



**Directorate for Education
Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), OECD**

Innovative Learning Environments (ILE)

INVENTORY CASE STUDY

Yuille Park P-8 Community College

Australia (Victoria)

Yuille Park P-8 Community College is located in Wendouree West, on the outskirts of the city of Ballarat in regional Victoria. Wendouree West is an area of high disadvantage that has been going through a neighbourhood renewal project since 2001. Yuille Park P-8 Community College is a unique school as it is the centre of a Community Hub offering opportunities and facilities for the wider community. Every aspect of the physical buildings, school operations and curriculum has been carefully designed to enable the motto 'Living to learn, learning to live' to become a reality for each student at the school. Another innovative aspect within the school is the attempt to flatten staffing structures and to respectfully work with all members of staff in an equal way. The new physical spaces in the school are exceptionally well designed and the school received the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's 2008 School Design Award. Yuille Park P-8 Community College is an example of where a strong vision comes together in the school buildings and layout and this vision is lived out in the pedagogical and social approaches of the staff to students.

This Innovative Learning Environment case study has been prepared specifically for the OECD/ILE project. Research has been undertaken by Professor Jill Blackmore and her team at the Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation, Deakin University in partnership with Dr Elvira Vacirca from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development of Victoria, Australia, following the research guidelines of the ILE project.

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Department of Education and
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OECD/CERI

Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) Project

Case study: Yuille Park P-8 Community College

Aims of the ILE and the nature and history of the innovation

This innovative learning environment—a community college catering for students from Prep (first year of schooling) to Year 8—is the product of the amalgamation of two schools that were experiencing low enrolments and achievement in a disadvantaged community.

Background and context

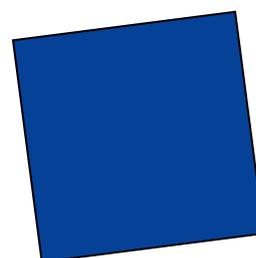
At Yuille Park P-8 Community College (YPCC), educators, parents and other adult community members work together to achieve generational change for their children. Every aspect of the physical buildings, school operations and curriculum has been carefully designed to enable the motto, *'Living to learn, learning to live'*, to become a reality for each student at the school.

YPCC is located in one of the most disadvantaged communities in Victoria. Situated in a neighbourhood of public housing in Wendouree West on the outskirts of Ballarat, the vast majority of parents are unemployed and many families have lived in the neighbourhood for two or three generations. Others are itinerant. The housing was initially a concentrated area of public housing stock commencing in the early 1950s and growing rapidly in the following decades. Some of these houses have more recently been sold off at a low cost to landlords who use them as cheap private rental properties. Initially there was extensive industry in the area so most people had some form of employment. However, as the community and educational liaison officer explains:

When industry closed down, this was the community that suffered the most... Most members of the community are unemployed now due to the closure of industry. So when you've got third generation unemployment, there's not a lot of role modelling for the students. We're starting to change that.

The community and educational liaison officer is jointly employed by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), a very successful partnership in this school community. She says that:

People who are being moved on from other areas come into this housing, they have no other option. They're often the ones that have more social issues within the community.



Nature and history of the innovation

YPCC is listed as 'low' in the Government Schools Performance Summary 2009. The Index of Community Socio-Economic Educational Advantage (ICSEA) for the school rates four per cent of students as coming from the most socio-economically advantaged top quartile, two per cent from the second highest quartile, 78 per cent for the bottom middle and 16 per cent for the least-advantaged quartile. The student attendance rate is 91 per cent. YPCC has a total enrolment of 205 students, 81 girls and 124 boys, of whom six per cent are Indigenous. The school employs 20 teaching staff (18.2 full-time employed), 12 non-teaching staff (8.7 full-time employed), and benefits from a multitude of volunteers.

YPCC is part of both neighbourhood renewal and school regeneration programs funded by DEECD (Facilities funding) and DHS (Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Support Fund and Community Facility Fund) and where school and Community Hub facilities are shared. This community was particularly chosen for neighbourhood renewal due to its high levels of disadvantage, exemplified by third generation unemployment, child protection notifications, children not transitioning well between primary and secondary school and students often leaving school at Year 7 or 8, which is under the legal school leaving age, and rarely completing secondary school.

The area was also stigmatised and had a bad reputation in Ballarat. The renewal project aimed to increase the wellbeing, safety, education, employment, housing, pride and participation of community members. The community and educational liaison officer, who worked on the initial project, explains that 'things were desperate, something had to happen'. The school bursar, who worked at Yuille Primary School prior to these initiatives, recalls:

Before our students were leaving school at the end of Grade 6 and I was so concerned that they would drop out of primary school and a good proportion of them did. We had a lot of angry parents and we witnessed quite a lot of violent situations with parents. The only time that you would see them is if they felt that their child had been hard done by.

She says that she was really frustrated about what was happening with these students, 'but when they got together and started talking about a new model I became really excited about it'. She considered that the schools' programs were not working.

We were such a close-knit staff and the teachers genuinely cared about these students but what they were doing didn't really work (school bursar).

YPCC was formed out of the merger of Yuille Primary School and Grevillea Park Primary School. The existing buildings on the Yuille Primary School site were demolished and replaced with open-plan, well-designed buildings and grounds. Like every aspect of this school, the architectural layout and design of the school was developed through a process of extensive consultation with the full school community, with the children's best interests at the centre of the planning.

According to the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) *A Fairer Victoria* report:

This partnership has already resulted in rising kindergarten enrolments and school attendance rates. In 2004 for example, only 22 per cent of children enrolled in Prep had attended kindergarten. By 2010 the figure was 100 per cent. Service integration has increased access because services share the same location. The shopping strip has been revitalised, there is a new train station, sporting facilities have been improved, and major housing upgrades have followed. Unemployment is down with more than 265 jobs created. Smarter urban design has better integrated intersections and footpaths and the community is going from strength to strength (DPCD 2010).

Building community spaces

There is a seamless cohesion between the vision, architecture, social environment and pedagogical approaches throughout the school that is the result of the depth of attention given to every aspect of planning and operations. Listening to the entire school community has led to the development and enactment of a shared vision around the wellbeing and education of the children (see Figure 1). As in all schools, there is a diversity of community membership but unusually, the Principal, team leaders, teachers, teachers’ aides, paid staff, volunteer staff, parents, teachers from other schools, employees of other government agencies and local community members all work together at this school in an almost flat structure. All voices are listened to and the focus is the present and future of the students in their care. Visiting Yuille Park P-8 Community College is an uplifting experience as an atmosphere of joy for learning and enthusiasm for working with these young people permeates the school.

