



Engaging secondary school students in lifelong learning

Jennifer Bryce and Graeme Withers



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ACER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Study

A 'lifelong learning' orientation to education is seen as vital if young people are to thrive in the knowledge rich, constantly-changing world of today and the immediate future. This study identifies ways that the foundations for lifelong learning can be built in secondary schools.

'Lifelong Learning' is interpreted as engaging people with learning throughout all stages of their lives. Lifelong learning at secondary school level is concerned with keeping students engaged in learning, and developing in those students the characteristics that will make learning an integral and valued part of their lives when they leave school. Thus the report considers: what can it mean to be, or become, a lifelong learner at secondary school? How can secondary schools be helped to orient themselves towards lifelong learning?

Research Process

This study aims to provide strategies for implementing theoretical issues outlined in a paper which formed the preliminary investigation: *The Era of Lifelong Learning: Implications for Secondary Schools* [Bryce et al, 2000]. This issues paper is a commentary on the extensive literature on lifelong learning. The present research report is based on case study work. Seven secondary schools (catholic and government) in South Australia and Victoria were visited. The schools selected were not necessarily exemplars although all had an interest in focusing on lifelong learning. The aim was to explore different kinds of approaches in various kinds of school environments. In addition, a questionnaire was administered to 'mature age' tertiary entrants to explore their approaches to learning and their reasons for wanting to return to study.

Ways of Orienting Secondary Schools to Lifelong Learning

The report acknowledges that all schools are learning communities and that all are in some way engaging students in lifelong learning. It encourages schools to build on their present strengths and to seek a gradual orientation to a lifelong learning approach rather than to sweep aside more traditional practices. Secondary schools with a focus on lifelong learning are seen to have strengths in:

- Information literacy: accessing and retrieving information is assessed as an integral part of students' learning, students are given specific guidance on how to seek and evaluate information – for example, how to evaluate the authenticity of Internet sites and students are encouraged to use multiple sources of information.
- Acknowledging the importance of certain values, dispositions and attitudes: there is fluidity between subjects and year levels, initiative and curiosity are valued and change is celebrated.

- Helping students acquire certain generic skills: learning is seen as a form of problem-solving; students are encouraged to set their own learning goals; students are encouraged to reflect on what they are learning; students are encouraged to work collaboratively and to develop good communication skills; and the learning environment is 'safe', so that students and teachers can take risks.
- Valuing every student as a learner, aiming for every student in the school to have positive pictures of themselves as learners.
- Teaching students how to learn: there is acknowledgement of different styles of learning, there is often a 'learning centre' in the school and learning is seen as fun.
- Valuing teachers as lifelong learners: teachers are valued and respected by the school and are encouraged to continue learning and developing their career paths, teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively and their innovations are celebrated. In their relationships with students, teachers are mentors and facilitators more than dispensers of knowledge.

Some key ingredients to becoming a secondary school oriented to lifelong learning are:

- Having a learning centre that becomes the hub of learning in a school. This could be the resources centre or some kind of tutorial centre.
- Having programs that help to develop students' self esteem, such as peer support programs or a strong pastoral program.
- Having a strong focus on the development of students' metacognitive skills.
- Having VET programs or other programs that link work with school.
- Above all having someone in the school (often the principal) whose enthusiasm for lifelong learning is inspirational.

The report suggests that two obstacles to becoming a lifelong learning school are:

- The need to change the attitudes of some parents and teachers who expect schools to have imposed discipline, mainly competitive, summative assessment and teachers who are dispensers of knowledge, and
- The strong influence on the curriculum of end of school examinations which can encourage a short term approach to learning (How much do I have to know?, rather than What do I need to learn?).

INTRODUCTION

The Nature of this Report

A 'lifelong learning' orientation to education is seen as vital if young people are to thrive in the knowledge rich, constantly-changing world of today and the immediate future. ACER has acknowledged the need to identify ways that the foundations for lifelong learning can be built in secondary schools. This report is the second main publication relating to research in this area undertaken at ACER between 2000 and 2002. The project, entitled *Improving the Foundations for Lifelong Learning in Secondary Schools*, addresses the question of what secondary schools can do to help their students develop lifelong learning skills and attitudes. The first publication was an issues paper, *The Era of Lifelong Learning: Implications for Secondary Schools*, published by ACER in 2000. It is a conceptual paper that reviews the extensive literature on lifelong learning. This report aims to take the discussion further, and show how the issues outlined in the first publication can be put into practice in Australian secondary schools.

What is Meant by 'Lifelong Learning'

Over the past ten years the term 'lifelong learning' has become ubiquitous in education policy documents and it has been interpreted in various ways, ranging from 'second chance' education, or linking secondary and tertiary education with industry, through to a much broader interpretation that concerns ways of engaging people with learning throughout all stages of their lives. This project adopts the latter view of lifelong learning; a view that is in keeping with the setting up of what are sometimes called 'communities of inquiry' and 'learning cities' [Longworth, 2002]. But here we are focusing on the secondary school: what can it mean to be, or become, a lifelong learner at secondary school? How can secondary schools be helped to orient themselves towards lifelong learning? Lifelong learning at secondary school level in particular is concerned with keeping students engaged in learning, and developing in those students the characteristics that will make learning an integral and valued part of their lives when they leave school.

It is important to acknowledge that all schools are learning communities of some kind. Becoming a learning community oriented to lifelong learning does not require complete or radical change. There is much 'lifelong learning' taking place already in secondary schools. The process must be gradual, building on elements - strategies, attitudes or school ethos - that are already established in a school. Like others, we have found it useful to view the process of orientation to lifelong learning as a 'journey' [for example, see Longworth, 1999].

There is a more comprehensive discussion of the interpretation of lifelong learning, and an exploration of the extensive literature in the issues paper written as an introduction to this project and mentioned above [Bryce, et al, 2000]. This paper is available in hard copy from ACER or it can be downloaded from the website www.acer.edu.au/research/vocational/foundations.html.

The key elements in the interpretation of the term ‘lifelong learning’ for this project are that:

- ownership of the need to learn and its content are given to individuals;
- learning is about how to think rather than what to think;
- teachers are mentors and models of lifelong learning more than dispensers of knowledge;
- the purpose of assessment is to assist and encourage further exploration, rather than to categorise or merely relate students to some concept of a ‘norm’;
- learning should be viewed as an enjoyable and integral part of one’s life.

The Purpose of the Project

The overarching aim of this project is to help transform the rhetoric surrounding lifelong learning into programs and strategies that schools can implement. It is focused on secondary schools but, because of the nature of lifelong learning, many of the strategies suggested will be useful in other formal and informal areas of education.

The project set out to explore the theoretical basis for lifelong learning in a secondary school context by identifying key educational concepts that are thought to provide the foundations for lifelong learning. It then aimed to give a view of how to operationalise these concepts by exploring curriculum structures and teaching and learning strategies seen in existing secondary schools of various kinds which already followed various approaches to lifelong learning. Seven schools were visited. They were not necessarily ‘light-house’ schools – exemplars of practice. But all had some interest in orienting towards a ‘lifelong learning’ approach. The schools were government or catholic, located in South Australia and Victoria.

It is intended that teachers and policy writers will identify particular approaches described in the case studies that will suit the contexts within which they work. In addition there is a tool, an audit instrument, *The Journey to Becoming a Lifelong Learning School*, printed below as Appendix 1, which may be useful for self evaluation or for professional development activities.

Ways of Using This Report

This report is intended in particular for people involved with secondary school curriculum development, and for secondary school principals and teachers, but it is likely to have a wider use. Most of the elements of the journey to lifelong learning are applicable at any level and in any context, from primary schools through to Universities of the Third Age. Although some suggestions for using this material are outlined below, it is expected that readers will adapt the ideas to meet their own circumstances.

Curriculum specialists may wish to take an element of lifelong learning, such as information literacy, and explore the ways it might be implemented in a secondary school. This would involve focusing on the ‘information literacy’ section below then going to the information literacy descriptions in the case study reports and looking in greater detail at various ways information literacy is handled in these secondary schools.

A school principal wanting to initiate lifelong learning ideas in the school might take a more global view, paying particular attention to the sections, 'What militates against a school becoming oriented to lifelong learning?' and 'How do you do it?' The principal may also see similarities between his or her school and one of the case studies. This would lead to a careful reading of the particular case study report.

A school may decide to focus on a certain element of lifelong learning for a year: for example, senior teachers might decide that there should be a special emphasis on encouraging students to think about how they learn. All teachers in the school would be encouraged to read the 'learning how to learn' sections of the issues paper and this report, and then to address appropriate questions from *The Journey to Becoming a Lifelong Learning School* and the questions at the end of the 'learning how to learn' section of this report. These could then form the basis of professional development activities.

Individual teachers may decide that they would like their teaching to take on a more mentoring and facilitating quality. They could read sections in the issues paper and this report on 'oneself and one's learning', 'learning how to learn' and 'teachers as model lifelong learners'. After a trial period, they could then use appropriate questions from *The Journey to Becoming a Lifelong Learning School* for self evaluation.

WHAT MAKES A LIFELONG LEARNING SCHOOL DIFFERENT?

An exploration of the literature on lifelong learning suggests that rather than imposing a 'lifelong learning' orientation on a school, it is useful to view it as a journey [Bryce et al 2000]. Borrowing from Longworth [1999] we suggest that the main elements of such a journey are:

- the centrality of the learner and learner needs, reflected in an orientation towards the demand side of education and training;
- an emphasis on self-directed learning, and the associated requirement of 'learning to learn' as an essential foundation for learning that continues throughout life; and
- a long-term view that encompasses the life cycle.

With these elements in mind we found it useful to consider schools' progress on the lifelong learning journey in relation to the following headings. Each will be considered in turn.

- information literacy
- values, dispositions and attitudes
- skill sets beyond the 'basic'
- oneself and one's learning: self concept
- learning how to learn
- teachers as model lifelong learners

For each of these headings we will:

- discuss characteristics that distinguish a lifelong learning school;
- give examples from case studies of ways that lifelong learning schools are handling this area;

- suggest questions that a school could pose, for example in a professional development session, that might indicate the extent to which the school is orienting towards a particular issue in a lifelong learning way.

Information Literacy in a Lifelong Learning School

A part of learning how to learn and becoming an independent learner involves learning how to handle information, and learning how one best handles this in terms of one's own strengths and weaknesses. It is essential to have some information literacy in order to become a lifelong learner. Thus having students who are information literate is integral to a lifelong learning school. Students explore information independently with guidance from teachers. Students are aware of multiple sources of information – for example, deriving information from telephone conversations and interviews as well as printed and electronic material. They learn to make links between these sources and different subject areas. In many schools students are fluent users of the Internet, but the term 'information literacy' encapsulates a great deal more than information technology. It includes recognition of the need for information. It involves collecting, analysing and organising information from multiple sources and the ability to pose appropriate questions and integrate the information. Most importantly, students who are information literate are able to evaluate and offer critiques of the information they gather, sort, and classify.

Examples from the case studies

In most case study schools there was considerable use of the Internet, and the schools had their own Intranet sites where teachers posted assignments and reading guides. In some cases email was used for commenting on students' work. As one school reported, this was a way of encouraging students to use email in a responsible manner. Not only do teachers send students comments on their work, the students are encouraged to keep in touch with their teachers through email, for advice, assistance and review as their learning proceeds.

One example of an information literacy initiative that does not depend on computer technology was seen at Tallangatta, where the LOTE teacher encouraged her students to write their own textbook for an aspect of Indonesian grammar.

In several schools the Library or Resource Centre appeared to assume a particularly significant role. Staff assisted both students and teachers in the retrieval of many kinds of information. In some cases the library staff saw part of their role as assisting students to evaluate information – at Marden there were written guidelines on how to assess the authenticity of a website. Teachers worked collaboratively with library staff in their planning of units of work. In some cases the guidance provided was considerable – narrowing down resource possibilities and, at Marden, creating book marks linked to students' subjects, designed to give students a taste for Internet searching without excessive waste of time.

Learning information literacy skills is an integral part of a student's work. For example at Marden, an assignment about identity is also a means of learning about hypertext:

[The students] had to choose a public figure they could identify with, and they would have to research this person, then we were going to create a hypertext assignment where they would need to establish four or five connections with this particular person and to explain them. In this case, the research is up to [the students]. So I'd be saying – have you tried this particular search engine? and I'd explain why I think it's useful.

Planning and making best use of one's own learning styles is a part of information literacy which is recognised at St Aloysius, as one teacher explained:

It's not just a matter of finding out some information and that's it. We actually sit down and plan what they are going to learn, their skills, their knowledge, their experience.

Students use each other as resources. For example at Caroline Chisholm one of the students said:

Even in the library now, if a Year 7 has a problem with his work, he wouldn't hesitate to ask you if you were sitting next to him to help him with his problem.

Questions to assess information literacy in a school

- Is the accessing and retrieval of information evaluated as part of students' assignments?
- Are students given specific guidance on how to seek information – for example on how to search the Internet?
- Are students given specific guidance on how to evaluate information – eg how to assess the authenticity of a website?
- Are students encouraged to seek a wide range of resources including non print and non electronic resources? Are they rewarded for using multiple sources?
- To what extent are students helped to analyse information – to extract relevant information and to keep records of sources?

Values, Dispositions and Attitudes in a Lifelong Learning School

A lifelong learning approach is consistent with a world where knowledge changes rapidly and subject boundaries are fluid. Young people need to be able to make connections between different fields of knowledge – to have what Candy, Crebert and O'Leary have described as 'helicopter vision' [Candy, et al 1994]. Lifelong learners need to be willing to adapt and be prepared to be flexible. Curiosity is an important attribute for the lifelong learner – a disposition where one uses initiative to explore avenues regardless of traditional subject boundaries. There is a close link here with information literacy, where a person uses initiative to explore various sources in pursuit of knowledge.

