

Australia (Victoria)

Ballarat High School. Learning Community

Ballarat High School has changed pedagogy and practice through school management initiatives, and the integration of organisational, learning, and core values frameworks. The Year 9 ARCH (Active Resilient Connected Happy) program, which incorporated a new facility and building upgrades, helped staff to refocus the school frameworks and structures as well their focus on relationships and the personalisation of learning for all members of the school community. The Year 9 ARCH program, where a core of teachers is committed to Year 9 in a dedicated space, has re-engaged both students and teachers, and stimulated innovation elsewhere in the school. The Year 7 and 8 programs are now developing their own Learning Advisory programs. Learning advisers are teachers who weekly meet with small groups of students (<13) and function as mentors who help the students organize their learning. A leadership team develops and monitors the adviser approach.

Main focus of innovation: TEACHERS, CONTENT, ORGANISATION

General Information

Name of the ILE: Ballarat High School. Learning Community

Location/Address: Sturt Street West Ballarat

ILE submitted by: Department of Education & Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Australia

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Context

Ballarat High School has developed into an innovative learning community. Over the past four years we have implemented significant change, challenged traditional understandings of how students learn and developed a school community which has learning as its main focus. We have developed into a learning community by listening to all members of the school community and reflecting openly on our practice. We started our transformation with a teacher, professional leave team researching learning, and then we were selected as a leading school and built a truly innovative way of teaching and learning at year 9. This led to the development of a year 7 and 8 review and restructure based on our success with year 9. It was then that our principal dedicated two of his assistant principals to the development of teaching and learning across the school.

We developed shared values and a shared learning framework that is underpinned by POLT but most importantly places the learner at the centre. We then took the challenge to our staff of personalising learning for the learner of the 21st century and developed our whole school learning adviser approach.

Need for Inclusion

We are extremely keen to be included in the project as we feel it is our responsibility to share our learning and since many schools and leaders seek us out to explore our practice we are aware that we have been able to implement some very successful approaches. That said we are a true learning environment and are excited by the opportunity to learn from others both locally and internationally.

Response to 21st Century Learning Challenges

During 2007 the leadership in consultation with the school community developed a learning framework that has formed the basis of Ballarat High School becoming a learning community that can meet 21st learning challenges. Through our extensive research we have come to the agreed understanding that school leaders and teachers have the greatest impact on student learning and so have shifted the focus of our school to be on learning as opposed to traditional management processes. The centre piece of this is our learning framework. The framework is comprised of six core components that are inclusive of the Principles of Learning and Teaching and are reflective of how all members of the school community understand learning.

Ballarat High School Learning Framework consists of six core components:

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

As a leadership group we have worked collaboratively with staff, students' parents and members of the wider educational community to ensure that the framework is shared and contextual. We explored how we teach, use spaces and time and how we can ensure that learners are the focus.

We developed a greater understanding that learning is not something that can happen on the same day, at the same time with the same people and challenged ourselves to develop approaches to personalise learning. To do this we have developed our learning adviser approach.

The school has introduced a dedicated time for learning advisers to meet every Monday immediately after recess for all students and staff. In Years 7, 8 and 9 one of the students' core teachers is their learning adviser which builds on the already established relationship they have in the classroom. In Years 10, 11 and 12 students are grouped in program areas of Arts, HAPE, Humanities, Maths/Science, and Business/Technology. They have a Learning Adviser who is a teacher within the same program area and they are in groups of no more than 13 students. The Learning Adviser is the person in the school who really gets to know, understand and assist the student in their learning. They provide students with the necessary balance of support and challenge to enable them to grow as a learner and ensure that they are achieving their goals. The role of the adviser is to help challenge the learner, ensure their program is appropriate and help them build their learning as individuals. Together with clearly defined school values and a learning framework that places the learner at the centre we are striving to create learners that are well equipped for life in the 21st Century.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

Core Learning Aims

We as a school have implemented a learning framework to increase student achievement, connectedness and engagement. This framework includes the development of positive relationships which has been widely researched but also identifies five other key components to learners succeeding. This year we have introduced a learning adviser approach which is helping us to challenge all learners in the school community. Our involvement in this project will allow us to monitor and assess the change in teacher practice as they take on the role of learner and model learning to their students. We have seen the transformation of our learning community which began with leading schools but has led to whole school transformation. What we want to do is ensure that we are embedding deeper levels of learning and raise achievement for all learners in our community.

Knowledge Skills and understandings to be acquired

We want to evaluate the implementation of a framework and its ability to provide the impetus for whole school transformation and the distribution of leadership across a school community.