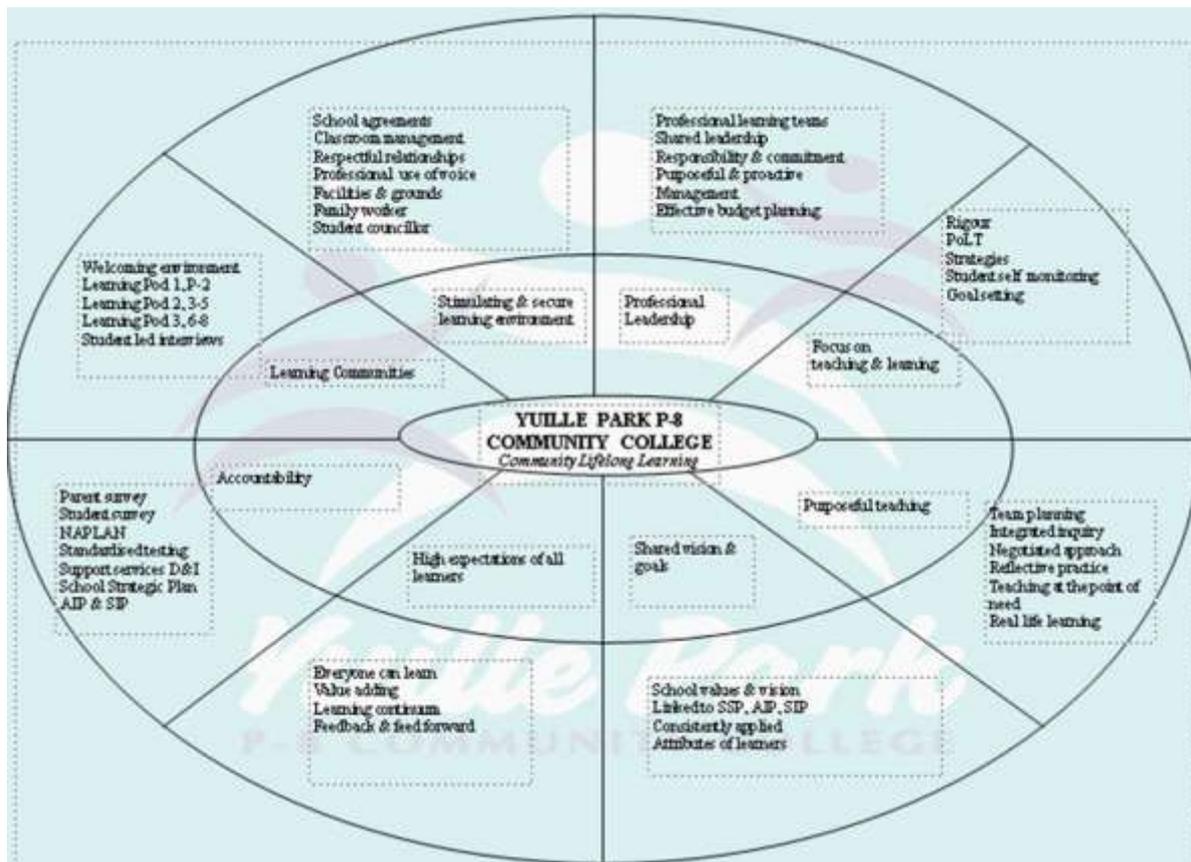


Figure 1. YPCC framework for lifelong learning

Described as ‘the heart of Wendouree West’ (Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal Team 2003), the school is a part of the Wendouree West Community Learning Hub, which includes education, health and community facilities in one location (see Figure 2). The hub exemplifies multiagency collaboration at its best, showcasing what is possible when different government departments, agencies and ministries work together with a shared vision that puts the community they serve at the centre. In addition to the school, the hub hosts Wendouree West Children’s Services (providing occasional care for children aged one to three; a three-year-old kindergarten; a four-year-old kindergarten; and maternal and child health services); Wendouree West Youth Centre; Wendouree West Wellbeing Inc. (promoting health, education and encouraging positive life choices) and a dental clinic.



The school entrance



The Agora



The library



Main building corridor

Figure 2. Features of Yuille Park P-8 Community College

The building is designed so that the community facilities can be accessed from within or outside the school. Facilities that can be used by the community outside of school hours include a café, commercial kitchen, function rooms, woodwork and sewing facilities, laundry, ICT (information communications technology) room, gym, art room with kiln, library, band room, community garden, multifunction hall, and dental clinic. The school can be securely locked off outside school hours, and a voluntary staff of parents in the front office monitors both school and Community Hub visitors carefully. The attention to every detail makes the spaces more flexible. The large gymnasium for instance, has wooden soundproofing so it can be used as a performance space, assembly hall and gym. The space at one end of the gym can be closed off to become a practice studio or the gym can be totally opened out into the large open space called ‘The Agora’ (gathering place), to create a huge open space for large events. There is a monthly community market held in this space and it was recently utilised for the Ultranet¹ professional development (PD) day, which was attended by 150 teachers from Ballarat. The school kitchen is at one end of this space, facilitating its use for catering at large functions. Students cater for and serve guests at events. The kitchen is also used for a kitchen garden program and the wider workforce students run a breakfast club three mornings a week that is attended by about 40 students. On Fridays all students are provided with fresh fruit on big platters.

In each of the shared spaces, provision has been made for use by both the school community and the broader community. For instance, in the art and woodwork areas there are separately-keyed school and community storage areas. Each agency that operates within the hub has its own coloured logo, the design of which depicts an adult with a small child and an adolescent (see Figure 3). The design represents the idea of working in the community through the stages of life.

¹ Ultranet: a state wide learning platform that enables online communication between the system, school, teachers, students and parents on curriculum, organisation, assessment and student progress across all DEECD schools.

The use of the logos throughout the school creates a shared sense of identity and community belonging.



Wendouree West Community Hub



Wendouree West Wellbeing



Wendouree West Children's Services Centre



Wendouree West Learning Hub

Figure 3. Wendouree West Community Hub Logos

A 'bottom-up' model for change: schools regeneration

Due to the schools' regeneration project and the low enrolments of the original two schools, there was an intensive and extensive consultation process between school councils and staff that produced an education brief about what was envisaged for their learning community. A working party of around 20 people included staff from the regional office and the leadership team of the local secondary school. The bursar explained how they sought to engage the school community:

We had a lot of meetings with parents—we would have sausage sizzles and think of all different ways to get them along so we could talk with the parents. The focus was on what the local community wanted and needed.

The working party recommended the amalgamation.

For the design phase, a working group was formed of the principals, Acting Principal of Wendouree Secondary College, the Regional Director, Assistant Regional Director, and the Student Wellbeing Manager from the region. Members of this group visited Western Australia to view models of schooling and facilities, giving rise to concepts that informed the initial brief. After community consultation, the Principal took a team of teachers, renewal staff and Department of Health staff to Western Australia and South Australia to review open-plan schools. Then the principles of design for the new facility were developed, with the community aiming to maximise the potential of an open-learning, team-teaching model. The basic principles were largely derived from Kinross

College in Western Australia and in particular how they imagined the middle years of schooling for YPCC:

We've taken it down to the primary and the pre-school as a synergy that flows ... a consistent flow-through ... We probably did about three or four drafts of what we wanted. We talked with the staff and we had to take the staff through a journey of saying what is possible ... In the model that I wanted in place [were] students working in multi-aged groups (Principal).

A teacher who was at Grevillea Primary School at the time described the process:

There was a lot of change. [The Principal] was fantastic, handled the change really, really well, put in a lot of background and everything went really quite slowly. I would have wanted it ... kind of let's go, let's go, let's go. And he never did that once. He was always laid back, slow, let people take their time, and all of that sort of thing. So, in the end he just brought people along with him. Then I think a few went oh, doesn't quite fit me and they've moved on (teacher).

Transitioning into the new site: developing new pedagogy and new ways of working

When the buildings at Yuille Primary were demolished and the schools amalgamated on the Grevillea Primary site while the new YPCC building was in progress, the staff began to form a shared learning community and to try some of the ideas that could be embedded in their new spaces. For example, some areas of the school could be crudely opened up by the removal of walls and these were used to trial different approaches to teaching and learning.