In a lifelong learning school one sees young people working in groups in all kinds of places, not necessarily in the classroom or the resource centre. There is often animated discussion. Differences and change are celebrated.

These values, dispositions and attitudes are as important for the teacher as for the student. It may be more difficult for the teacher to adapt to this kind of outlook – particularly those teachers who have been in the profession for some time and who are used to a more traditional kind of school ethos where teachers are viewed as sources of indisputable knowledge and authority. Some teachers will not be used to making links between different subjects or to celebrating change.

Examples from the case studies

At Tallangatta students and staff celebrate differences. In Year 7 students are surveyed and made aware of their particular intellectual strengths and weaknesses (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Students speak openly about their particular strengths and weaknesses. As one teacher explained:

We encourage the students to develop strength groups and when they are working on a project to incorporate within their strength group someone who is not strong in that area so that that person can have a different input into their project.

At Tallangatta there is a strong focus on the school having a seamless curriculum. For example, the boundaries between the school and the local community are transparent. Students are used to questioning people outside the school – by visiting, or telephoning – as a part of their day-to-day learning. Even the boundaries between different year levels are loose.

At St Aloysius some former scholars reflected on how they were encouraged to be curious when at school and they were given confidence to be forthright in their attitudes:

I think we're also trained to be curious – it seems that we'll never stop trying to work out what's going on. . . .

In Year 10 I remember my class decided it would be a really good rule for the school to ban all hairsprays that contained fluorocarbons. We were just really encouraged, that if you could make a positive difference – if it sounds like a sane idea, run for it.

A Mathematics teacher at Birdwood encouraged his students to make connections and to think outside the 'box' of Mathematics:

If I'm doing a particular topic, I never stick with that topic. I try to show students connections. If we're doing triangles I say, hey, look, go up on the roof, look inside. There's a triangle right there. I try to bring other subjects into it as well, the Art Department or the Science Department. So kids can see a reason for doing things – a tangible reason.

Questions to assess values, dispositions and attitudes in a school

- To what extent does the school have a 'seamless' curriculum where there is fluidity between subjects and between year levels?
- Do teachers make or encourage links between subjects?
- Are students rewarded for showing initiative and curiosity?
- How does the school react to change? To what extent is change celebrated?

Skill Sets beyond the Basic in a Lifelong Learning School

In a lifelong learning school certain generic skills are valued and practised in all areas of the curriculum. The exploration of issues may be seen as an exercise in problem-solving. This includes issues involving information literacy – how to find out about something, where to find the sources. Problem-solving in a lifelong learning school is not necessarily of a convergent nature where students need to find a ‘correct’ answer. Creativity and experimentation are encouraged. The problems themselves are often conceived by the students – this is one way in which students can learn to take control of their own learning and develop research skills.

Much learning arises from interaction with others, and communication skills are valued in a lifelong learning school. In particular, students work collaboratively, expressing themselves clearly in both formal and informal situations, listening to others and making appropriate contributions. They are also able to persuade others and ‘stick to’ their viewpoints. Through their interpersonal interactions students acquire ‘reflective independence’ [Nixon et al, 1996] whereby they build for themselves a richer and broader community which assists the development of their sensitivity and judgement. Interaction with both peers and adults helps to develop such independence, especially when the interactions are common and valued by all parties. These skills are best developed in schools where the classroom becomes a community of inquiry [Splitter and Sharp, 1995], where students feel it is safe to take risks in asserting their own opinions or challenging those of others, students or teachers.

It is also important to be able to work alone. Lifelong learners need plenty of time to reflect – a crucial part of making the links discussed above and also to think about and monitor their own learning needs, and set personal goals for taking their learning further.

Examples from the case studies

How do you encourage a class of lively adolescents to reflect? One way used at Tallangatta is to have each student keep a diary. But the written diary needs to be discussed:

They have got lots of skills, but they don’t know how to audit the skills that they have achieved. . . . So I try and break down their tasks that they’ve done into smaller parcels and then push it in front of them and say, you just did that – do you realise you did all those steps? Like a kid said to me the other day, I took a cutting deck off a [*brand name*] rider mower, that’s all he wrote. I said, how do you do that? . . . And he said, you do this, you take these bolts – and I said, what bolts, tell me exactly what you’ve got to do, so that if I was going to do it . . .and we wrote down 19 steps.

Collaborative work and communication with peers and adults were evident from this exchange with Year 11 and 12 students at Tallangatta:

We had to do group projects to improve the school. Our program was to get the silver tables and chairs – there’s some just out there. It was to improve the school. So we organised to get those. We had to plan how we were going to do it; what we had to do; how much money it was going to cost; who we had to involve. We went to staff meetings, Council meetings. Then we had to ring up all the places to get them in. At the end of it, we assessed ourselves. How well we thought we’d gone.

And how did you think you'd gone?

Our group actually didn't work all that well together – so we sort of gave ourselves a B. But that we actually got them here, as the teacher pointed out, was probably better [worth more than B].

Students can be encouraged to see their part-time jobs as a way of learning communication skills. This is the case at Caroline Chisholm. This student is talking about his part-time job at Macdonald's:

Occasionally I interact with the customers, so I'm learning things about dealing with people, interacting in the workplace, and then interacting at school.

At Caroline Chisholm students are encouraged to stick to their viewpoints, as two students commented:

Boy: Sometimes teachers ask you to challenge them.

Girl: You have to think about it first before you make a point, you have to make sure it's valid enough so they don't come up with a stronger point that challenges you straight away.

Questions to assess skill sets beyond the basic in a school

- To what extent is learning seen as a form of problem solving? Do students set and evaluate their own goals?
- Are students encouraged to reflect on their learning – for example by using a diary and discussing it with a mentor?
- Are students helped to work in a collaborative manner? Are they helped with communication skills? Are they praised for being good listeners and for making appropriate contributions to discussions?
- Is there opportunity for students to have one-to-one communication with adults and others outside their immediate peer group?
- Is it safe for students to take risks?

Oneself and One's Learning in a Lifelong Learning School

In an ideal lifelong learning school every student is important, and every student feels important. Schools help students to construct their identities as learners and aim for every student to have a positive picture of themselves as a learner no matter whether they are aiming to do Medicine at University or whether they dislike academic subjects and are unsure of what they want to do when they leave school. Only a very few 'high achievers' will develop positive self concepts as learners in competitive school environments. Although some social comparison is inevitable, lifelong learning schools will, whenever possible, provide students with individual feedback related to a student's own particular goals. One sure way of turning off people's interest in learning is to set up a situation where they see themselves as failures, either real or potential. 'Sorting' and 'labelling' students usually has a negative effect. A lifelong learning school encourages self assessment, opportunities for reflection on one's achievements (such as through use of a diary), and development of portfolios of work done that can be individually focused and evaluated through discussion.

Students gain confidence from various social interactions at school, for example participation in bodies such as a Student Representative Council, or taking part in sports and school productions.

The cultivation in all students of positive self concepts as learners is probably the most important mission of a lifelong learning school.

Examples from the case studies

A student at Caroline Chisholm describes how being a member of the SRC develops her confidence:

Basically it gives you that confidence, and you have that feeling that . . . it's not a power thing – it's not a power issue – but you're making a contribution back to the school, and you can have an opinion, and you can help other people's situations . . .'

In another way, a student at Tallangatta described how he gained confidence from having the opportunity to find out that he could help someone:

On the farm I learnt heaps. My Pa – he sort of looked after me a bit. He made me feel good, cos I feel like I've actually achieved something.

That's terrific. How did he do that?

He always made sure I had stuff to do. So I wasn't just sitting around doing nothing. He's getting a bit older now, so I did jobs that he used to do. So I feel like I've helped out and actually done something.

One of the boys at Caroline Chisholm commented that students are taught 'individually', suggesting that teachers consider each student's particular learning needs.

The Maths teacher at Birdwood describes how he removes individual competition from Maths assessment:

I try very carefully to group the students in a mixture of abilities and so on, so we don't have like the 'smart' group and the 'not so smart' group. I try and spread the talent out. And I try to make students responsible – not only for themselves, but for the group as well. So, for example, if a student isn't listening, the group, more or less, has to take care of that. If a student comes without homework being done, then the group gets penalised. And of course there are credits as well. So if a member of the group does something really wonderful, the student gets credit for it. But the group, as well, gets credit for it. So it's a communal thing. So by sharing the responsibility of learning amongst themselves, the students react to that very, very well.

The LOTE teacher at St Aloysius spoke of the need to create opportunities for all students to achieve:

I provide lots of activities that are attainable, like it's about setting a test where students can achieve, it's not about 'well, let me see how difficult I can make this.' . . . It's about giving students the opportunity to be able to succeed. . . . I think that's the important thing, giving students the opportunity to be able to achieve.

The way that engagement with learning can be encouraged by individual attention is summed up by these Year 12 students at Tallangatta one of whom said he'd originally intended to leave school as soon as possible:

J: I was hoping I'd be leaving after Year 10. I was dead set on that. But once I sort of got into things I started enjoying school more. I started thinking about it more and wanted to keep going.

So – you said – once you got into things. What did that actually mean?

J: Like working harder, trying to achieve better grades. Just having an interest.

So, what in this school encouraged you to work harder?

K: The fact that the teachers want to help you and they really show a keen interest. . . [The teachers] help you set up your own goals. I know if I didn't come here, I wouldn't be doing much. I'd probably be sitting at home doing nothing.

Students are helped to construct positive identities as learners by being made aware of how much they know. For example, a teacher at Tallangatta described how he would explore with the student the steps involved in a task:

A kid said to me the other day, I took a cutting deck off a [*brand name*] rider mower. That's all he wrote. I said, 'How do you do that?' And I got my pen. And he said, 'you do this, you take these bolts' – and I said, 'what bolts, tell me exactly what you've got to do, so that if I was going to do it' . . .and we wrote down 19 steps.

Questions to assess oneself and one's learning in a school

- To what extent can it be said that every student has a positive picture of themselves as a learner?
- Are students grouped according to ability? Are some made to feel that they are 'failures'?
- Do assessment exercises take account of different styles of learning?
- How much self assessment takes place? How much opportunity is there for students to discuss their achievements with a teacher or mentor?
- Are students encouraged to set their own learning goals?

Learning How to Learn in a Lifelong Learning School

Most students need to be taught explicitly how to learn. Lifelong learners need to:

- cherish the habit of learning;
- know their own learning styles;
- be open to new learning techniques and new knowledge;
- want to learn with self confidence;
- set realistic personal targets for their learning; and
- recognise the gap between the current status of their learning and the target, and understand how to fill it.

[Bryce, et al, 2000]

Students will learn well if they see their teacher as a model learner. They will learn well if the classroom environment is a ‘warm’ one, a community of inquiry (as suggested above), where they can feel comfortable about taking risks. Learning is essentially active, and students will learn well if they have opportunities to construct their own knowledge and set their own learning goals. They will do this more readily if they can see a purpose to their learning. It is very important to respect a learner’s idiosyncrasies and to provide space so that he or she can explore areas and make connections according to personal interests and learning styles. There needs to be time to reflect – to ask ‘Am I going in the right direction?’ Students need help in developing self-organisation skills so that when they have set their goals they can plan how to achieve them in a realistic way.

The context for learning is significant. Some students feel uncomfortable in an atmosphere that is dominated by seriousness and a lack of openness. For some students learning becomes more relevant if it has a practical, work-related orientation – such as that provided by Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. Opportunities to combine school and work are often helpful to students in senior years. They can then relate their learning to the work place and to life outside school.

Examples from the case studies

Many lifelong learning schools have learning centres where students can go to receive help with their learning. In a lifelong learning school this is quite different from the idea of ‘withdrawing’ students from class if they are having difficulties. A learning centre in a lifelong learning school is for everyone. Some students talked about the Tutorial Centre at Marden Senior College:

W: You can go to the Tutorial Centre whenever you want. [*and there’s always a teacher rostered on to help*] Like you feel more free to do it [*seek help*] and more relaxed about doing it.

K: They treat you with more respect – like an adult.

At Tallangatta Secondary College, learning is based on the Quality Learning program of the Australian Quality Council: ‘Plan, Do, Study, Act’. This means that students are actively involved in all aspects of learning, not just in producing work according to a teacher’s plan. At Tallangatta, planning and the assessment of work is collaborative – students are closely involved in discussions about their learning outcomes rather than receiving red scribbles in the margin and a competitive grading. Of course some students complain that this is hard work – it requires far more in-depth study and reflection than does a response to a work sheet. This was the case when the LOTE teacher suggested that her class write their own textbook on a difficult point of Indonesian grammar. The ‘Plan, Do, Study, Act’ approach is summarised on the walls of all classrooms. This approach to learning was summed up by some Year 12 students who said:

They’ve changed the course around, so, instead of the teacher teaching you, you’re learning for yourself. So they’re pushing you more to do the stuff yourself, even to correcting your own work as a group.

Students are motivated when they can see a purpose for their learning. There are many ways that this happens in a school like Tallangatta Secondary College where there is a seamless curriculum within, and close connections with the community outside. At lifelong learning schools there is interest in students’ career pathways and they are

encouraged to see that their learning at school will help them achieve career goals. A girl at Caroline Chisholm expresses this:

How do you learn best?