The framework has been built into the professional learning program of all staff to ensure leadership is distributed. Members of the leadership team are using coaching conversations to assist staff to develop a plan for implementation of changed practice linked to the framework. Staff set goals, have several coaching conversations, trial a pedagogical change and gain feedback on the change and share their experiences in a professional learning environment.

School improvement initiatives often show gains when they involve a small key group of committed professionals focused on a manageable number of students, especially when these professionals work together on learning and teaching approaches. However, less well understood is how to get the success of a small group of professionals and students to expand out to the whole school community. We want to explore the key drivers that lead to school transformation. The particular aspect for analysis is identifying the key factors that will assist a school community to make the shift from the industrial era to a school equipped for the learner of the 21st century or more specifically the knowledge era and feel involvement in this project is essential. Ultimately the aim is to create a self sustaining learning system that is not dependant on a few individuals to drive it.

Instead of seeing schooling as a system of years and grades, with key stages and examinations, targets and regulators, it should be seen as a set of relationships between teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community. (Leadbeater 2007:9)

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

Learners that our environment is aimed at

Our innovative learning environment involves all members of the school community. Students from year 7-12, all staff as learning advisers and leaders as learning advisers of staff. We have also developed a working party of parents to share our development as a learning organisation. We want to further personalise learning for all members of the learning community.

How many learners are there

As a school of 1400 students and 100 teaching staff we have spent a great deal of time on developing the conditions and structures that allow us to better use our time and spaces to construct learning opportunities for all.

Identified Learning needs of the students

As we are working to personalise learning we have acknowledged that the learning needs of all students are different. What we focus on is building the learning and desire for learning through ensuring that all learners have a significant adult that supports them.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

The teachers involved include all teachers as they are all facilitators of learning adviser groups.

Explicitly the team leaders for each learning adviser team will have a significant role as they are facilitators of professional learning times and currently meet as a professional learning team focused on building and developing our learning adviser approach. They facilitate the sharing of practice and assist staff to collaborate and develop their skills and capacity to support learners in a holistic manner. Many staff have expressed the need to build their skills to be able to conduct coaching conversations that can support and challenge our learners to full fill their potential.

The leaders are members of the executive leadership team of the school and include the School Principal and the Principal of Middle Years and Later Year and Principal of School Improvement.

The Middle and Later year principals are responsible for teaching and learning and professional learning and growth across the school. The principal for school improvement focuses on staffing and development of the school improvement linked to the strategic plan. The principal oversees the whole process and as a team of four we have a shared priority on educational leadership.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

Organisation of Learning

Our innovative learning environment ensures that every student has a learning adviser that they meet with every Monday for 45 minutes these sessions are focused on learning. All learners have set learning goals and each year level focuses specifically on building on these goals.

Year 7 & 8 focus on developing skills and understanding of learning –and different ways of learning e.g. collaborative learning, year 9 focus on learning strengths using Myers Briggs, Hermann’s brain and exploration of building learning strengths. Year 10 is focusing on developing Emotional Intelligence and year 11 & 12 on specific skills building to meet learner’s goals.

Year 7-9 see their adviser for at least 9 periods a week and in year 10 -12 at least once a week but the group size is 1-13

At Ballarat High School we have a shared learning framework that has allowed us to put the learner at the centre and develop a shared vision for learning within our school community.

As a learning community we have identified we value all learners and believe that a learning advisers is the best way to ensure all learners are provided with maximum opportunities to succeed and personalise learning.

“How students feel about school is in large a measure determined by the quality of the relationship they have with their teachers”

(Brew, Beatty & Watt, 2004)

Learning advisers allow us to improve student outcomes by ensuring that relationships with both adviser and subject teacher are positive and enduring.

Such a process does not allow students to be anonymous,

- fosters personal responsibility for learning,
- provides each student with the necessary balance of support and challenge to allow for personal growth as a learner.

Learning advisers are about unlocking the potential in order to maximise learning – it’s about bringing out the best in people. This includes the school leadership team, team leaders, advisers and students. All staff has undertaken a range of learning styles assessments as well and Emotional Intelligence analysis as they will be assisting to build on students learning goals through classroom connections.

The learning adviser in year 7-9 is a core teacher for the student and works with them as a teacher of interdisciplinary maths and science or English and Humanities. They are the core person responsible for ensuring that these students are connected to school- they are the key contact for parents and link with the students’ elective teachers. The Monday sessions are a specific time set aside to focus on understanding how students learn and that learning can take place in a range of settings. They focus on exploring different learning styles and different learning environments. We are trying to build their metacognitive understanding of themselves as learners and having a teacher who knows them well can let others teachers know their learning strengths and challenges.