A teacher describes how some of the teachers began to change their practices in preparation for working in these new spaces:

We started to make it a learning community over there, even though it was still traditional class rooms ... The teachers moved their desks all into one room, so that they were all together, similar to what we have here, so that we could plan together and work together, so that was the first step. And we shared; I did a little bit of team teaching back then with another teacher for maths and it started there.

This meant that the teachers had already changed their mind-sets and practices by exploring ideas, concepts and models of pedagogy that they trialled for two months prior to occupancy. This capacity to experiment provided staff with a deeper knowledge and understanding of how pedagogically they needed to organise learning for the first year. Parents were also prepared for the move. One parent, now actively involved in the school community, recalls the community newsletter and how she kept her children informed and with anticipation they observed the building of the facilities over time.

Place-based education: connectedness and visibility

The intensive consultation process generated a design based on both educational and architectural principles and which addressed individual student and community needs. Teachers also felt that the consultation process had given them ownership over the spaces, which were no longer classrooms in the traditional sense—being open and flexible (see Figures 4 and 5 below). This new physical visibility provided a sense of being able to observe what was happening throughout the school, and it also was symbolic of the transparency about the school's values and culture. The community and educational liaison officer, who also runs most of the school tours, explains:

That's why this has also been developed as ... very open. So you can see what is happening in the playground from the board room. You can see what's happening in the classroom from the passage way, from the Agora. There's nothing to be hidden. All the windows that face onto the road you know they have these blinds but that's for sun glare. The first couple of weeks we were in we had some of the residents across the road say we can see into the classrooms, we don't know whether we should be able to do that. We said

we've got nothing to hide. It's about bringing learning in and taking it out and making it really visible.



Figure 4. Staffroom window opening onto playground



Figure 5: YPCC architectural design

The external playground spaces were carefully landscaped around themes of age-appropriate play areas, security and safety, and environmental sustainability. Covered walkways link buildings and the playground spaces around each age-based learning centre. Plum trees planted throughout the playground encourage students to pick the fruit. The large kitchen garden and animal farmlet means that students learn to tend to chickens, ducks and guinea pigs and collect eggs, while the older students monitor visiting time during recess and lunch periods. The grounds are watered by a 100,000-litre tank.

Structured patterns and characteristics of the learning environment

The school is structured in a multi-aged model in three distinct areas called Pods. Each of these Pods is an open-plan space with areas where smaller groups can work. Each of the Pods is slightly different but they all have open spaces, maximum use of natural light and an ability to use the well-fitted spaces flexibly. Each Pod is self contained with its own toilet facilities, spaces for the children to store their things and with gallery spaces allowing work to be displayed. The self-contained nature of the Pods creates a sense of belonging for the children—a home space—and how space is used is taken into account when teachers work out how to mix students in groups.

Because the school is establishing how to best use the new facilities, the organisational structures are not fixed. In 2009, there were three learning communities: Years Prep-2, Years 3-5, and Years 6-8. After a review, a decision was made to move to the basic multi-aged Pod structure. In 2010, it was a two Year Prep-1 and two Year 1-2 home groups in Pod 1 and Year 3-4 and Year 4-5 groupings in Pod 2, an organisation that may later be revised. This desire to evaluate aspects of the programs continuously means that each Pod is organised differently.



Figure 6. External spaces

Kindergarten

Since 2001, the numbers attending kindergarten have increased from 12 to 36 children. The hub is designed to meet the physical as well as affective and cognitive needs of this age group. There are low windows at the back of the hub, so children can see the older children at school, and vice versa. With increasing kindergarten attendance due to the local government and renewal project partnering with Best Start², there has been improved participation at primary school and thus an easier transition into schooling. Best Start sponsored by local groups:

Ballarat Grammar was one, Centrelink, and a couple of other organisations. So we got around \$5,000 in sponsorships. We were able to sponsor about 19 students to attend kinder (kindergarten) over three years. We knew that there were some barriers. We thought finances were one of those barriers even though they're only paying \$60 a term... We targeted the most vulnerable children, so we didn't make it a blanket advertisement. We got referrals from agencies and child protection. So those children who are most vulnerable we made sure they were sponsored to attend kinder and they did. So that in fact gave them a really great start into primary school and it's all around that pattern of attendance ... if you can get the student to kinder and get them there on a regular basis, that translates very well into primary (anonymous).

² Best Start is a Victorian government early years initiative. It supports families, caregivers and communities to provide the best possible environment, experiences and care for young children in the important years from pregnancy to school.

Pod 1

Pod 1 houses students from Prep to Year 2. The day begins with a whole group session, where the students generally sit together in a circle, go through the daily news and celebrate birthdays and other special occasions, before dividing into their working groups. The working groups are split into different configurations according to planned activities. The program follows an early years literacy and numeracy schedule with elements such as shared reading, small group reading, writing focus, etc. There is also an emphasis on oral language development and phonics. After a half-hour break, the students continue with literacy activities from 11:30am to 12.30pm followed by numeracy activities. After lunch the final hour is inquiry time, where units of work follow the students' interests. At the time of our visits, the students were studying animals and had been researching zoos, animals, their habitats and endangered animals. They had constructed a large model of a zoo from Lego and the work displayed showed an investigation into the habits of spider monkeys. Some children had done research on endangered animals and had constructed a display about orangutans. Students were able to articulate their learning to the researchers.

The teachers in this Pod have a strong focus on welcoming the children and making them feel comfortable in the setting. Many of the children who come into the school do not have very strong oral language or pre-literacy skills. A teacher explains:

They are not exposed to a lot of conversation at home and it makes it difficult.

Another says:

We felt that our children coming in were so low without any intervention that we really needed to have a needs-based program. That's what we've provided this year for the Prep children and we have had fantastic results. I suppose what we do and what [my team-teaching colleague] and I do is we really care about our children. So it's like they're our own children and we treat them as we would want someone to treat our children.

The level of oral language that the students come in with varies but when the teachers have visited other schools, they immediately notice how much higher the oral language levels are and how much more skilled the students are at constructing narratives. They run a phonics program but the emphasis is on what to do with language. Another teacher says:

It might have taken them all year to just about learn their alphabet—but now we're actually teaching them what they do with their alphabet so that they can use it. Whereas a lot of times people say, 'Well they know their alphabet, okay'. That's fine, they know their alphabet, they know their sounds, but what do they do with it? They don't know what to do with it. So that's the sort of focused teaching ... and our results are improving.

Planning for individual needs enables the teachers to fill in the gaps for each child. The teachers keep detailed data, tracking the children individually on a spreadsheet and constantly re-evaluating the program for each, according to his/her needs.

Developing appropriate social behaviours is also an issue for some children. A teacher states that the staff explicitly and implicitly teach values, resilience and friendship:

You're teaching values all the time anyway, through your regular teaching and learning every day, so your values, what's appropriate behaviour, how do we be good friends, all of that, every day. We come in from play and we always have 'happy news': Who would like to come and talk about something great they did in the playground? So really looking on those positives and talking about being a good friend, how do we show that, all of that.

When discussing photos they had taken, the children expressed enjoyment about the inquiry approach, the spaces and how they loved coming to school. One boy took a photo in the kindergarten room because he could see his sister there. Another took a photo of the chickens because he was looking forward to caring for them when he was in Pod 2.