When I motivate myself, and that's what gives me the push to try and do well, and I think 'Yeah, I want to do this when I leave school', and I start thinking about universities, etcetera, and that motivates me to maybe start revising earlier – find motivation from somewhere and I try and work on that.

Questions to assess learning how to learn in a school

- Are teachers aware of, and is there discussion about, different styles of learning?
- Are teachers aware of students' different learning styles? Is this information gathered in a formal way – and shared with students?
- What are students' learning needs? Is there a learning centre in the school? If not, what other arrangements would best satisfy the needs of students?
- To what extent are students in control of their learning? Do they set their own goals? Do they receive assistance in setting their goals?
- Is it safe for students to take risks? To what extent are classrooms communities of enquiry?
- Is it fun to learn at this school?

Teachers as Model Lifelong Learners in a School

In a lifelong learning school students are aware that their teachers are continuing to learn. Teachers are mentors and facilitators rather than dispensers of knowledge. They value all students as learners – not just those who show academic potential – and they have high expectations of all students. This means taking an interest in each student as an individual rather than categorising some students, and also taking an interest in *how* each student is learning rather than only evaluating the end products. This includes helping students with their planning and goal setting. Teachers in a lifelong learning school aim to help their students to learn – not to 'fill' them with content. These teachers feel comfortable about taking risks, they feel they can be open about their own lack of knowledge in certain areas, and they work collaboratively not only with teaching colleagues but with specialists such as librarians, and members of the local community.

Many of these characteristics are easy to articulate but very much more difficult to implement – particularly for teachers who have been practising for some years. Many teachers were trained to believe that teaching involved 'putting on a performance' as they stood at the front of a classroom. Secondary school teachers are used to being regarded as authorities in their fields of specialisation, where acknowledging that one doesn't know something is regarded as a weakness. These views are perpetuated by students, who are often brought up to have a view of teachers as authoritarian figures who are founts of wisdom. Traditionally teachers have been the final arbiters of a student's progress - often they are not used to being mentors or working in a more collaborative way with students to judge the extent to which goals are achieved.

It is difficult enough for teachers to change from performing in a way that may have been entrenched over 20 or more years of practice, but other factors may also militate against change – in particular the crowded school curriculum. Many teachers feel constrained by the need to steer their senior students over the high stakes hurdles of senior secondary school certification. Because of the crowded nature of the curriculum it is necessary to do this as efficiently as possible. Taking on a mentoring approach to facilitate students' learning is often regarded as worthy, but impractical in light of the heavy schedule of compulsory assessment tasks. In addition to the constraints of the senior curriculum, parents have expectations of graded assessment which run counter to the principles of good learning outlined above. Parents want to compare their own child's results with other students at the same level. There is pressure for teachers to focus on more summative, comparative kinds of assessment rather than assessment which does not categorise students and which focuses on students' own learning goals.

Teachers therefore need a great deal of support and encouragement to orient their school towards lifelong learning.

Examples from the case studies

Lifelong learning schools support their teachers in all kinds of ways. One way that St Aloysius College shows that it values its teachers is by providing a particularly comfortable staff room with armchairs, generous provision of newspapers and magazines and a very peaceful outlook onto a courtyard. Teachers' professional development is given a very high priority in the school's budget. There are possibilities of overseas study tours and generous support for teachers who want to undertake postgraduate degrees. The principal (who has set an example by undertaking a PhD) has a close interest in each teacher's learning pathway:

We have a sheet that they fill out ...it's a check list that says, 'what have been the good things about this year, what have been the frustrations, what was your teaching load like, what sort of professional development have you done in school time and in your own time, what sort of study.' They write responses to that and bring it to [a] discussion . . . Another bit is, 'what would provide a challenge for you?'. Some might say 'I'd really like a leadership position and I'd be interested in a couple of areas.' Those who have been in positions of responsibility have another sheet that they fill out that talks about their achievements for the year and whether they achieved their goals and where they might have left room for improvement and whether they are interested in a position for the following year and what their vision will be, where they might take the faculty. So that's just an automatic thing that happens every August.

At Marden Senior College, teachers' work is celebrated. There are frequent opportunities to share and show-case innovative work through a series of twilight seminars – and teachers are so interested in working collaboratively, there seems to be no difficulty in encouraging them to attend these sessions. In 2001 there was a special focus on information technology and all staff were involved in learning in this area. Much of the learning took place through mentoring, so the teachers themselves were modelling what they encourage their students to do.

At Tallangatta Secondary College there is an environment that encourages teachers to be innovative. The principal describes this as a ‘no blame mentality’:

We worked very strongly on a no blame mentality about things. And the staff then gained some confidence. They tried things because they knew if it was a disaster they wouldn't be crucified because of it.

Questions to assess the extent to which teachers are model lifelong learners

- Do teachers feel valued and supported?
- Are teachers encouraged to be open and experimental? Are their innovations valued/celebrated? Is there a ‘no blame mentality’?
- To what extent do teachers work collaboratively? Is there a formal system of mentoring? How much informal mentoring takes place?
- Is there an opportunity for each teacher to discuss their goals, aspirations and achievements with a senior person, for example the principal or a deputy principal? Is there an awareness of each teacher's career pathway?
- Is the school exploring ways of lessening competitive assessment and informing parents about the value of more personalised assessment that relates to individual students' goals?

It is interesting to note how a number of the principles outlined in the above discussion are integral to learning in the context described below.

KEYS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SELF DIRECTED LEARNER

The material in this box emerged in a different context from Lifelong Learning: it derives from a presentation about the educational needs of young people at risk or who had already offended. The heading and subheadings have been inserted to frame the 'stages' and a few illustrations added (these are in brackets).

Inserting the Key

- active participation
- enquiring and curious
- establish work study and acquisition habits
- maintain personal growth and development
- responsible to self and for self
- willing to take initiative in utilising teachers as facilitators and consultants
- develop a need to know

Opening the Door

- diagnose for oneself current and future learning needs
- see how they relate to short- and long-term life goals (private and employment)
- find ways of refining and clarifying the goals, and relating one's learning to them
- realise that goals can only be established jointly (teachers; fellow students; fellow workers)
- develop confidence in one's own point of view
- develop confidence in self-evaluation
- tolerate, evaluate and incorporate new ideas
- develop a want to know

Inside Learning

- skills in identifying and locating needed information
- identify and trace material and human resources in obtaining information
- develop skills in sorting, analysing and synthesising information chains or strings
- learn by doing and investing energy, while maintaining clarity of purpose and goals
- development of a personal learning style, based on intrinsic motivation
- learning how to learn and evaluate one's learning
- recognition and celebration of one's own progress

Pedagogical Assistance

- teacher as synergiser: encourages pride in learning
- validates and rewards the learner's achievements and accomplishments
- sets the stage for the offender to transfer skills and behaviours learned to real life and employment
- uses a classroom structure based on acquisition, not transmission or instruction
- is a procedural guide before a content guide
- teaches by example - is a self-directed learner oneself
- aids in goal development - do not set them for the learner
- treats anxiety, frustration and weakness in the learner as indicators that further learning is needed (and where), rather than symptoms of learning failure

[adapted from Gaddis, 2000]

WHAT MILITATES AGAINST A SCHOOL BECOMING ORIENTED TO LIFELONG LEARNING?

Don't rush it!

Some of the fundamental elements of a lifelong learning school involve the attitudes of teachers and parents – and these can take a long time to change. A lot of teachers are under stress with heavy workloads and responsibilities of shepherding students through end of school certification. The idea of espousing a new kind of orientation in their teaching can be very threatening. Many parents have the expectation that their children's school experiences will be very much like their own – with imposed discipline, mainly summative assessment and teachers who are remote figures of authority. Lifelong learning requires that these perceptions be changed.

Birdwood High School has a new principal who has been involved in lifelong learning at another school. He is very enthusiastic about it, but realises that he must proceed slowly:

The biggest challenge to me as a leader is winning the day in terms of opening people's eyes to question and challenge the way we do it. . . . If you can get the hearts and minds working, thinking – as a team they'll collectively work towards change as opposed to – if I'm passionate about that and I come in and say, right – we'll have 100 minute lessons, we'll have work placements – I may have the authority to do that, but I don't think it would be sustained. . . . My approach here has been to keep that stuff on the boil, to ask those challenging questions, to cause a little bit of discomfort.

As with good learning (start where the student is at), it seems best to start by building on the foundations that already exist in a school. In the case of Birdwood High School these foundations included:

- a strong pastoral program and a school that is a caring community;
- some teachers are already helping students to take control of their learning;
- a learning centre; and
- availability of Vocational Education and Training and the Employment Options Group, providing an emphasis on career pathways and opportunities for work experience.

Ways in which current systems of end of school certification hinder lifelong learning

The curriculum of most Australian secondary schools is influenced by Year 11 and 12 certification requirements. Students start undertaking essays or projects in Years 8 and 9 in order to practise the kinds of investigative work required in Year 11. Around Year 10, students 'start to work', in preparation for the 'hard work' in Years 11 and 12. Around Years 9 and 10 students start to plan the course which they perceive would maximise their success when it comes to the competitive high stakes of Years 11 and 12.

This influence is not entirely bad. But in many cases it encourages a competitive, more superficial approach to learning: 'What can I do well in?', 'How much do I have to know?', rather than 'What do I need to learn?', 'What would I like to learn?' In particular, the competitive nature of end of school certification:

- moves the ownership of learning away from the individual learner's specific needs to one where content is tightly specified, often by an external 'authority';

- makes the goal of learning short term, and often a grade or score, rather than a long-term and intrinsically satisfying love of learning;
- classifies some people as ‘failures’, which is one of the strongest deterrents to learning;
- forces students to learn (or produce material) according to specified time-lines rather than according to individual needs.

Moreover, if the assessment outcomes are ‘narrowly conceived’ [Russell, 2000], they will not measure those aspects of lifelong learning that are most valued. It is difficult for both students and teachers to place emphasis on elements of learning that are not rewarded by the school system – or, perhaps more accurately - it is difficult to devote oneself to an approach that offers long-term intrinsic rewards in an environment that emphasises short-term extrinsic ones.

It is true that many students who have become lifelong learners will succeed in spite of the system. Their curiosity, good information literacy skills and habits of self evaluation will serve them well in high stakes assessment. But, as one principal pointed out, it is the ‘middle students’ who will not benefit. They are the students who manage to get into university because they have learned the more superficial, competitive routine of passing exams and producing satisfactory work requirements. They and their parents quite reasonably have expectations that they will be helped to gain sufficient marks to enter a tertiary course.

It runs counter to a lifelong learning approach to classify a group as ‘middle students’, but at present the pressures of end of school certification are so great that even enlightened principals talk that way. They need to keep attracting students to their school and, because of the dominance of tertiary entrance success at Year 12, certification is, for many parents and students, one of the main criteria for selecting a school. Some principals in our study who were strongly committed to the idea of a lifelong learning school admitted that they could not afford to make changes that might in any way impede the chances of some students obtaining the short term goal of tertiary entrance.

If all secondary school students in Australia are to have the opportunity of engaging with learning in the rich environment of a lifelong learning school, there will need to be radical change to most secondary school assessment policies so that the curriculum is not driven by certification requirements. How could this be done? Such a question is not easy to answer and would form the basis for a substantial study. The following comments may provide some guidance.

- Why do practically all students in an Australian state need to undertake the same Year 11/ 12 examination and receive an ENTER or TER or similar score? Why not focus on more flexible (and potentially more formative) kinds of assessment such as portfolios of work that could ‘celebrate’ the completion of secondary schooling and leave entrance / selection testing to higher education institutions?
- Why not trust the professional judgement of teachers to assess students’ completion of secondary school? This would allow schools far greater flexibility to develop curricula appropriate for their students and could put far greater emphasis on portfolio work and the school reference.

- Countries with a strong orientation to lifelong learning, such as the Netherlands, have an emphasis on vocational education in the upper years of secondary schooling (and often a separate senior school, such as the Swedish gymnasium). There are strong industry/education partnerships which enhance the blending of general and vocational education through a rich and supportive learning culture [Misko, 2001]. This kind of structure removes pressure from the lower secondary curriculum and provides flexibility of pathways to tertiary study. This flexible pathways approach is not new to Australia but at present it is not the prevalent way of entering tertiary education.

The negative influence of failure on a student's learning has been known for some time, as is apparent from the outline below.

EVERYONE MUST BE LEARNING SOMETHING

The material in this box emerged in a much earlier context than current views of Lifelong Learning: it derives from the writings of an American penal educator, Mary B. Harris, who was born in 1878 and died in the middle years of last century. The principles of Lifelong Learning are not novelties in the educational world.

One of the outstanding traits of delinquent children is their resignation to failure ... many of the same elements in delinquent children are in the adult offender: a feeling of inferiority, lack of preparation for earning a living, and acceptance of failure, lack of ambition and avoidance of stimulation. ... We found that schools had put too great a stress on the content of the subject studied, and not enough on achievement. we made it the rule of our school that everyone must be put to doing or learning something, no matter how trifling it might be. Our pupils were to have the thrill which comes from success and progress.

* * * *

No-one is allowed to fail ... Reformation, like education, is a journey, not a destination, and requires providing inmates with:

- goals;
- incentives;
- information;
- morale boosts;
- supportive atmosphere;
- self-respect; and;
- sound reasons for positive attitudinal changes to occur.

* * * *

Our goal is to produce self directed learners, individuals who are:

- confident in themselves;
- confident in their ability to adapt to new situations;
- persons who want to be valued;
- persons who want their talents utilised;
- persons who want to share with and in society.

[quoted in Gaddis, 2000, and reformatted.]