As the students get into the senior years they are in smaller groups to allow individual discussions and support toward learning pathways. Every student in the school has a learning adviser and all students are involved in the advisory process.

Learning Adviser Foundation Statements

Know how & why the learn

- The learning adviser has a greater understanding of the individual's learning preferences.

Believe all people can learn

- A learning adviser will improve student's attitude to learning.

Use higher order tools to solve problems

- The learning involved in this process encourages students to manage their learning and students accept ownership and responsibility.

Seek feedback and reflect on learning

- Learners can seek feedback on their learning and will be encouraged to reflect, and focus on improvement.

Learn in a range of contexts

- Advisers can connect with learners in contexts that are different from the traditional classroom environment.

Develop positive relationships

- The relationship between learner and learning advisers will allow learners to feel safe, supported and ensure students reach their potential.

The organisation of the curriculum to meet the goals of advisers:

Know how & why they learn

The learning adviser will have a greater understanding of the individual's learning preferences by:

- Having access to a range of learning preference information.
- Helping students to understand what their learning preferences means for their learning and how they can apply this knowledge to work tasks and problem solving.
- Ask the learner when do you learn best?
- Work in with parents – set goals / discuss progress etc.
- Being involved in developing a viable pathway for the learner through course counselling, seeking advice and assistance as required.

Believe all people can learn

A learning adviser will improve student's attitude to learning by:

- Assisting them to set manageable goals.
 - Identify issues
 - Problem areas
 - Priorities
 - Set up plan for achievement
- Encouraging self belief by supporting student reflection, care interest – working on incremental progress.
- Recognising different learning styles as equally valid.
- Understanding how they learn might encourage success.
- Being positive and developing a personal connection.

- Being an advocate and helping other staff to know how the student learns.
- Encouraging empathy & respect in the group through positive experiences and outcomes.
- Helping the student to find alternatives and build resilience when something isn't working.
- Focusing on academic and personal learning and encouraging them to keep samples of their achievements in a portfolio.

Use higher order tools to solve problems

The learning involved in this process encourages students to manage their learning and students accept ownership and responsibility by:

- assisting the learner in managing themselves and their learning;
- providing them with skills and tools to solve problems through an inquiry based approach;
- not providing them with answers but help them develop skills to assist problem solving by teaching the learner to 'breakdown' problem – tackle one aspect at a time;
- explicitly teaching time management, prioritising, goal setting, planning;
- presenting a variety of problems – personal & school community.

Seek feedback and reflect on learning

Learners can seek feedback on their learning and will be encouraged to reflect, and focus on improvement by:

- Using portfolios to reflect on their goals.
 - The portfolio becomes a working document that is constantly being added to;
 - goals will be reassessed;
 - reflection on their progress towards attaining these goals;
 - revaluation as necessary.
- Having regular meetings.
- Gaining qualitative feedback from learner.
- The learning advisor gaining regular update from subject teachers via Daymap and feedback to subject teachers.
- Teaching self assessment tools to identify areas of strength and weakness.
- By having contact with the students parents.

Learn in a range of contexts

Advisers can connect with learners in contexts that are different from the traditional classroom environment by:

- Using technology – SMS Ultra net, Daymap, blogs, pod casting, social networking tools.
- One on one discussion.
- Getting outside traditional school environment.
- Taking an interest in non-school activities e.g. watch footy, art shows – whatever the learner is doing.
- Exposing students to outside role models e.g.: ex students as.
- Encouraging exploration of pathways.

Develop positive relationships

The relationship between learner and learning advisors will allow learners to feel safe, supported and ensure students reach their potential by:

- Having regular contact in one to one situations in a non threatening environment.
- Encouraging students to become involved in sport, debating, etc and taking an interest in their success.
- Being an advocate in conflict situations.
- Tracking and short circuiting problems
- Building resilience and confidence and helping students to build relationships with peers and teachers.

- Organising activities to build group identity.
- Taking an interest in their lives outside of school and outside of the classroom.
- Celebrating learners' successes.

The curriculum is structured and resourced by having two principals lead this and all professional learning. All team leaders are involved in a professional learning team that has the goal of developing and monitoring the adviser approach. We also have a working party of parents as well as a student adviser team involved in planning.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

At Ballarat High School learning takes place in a range of contexts. As is evident from our framework and the implementation of learning advisers we understand that learning can occur by:

- Using technology – SMS, Daymap- online communication system that allows parent, student and teacher access into a virtual learning centre, blogs, pod casting, social networking tools.
- One on one discussion.
- Getting outside traditional school environment.
- Taking an interest in non-school activities e.g. watch footy, art shows – whatever the learner is doing.
- Exposing students to outside role models as.
- Encouraging exploration of pathways.
- We are accessing a range of community links to assist with learning.