Figure 7. Inside the learning pods

Pod 2

Pod 2 houses Year 3 to 5 students, with four classroom teachers and four educational assistants. Some home groups belong to a single teacher, but the majority of the program is taught in cross-groups of students with teams. Sometimes the home groups are together and sometimes there are other groupings according to the program or the needs of the students. A teacher in this Pod explains:

I've got a group of four or five students that are quite above the rest of the group and so I'll set a task for them as an independent group ... separate from the rest of the class where they go off and work on a task by themselves in a group of four. You know, because the space is so flexible you can allow them to go away but still see them working.

The Pod space facilitates the capacity for flexibility with working groups and the school's collaborative approach. The Pod leader emphasises that:

There's a bit going on. We're really fortunate I guess to have a flexible staff where we're able to [work together] and [that's] the beauty of our open environment across the school.

He adds that team teaching enables Pod staff to:

... bounce ideas off each other and work towards differentiating the curriculum for the students across the board ... it's the collegial discussions, the team planning, the team teaching. Knowing that I don't have to know everything, that I've got a team member who can jump in and support at the same time ... so you know you can really support each other through that process.

The Pod encourages the students to develop their teamwork skills, and they explicitly work through issues around teamwork in class. The Pod leader describes this:

A lot of the times [they] negotiate and think very carefully about who they're going to select or who they're going to work with ... students are going to gravitate to, normally, to their own friends but we're finding now there's a bit of a change to that; the students are actually looking for how is this going to best benefit me and my team.

The Pod has a focus on reading in the literacy block and teachers have tried to encourage the students to read for longer periods of time. The team has studied their NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) data in detail and identified a need for improvement in reading, so that the students could become ‘solid readers who can interpret and understand questions’. They are trying to establish a love and stamina for reading, starting with ten minutes at a time, which was ‘a massive task for our students. We now have students reading 20 minutes, half an hour’. Library book borrowing has increased as have sales at the school’s book fair.

In Pod 2 there is an inquiry unit every term. In Term 4 it is based on gold and economics, so it is strongly related to the history of the local community of Ballarat. Pod 2 students also participate in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program³, and the team has focused on integrating this program more into the curriculum.

We try to really integrate and align a lot of our teaching to those hands-on experiences the students have in the classroom or in the garden or in the kitchen, so what we’ve actually decided to do now is: let’s see how we can really support their literacy and numeracy more whilst also having the hands on experience.

What we did was we broke our groups into half. Whilst a group [is] in cooking we’re doing an activity aligned to the activity that’s going on in the kitchen. So it might be a garden exercise so we take students out; we’re actually measuring the garden. We’re out there using trundle wheels. The hands-on stuff. Then they’re getting an idea: it says on this packet that I need to place this seed every so many metres, about measuring, doing it, and it’s all very connected and authentic ... We’ve done a YPCC MasterChef⁴, so they’ve had to come up with their own, we’ve videoed it, all that sort of stuff. So lots of ... connecting it to what they see on TV (Pod 2 teacher).

Students discussed with the research team the photographs of locations they liked and where they felt they learnt well. One very quiet child chatted about the pictures he took of the woodwork room, where he likes to ‘build stuff’ and ‘measure things’. Another girl was extremely enthusiastic about the kitchen program and ‘quick smart room’ in which one or two students work at a time solving specific (maths) problems. Her preference was for small groups, as she finds big groups ‘too hard’. A third student took pictures of the multipurpose room used for indoor sports and activities as he is a fan of Australian Rules Football, plays for the school’s football team and most enjoys the sports program. All students were enthused by the kitchen garden and the chickens. The boys talked about growing vegetables, making compost and cooking pizzas in the outdoor oven, and girls about anticipating next being able to care for the ducks. The children clearly distinguished ‘where we learn’ as the areas where they sit together on the floor (around the electronic white board) and, for the student in maths intervention, the quick smart room, where, clearly, she has discovered that she can learn.

Pod 3

Pod 3 is based on the middle years of schooling model, with a strong emphasis on self-directed learning and multiple points of entry. Children in the Pod have a huge range of skills and abilities in addition to a wide age range. Consequently, learning activities are designed with different entry points to enable the students who are ahead to be challenged and others to learn and complete some of the work. The Pod leader explains:

³ The [Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program](#) began in 2001, and has since been implemented in 180 primary schools across all states and territories of Australia. The program aims to change the way children approach and think about food, as they learn how to grow, harvest, prepare and share fresh, seasonal food.

⁴ Amateur cooks compete to win the coveted MasterChef title - based on MasterChef Australia.

We have students there who can't function in the classroom so we have a program for that. We have multi approaches and we always have multi entry points because if you do not have those multi entry points then students get lost. And that is why we have [that] range in the first place because students have just fallen through the cracks.

The importance of team teaching was emphasised in the interviews. One teacher said how their skills 'combine really well', in particular with the three education support staff in their Pod, who were indistinguishable from teachers in terms of what they were doing in the space. One of the teachers explains:

I know they're not teachers but ... They are better than a lot of teachers I've worked with, as far as the way they interact with the students and their expectations of work [and] their knowledge of how to discipline students.

The Pod leader concurred with this and outlined other leadership activities that the educational support (ES) staff take on:

We designed a workforce program, so we have students out on work experience—today there are three out. I have an ES staff member that runs that. Educational support team members run the advanced program and the work experience program. They run cafes at the school with the specific focus of getting these students into the workforce. We identify and pool the resources for the educational support—the ES staff work across the Pod.

He explains that 'they are as good as teachers. That is how the school runs because of the brilliance of our support staff'.

The flexibility of the spaces with kitchens integrated into each Pod facilitates the inquiry program:

It allows you to do so many different other activities. ... Now we cook, and it's just so easy. We do science experiments that are not using any dangerous chemicals, we just use vinegar and bi-carb soda and all those, but you can do all that really easily without even thinking about it ... It's not this little add on, and it's not hard to do, and there's plenty of storage, and there's just plenty of space, and it's not all carpet, so it doesn't matter that we have stuff spilling on the floor (Pod 3 teacher).

The focus of the team is to prepare students for transition into secondary school and help them become more self directed. For example, when on work experience the students are required to self identify the skills that they need to develop, and these are used to inform their program. As with other year levels, the program is constantly being revised and reviewed relative to the whole school, 'all these things link up and we have this extended community around this small school. It turns this school into a big school and powerful school with a fantastic view for students' futures'.

Y2

Because there are some students who are not ready to go to mainstream secondary schools or those schools do not meet their needs, an alternative track is being developed. These are usually the students who drop out of school early, an issue already identified by the neighbourhood renewal team. The Y2 facility aims to keep these young people in education longer and to help them to move into the workforce directly or preferably into further training that will lead to work.

What we needed to do with these students is to change that attitude that what's the point of going onto secondary school cause I'm not going to get a job anyway, and I'm useless, and I've been told that all along, not only by my parents or my care givers, maybe even some teachers ... Sometimes our students don't have that motivation and desire (community and educational liaison officer).

The leader of the Y2 campus was previously a school principal and was keen to take up this new role to work on this problem. He stated:

Flexible learning wasn't occurring for really difficult primary school students transitioning into secondary education, and this was a gap in the system ... My view is that those students [at risk] are known to the school, the system, the teachers ... but there's got to be some form of support for these students at the earlier stage ... professional support.

The aim of Y2 is to integrate such students back into school—into mainstream school or into a work pathway. The Y2 leader considered that: 'Some students need to be taken away from the mainstream and some students need the flexible learning processes that have got a linkage with the mainstream ... we're grabbing the student and then we're designing the curriculum around them'.