HOW DO YOU START THE ‘LIFELONG LEARNING’ PROCESS IN A SCHOOL?

As suggested above, the main advice about changing a traditional secondary school into a lifelong learning community is to aim to do it gradually. It is most important to build on existing features of the school rather than to introduce the idea of lifelong learning as something completely new.

The principal of Birdwood High School was well aware that an orientation to lifelong learning must occur slowly, otherwise teachers will become anxious (‘yet another change’) and parents dubious, if not actually mistrustful. This principal started to encourage teachers to think about the philosophy of lifelong learning by circulating short ‘pithy’ papers for their comment. Teachers were encouraged to keep a log of their professional reading (and the pithy papers were professional reading). In South Australia, teachers who undertake 37.5 hours of professional development in a year are able to finish teaching some days before the official end of the school year. This provided an additional incentive for reading the principal’s papers.

There is no recipe for orienting a school to lifelong learning because it is important to build on features that are unique to each school. Birdwood is building on the features mentioned above, such as the learning centre and the pastoral program. It is important for a school to consider the strengths it already has, and to plan to build on them. A starting-point could be to use some of the audit instruments of *The Journey to Becoming a Lifelong Learning School* [Appendix 1] as a part of professional development. But the instruments should be modified to suit the school’s needs. For example, in a large school senior staff might use the section ‘The school itself’ as a basis for discussion. In a smaller school it may be appropriate to involve all staff in such a discussion. It would be important to focus on only one or two outcomes from these discussions and possibly make a plan to achieve certain goals during the year. For example at Marden it was decided appropriate to focus on Information Technology (this was not based specifically on *The Journey to Becoming a Lifelong Learning School*, which had not been developed at the time). During the year twilight seminars celebrated teachers’ accomplishments in developing particular units of work based on ICT and mentors helped teachers learn new skills in this area.

ANOTHER APPROACH: THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS RETURNING TO STUDY

The discussion so far has been underpinned by work from international studies, studies focusing on tertiary institutions (in the Issues paper), and on case study work we have undertaken in Australian secondary schools. Another perspective was gained by questioning people who planned to return to tertiary study as ‘mature age’ students. Are their motives mainly ‘extrinsic’, to enhance their job prospects and earn more money [Gallacher, 2000] Do people who want to return to study come from a group who have enjoyed learning at secondary school? Do these people seem to display curiosity [Ainley, 1999], or display the characteristics of ‘deep learners’ [Biggs, 1987]. As part of the research, we surveyed a group [N=279] of people who applied to sit the Special Tertiary Admissions Test. This candidature indicated that they were not proceeding to tertiary studies directly from secondary school.

Characteristics of the Questionnaire Respondents

The majority of questionnaire respondents was female (72.5%). This reflects the expected gender trend of people returning to study – for example, many women return to study after child-bearing. More than half of those commencing a course leading to a qualification in 2001 were female [ABS, 1999]. Most of the respondents were currently working full-time (52.8%) and most (61.0%) lived in an Australian capital city. About a third of the sample was under 25 years of age as can be seen in the table below. Any responses from people under 21 years of age were excluded from questionnaire analysis.

Age of questionnaire respondents

| Age group | Percentage of sample in the group |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| 21 – 25 | 33.1% |
| 26 – 30 | 16.2% |
| 31 – 35 | 16.1% |
| 36 – 40 | 15.4% |
| > 40 | 19.2% |
| | 100.0% |

Most of the respondents had completed Year 12 of secondary school.

Level when questionnaire respondents first left school

| School year level | Percentage of sample in the group |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Year 9 or lower | 3.1% |
| Year 10 | 26.6% |
| Year 11 | 15.6% |
| Year 12 | 54.7% |
| | 100.0% |

Summary of Questionnaire Outcomes

The questionnaire was based on work by Mary Ainley [Ainley, 1999] which distinguishes characteristics such as curiosity as important ingredients of a ‘deep’ approach to learning. A major aim of the survey was to explore the extent to which people returning to study perceived themselves as ‘deep learners’. Overall three categories of responses emerged indicating different kinds of approaches to learning. It must be remembered that these data are the result of self-report. Although we made it clear that responses would be strictly anonymous, some respondents may have been influenced by the fact that they were embarking upon a process of rigorous tertiary selection.

Three key factors emerged when candidates' responses to the opportunity to reflect on their own learning characteristics were interpreted. Responses were subjected to a factor analysis. The statements are outlined as part of the Questionnaire in Appendix 2. For convenience these factors have been labelled:

- 1 Learning for Understanding
- 2 Surface Learning
- 3 Learning for Utility

When the responses were considered overall, there appeared to be some overlap between the first and third factors and the second and third factors.

Factor One: Learning for Understanding

This factor seemed to indicate a 'deep' approach to learning. Learning is linked to a personal need to achieve a greater understanding of subject matter and the world one finds oneself in. Statements from the questionnaire [Appendix 2] that load onto this factor are:

- I like to find out more about a new idea.
- If I don't understand something I like to inquire about it.
- I like to try to find out why something happened the way it did.
- I like to find out how something works.
- I look forward to learning new things.
- I expect to keep learning all my life.
- I am returning to study for my own inner development.

There is emphasis on curiosity to 'find out more', 'why something happened', and a sense that learning is intrinsically valuable, 'for my own inner development': both are classic lifelong learning characteristics indicating enjoyment of learning and an expectation to keep on learning.

Analysis of the component correlation matrix involved in the analysis revealed a significant correlation between scores on 'Learning for Understanding' and the 'Learning for Utility' factor. The relevant statements are:

- I find that studying some subjects can be really exciting (maybe respondents placed different emphases in their reading of 'some')
- I usually relate what I learn in a subject to what I already know.
- I often try to think about why the world is in the state it is.
- I find that many subjects become interesting once you get into them.
- I like to work at a topic until I can form my own view of it.
- For me, new material often clarifies material I already know.

Several of the statements that load onto the two factors (1 and 3) seem to exemplify the notion of 'helicopter vision', mentioned above; the idea of making links between curriculum areas and having a broad, encompassing perspective of what might be learned.

Factor Two: Surface Learning

Some responses seemed to exemplify what Biggs [1987] has described as ‘surface’ learning. The learner can relate to the learning of facts without much understanding and sometimes shows some impatience with learning situations that are not of immediate interest or relevance. Statements from the questionnaire [Appendix 2] that load onto this factor are:

I don’t spend time learning things I know won’t be assessed.

I usually study what is set, but nothing extra.

Learning just facts is better than to have to do a lot of reading.

I really don’t like study – it will be hard to complete the course.

I didn’t like school and wanted to leave as soon as possible.

I used to not like studying, but now I’m motivated to learn.

Some statements indicate that respondents do not like, or in the past did not like, learning, and some exemplify an attitude to learning that may be encouraged by high stakes certification at the end of secondary school, discussed earlier in this report. Two examples: ‘I don’t spend time learning things I know won’t be assessed’, and ‘I usually study what is set, but nothing extra’.

There was only one statement that loaded on both ‘Surface Learning’ and ‘Learning for Utility’: ‘I often find the only way to learn is to memorise topics by heart’.

Factor Three: Learning for Utility

People who gave high ratings to statements that loaded on this factor considered themselves to have high literacy and numeracy skills. This factor suggests that learning for such people is governed by purpose, or a need for personal utility. Most statements also loaded onto one of the other factors. They have been reported above. The one statement that stood in this group alone was:

I try to think how useful the material I’m learning will be.

Depth of curiosity

A second order factor analysis found one factor underlying scores on all three lower-order factors discussed above, and this accounted for over 40 per cent of the variance. This higher order factor is labelled ‘Depth of Curiosity’ – it represents a high need for understanding, a positive need to see material as useful, and a negative relationship with superficial study techniques, as shown in the following table:

| Lower order factors | Loading on depth of curiosity factor |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Need for understanding | .757 |
| Superficial learning/ facts only | -.409 |
| Literacy/ Numeracy and utility | .714 |

Connection with learning at secondary school

Time and financial constraints did not permit further investigation which might have answered more fully the questions posed at the beginning of this section: Are ‘mature age’ students’ motives for returning to study mainly extrinsic or intrinsic? Does the nature of their motives make a difference to their lifelong learning orientation? But the higher order factor mentioned above does seem to encapsulate some of the characteristics of lifelong learners that emerged from case study visits to secondary schools, particularly curiosity, independence, and deep rather than superficial learning. This small survey does seem to suggest, therefore, that people interested in returning to study exhibit an orientation to learning that includes key characteristics associated with lifelong learning.

In addition to the responses above, those surveyed were asked to suggest two things that secondary schools could do which might better encourage their students to keep learning after they leave school. The question was open-ended. It is not possible to give values to the suggestions because respondents were not asked to rank their responses, but it can be assumed that the suggestions made were generally considered important by those who completed the item.

How secondary schools could encourage students to keep learning: suggestion made first

| Category | Example | Frequency (N=279) | Valid per cent |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| focus more on students as individuals | ‘build students’ self esteem’ | 40 | 17.2 |
| make schools more relevant to ‘life’ | ‘integrate more with the community’ | 32 | 13.7 |
| make school programs more flexible | ‘integrate work programs into the curriculum’ | 32 | 13.7 |
| provide more careers counselling | | 30 | 12.9 |
| focus more on how people learn | ‘encourage deep learning’ | 40 | 17.2 |

How secondary schools could encourage students to keep learning: suggestion made second

| Category | Example | Frequency (N=279) | Valid per cent |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| focus more on students as individuals | ‘build students’ self esteem’ | 36 | 20.3 |
| provide more careers counselling | | 30 | 16.9 |
| focus more on how people learn | ‘encourage deep learning’ | 24 | 13.6 |

There is an emphasis here on the importance of developing students’ confidence as learners – on developing their independent learning styles. This ties in with ways that case study schools focus on ‘learning to learn’ and the importance placed on development of students’ self esteem. There is also some emphasis on the importance of

making links with the community both by linking school and work and by integrating school programs with community activities. Once again this reflects to some degree the notion of a ‘seamless’ curriculum for secondary schools – the need to view the local community (and indeed the community at large) as a part of the learning context and to consider the importance of the career pathways of all students.

The principles of lifelong learning are indeed apparent in many learning contexts and they are applicable to many different age groups as can be seen from the example below.

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS

The material in this box emerged in a somewhat different context from our school-based views of Lifelong Learning: it derives from the writings of an American adult educator, Malcolm Knowles, whose work is aimed at describing and producing the Self-Directed Learner. Inculcating the principles of Lifelong Learning is not confined to the educational world of young people.

[Self directed learners are those] ‘Individuals who take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in:

- diagnosing their learning needs;
- formulating learning goals;
- identifying human and material resources for learning;
- choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies; and
- evaluating learning outcomes.

[M. Knowles, 1975. *Self Directed Learning*. Chicago: Follet. This section has been reformatted.]

* * * *

Self-directed learning during personal computer training:

- ‘There is a need to explain why specific things are being taught (e.g., certain commands, functions, operations, etc.)
- Instruction should be task-oriented instead of memorisation - learning activities should be in the context of common tasks to be performed.
- Instruction should take into account the wide range of different backgrounds of learners; learning materials and activities should allow for different levels/types of previous experience with computers.
- Since adults are self-directed, instruction should allow learners to discover things for themselves, providing guidance and help when mistakes are made.’

[Knowles, M. (1984). *Andragogy in Action*. Appendix D. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.]

* * * *

Knowles emphasises that many adults are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions. Adult learning programs must accommodate this fundamental aspect. His theory makes the following assumptions about the design of learning:

- ‘Adults need to know why they need to learn something;
- Adults need to learn experientially;
- Adults approach learning as problem-solving;
- Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value;
- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction;
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities;
- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life;
- Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented.

[adapted from Knowles, M. (1984) *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (3rd ed.) Houston, TX:Gulf Publishing]

SOME CONCLUSIONS






There is considerable danger in attempting to summarise a diverse array of approaches to lifelong learning in secondary schools. We have tried to stress that there is no recipe for becoming a lifelong learning secondary school. Achievements in this area range from the young women of St Aloysius going forth into the world from their valedictory service to the young man at Tallangatta who for maybe the first time felt valued when he was given the opportunity to help his grandfather on the farm. Having said this, some significant indicators are:


- ownership of the need to learn rests with students who, with assistance, set and evaluate their own learning goals;
- a central hub of learning within the school, rather than a rigid vertical class structure;
- fluidity between subject areas so that students are encouraged to develop 'helicopter vision';
- provision of time for students to think and reflect, with opportunities for discussion with a mentor;
- teachers themselves being model lifelong learners;
- students having positive pictures of themselves as learners – encouraged by more formative, non – competitive assessment;
- acknowledgement of people's different styles of learning; and
- an environment where learning is fun.

The following tools, which are repeated in Appendix 1 with other aids, may provide a useful way for a school to assess the extent to which it is oriented to lifelong learning.

HOW FAR IS THE SCHOOL ON THE JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING?