In addition to exploring a range of learning contexts we also have worked hard on developing our links with parents who are sharing the learning journey through participation at student led learning conversations, student presentation evenings and so forth.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

Initiation of project

Our innovative learning environment now incorporates all parts of the school community and has been strategically developed. What began with a teacher professional leave team led to a leading schools application which led to evidence of successful innovative learning approaches which were reflected in the data. What sets us apart from other leading schools is that our principal had the forethought to challenge the school community to take learning to the next level – a whole school focus. By his alignment of resources, into learning we were able to develop a set of shared values and a shared framework for learning and this led to a redevelopment of teaching and learning at year 7 and 8. This was followed by development and implementation of interdisciplinary professional learning teams focused on our shared learning framework. The principal and leadership team then challenged the school community to investigate how we could better meet the needs of the 21st century learner and used our framework as a basis. This led to learning advisers for all students and staff and all staff being a member of a learning team that has the students as the common link not curriculum.

Purpose

We developed our plans for reorganising the school to place a focus on learning because our data was extremely poor in terms of students' attitude to school, staff opinion and parent opinion. We held discussions about our student data as a staff and the decision was to begin with year 9 as their data was the worst.

Evolution

Since the beginning we have seen significant improvement in all data across the school. When the current leadership team began the school was undergoing a 'Building Capacity' initiative as the data had been extremely low. We have improved in **staff opinion** in all areas with a particular increase in the area focused on **leadership**. The parent opinion survey has improved in all sections but the most significant improvement has been in the area of **learning focus** which has seen us move from the developing section to the excellent. In response to our student survey we have focused on improving from year 7 up and the data from year 7 & 8 see us in the 50th% percentile.

During 2006 the data at year 8 had our students rate the teacher effectiveness at 2%. The same group in year 9 with the development of teams and a shared vision for learning achieved 90%.

Year 9 for the past two years has improved from being at 8 % to being in the 90% with student attendance also going from 22 days average to 10.2 in the lowest 15th% percentile in the state. In addition we have been involved in the Gatehouse project which measures similar areas and the results have seen outstanding improvement across all middle years' levels. Our VCE data has shown a consistent pattern of good results but now with all students having a learning adviser we expect to see even further improvement in the upper levels as our student's progress from middle years to later years.

While we have significant data to support our claims for a changed learning culture we have evidence of this by actually walking through our school and observing learning. Parents and students from Horsham College came and spent a day in our school last year observing our practice. They attended regular classes and spoke with students and staff and parents. They then spoke of our school to their own school community and reflected on collaborative learning in open spaces, the opportunities for peer teaching provided by the round tables, the manner in which students spoke about their teachers the positive relationships that were built on strong values. We believe we have created a dynamic learning environment yet it is very affirming to hear others reflect on it as well.

It is best summed up by a comment from one of our students "I'll miss being 14 and in year 9, thank you for this year. I learnt so much just about life and growing up. Thanks for being a great teacher and for preparing me for a great future" (Year 9 Student journal entry 2008). The student voice here is a testament that relationships are a key factor in increasing student connectedness and engagement. How many students would reflect that they miss being 14 and in year 9?

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

The ILE is funded from within the schools normal budget. What has occurred however is that funds that previously may have been allocated to management roles have been allocated to ensure the focus is on learning.

The executive leadership team are responsible for allocating funds in conjunction with school council and the advice of the finance committee.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

We have been and are continually gathering a range of both qualitative and quantitative data to use as a guide in assessing the impact of the approach.

Our data collection includes the following:

All staff has undertaken an Emotional Intelligence Assessment through Swinburne University and have been given a feedback report and have discussed strategies to build on areas reflected in their personal report.

All team leaders have been trained as EI facilitators again in conjunction with Swinburne University and are able to assist with staff debriefing of results and facilitate conversations around those results.

Other data sources:

- NAPLAN
- Student Attitude
- Parent Opinion
- Staff opinion
- Attendance
- Student, staff and parent interviews
- Student reflections from learning journals and drawings of learning

We obtain VCE value added data from Carmel Richardson at Melbourne University which compares student performance in unit 3 / 4 subjects against potential achievement on the General Achievement Test. (GAT)

All students from year 9 -12 and staff have undertaken Myers Briggs assessments. These results allow a deeper understanding of our learning preferences.

To measure teacher capacity we have developed a teacher planning matrix and Performance and development matrix that links our framework and the professional standards. These will be included as attachments.

Our comprehensive data collection allows us to build a picture of our processes and gives us important tools for conversations. Given that we used data to begin our discussions around learning it has been important to continue to monitor it.