At Y2, the attendance rate is 80-90 per cent. Y2 structures an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each student that is directly related to his/her needs. The second stage is about students managing their own ILP, actively engaging in hands-on applied learning activities, and ushering them towards secondary school, the workforce or further study.

We've already transitioned two students back into the mainstream and my argument is it's because of that preparatory work ... To put it in simple terms ... we've received damaged students at 14 or 15 and with a cohort of really difficult students our belief is you need some strong models in amongst them (Y2 leader).

Transition programs

The school is extremely attentive to transitioning to the next stage of schooling and the next stage of life. Year 1s were able to articulate about moving in from kindergarten, moving up to the next Pod, being able to use the middle Pod's playground space as part of Year 2 to 3 transition and the excitement about what they knew was in store for them (looking after the chickens!) later on in their schooling. The transition program begins with developing relationships with the Prep parents. The Prep-2 teachers visit the kinder for half an hour each once a week and run a transition program. Later in the year the students come from kinder to visit the school, play on the playground and see the school. The Pod 1 teacher who runs the program explains:

They play on the playground—they did today, so they're familiar with the playground. [We] line them up where they're going to line up, go and see where they're going to do their art and woodwork and music during class time and we'd go in and read a story to the students, sing some songs, so that they knew who we were and then they start coming in from July and they'd have numerous visits ... over ten weeks ... So they're familiar with the setting.

This program has immediate benefits for both parents and students. One of the parents cited the Prep orientation as the reason for choosing this school because her daughter 'felt connected'. The transition between Pods is also carefully planned with students moving into the next Pod through activities that focus on transition such as the Year 3-4 students reading to the Year 1-2 students.



Figure 8. Library and Art Room

Nature and quality of the learning

Leadership: flat structure of community

The school is trying to build what the Principal describes as a ‘flat structure’. He explains:

They're not going to deliver it by me telling them. I can provide and I say to my teachers you are not the font of the knowledge ... We're not teaching a knowledge content, we're teaching thinking and developmental learning that's continual. And I said I'm not going to tell you what to do, but I'll provide, facilitate and guide, what I think we need to do and where we need to go. So that's our philosophy.

A Pod 2 teacher explains this further in terms of the ways in which teachers work alongside the education support staff. As noted previously, in the Pods you cannot immediately tell who is the support staff and who is the teacher.

That's something we're specially trying to do ... everyone is treated equally and even within the planning and structures that we have as a far as literacy coordinating and maths specialists and things like that, everybody is brought into that planning.

Staff commitment and teacher renewal

The staff were all enthusiastic about the work they did at YPCC. While they noted that the school was not without challenges and difficulties and that people did not always agree, there was a strong sense that staff felt valued and that they had a shared vision about the community and a sense of connectedness. The parents also notice this. A parent said, ‘I see the teachers a lot when I come up here and with parent–teacher interviews and that they really know where she is, what level she is at and they are not reading it from a piece of paper, they can tell me’.

The community and educational liaison officer proclaimed:

I love this facility. I just am so passionate about this. It's given this community an identity, even though they had one, it's given them a different identity and a positive identity. It's opened doors of their students. The students are proud of it. The community are proud of it. You can tell that by the lack of graffiti or any vandalism in this place. It's given them a central focus for the community. It's just opened doors.

A Pod leader described his own commitment:

I wouldn't be here if I didn't have a passion for these students and an understanding that these students ... can learn I think. In the past people thought no, these students can't learn. It's not because they can't learn, and it's not because they don't want to learn, these students have to be challenged to learn and we have to give them the opportunities to learn ... And it's not because of the model that it is, it's just the biggest part about this place is the staff ... it's just an easy place to come work. And it doesn't matter how busy you are, it's just easier to get out of bed.

One of the teachers talked about her passion for the work and her love for the school. She was also very articulate about the difficulties that teachers face on a personal level when they begin to work in disadvantaged communities that are so different from their own family backgrounds. Working closely with a community different from their background can be difficult for teachers. YPCC has provided extensive support to teachers in creating their own community of practice, as symbolised by the weekly lunch that felt like a family dinner.

Team teaching

The teachers all work in teams in each Pod. Each has a partner they work with most of the time. But there are various configurations of teaching teams across the week in each Pod according to the program. We noted that the design of the Pods shaped a team-teaching approach because on a basic level the teachers had to at least work together to arrange quiet times (for example, avoiding planning silent reading in one area while another is doing drama). Because of the visual connections teachers are always aware of how/why people are working in the space. A Pod leader appreciated the ways in which the spaces worked:

The spaces here facilitate a team approach. So you will notice that at this school—and I can see that it will continue to evolve because it is a different form of teaching—that you have to teach in partnerships. We have a team of eight people—we work together—and mainly there are two teachers there at a time. While one delivers the lesson the other is walking around—they pitch in when they have to and they make sure all the students are on task.

Team teaching is facilitated by planning, with dedicated planning times. The condition is that the Pod team must spend three of the sessions planning together. Organisationally, it is possible because of the blocked timetable, with blocks of two hours, two hours and one hour. The four specialist teachers in technology, visual arts, performing arts and physical education work with the students during planning time. During this time the children get one hour of each of those specialist areas. This time is highly valued by the staff as it gives them opportunities for assessment and planning together and has meant that the teams have been able to build and consolidate their working relationships more quickly.

One team teaching pair in Prep-Year 1 is in some ways an unlikely pair. One has worked at Grevillea and now Yuille Park for around 35 years, initially as a teacher aide and then she went to university, trained and came back. The other is a young fourth-year teacher. The older staff member describes team teaching as 'a fantastic process'.

A second-year teacher who has been a classroom teacher in Pod 2 since she graduated said that she was attracted to the school by the way that the school was set up and the team teaching approach. She explained, 'I'm a team person so this type of environment was something that I felt best suited me'. In Pod 2 there has been a stronger emphasis on team teaching this year and she feels that:

Planning and preparation has been a lot easier because you've basically got two minds working together on the one project or four minds in our case because we all have the same inquiry topics, same focus, so we're all on the same page so you've got four people constantly working together reflecting, giving feedback, sharing resources, and it's just that constant ... You're reflecting all the time without even doing it consciously.

Team teaching also facilitates immediate reflection on action due to having someone there to provide feedback and work with through problems. The newer Pod 2 teacher explained:

At uni (university) one of the things was to reflect on the lesson, do all this, write up your notes, those kind of things, and when you're in a classroom by yourself you don't have a person to say 'oh that went well, that didn't go well'. Whereas here you find you're just doing it naturally. You'll have a class, you'll walk into the office which is in the Pod, and you'll say 'oh that was a disaster or that went well'; it's a natural thing that you do here. The naturalness of this reflection on success and failure [is] an important aspect of the ongoing

nature of the change and planning cycle. A notable feature of this school is the level of staff commitment.

A Pod leader describes the benefits to the students of team teaching:

The children see us modelling that team work. The open discussion whilst we're teaching them, the banter sometimes that we have with each other, the laughter we have, and the students therefore see ... people working well together and I think in terms of them when they get to their work they're able to work well in teams as well and they're really selective in who they work with. They look for the strengths with their partners that they go to work with also.

A Pod 3 teacher noted that team teaching helped to give everyone in the classroom an opportunity to learn:

The beauty of the team teaching is that you know what it's like in a classroom, you know you can have like 24 students and there's 22 on task, and doing exactly what you want and it's those two that monopolise your time ... so the beauty of it is one of us might go and work with those two students and it might mean that you take them outside. You take them out completely ... But you know because no one lets that go anymore ... we work with those students so that everyone benefits then.