This tool may be used as set out below for general discussion, or there is a rating scale version that follows.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Ownership of the need to learn and its content is with the teacher. |  Do students set their own learning goals? Are students given explicit assistance in planning and setting goals? | As far as possible ownership of the need to learn and its content is given to individuals. |
| Education is compartmentalised according to age and subject. |  Is there fluidity between year levels? Are students helped to develop 'helicopter vision' – to make links between different curriculum areas? Is there a Learning Centre or Resources Centre that is the hub of learning in the school? Is there explicit help to acquire generic skills – especially information literacy skills? | Learning is lifelong in concept and content, there are links vertically and horizontally between age groups. |
| Learning is about what to think. |  Are students given adequate time for reflection? Are students helped to reflect by aids such as a diary, which is regularly discussed with a mentor? Are students' ideas rigorously challenged? To what extent is learning seen as a form of problem-solving? | Learning is about how to think. |
| Teachers are dispensers of knowledge. |  Do teachers feel valued and supported? Are innovations valued and celebrated? Do teachers work collaboratively? Is there a system of mentoring? | Teachers are mentors and models of lifelong learning. |
| Failures are separated from successes. |  To what extent can it be said that all students in the school have positive pictures of themselves as learners? Are students grouped according to ability? Are some made to feel that they are 'failures'? Do assessment exercises take account of different styles of learning? Is most assessment formative rather than summative? How much self-assessment takes place? Are students able to discuss their progress with a mentor? Is it safe for students to take risks/ to expose lack of knowledge? | Emphasis is on progress and encouragement of further learning. |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Learning is a difficult chore and is about received wisdom. |  <p>Is there discussion about different styles of learning? Are students aware of their styles of learning?</p> <p>To what extent are classrooms communities of enquiry?</p> <p>Are there opportunities to celebrate learning?</p> <p>Is it fun to learn in the school?</p> | Learning is fun, participative and involving. |
|---|--|---|

Rating scale for: How far is the school on the journey to lifelong learning?

Tick a box to indicate where you would place your school on the scale for each item then add the score. The highest possible score is 30 – but it is unlikely that there is a ‘perfect’ lifelong learning school. A school scoring 6 is at the very beginning of the journey.

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Ownership of the need to learn and its content is with the teacher. | | | | | | As far as possible ownership of the need to learn and its content is given to individuals. |
| Education is compartmentalised according to age and subject. | | | | | | Learning is lifelong in concept and content, there are links vertically and horizontally between age groups. |
| Learning is about what to think. | | | | | | Learning is about how to think. |
| Teachers are dispensers of knowledge. | | | | | | Teachers are mentors and models of lifelong learning. |
| Failures are separated from successes. | | | | | | Emphasis is on progress and encouragement of further learning. |
| Learning is a difficult chore and is about received wisdom. | | | | | | Learning is fun, participative and involving. |

METHODOLOGY

Case Study Research

The most substantial part of this study was undertaken by case study fieldwork. This seemed to be the best way to investigate how different kinds of schools approach lifelong learning. We wanted the outcome to provide rich examples of different ways of helping students to develop lifelong learning characteristics – slices of life from different kinds of school settings.

Selection of schools

How did we select the sites? We wanted ‘realistic’ examples that would provide practical models for other schools; in Patton’s words, cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely (Patton, 1990). Rather than being ‘lighthouse’ schools, the case study schools have a strong interest but are not necessarily centres of excellence for lifelong learning. Criteria for selection were, of necessity, fairly loose. We did not want to exclude an ‘interesting’ school by having selection criteria that were too tightly specific.

Budget constraints limited the location of schools to Victoria and one adjacent state. South Australia was chosen because of an explicit interest in lifelong learning through programs such as ‘Learning to Learn’. Names of schools in Victoria and South Australia were put forward by members of the project reference group – most of whom were in a position to know of schools meeting our criteria. It was important to have at least one school with a ‘re-entry’ focus so that we could consider the issue of people returning to study. Appropriate authorities were contacted and permission was granted to approach school principals. Principals of ten secondary schools were approached. They were sent an initial fax, outlining the scope of the project and the main purpose of the case study visit. Seven of the ten schools approached were happy to take part, and the number seemed manageable in the fairly short time frame available.

The following table outlines details of the schools that took part. Only one was a single sex (girls’) school, none of the schools recommended were boys’ schools. Our data may have been richer with an example of an all boys’ school, but given that our purpose was to show different ways of implementing lifelong learning in schools, this gender imbalance does not seem a significant problem.

Two schools were in rural locations, the others were suburban with a range from inner city to outer suburban which had rural characteristics (such as a strong dependence on bus transport for its students).

SCHOOLS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH

| School Name | Approx. Size* | Gender | Location | Nature of Contact |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------|----------------|---|
| Birdwood High School | 650 | co.ed. | rural | full case study |
| Box Hill Senior Secondary | 600 | co.ed. | suburban | pilot visit, follow-up, but not a full case study |
| Caroline Chisholm Catholic College | 1600 | co.ed. | suburban | pilot visit and full case study |
| Marden Senior College | 600 | co.ed. | suburban | full case study |
| St Aloysius College | 900 | female | inner city | full case study |
| Tallangatta Secondary College | 370 | co.ed. | rural | full case study |
| Whittlesea Secondary College | 1060 | co.ed. | outer suburban | two visits, but not a full case study |

*effective full-time students

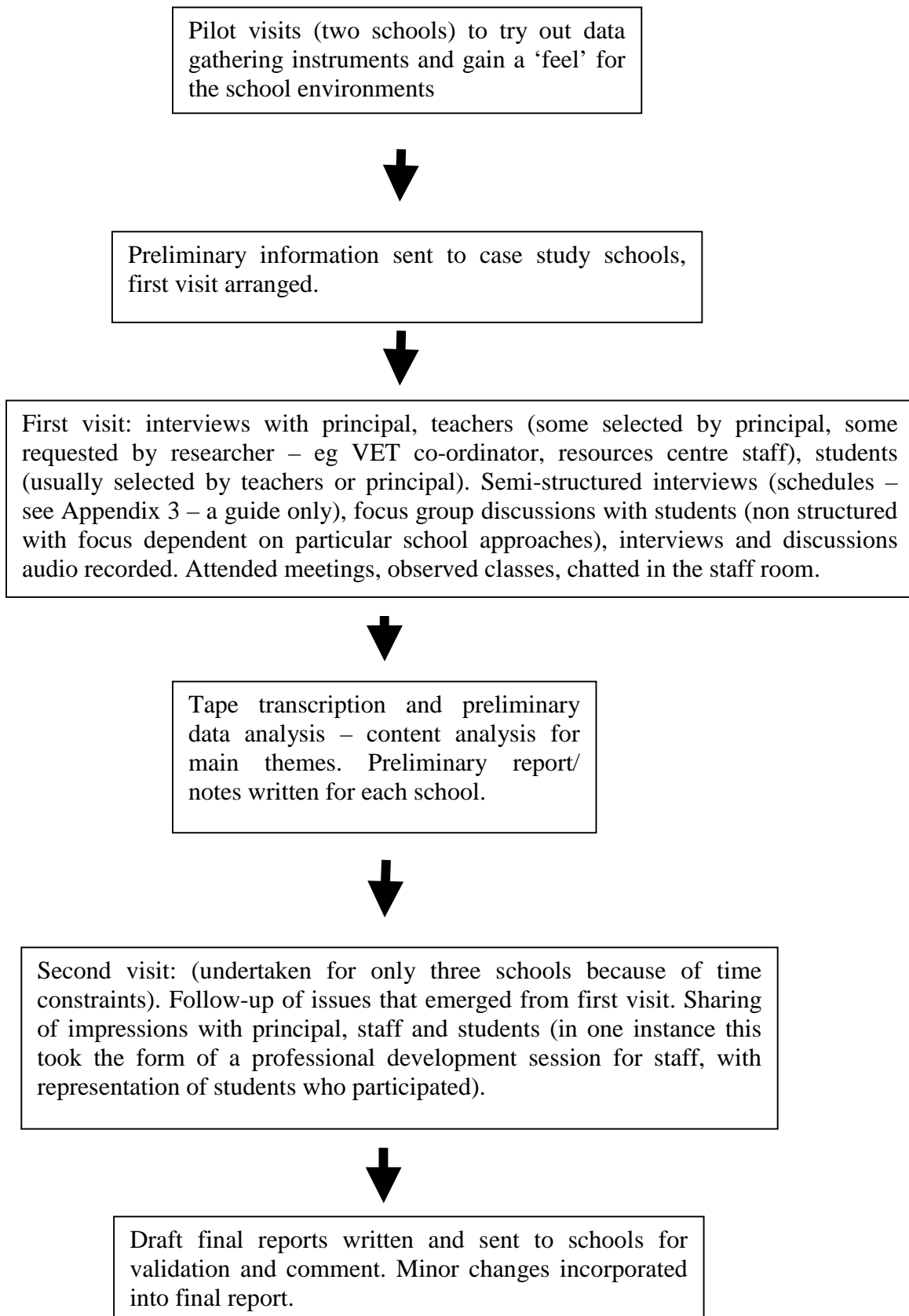
Data gathering procedures

Pilot visits to two schools from the sample were undertaken. The main aim was to get a feel for the school environment and to try out question schedules and interview protocols with the principal, teachers and students.

The schools that agreed to take part were sent further information and were contacted to organise mutually convenient times for two case study visits several weeks apart. The purpose of the second visit was to clarify and revisit aspects of the school that, on reflection, needed further exploration by the researcher, and to share with the school staff the picture emerging from the first case study visit.

With two of the seven schools it was difficult to arrange sufficiently extensive involvement. This was due to a combination of factors – in one case a school was undergoing a building program, in another there were time limitations imposed by the researcher's commitments. These two schools were visited and examples from these visits are used in the general discussion of this report.

The following is an outline of the procedure followed:



Questionnaire to Students Returning to Study

As mentioned above, a questionnaire was prepared for candidates enquiring about taking part in the Special Tertiary Admission Test (STAT). The purpose was to gain insights from people actually engaged in lifelong learning as to what schools could do to develop lifelong learning skills. The questionnaire, which was aimed at candidates aged 21 years and over, sought information on their attitudes and approaches to learning, and their views on schooling experiences that would help develop lifelong learners. Some 2000 copies of the questionnaire were included in the STAT information booklets. There were 279 responses. This is a very low response rate, but it cannot be assumed that all 2000 copies that were distributed would have been directed to 'appropriate' candidates.

The development of the questionnaire was based on work undertaken by Mary Ainley (1999) (see Appendix 2). A principal component factor analysis using Oblimin with Kaiser normalisation was undertaken for the semantic differential section of the questionnaire. Responses to open-ended questions were coded and frequency percentages were calculated.

CASE STUDIES

Below are reports of the five schools we visited. Each school has its own particular way of orienting to lifelong learning and each school is at a different stage on the lifelong learning journey. The first school, Birdwood High School is at the beginning of the journey.

BIRDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

‘The students are partners with teachers on a learning voyage.’

Introduction

Birdwood High School is at the beginning of the journey of orienting to lifelong learning. The principal, who at the time of the case study visit had been at the school for less than a year, is enthusiastic about lifelong learning. His previous school had been involved in the Learning to Learn project where participants investigate the learning process and there is a focus on teachers being model learners. He summed up his views by saying:

We’re in an information era. There’s a mismatch. We’ve got to become more facilitators - coaches of kids. It’s not so much: this is the set curriculum and deliver. It’s not the facts any more.

The principal describes Birdwood as a very traditional high school. There is a good retention rate and a high proportion of students go on to tertiary study although the Year 12/13 co-ordinator mentioned difficulties for students having to travel from the area to attend university in Adelaide.

After visiting the school it seemed that there were several features that will provide useful starting points in orienting the school to lifelong learning.

- The pastoral program provides excellent opportunities to develop students’ self esteem and to work co-operatively in groups.
- There is a general belief that students should take control of their learning. Senior staff (such as the Assistant Principal) will ask students, ‘What are *you* doing about it?’, suggesting that students should see it as *their* responsibility to work out their learning needs and plan how to achieve them.
- The school’s Learning Centre provides a great deal of support and encourages students to help each other and provides opportunities to work with teachers on a one-to-one basis. It is open to any student who wants help.
- Provision of VET programs makes school more meaningful for some students who would otherwise leave in Year 10 or 11. Also the use made of the Employment Options group gives students a feeling that they are being supported and helped to find a career pathway.
- The principal’s enthusiasm for Lifelong Learning is palpable and his knowledge and experience of approaches to learning through projects such as ‘Learning to Learn’ is considerable.

The Pastoral Program

The Assistant Principal knows every student in the school. It is small enough for this. The students know that they will be listened to and that their opinions will be considered. Year 8 (first year of secondary school) enrolments have been growing, and it is thought that this is largely because parents recognise that the school is a caring place. A lot of effort goes into integrating students when they come into Year 8 from various primary schools. The school obtains a considerable amount of information from students' previous schools and during the first weeks in the new school there are a lot of group activities requiring team co-operation. There is also a barbeque that includes parents.

There is a home group system, and home group teachers teach their students as much as possible. Students are encouraged to talk freely about how the group is going and whether they want to stay together as a group the following year. The home group teachers are 'hand-picked' by the Assistant Principal, who looks in particular for qualities such as a caring approach and ability to relate to students.

Students Take Control of Their Learning

In many ways the school is still a traditional high school on the brink of change. There are classes where notes are dictated and where students are mainly focused on a competitive achieving of grades, but some students mentioned times when they participated in stimulating discussions, when they talked to teachers on a more equal level and when they could reflect about their learning:

A: I don't like being dictated lessons constantly. If you have 'dictation', I like time to work on it and see how much you've grasped. In Accounting, you write notes for a day or two then do practical work. When you have to write a lot of notes [*dictated*] you sort of tune out a bit.

Do you get a chance to reflect on what your strengths and weaknesses are?

B: Formative work helps you to reflect. Work for [*summative*] tests is less helpful. Work that shows where you are, and what you don't understand is useful.

[Students are used to the terms 'formative' and 'summative' assessment. Formative assessment provides information to help students reflect about their strengths and weaknesses, whereas summative is for grading and sorting purposes.]

