 themselves. This has greatly re-energised them and this investment in these staff has had significant other pay-outs in addition to the program development.

The general tone of the school has been greatly enhanced, as described by various staff members in terms of the amount of eye contact and conversation. The data supporting school connectedness has increased dramatically; in 2006 school connectedness was rated at 46%, this had risen to 70% in 2010. In terms of the whole school, Professional interaction in 2006 was rated at 41% and this had also risen to 70% in 2010.

Overall, these innovations have made BHS a much more connected Learning Environment where the learners are much more agential and connected to their learning. Staff involved in the innovations have been very keen about the changes that they made, and it seems that the changes made have had very significant flow on effects.

**References**

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) 2006 Census. Retrieved 10 December, 2010 from <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>.



## **Appendix A**

### *BHS Learning Framework*

Effective Learners at Ballarat High School: Know how and why they learn

Learners are able to articulate their learning strengths and areas of concern. Learners are challenged to build both on areas of strength through experience and areas of concern through goal setting.

Effective Learners at Ballarat High School: Believe all people can learn

Learners are celebrated for their individual learning capabilities and are able to set challenging learning goals to work towards. Teachers at Ballarat High School have high expectations for all.

Effective Learners at Ballarat High School: Use higher order thinking tools to solve problems

Learners are encouraged to develop higher order thinking skills and apply these skills to a range of complex problem solving situations. At Ballarat High School we encourage learners to analyse, evaluate and question.

Effective Learners at Ballarat High School: Seek feedback and reflect on learning

At Ballarat High School feedback is provided to support the development of challenging learning goals. At Ballarat High School feedback is given and received in a culture of respect. Learners reflect on their development and are celebrated for their achievements.

Effective Learners at Ballarat High School: Learn in a range of different contexts

Ballarat High School recognises learning within and beyond the traditional school context. The Ballarat High School community actively seeks opportunities for students to use their skills and knowledge in the wider community.

Effective Learners at Ballarat High School: Develop positive relationships

We value all members of the school community. Relationships are a core aspect of the learning community at Ballarat High School. At Ballarat High School we develop relationships based on Pride, Respect and Responsibility.

## Appendix B

Ballarat High School staff see effective learning as:

Being built on relationships

Being prepared to take risks and learn from experience

Being promoted by encouragement

Being a shared experience

Being scaffolded and linked to prior learning

Being purposeful learning

Being owned by the learner

Being a successful experience for all learners

Providing a culture where feedback is used to guide learning

Providing a culture of celebration

Providing a culture where learning is modelled

Providing conditions for learning that are motivating

Providing opportunities to apply the learning

Providing an opportunity for reflection

Providing a supportive environment