Parents also appreciate the value of team teaching. A parent said, 'You might have some students that are falling a bit behind but the teachers are always there to pick them up and help them move on'.

Professional learning and continuous improvement

In addition to the team planning time, the school also has regular professional learning sessions every Tuesday for two hours. Some of this has focused on pedagogy (such as the maths focus in 2010) and some on relevant sociological information. Recent study has been on understanding the research literature around cycles of poverty, knowledge of which came through in the depth of understanding that the teachers had about the community and the informed ways in which they spoke about it. Other work is on technological capabilities. To build up the general capacity in the staff some of the teachers are completing additional intensive training, such as a primary maths specialist initiative for which 81 teaching staff from across Victoria were selected for several weeks of training in Melbourne. These teachers have taken on a maths specialist role, and then share this with their colleagues.

The Pod 2 leader is currently involved in the Emerging Leaders Program through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership⁵ with two other team leaders. He explains:

As a part of [the Bastow program] we've got an in-school project. On Friday mornings we do a techie brekkie (information technology breakfast) it's called and that allows all staff members to come in on a Friday morning and we update them on programs ... like we do a bit of stuff on Excel, we talk about our web page, how to update it. This week we're going through the Ultranet because we've just done some Ultranet training during the week.

Teachers talked about the cycle of continuous improvement, and they all had plans for things that they intended to do differently and changes (both small and big) that they were hoping to make. One teacher noted that the time given to planning, staff meetings every week and staff working in other Pods as part of the transition programs, led to a valuable 'cross-pollination of ideas'.

⁵ The Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development delivers a suite of high quality programs for emerging leaders, new and experienced principals, leadership teams, rural school leaders and early childhood professionals.

Working in open spaces

In an environment like the Pods it can become quite noisy. A Pod 2 teacher explained that:

We encourage the social interactions between the students but when you have four classes in one environment or 85 students, it becomes quite noisy so you have to adjust to the noise levels and you have to set routines with the students to make them aware that they're not the only home group in that environment. There's other students that might be doing silent reading or something like that, so you need to set those routines from the start.

As a new teacher, she initially found it difficult to fully utilise the open space.

At the beginning I just had my whole group together and that's just me being a new teacher as well, just had the whole class together, constantly did the whole group and then to the tables ... and that was me being safe I guess. And seeing how other teachers do it as well ... now I'm getting used to small focus groups ... and I think too because I didn't know the staff that well ... but it's a confidence thing too. You could walk in and be someone who's really paranoid about everyone else seeing what you're doing in the classroom.

Impact and effectiveness of the ILE

Motto: Living to Learn, Learning to Live: Learning how to be in the world and building social capital with students

An important aspect of the success of this school community is the genuine attempt by the Principal and leading teachers to create a flat structure where all of the staff contribute to planning and provide input to major decisions. The level of staff commitment to the community is extremely high and staff have a deep sense of the value of the work that they are doing with the children. All who were interviewed talked about 'our students' as their driver. The values of respect and recognition permeate through all relationships.

NAPLAN data show YPCC as performing well below Australian and similar schools in all assessment areas. The Principal and staff are well aware of this and are working to build academic capacity. The school's vision is to achieve continuous improvement in student learning outcomes and maximising opportunities for the development of lifelong learning skills (Yuille Park P-8 Community College 2010). A literacy coach works with staff and students and the school provides numeracy intervention. There is an expectation that greater uptake of kindergarten places on the Community Hub site will contribute to improved early years results.

The substantial indicators of school improvement since the school opened in late 2008 are the results of the Attitudes to School Survey and the Staff and Parent Opinion Surveys, where enormous shifts have occurred across all survey categories. The Attitudes to School Survey (Years 5 and 6) shows significant improvement (from low in the first and second quartiles to high third and fourth quartiles) across all indicators. The Year 5 and 6 self-assessment of morale, learning motivation, learning confidence, connectedness to school, classroom behaviour and student safety moved from below (and mostly substantially below) the State mean in 2008 to above and often well above the 2010 State mean. Year 5 and 6 students rated teacher effectiveness at above the 75th percentile in 2010 compared to just over the 10th percentile in 2008. Indicators for upper middle years' students show enormous change in school engagement. Year 8 students at YPCC report above the 95th percentile in all attitudinal indicators when ranked against all Victorian government schools. Student absences at Year 7 averaged 23 days per student in 2008; this was reduced to an average of 13.5 days in 2009, almost two days less than the State average. The average Year 7 student absence was six days in 2009, compared to the State average of 18.8 days. This is astounding, considering that prior to the opening of YPCC, there was a very low retention rate for students beyond Year 6.

Staff opinions have changed significantly in three years. In 2008, staff morale was extremely low, staff engagement and learning were low, and perceptions of student motivations and behaviour were poor. Almost all sections of the survey reported low in the first quartile. The 2010 Staff Opinion Survey, however, shows almost all indicators in the fourth quartile. Staff are highly motivated, have strong relationships with other staff and students, have a very clear sense of their role, value professional growth and perceive high goal congruence and supportive leadership. They have a high opinion of the school's discipline policy and see strong improvements in student behaviour and motivation. The Principal refers to improved staff survey data:

You can see there where the growth in the staff has been. They still have some issues around (and this is a middle-class value of teachers) student motivation, what our idea of what it looks like and what it is. Not [taking into account] how connected these students are and what they're doing. It's about our perceptions and that's important.

Demonstrating the school's understanding of data as an evaluation tool, the Principal noted that there were:

... some interesting growth patterns, particularly from 2008 to where we are this year (2010). But there was some drop offs in some areas, not a lot, but some areas dropped back in 2009 and what we needed to do was unpack that and ... where the students coming from particularly in the Year 5s, what do they go through in that time to get to that place that they found that they weren't as connected ... [Years] 3 to 5 ... shows you the growth and the connections. It shows you those building blocks of what can be achieved.

Building social capital

Social relationships are central to the school's approach. Teachers are constantly building students' social capital. The research team witnessed numerous student/teacher interactions that exemplify this. When we were introduced to a student who was in the staff room because he felt sick, he talked with us, and then the teacher said, 'Now, what do we say to people we have met who have spent time with us?' He smiled and said that he enjoyed meeting us. At the end of the day, a pair of teachers from Pod 3 each stood next to a door and farewelled the students, calling each one by name and wishing them a nice evening. So, as they left, two people individually spoke to them, and many of the students returned the greetings. Senior students were affirming of other classmates in the school photos they took, promoting the work of others and commenting on what a great job that they had done. One student who was waiting to hear some instructions in a room was complimented for waiting so patiently. Each of these incidents on their own is not remarkable, but throughout the school, all teachers are attending to developing students' sense of self worth and social skills as a natural part of all of their interactions, so the sum total of this is extremely significant.

This extends even to the ways in which the students see the teachers working together. A Pod 2 teacher explains, 'I think one of the most important things that we try and model for the students is that the students are seeing the teachers working collaboratively as well. And we often talk about it with the students.' Her colleague describes the ways in which the students need support to make connections, even with local facilities:

Next Tuesday we're going on an excursion to the Ballarat BMX (bicycle motocross) Centre. Now you wouldn't think that would be difficult for a community to do that but they're really resistant to step out of that environment. This is a (Australian) Sports Commission run program just trying to encourage students to get into clubs. It's a free thing. They wouldn't go there so we're just happy to provide a bus, a couple of staff to go down, just to expose them to things that are close in their community. Initially it's just about making a connection with a familiar face from a club, and then they therefore become comfortable.