What's the ideal way for students to learn?

A: I'm not sure – when a teacher can get to a level where they can talk to a student – not as a figure of authority, but not on a student level – do it with respect. Then the students listen. But I also think that [*students learn well*] when teachers use examples that stick in your mind. Like I remember in Geography we were talking about different grasses and the teacher drew a giraffe on the board. It was really funny, but we all remembered it! Like a month later, we could even tell you what board he drew it on! . . .

It's good to allow some time for discussion. When you talk about things it brings up little issues that are relevant.

When the principal said, ‘It’s not the facts any more’ (quoted above), he acknowledged the importance of students developing a ‘kit bag’ of generic skills to facilitate learning and encourage students to make connections with other subjects or with life outside school. He went on to say:

There are those common threads that we’ve got to give – the passion for lifelong learning, interdependence, you know – the key competencies – that’s the stuff that’s got to be in the kit bag of all students when they leave. If they can learn how to learn and know how to access information, how to communicate, know how to problem solve – all that stuff, then I think we’re doing the right thing.

One of the Maths teachers encourages students to make connections in their learning:

I try to show students connections. If we’re doing triangles I say, hey, look, go up on the roof, look inside. There’s a triangle right there. I try to bring other subjects into it as well, the Art Department or the Science Department. So kids can see a reason for doing things – a tangible reason.

Students have opportunities to develop generic skills through participation in the Students’ Representative Council, school productions and various other activities as described by this student:

Ms P introduced an all girls PE class in Year 10. We’d teach the little primary school kids for PE lessons. It was like all girls, so we did team stuff and leadership skills and everything. That was really, really fun.

Students mentioned that through VET programs and Work Experience they learn ‘people skills’ which also help them to learn independently.

The Maths teacher (quoted above) was aware that practices such as classifying students or labelling them as ‘failures’ can be detrimental to learning:

I try very carefully to group the students in a mixture of abilities and so on, so we don’t have like the ‘smart’ group and the ‘not so smart’ group. I try and spread the talent out. And I try to make students responsible – not only for themselves, but for the group as well. So, for example, if a student isn’t listening, the group, more or less, has to take care of that. If a student comes without homework being done, then the group gets penalised. And of course there are credits as well. So if a member of the group does something really wonderful, the student gets credit for it. But the group, as well, gets credit for it. So it’s a communal thing. So by sharing the responsibility of learning amongst themselves, the students react to that very, very well.

An Arts teacher pointed out that both the system and parents encourage a competitive approach to assessment that is really counterproductive and inhibits students in their attempts to take control of their learning. Parents want to compare how their child measures up with other people’s children. The system (examinations such as the Year 11 and 12 certificate, SACE) does not allow scope for individuality. He commented that it feeds a political, economic agenda rather than an agenda catering for individual students’ needs. He believes that the Writing Based Literary Assessment (a compulsory component of the system) is unattainable for some students. They know this, so, because of this requirement, they drop out of school altogether. [*The implication being that if the requirement were not there, they might stay on, following paths of relevance to them.*] He believes that SACE has had the effect of reducing retention rates in general.

The Learning Centre

There is a Learning Centre in the school, which houses a number of activities including Special Education and 'gifted and talented' activities. A significant learning program that is run from the Learning Centre is the LAP: Learning Assistance Program. The key objectives of LAP are to assist students to build on their strengths and to improve their confidence and self-esteem. Each student involved in the program is provided with a mentor who is a volunteer. Volunteers may be school parents, other students or community members. The school counsellor described the motivation of some of these volunteers:

A lot of them had trouble themselves in their early years at school and they want to help somebody. A lot of them need a boost in their own self-esteem and they become the guru rather than being at the other end. . . . We've got a number of Year 8 girls who we think are just very lonely and often don't have adult females in their lives and like to spend some time with some adult females and if we haven't got adult females, then senior girls.

The student counsellor was asked whether there is a stigma about students coming out of class to participate in the LAP program:

What we also try and do is break down that barrier by having a combination of things. A number of Year 11s who aren't in special ed., who aren't in the LAP program, who aren't in the gifted and talented program go there for help in their studies anyway. So, if they've got something to type up they go to the special ed. teacher and say, 'Can I come and use one of the computers?' and what really ends up happening is they get some help, they don't know what to do. So there are all sorts of people going in and out of that room all the time and I think that has broken down a lot of the stigma. It's not perfect, but it's close.

This lack of stigma was endorsed by a Year 12 student:

It is good, because it's not a specific – right, we're going to teach you how to read. They just have sessions and they do – maybe work they have to do for a subject or learn how to use a program on a computer. Most importantly it gives them confidence. I think it would be good if we could have heaps more volunteers so that everyone could use it – not everyone -- but a lot more people who didn't think that they needed assistance.

A student who had participated in the program, described her experience:

K: In Year 8 I had a LAP person in Year 12 who was helping me.

Can you tell me a bit more about it?

K: The one that I had. She was very nice. She had a folder like from when she was in Year 8 doing Maths. She'd kept it all that time. I was just going through all her things and reading everything. She was really good.

Do you think it's sometimes better for a Year 8 student to have another older student help them, rather than a teacher sometimes?

K: Mmm – because it's one-on-one, just them personally in a room.

Provision of VET Programs

Some students have taken firmer control of their learning by participating in VET programs, which they see as ‘more adult’ or ‘more relevant’ than academic work. There is still a hint of disrespect with some teachers mentioning ‘VET-type students’, harking back to the old belief that trade or practical education is inferior to academic.

One student who travelled to undertake a TAFE program described how this gave her confidence:

I have to go down to Gillies Plains once a semester by myself, so I have to socialise with other people who I’ve never met before, and go on buses by myself – yeah – even if they are the wrong ones and you get off at the wrong stop!

We all do that sometimes!

It helps me kind of do stuff by myself and know my way around by myself, and stuff. It helps me get around the idea that I don’t need to rely on other people for transport. It’s nice to know I can do something by myself without having to have someone to help me.

One Year 11 student was very much down on school. She said she had hated it ever since Year 8. But she described how she preferred TAFE. It seemed that the opportunity to include in her program some TAFE studies had helped to keep her at school.

How is TAFE better than a high school?

K: There’s no normal school rules and they treat you like adults. Different times.

Different times?

K: I dunno – some people go at different times of the day.

Like – you could go at night if you wanted to?

K: Yes

Any other ways?

K: There are adults there as well as teenagers. They’re not all immature.

Some Year 11 boys expressed similar views:

R: I wasn’t sure whether I wanted to do this Aviation thing, but now I know I do because I’ve been out there and I’ve done some things. . . .

What do you think is the best way for secondary school students to learn?

M: If they had stuff that was actually relevant – that you’d need when you got out of school.

Enthusiasm for Lifelong Learning

Teachers are encouraged to take a more mentoring and ‘open’ approach with students. Some take to this readily, others find it more difficult to change from the traditional ‘provision of wisdom’ approach. The principal is aware that, to be successful, change must take place gradually. There were certainly examples of teachers who felt comfortable being open with students about their own learning:

Work Ed is another subject I teach and that has become more about:

'Here's a heap of web addresses, take them home and see what you can find out about this. Telephone that person.' It's about admitting that I don't know. I don't know why teachers have so much trouble with that one.

Students appreciated teachers taking on a facilitative role and making learning enjoyable:

The teachers are good, because I find that they relate to us a lot more now – [*that we're in Year 12*] they're a bit more relaxed and you can talk to them more easily. They're not bothered by us. Like they don't care if we come and see them at recess and lunch-time, like if we have trouble understanding stuff in class, they don't mind if we do that.

Some of these qualities were mentioned by a group of students undertaking VET programs:

K: They treat you more like an equal

V: They teach you things like in a fun way so that you want to learn about it. You don't get bored.

Can you give me an example of a time when you were taught something in a fun way?

V: In Food & Culture we get to cook – like we cook different foods from different countries and all that.

K: When you get to do practical things in Science and that.

These kinds of 'open' mentoring approaches were evident when a Maths teacher spoke of students being partners with him on a voyage of learning, and when another teacher mentioned the importance of celebrating what students know.

The Maths teacher summed up some of the difficulties in trying to get some teachers to change their approach:

Generally as a profession, we don't get many opportunities to go out and improve our skills. There's not the time. There's no financial incentive for some people, and so on. It's got to come from within. It's just, we'll let you, but in your time thank you very much! It's sad, because a lot of the teachers who are teaching at the moment are not skilled in terms of current practices, and that really worries me. They're still died in the wool, how we did it years ago. And of course, we're also an ageing population and that makes it very difficult to change. The older we get, the harder it is to change.

The Arts teacher suggested the need for a 'seamless' approach to curriculum although he did not use the term:

Good learning often occurs by 'accident' and can be quite outside of schooling. The school system is a long way off what it should be. There is need for massive change. More need for deschooling than ever before. With a lot of 'top down' policies, education is being made less, rather than more relevant.

This Arts teacher encourages students to be more independent in their approach to learning and sees the teacher as a guide rather than a provider of information. He encourages students to reflect on their learning practice. When asked how he would do this with a class of, say, 25 Year 8 students, he said:

Through individual one-to-one contact. It requires a teacher who has a trust in that process – and a high proportion of teachers don't have this.

How do you implement these lifelong learning approaches?

The principal stressed the need to proceed slowly:

If I'm passionate . . . and I come in and say, right – we'll have 100 minute lessons, we'll have work placements – I may have the authority to do that, but I don't think it would be sustained. After a little while, the arms would be folded and we'd see all the problems it would have caused because it had come too soon. So – I think it's stealth. My approach here has been to keep that stuff on the boil, to ask those challenging questions, to cause a little bit of discomfort. . . . I've put a paper out to all staff – and that's another technique I use – to put out papers – would you like to read one of these? To talk about one of these? Very simple, pithy little articles that I hope a lot of the people will read.

The principal suggested that it is best to incorporate a lifelong learning orientation into the tasks that have to be addressed by the school, such as implementing the SACSF. It is important to find ways to free up staff time so that there is time to engage in new approaches. In South Australia there is a shortened school year policy which enables teachers to have 'extra' time off at the end of the year if they bank up 37 ½ hours of professional development in their own time. The principal suggests ways that this can be done:

Keep a reading log and in your log, have up to 10 hours of that as professional reading, so when this paper comes out if you want to put on your reading log that you read it and it took say 20 minutes well – you can see a benefit in that.

The principal sees that there is a challenge, but his enthusiasm suggests that the challenge will be met:

I don't believe in compartmentalising the curriculum. Why should you do English, then 40 minutes later you're thinking Maths? That's not life. It's not how we learn. We learn by immersing ourselves in something, and your skills build up. . . . The curriculum should be a part of the real world. Develop thinking skills. How do we develop that love for learning? We should do it with that open-ended approach, not deliberate – shut up, listen, regurgitate the stuff to me and I'll put you in a box . . . we've got to move beyond that. And that's a big challenge.

Conclusion

The table on the following page summarises a perception that Birdwood High School has started the journey to becoming a lifelong learning school. A journey that leads to a situation where students reflect on their learning, think learning is fun, see it as something that they will continue to do throughout life and where they are mentored by teachers who are model learners.

BIRDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL ON THE JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

| | Commentary on the stage of the journey for Birdwood High School | |
|--|--|--|
| ownership of need to learn with teacher | There are still many cases where teachers feel the need to control learning and that students' learning is their responsibility. But key staff, such as the Assistant Principal actively encourage students to take control of their learning. | ownership of need to learn with students |
| compartmentalised according to age | Learning is mainly compartmentalised except for 'gifted' students who take accelerated programs. But the 'compartments' break down in the Learning Centre. | links vertically and horizontally between age groups |
| what to think | The principal strongly encourages an orientation to 'how to think'. | how to think |
| needs of organisation | Some teachers express concern at the controlling and limiting effect of SACE on the curriculum. | desires of the individual |
| authority decides where, when, why and how | The school seems to be a fair way from empowering learners in this way. | learner is empowered to decide where, when, why, how |
| failures are separated from successes | Several staff expressed awareness of the negative effects of failure. | emphasis on encouragement |
| reactive | To a large extent [inevitably] dominated by SACE. | proactive |
| educates and trains for short term | Difficult to evaluate. Plenty of emphasis on finding jobs etc – but this is more 'short term'. | educates for employability in the long-term |
| work-based | The principal encourages a 'life-based' approach | life-based |
| inward looking | A sense that the school is starting to be more outward looking. There is not a great deal of contact with the local community, but members help in the Learning Centre, students take units at TAFE. | outward looking |
| learning satisfies the present | Difficult to evaluate – varies with the different school programs. | learning prepares for the future |
| received wisdom | Some teachers believe that they must impart 'wisdom', but this is not the case in all areas. | fun, participative, involving |

Caroline Chisholm College is different from Birdwood in many ways, particularly in its location in the western suburbs of Melbourne, in the ethnic backgrounds of its students and in the extent to which Lifelong Learning is fundamental to the school community.

CAROLINE CHISHOLM CATHOLIC COLLEGE

A Safe House for Learning How to Learn

Site and Administrative Information

This secondary school is situated in Melbourne's western suburbs in the heart of a generally low-income area characterised by high levels of drug-related and juvenile crime. The college environment contrasts markedly with these circumstances, which do not seem to impinge on the school or its reputation. It is a multi-campus college on two main sites, not far apart. The college deals with these external challenges in an outstanding way. There is a strong sense of the school as a refuge in a prevailing social climate of disadvantage and adversity.