The Principal believes that the successful members of the current groups of students will return to the school and help build social capital with their community:

In five years time I want to see... a block of students that are going through Year 11 and 12 and have an opportunity to go to university, if they choose to go to university. But at least ... they've expanded their choices. I want them to be coming back and sharing ... like one of our students who has gone through university and graduated in accountancy with top marks, can't get a job now because he hasn't got ... that social emotional IQ (intelligence quotient) that you need and he's a bright student, he's a good student. But he comes from a family that has lived here for 30 years and in that generational sense, got the nous but hasn't got that ... And I want that package for these students. I just don't want them to be an academic. I just don't want them to have good relationships. I want them to have that package and if we can do that in most cases we have done great service for this community and the wider Ballarat.

Learning begins at home: building social capital with parents

The Pod 3 leader acknowledges the importance of building strong social capital, particularly with the parents:

What you are talking about there is the social values, and we are trying to get that model so that eventually it catches on at home ... We want these students when they have students to be modelling those values. It is about changing the cycle ... let's show them that there is another option (Pod 3 leader).

The school uses the parents who model positive behaviour to work with other parents. They ran a FAST Program⁶ in conjunction with Uniting Care where those parents who related really well to their children mentored other parents in parenting. One of the leading teachers sees this as, 'Trying to break the cycle, opening up the doors, showing other options' and he adds that 'it is really good to see a small win'.

The Community Hub provides opportunities for parents that increase their social capital. One parent who has been working at the school office for Wellbeing for about six months describes her job:

My best friend ... she worked for Wellbeing Wendouree, and she said that they were getting volunteers for reception. And I dropped out of school as soon as I turned 15; the day I turned 15 I was out of there, and I thought, 'This will give me another skill'. I have got limited skills. So I started off in reception and [she] taught me ... she had to show me heaps ... I sit at the desk. I mainly do phone calls. I take appointments, gym, new gym memberships, show people around the gym and run the community market that's on once a month with [another staff member]. So that's organising the store holders, food, making sure everything is more or less where they want it to go. So, on a Saturday, I start work once a month at six o'clock in the morning with the children and work until it is all done. My oldest girl, she helps, they all help. And then I also help run the youth group Monday and Wednesday nights. That's where I want to be, I eventually want to be a youth worker. I have learnt heaps. Seriously when I first started I was just like, wow this is really overwhelming and I didn't have people skills, and within two months I had worked out the computer lab, and if I have got any problems I just go '[Friend], I need help' (parent volunteer).

Relationships with parents

The school works extremely hard to create and maintain relationships with parents. In the course of our research there, we came across several examples of relationships with parents where a bridge had been rebuilt with parents after they had been angry at the school, and the communication lines

⁶ Families and Schools Together - an element of 'Kids Matter' the Australian primary schools mental health initiative.

were still open. The community and educational liaison officer described the importance of parental relationships:

We want to have a relationship with parents, whether it's good or bad or whatever. We need to have that relationship. If we don't have that trust with them, we can't protect their children. We'd much rather have the trust of a parent that's not treating their child very well ... but know that the child is coming to school and we keep that child safe for that period of time, than to have a really bad relationship where the parent keeps the children home; we have no idea what's going on there.

The school begins building this relationship with parents when the children are in kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher and one of the Prep teachers complete the Transition Learning and Development Statements together with the parents. These forms have a section which asks parents how they feel about their child coming to school, and any issues they might have. A Pod 1 teacher explains that:

We usually fill that out for them, because a lot of them are illiterate ... We just find that's easier, they don't feel threatened ... and they get to meet someone from the school if they haven't already been in on the kinder days and you find out individually about the students.

We observed the extent of social support throughout the school, and teachers told us of incidents where they were required to offer this kind of support. The community and educational liaison officer talked about the importance of extensive support, '... there needs to be in this type of school. And I think we could possibly do better because I mean we're not eligible for welfare workers and things like that, we have teachers that have got some skills and training in that but I really think that ... we need a social worker here'.

The Community Hub has offered programs for some of the adults in the community. An extremely successful program was the Certificate 3 in Childcare in 2008. Nineteen women from the community completed the course that was run in the hub (two days) in partnership with the University of Ballarat (one day), and nine of them found employment. They also tried Aged Care, as some people seemed interested, but only two completed that program. The community and educational liaison officer said that working in the community you have to accept this:

When I get frustrated and say, I'm offering your program, why aren't you taking it up, they may not want to take it up. We have to accept it's not about what we're doing, it's about their needs, and they're not ready for that. So we have to work in a different way and that's where we work with students.

We noted other aspects of the school that were specifically designed to build relationships with parents. The Pod 1 teachers stand at the front of the school for 15 to 20 minutes every night and speak to parents. One of the parents said:

There is good support, like, they lost their grandfather in May, two months after school starting and I think it's [education support staff member], she helps students with the grieving process and all that and it was just lovely. She went out and bought them a little box and their own little books so they could write their memories of their grandfather and that in it.

Another parent reflected:

I don't have anything bad to say. I really like it here and I have connected with the teachers and that really well and touch wood we haven't had any issues yet but I feel that if there was an issue that the teachers would be willing to sit down and talk to us.

School as a safe place

The staff make an extra effort to make this school a safe place for children in their community. Prior to the regeneration project there was a community boundary, an arbitrary separation across a street, by which families determined which school their child would attend. This self-determined

partitioning required some adjustment when YPCC was built. Some parents were very concerned that there were no ‘high fences’ around the school. These issues have been dealt with well by both the school and the neighbourhood. The school has become a central and openly accessible area that draws the community together. Further to this, the school operates as a ‘safe place’ for students whose home life may be unstable. A Pod 1 teacher indicates that ‘the school is working to provide a fabulous facility for the children—but as teachers clearly acknowledge—you cannot change their outside lives—you can hope to help the children change their lives’. She goes on to say that, ‘If you don’t have them looked after, if they don’t feel safe, happy, cared for, they’re not going to learn’.

We’ve got one little boy who never goes outside and if you look at his complexion you would know he never goes outside, but it was also he’s not allowed outside in the backyard and he’s not allowed outside in the front yard, so he has to stay inside all the time ... It’s so unstable at home, that they know when they come to school that Miss [D.] is going to be here and Mrs S. is going to be here and that if they’ve got a problem they can tell us and it doesn’t go any further and we will deal with it and they know that.

Measures of success

The school has had over 7,500 national and international visitors in the past two and a half years. In response, the students have a sense of pride about the school and have become accustomed to being interviewed about how different their school is. One group of visiting teachers suggested that the school had set it up so the students were on their best behaviour and working. The community and educational liaison officer said:

But why would you want to do that? We want to show this, warts and all. We want to show how the teachers react and relate to the students ... and there might be times we go in there and there is a problem. And you just leave ... But ... the teachers accept the fact that there’ll be groups coming in at different times. Last week I had four out of the five days I did tours.

While there is a strong hope for generational change in this community, the experiences of this school demonstrate how change occurs—in terms of the obvious care the community and students take with the building. In the focus group interviews with Pod 3, one student photographed the sports store as she loved the variety of equipment but was apologetic that it was messy. A Pod leader shared a similar story:

The connectedness of the community to this hub—people are very protective of it—and very respectful of it and we have had minimal—and I mean minimal—damage. I haven’t seen anything major at all; students at this school do not graffiti. I can remember one word drawn on the playground, and you know who came and told me? The students. And they said, ‘Can we have some remover and we will remove it’. The students are the ones who want the place set up.

The bursar explains that over half of the school community pay the per student levies, enabling the purchase of additional curriculum resources:

We have 99 per cent of parents on Centrelink; we have got two families who aren’t on welfare. Then we get some parents who will just refuse to pay and believe that everything should be for nothing and we get others who send five dollars in an envelope every single week until they have paid their fees off, which is really good. We charge \$100 a year to cover the extras. I think it gives them a sense of pride and ownership if they pay.

The chair of the Wendouree West Neighbourhood Alliance and the Steering Committee (which is co-chaired by the Mayor) who was involved in the renewal process and has lived in Wendouree West for ten years, said many people ‘think everything is wonderful here’ and adds with school attendance rates increasing from 60 to 90 per cent:

There are disadvantaged students, students with behavioural problems, students not going to school, which this school actually has addressed in a very unique way. It is an innovative way of doing it because the drop-out rate for this school was pretty high until they introduced the new paradigm. The students just love coming here now.

The school is already making a big impact in the community. A Pod leader explains:

My understanding is that before I got here we used to have angry parents quite often coming through ... We don't get angry parents any more. Fighting in the yard—no more. The data from the wellbeing, engagement, and school connectedness is really positive.

An elderly lady next door has planted a garden between her house and the school gate because the school was so beautiful and she wanted to give the students something beautiful to look at while they waited for their parents.

The measurement will be in the future. We can measure it now; we can measure it in the number of students enrolled in kinder and attending. We can measure by the waiting list for childcare. We can measure by the effect, the difference in the students, the happiness, the warmth of this place when you walk in, the feel of it (Principal).

A Pod 1 teacher explains how the staff focus on the children has contributed to changing the culture of education in the neighbourhood:

Yes, so therefore the key to that is you have to have a team of teachers who are willing to actually share and work just solely for the students, not for your own self-gratification. It's how you can improve that child's learning and that child's needs and teaching to the point of need, whereas there are some people who just can't handle that and that doesn't make them any different or any less a teacher, it's just that you really need that and we found it easier and we've worked hard at it too.

Concluding comments

Transferability and sustainability

While this school is in a very disadvantaged community, the approach to schooling is applicable to other places but not to be transplanted in this particular form. The Principal argues:

This model can work anywhere. If it can work at this disadvantaged level it can work at the top ... If you hear of Ballarat Grammar coming in and looking at the space and looking at the way it's happening, they go and build a facility that can facilitate that ... It's about facilitating the way forward and the mind[set] ... you've got to have your local ownership.

Unlike many schools where the new learning spaces are built before the staff is ready pedagogically, this school prepared the staff for the new spaces by developing and rehearsing new practices before they took occupancy. While further adjustments were made, this solid preparation meant that the teachers were emotionally prepared (or on their way to being so) when they moved, in addition to having thought through new strategies and ways of working. This extended period of time, and the work that the community had done individually and collectively, facilitated the change. And there is serial design occurring, with teachers talking about their plans for trying things differently next time and fine tuning their practices to improve the work that they are doing with their students.

The Principal is clear in his intentions for the school and how to judge its successes: 'What I'm on about is providing the foundations and then the mechanisms for generational change'. The aim is for generational change and this is a very long-term project. Like the architects of medieval cathedrals, the Principal and staff here will not necessarily see the end product of this. What this aim does, however, is to focus staff on putting systems in place that can be developed and modified in the future, and to ensure that the programs and the approach are not overly reliant on

particular staff, but there are multiple people who can fill the gaps. This focus on sustainability is an important feature that will enable the ambitious goals of the school to be met. In the Principal's words:

I'll say now, I'll be as rich as anybody when I walk away from this place if I've got something that's embedded and sustainable for generations to come here. But it's for the next person to come in to still facilitate, to guide a little bit, put their own bent on it but have that same emotional, intelligent investment.

The school offers a number of approaches that are critical to this environment.

- Consultation with and ownership by the wider community, recognising that in addressing children's needs they are also addressing community needs;
- A culture amongst staff that prioritises mutual respect and care, with attention to relationships; and
- An ongoing desire by the teachers and community members to continue to change their curriculum through systematic inquiry in order to do better for their students. Critical to this school redesign was interagency collaboration, a supportive policy environment, and the investment in buildings based on sound design principles that were educationally grounded.

Glossary

ACARA: The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

Attitudes to School Survey: The overall objective of the Attitudes to School survey is to collect data about the opinions of Victorian government school students from Year 5 to Year 12 and for individual schools across Victoria to use this information to drive improvement.

Best Start: is a Victorian Government early years initiative. It supports families, caregivers and communities to provide the best possible environment, experiences and care for young children in the important years from pregnancy to school. Best Start aims to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all Victorian children (0-8 years). It supports communities, parents and service providers to improve universal early years services so they are responsive to local needs. It has a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Centrelink: Centrelink is a Commonwealth Government statutory agency, delivering a range of Commonwealth services to the Australian community. It is responsible to the Minister for Human Services and is part of the Human Services portfolio.

DEECD: The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Australia.

DHS: The Department of Human Services, Victoria, Australia.

DPCD: The Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria, Australia.

Government Schools Performance Summary: The Victorian Government School Performance Summary was introduced to give parents a clear overview of how government schools are performing in Victoria. Each performance summary provides overall results of students and how the school compares with other Victorian government schools, taking into account its student intake.

ICSEA: The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage is a measure that enables comparisons to be made across schools and between 'like schools'. The ICSEA measure is based on the socio-economic characteristics of the areas where students live, whether regional or remote area, and the proportion of Indigenous enrolments. It is used on the *MySchool* website to enable comparison between 'like' Australian schools. The average ICSEA value is 1000.

www.myschool.edu.au

NAPLAN: The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy developed by the Commonwealth Government in 2008. Every year, all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed on the same days using national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy.

Parent Opinion Survey: The overall objective of the Parent Opinion Survey is to collect data about parent opinions and for individual schools to then use this information to drive further improvements.

Staff Opinion Survey: undertaken in each DEECD school in Victoria annually. The overall objective of the survey is to collect staff opinion data about a school's culture and to support the use of this data for school improvement.

Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program: Noted Australian chef, Stephanie Alexander, began a program with an inner-city school in a disadvantaged community. She taught children how to grow and tend to a kitchen garden and then how to cook from the produce. This program is now in over 300 schools in Victoria and has been funded as a national program in 2010.

Transition Learning and Development Statement: The statement supports the consistent transfer of information, irrespective of the school a child is going to. It provides an opportunity for children, their families and the professionals working with them to contribute and have their views reflected in it.

Ultrahet: An online digital learning platform that provides communication between the system, school, teachers, students and parents on curriculum, organisation, assessment and student progress across all DEECD schools. The Ultrahet is a statewide, secure site that students, parents and teachers can access via the internet. It provides a new learning space and opportunities for information sharing across the Victorian government school system. All teachers in Victorian government schools now have access to the Ultrahet. Schools are bringing students and parents onto the Ultrahet in line with their local implementation plan. The Ultrahet will connect 50,000 teachers, 500,000 students and one million parents.

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