The visit was paid to the senior campus in October 2001, where upwards of 500 students were in Years 11 and 12. Twenty-one students were interviewed in small groups ranging from two to six, and each interview lasted about three-quarters of an hour, in a quiet and private conference room. (A previous visit had been made by other members of the LLL team, attending an administrative meeting, and has been separately reported.)

Girl 1: 'It's a really big school, but it feels like a big community - like, it's got all different nationalities, and I just feel comfortable in it. And if you feel comfortable you learn better.'

Girl 2: 'I know it's a learning environment but it's also an environment with a lot of extra-curricular activities you can get involved in - to make your interest in school increase. It makes a big difference.'

It gives you a sense of safety, and increases your experience. What else does it do?

Girl 2: It sort of moulds you to get ready for the outside world - work experience to prepare you for the big world.

Boy 1: When you're walking along the corridor, Year 7s aren't scared to say hello or look at you. That's a big change. When I was in Year 7, it was like you were scared because they were bigger than us. Pushy. Pains. Now we realise what they went through. It's just easier for us to get along with everyone in the college, and there hasn't been fights or anything. There hasn't been a fight for ages. Back then there used to be one every recess.

What's caused the change do you think?

Boy 1: People are probably opening up to each other, and stuff like that, and plus you're getting more involved with the junior and seniors, like in Rock Eisteddfods and stuff like that.

Boy 2: And the Bullying policy they introduced last year.

Boy 1: They introduced it but there's no need for it anymore.

Boy 3: There's no excuse for not knowing nearly everyone because you have plenty of chances to interact with people of different year levels.

Boy 2: And there's a buddy program for induction. When you're in Grade 6 you get a letter from a Year 10 student welcoming you to the school.

Boy 3: Even in the library now, if a Year 7 has a problem with his work, he wouldn't hesitate to ask you if you were sitting next to him to help him with his problem.

The School and Its Community

Is this a very multicultural school?

Boy: Very. But it's great. You look around a classroom and everyone is in together. They don't sit around in corners in groups - we're all mixed up together.

Boy: Community service is compulsory. Year 12s go and read to kids in primary schools, Ozanam House, Amnesty International, 40-hour famine appeals, the community comes to watch the students' concerts - definitely an open door school. They have signs out the front all the time - our art show is open, and people come in.

Boy: We've got a community centre down the road, and we go down there - put on shows, concerts, a band plays for them. We advertise in the local newspaper. We get a fair crowd - when we do our own productions here, they come in off the streets and have a look at them.

Course arrangements

The senior campus follows a fairly standard approach to VCAA Years 11 and 12 curriculum, including TAFE courses and modules being followed by students for cross-credentialling and study credit. One variation was noted:

Girl: They've improved the curriculum. They've changed the structure of the Year 10 program, so that if you want to undertake a Year 11 subject earlier, they actually incorporate it into your studies at Year 10, instead of overtaking one of your Year 10 subjects.

Boy: Usually you'd miss out on a couple of periods every week to do your Year 11 classes and travelling between campuses ...

Girl: ... then you'd have to catch up, but they've changed it so you don't have to do that, and it's actually a part of your Year 10.

What for each of you is the most significant benefit for you in terms of the way the school treats you in terms of learning?

Boy: They've got the best teachers, who really know their subject - a big teacher plus.

Girl 1: We get along well with our teachers, generally: teaching just doesn't stop in the classroom: Like in most schools you might be taught something in the classroom and it stops there. But in this school, if you have problems you can always approach a teacher without hesitating.

Girl 2: The wide range of subjects offered and the availability of them - I don't think there's been a time when we haven't got subjects we wanted - between co-ordinators and teachers, we always manage to get our preferences. 97 per cent of the people.

Student government

The core of the school's response to Lifelong Learning amongst its students is in the arena of student government, notably a strong, active and powerful Students' Representative Council (SRC). Unlike some bodies in other schools, this one works, and is totally supported by both students and staff. The power is real and far-reaching - student participation in policy-making and management is fostered through 'executives' which work in different areas, and extends from grounds and buildings management to events management of a more conventional kind.

The majority of the students interviewed were members of the SRC, and their commitment to it, and their sense of its efficacy in making the school a dynamic and responsible learning community, was too striking to be insincere and mere lip-service.

The principal mentioned that government at this school works by proposal. Can you tell me what he meant?

Boy: If we want something done, we've got to back it up with reasons. Like, say for example, we want a formal to occur, we've got to put a proposal forward, outline what's going to happen, what things will be set up, and with that proposal teachers and management decide whether or not to put it through. They have a team set up made up of heads of campuses.

Do you reckon it works? Do you feel satisfied with the way the school responds to this?

General agreement:

Girl: If the proposals are reasonable and they can be balanced against the other demands of the school, we get them through. If there's enough student support behind it, sure.

How do you garner student support?

Girl: Surveys, talk about it with your friends, advertising - it depends on the issue really.

Tell me about the SRC.

Boy: There's a representative from each class and we have a day at the start of each year where all the class SRCs get together and vote for executives which sit at board meetings and discuss issues which are related to the entire school [7-12].

Can you give me some examples?

Boy: The setting up of the cafeteria, for example, which recently opened. And now we're running a project for the women in East Timor, trying to help them out a bit. There was a conference that some of the teachers and students attended and we decided that would be a good initiative to take on, for the next couple of years. With materials and things. Materials, buttons, threads - money for them would be useless.

What's the main strength of the SRC?

Boy 1: Team work. Definitely.

How does that show up in the way it works?

Boy 2: It like makes the whole school into one big team. They all group together to achieve an outcome. We're all contributing different opinions but we're all representing someone else. Helping each other achieve something, that goal that they want.

Can you give me an example?

Boy 1: Last year, with the air-conditioners at St John's. We've been working on it for several years but finally last year we got it off the ground. They had ceiling fans, and in the summer months it gets very hot - people pulling off their ties and stuff. We went round and saw how other schools manage air conditioning and finally it's happened.

Boy 2: The SRC is a backbone in the way the school sees itself as a total community.

Learning how to Learn

In attempting to tap into students' development of metacognitive skills – planning, evaluating learning, setting realistic goals, modelling, and knowing one's strengths and weaknesses - one question worked particularly well with all six groups: 'How do you think you learn best?' The selection of responses below could be replicated from most of the groups. The emphasis on class discussion is obviously very strong in this school, and there can be no doubt of the students' acceptance of it, and understanding of the ways in which it helped them to focus on their learning and develop the metacognitive abilities.

The key issue of teacher-student relationships (of which more below) was referred to by almost all the interviewees, and never in less than strong positive terms.

How do you think you learn best?

Boy 1: Usually in a discussion group - you know, when there's been work set out, you've done that work, and then the whole class discusses it - as long as everyone takes it seriously and no one stuffs around. I reckon that's the best way because you get to hear individual's ideas, and you get to learn from that, or discuss an issue with them.

Boy 2: It works for humanities subjects. As well as English and R.E., it gets applied in economics a lot. The teacher can tell you where the different opinions come from, as well as maybe say which one is right.

Boy 1: Or if the teacher's really one on one with you, explaining about the topic you're doing - you can ask questions without feeling pressured by other pupils in the class. The more of that the better.

Do you ever get to set your own goals or are you totally driven by a syllabus or course of study?

Girl: Yes, I do, I set my own goals because ... sometimes a bit in my head, sometimes on paper ... on paper are the ones I'd like to forget but I have to follow. My goals which I'm writing down, which are separate from the school's goals.

Can you give me an example?

Girl: To get a certain score for example -and the school doesn't tell you what score to get. And to get better marks or trying to improve in this area when I'm not doing so well.

How do you learn best?

Girl: When I motivate myself, and that's what gives me like the push to try and do well, and I think 'Yeah, I want to do this when I leave school', and I started thinking about universities, etcetera, and that motivates me to maybe start revising earlier - find motivation from somewhere and I try and work on that.

Boy: Work experience and things like that is important, letting you know what you want to do. And at this school they really want you to know what you want to do, but not just choose subjects which actually limit you to just what you actually want to do at the end.

Girl: In Malta, they're [teachers] very strict. And if you go to them for help, they won't give you any help. The class finishes and that's it. It's very different here.

Do they do this spontaneously?

Girl: They offer. The teachers often say 'If you need extra help, come and see me' - some of my teachers, even on holiday times, they will say 'If you feel like you want to come and see me, I'll be here at such and such a time, and we can discuss whatever problem you having'. They really help you - I mean, obviously some teachers more than others, that have the time, but they give you their time to help you. As long as you're putting in the effort you'll get something else from that.

Do you feel you could challenge them if you thought they were wrong?

Girl: If they're wrong, they accept it, and they tell the class. Most teachers are like that.

What are the ways in which you think you learn best?

Girl: OK, when a teacher teaches I usually like to make sure that I'm using everything - like I can hear them, I can see what they're doing, they're giving me notes so I can go back. I like that. That's the way I like to be taught. Like they'll go up, they write the notes, you copy it, and they explain the notes, and you listen, you just kind of ... you're activating all the senses so that it's like an all-round thing.

With discussion on the end of it?

Girl: Depending on the subject.

Boy: I like that thing with the senses - that's really good. I think you've got to cover a lot of different grounds when teaching because obviously different people learn in different ways. I think for me the best way I learn is mostly verbal - I find it best for me when I'm listening and comprehending and then after that once I understand it, that's when I find it useful to put in the notes. Because then when I put in the notes, I can understand them as I go, in a logical way.

When you say verbal, do you mean 'oral'?

Boy: Yeah, talking, interacting.

Skill Sets beyond the Basic

All but one of the students interviewed had a part-time job, some more than one.

Communication skills

Tell me what you think you are learning out of the experience of running the restaurant and doing the TAFE hospitality course.

Girl: Money management, customer service skills, communication skills in the kitchen: I've already got my responsible service certificate with alcohol. All different kinds of learnings - waitressing, food and beverage - last year it was all cooking.

How does it relate to your life in school?

Girl: Once you improve your communication at work, you're more communicative at school - teamwork skills - you're good at working with other people, you've also got responsibilities.

What do you think it's giving you as a person?

Girl: Experience - knowledge of what it's really like out there.

Boy: I've just started a job at MacDonalds, to earn some extra money. I work out back, cooking and stuff, but occasionally I interact with the customers. So I'm learning things about dealing with other people, interacting in the workplace, and then interacting at school. When you start real work you need skills to get into it.

Information literacy

Despite the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the school's catchment area, all but two of the students had computers at home.

Girl: I chose IT because I sort of thought since we are going into technological advances, and computers are becoming more important all the time, and the sort of work I hope to be getting into I'd probably be using a lot of computers. So far it's going really well. There are two sides to it - IT Systems and IT Processing and Management, and I'm doing Processing and Management. I'm not always on computers - you know, it's a mix of theory and practical.

Which side do you prefer?

Girl: For me - I know it sounds really weird - but I like the theory: for me it's easier for me not to go on the computer and do a flow diagram. I like the theory side - learning about what it is and how it works, and then going on and making it work. Solid grounding. I want to know what I'm doing first and then get on to a computer.

Do you think IT will become compulsory for everyone?

Girl: It is in Years 7 to 10. Computers are everywhere - even in the hospitality industry.

Boy: I have a computer at home. Just about everyone does. If you don't have a computer now it's like you're ten years behind - you'd be playing catch-up and that's too hard.

Boy 1: Computers are everything now, and we know how to use them. I've got a computer at home, Internet, everything. It will be compulsory in schools within the next five, ten years for sure. If you can't do it you'll be at a disadvantage.

Boy 2: Not compulsory. I reckon you'll be doing it a lot more like handwriting today. We can send work to a teacher on the net, some do, but most teachers prefer the actual hard copy.

Boy 1: Some students carry laptops as well and hand their work in on floppy disc - teacher wants to print it, they can go to the library and print it.

Boy 2: Everyone's got their own account - even if you don't do IT, you can log in, you've got your own folder where you can save anything you want. Everyone has to have one - it's given to them: an ID number and a password.

Have you got a computer at home?

Girl: Yeah, I have two.

How much time would you spend on it out of school?

Girl: A few hours each night usually. Some of it on the internet, and some of it just playing around with the software on it, and then others just for work.

Do you submit work on it?

Girl: Yes. But most of the work has to be done in class, so you submit other stuff just to check, make sure you're on the right track, you're practising the right things, and you're doing the right things. But other than that we don't do any formal work and then hand it in on line. Usually it's all hard copy, and you print it out, and they see it and correct it.

Boy: They're really tightening down on authenticity, so that's why a lot of our major assessment is done in class.

Self concept

Oneself and one's learning

What's the way you as individuals learn best?

Boy 1: Experience. Definitely personal experience. I reckon if you experience something for yourself, it's like you learn from your mistakes. I mean, I've had three jobs now, and school - seven years of high school - I know when I'm going to do an assignment, from failures in the past I know what I have to do to make it better.

Boy 2: Like staff. They don't just put the work on the board, and we copy it straight down. They actually show us, using examples, day to day things which helps us learn more and understand.

Boy 3: Personal experience, responsibilities they put on you, assignments on reasonable deadlines, just putting your own effort into the research, and writing it up and putting it into format - that all helps you.

Confidence

Can you see any connections between your part-time jobs and helping your life at school?

Girl 1: I think it does - for me, it's like an outlet, and also you'll get some ... it's more sort of a people-relations thing, because the majority of the jobs we would work in are sort of retail, packers type jobs - none of us are scientists or brain surgeons here. So generally the part-time jobs give you that outlet - it's also a freedom, because you've got some income coming in, you're not having to go to your parents all the time, and it just gives you more confidence, which then gives you the ability to do your school work better.

Girl 2: I'm doing a hospitality course at TAFE, so it will be a credential as well as an experience.

Boy: I've got a part-time job at KFC. And I'm into psychology. So I interact with people when I serve them, and then when I come back to school, it will also help me with the people at school as well - because you're working with people in general - it's all interacting, it's all linked, so you gain more knowledge from the more experience you have. That's my perspective.

What does membership of the SRC give you, personally?

Girl 1: Basically it gives you that confidence, and you have that feeling that it's not a power thing - it's not a power issue - but you're making a contribution back to the school, and you can have an opinion, and you can help other people's situations - do you know what I mean? They come to you with their problems and you're able to act as a mediator between the school and them. So it sort of gives you that sort of confidence.

Are some members more confident than others? Do you try and raise each other's confidence in any formal way?

Girl 2: What you put in you get out. It has to work that way. We don't do it formally - it's a very sort of friendly atmosphere. So it's more informal. It just sort of rubs off. Like, everyone's helping each other but it's not because 'oh, you're not as confident as me I'll help you.' It's just because we happen to be friends.

Students and Staff as a Community

This line of enquiry produced, as mentioned before, a unanimously positive response from all the students. In four and a half hours of interview, only one teacher was mentioned as being less than a fully-committed member of the school community, and the negative, gently expressed, was accompanied by an explanation (some family difficulty).

The other aspect which stands out is the strength of the community of learning, and the recognition and understanding of exactly what makes the difference at this school, when it is compared with others the students knew about from their peer contacts.

Girl: I have a friend at another school who's having panic attacks because her friendship group is so awful. At this school, we're very friendly people. We're accepting of differences. I mean, if you go out there, the cultural differences are huge, but there's no problem with that. You'll never see any sort of racism, or sexism even. There's nothing really out there that's going to affect it. And the teaching staff and everyone contribute to that.

Boy 1: The best thing about this school - I'm not knocking teachers or anything, but it's really your friends. They're going through the same thing you're going through, and they offer you moral support and it's a good environment to be in. You always know that someone's going to care about you, pick you up if you're stuck along the way somewhere. I like that feeling. We form study groups - I've got a couple of friends doing the same subjects, and we help each other out, study for it together, talk about it together, and that's good as well.

Boy 2: Formal support from the staff - that's always there as well.

Boy 1: They give support - no, they offer support. For anyone who feels reluctant in front of the whole class, they make themselves available. My Business Studies teacher - I just tell him I'm coming, he doesn't ask any questions, and he'll stay with me for an hour at a time if I need it, answer my questions and help me with outcomes or anything I need.

Boy 3: And in Info. Tech, one of the teachers, just opens one of the rooms, and waits and helps you when you come.

Boy 2: And teachers have e-mails now and some people e-mail their questions. Some teachers even chat on ICQ to help them with their problems after school. It's just their availability that sometimes makes learning easier than in class.

Girl: Other schools, you go in, you do your work, you leave. Definitely not a community. The relationship between the teacher and the student is important - because if you feel you can't ask for help then there's something wrong isn't there, in a school where you should be learning?

Girl: I genuinely love learning. I don't love school. I love learning for learning's sake, so for me the way I learn can be very different in different classes. I can learn straight from a text-book. It doesn't bother me. I can learn from other students. I can learn from different teaching styles - as long as a teacher is willing ... I hate it when there are teachers who just teach straight to the middle band, and if you're above it or if you're below it - tough luck! That doesn't happen really in this school ...

Boy: It exists though.

Girl: What?

Boy: It exists.

Girl: Well, it exists in this school, but it's not really really bad. Do you know what I mean? And there are programs for either side of the spectrum - there are, there are really good programs. I know. I was in one for a while. At least they give us that sort of opportunity.

The key interventions by staff

Open and adult modelling

Would you ever feel free to challenge them [staff]?

Boy 1: All the time. If I get a grade back that I'm not happy with and I think I deserved higher, I can get to ask them, get them to explain why, discuss with them why it wasn't as high as I expected. And they don't get offended or anything- they always try to explain why.

Boy 2: I wouldn't say challenging them - I'd say appealing to them to say where I went wrong or getting their viewpoint on what could have been better.

Boy 1: They give us an open view of what they learned in uni, and what they know and stuff like that.

Boy 3: They put themselves on our level so we understand - they make it so we interact with them, and know what we should. They actually explain it. Everyone is equal in the classroom.

Boy 2: You understand it better not if they treat you like a kid, and they're talking in adult terms, but they actually meet you in the middle - you feel like an adult and they feel like they're getting through to you. So you both meet in the middle and it's easier to understand.

Boy 1: Without telling you to grow up all the time, or something.

What is absolutely the best thing about this school for you?

Girl: I've never been asked that question before.

Boy: I think it's the relationships that are built ... I think more generally than specifically you build relationships with other students, teachers - so I'm not saying relationships are only built with students but with teachers as well. I think there's a really cohesive atmosphere - since Year 7 I've found I've been able to relate with a lot of teachers and that's what makes it different. I don't know how it is at other schools but I've found that and with my peers I've found you can really relate to a lot of them.

Girl: The atmosphere is laid-back - you can relate to the teachers. If you have a problem the teachers encourage you to approach them straight away, so it's like the fact that they're open, that's the best thing about it. And it's easier to learn if you're kind of on the same level as the teacher and you understand each other. Your relationships with your friends develop over the years, but you might not have the same teachers again. But every year they present you with the same open attitude - how 'if you need help, come to me', whatever. That's probably the best thing.

Individual attention

Boy 1: I feel as though we're taught individually instead of as a group. I mean, in Year 7 we were taught as a group, but in Year 8 we were taught individually - the teachers get to know you.

Boy 2: I think some teachers learn from us as well. I mean, for us to respect them, they need to respect us. If we have a group outing or something like that, during the holidays, if the teachers make an effort to get along with the students, then the students will make an effort to get along with the teacher.

Open-mindedness and exposure to reality

Boy 1: I went to the worst school in the area, and coming here was like a total culture change. The education here is really good and all the teachers are like really dedicated, making sure we learn not only the education that the Board of Studies stresses. My form room teacher last year, Mr *****, he really got it into us about what really happens in the real world and how we'll need to deal with those things.

Boy 2: And surprisingly the study guidelines he gave us really work - it's partly his personality.

Would you feel free to challenge something he said?

Both boys, simultaneously: All the time.

Boy 1: Especially in classes like English. And R.E. Things being said that you might not necessarily believe. This is a Christian school and I'm an atheist myself, so practically everything that's said, I'm having a go at - and if I'm wrong, or I can't prove myself, I admit it.

Boy 2: He's pretty open-minded and always thinks about it, and doesn't really mind so long as we do it appropriately. Great interaction with the students.

Boy 1: Sometimes teachers ask you to challenge them.

Girl: You have to think about it first before you make a point, you have to make sure it's valid enough so they don't come up with a stronger point that challenges you straight away.

Boy 2: Like some teachers would say for instance 'there's a certain paragraph in a book and I think this means this, but you're free to argue with me.' And that not only gives students the opportunity to argue, but allows them to think, allows them to go further with their thinking, and not just 'oh this is what this paragraph means, and that's it', you know what I mean? Maybe that's what teachers want them to do - they want their students to go beyond what they're teaching them. To go to their best ability, extend them.

Learning is fun

Girl 1: IT is my favourite thing. Sometimes there's a bit too much theory, and I would prefer practical, but that's usually with everything, because then you're actually putting into practice what you've been taught. So in general IT for me is probably my favourite thing. It's fun! It's fun!

Girl 2: Well, like, from 7 to 10 I wasn't very outgoing but since last year I've kind of developed a personality where I'm more open, and extrovert kind of thing, and I think that, having a personality like that, I find it really easy to work in a fun environment, and with a teacher who wants to make something exciting for you, fun for you. That's kind of the way I learn the best. If things are fun, I can do it. But just book-reading and that kind of stuff - it's all right but you don't really want to do it. I work best when the teacher can have a joke with you, but also tell you what you really need to do. But as long as there's a balance there, I think it's easy and it's good, and it works.

Fun, but also hard work:

What do you intend to do when you finally leap the VCE hurdle?

Boy: Party for a year.

The next school, Tallangatta Secondary College is in a rural setting. It is further from a large metropolitan centre than Birdwood. The school seems to be well advanced on the lifelong learning journey.

TALLANGATTA SECONDARY COLLEGE

You get to think for yourself and not have the teachers think for you.

Site and Administrative Information

Tallangatta Secondary College is a government co-educational secondary school for years 7 to 12. It is a small rural school with approximately 350 students. The slogan: 'Big enough to deliver – small enough to care' provides an accurate description of the school. It is big enough to offer a wide range of programs, including VET offerings, but the visitor quickly becomes aware of a strong sense that staff and students alike care about each other. The principal expressed a feeling of obligation to help every student – particularly those who have difficulty fitting into the school community.

The school is located in a farming community with the large centre of Albury-Wodonga about 40 kilometres away. The school supports a bus service to enable students to take advantage of this centre. Some students from Albury-Wodonga choose to attend Tallangatta Secondary College. Other students are bussed considerable distances to attend the school. In spite of these distance factors, there is a strong sense of community. One teacher described this in relation to Saturday sport, in which almost everyone participates: 'In Melbourne, if you live in a suburb, say, 15 minutes away, it's a world away. Whereas here, there's distance, but really it's not. It comes together every Saturday. I think that's the community notion of the school.' The school is very loyal to the community. All school business is done locally and in spite of the tendering process, work at the school is always given to a local business.

Some of the impetus to have a 'lifelong learning' orientation came from a need to increase student enrolments by making it a more relevant experience for all students. The school went into a partnership with TAFE. A technology centre with very sophisticated welding equipment was built. The principal describes an 'attitude shift' that occurred in the community – one where the school is regarded in a very positive way.

Students are actively involved in the running of the school. In 2000 a Charter or Code of Co-operation was developed by a process that involved all students. Walking around the school it is clear that discipline does not have to be imposed – the students have ownership of this charter. In 2002 a new charter will be developed because by that stage the turnover of students in the school will mean that there will be too few students left who developed the first charter. This spirit of co-operation means that there can be a lot of freedom. Although there are means of tracking where students are throughout the day, the students realise that they have the teachers' trust, and they respect it.

Course arrangements

For a small school there is a wide range of sport and music options. LOTE is Indonesian, which is taught through to Unit 4 VCE.

VET programs are available and seem to be popular. The school offers Certificate I in Engineering, Certificate 2 in Hospitality, Sport and Recreation, Laboratory Skills, Horse Studies and Furnishings. Several of these programs are offered in co-operation with Wodonga TAFE. There is a 'vertical' timetabling arrangement for Years 8 to 10 which

enables a very wide range of curriculum offerings. The aim seems to be to provide as much choice as possible for students at all levels.

Learning how to Learn

At Tallangatta, learning is based on the 'quality learning' program of Plan, Do, Study, Act, developed by the Australian Quality Council. The principal pointed out that in traditional schools most emphasis is placed on the 'do' and students have little involvement in the 'plan' or the 'study', and usually no part of the 'act', because that is when the teacher does the correction. The correction, in a traditional school, is a bit of a mystery, and students are usually only interested in what mark they got. They are not interested in how they could improve their performance or implications it may have for planning further learning. This is not the case at Tallangatta, where students are involved in all stages of learning.

As an example of the Plan, Do, Study, Act approach, the LOTE teacher gave her students the CSF outcomes and asked the students to rewrite them in a way that was meaningful to them. The LOTE teacher pointed out many benefits of doing this. It gives students a clear purpose – they know where they are heading. While some students can work ahead at their own direction, the teacher has more time to help students who need more guidance. On another occasion this LOTE teacher encouraged her class to write a text book on a difficult point of Indonesian grammar. Some students complained that this involved a lot more work than having the teacher prepare a work sheet, but as the teacher said, the activity involved a lot more reflecting, moving on and adjusting what had been learned – skills that are 'lifelong' and transferable to other curriculum areas. Students learn how to break down tasks into components by using Lotus diagrams. There were a lot of examples of students transferring skills of this kind from one class to another.

Staff talk with students about learning and the students are exposed to ideas such as Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. Students are encouraged to think about how they learn and what are their strengths.

Some of the students' comments reflected these approaches. For example, a Year 10 student in an Industry and Enterprise class said:

In this class you get to make your own decisions. You get to think for yourself and not have the other teachers think for you. That's what I like about it.

And some Year 12 students said:

In English they've changed the course around, so, instead of the teacher teaching you, you're learning for yourself. So they're pushing you more to do the stuff yourself, even to correcting your own work as a group.

Skill Sets beyond the Basic

The school makes use of the Mayer Key Competencies. For example, for one class the competencies are outlined in their diaries. But as one teacher pointed out, for students these are very high order concepts. He said:

You've got to break it down to something very, very simple. We do refer to them [*the Key Competencies*] – especially the Communication area, we certainly talk about problem solving and they're all involved with using technology. Team work and organisation is an absolute key these days. But I've got to get it out of the kids, they don't offer it easily. When they write an application I make sure that we refer to these sorts of things. They've got to learn that that's important. The generic competencies are there happening for these kids [*students in the Industry and Enterprise class*].

As the teacher pointed out, some students have opportunities to develop generic competencies such as 'Working with others and in teams' through activities such as participation in the Students' Representative Council or school productions. Other students described by this teacher as 'isolationist type kids who don't want to contribute to a group because they're worried about their ability' gain these competencies from their experience in the work place.

Some Year 9 students seemed aware that they were learning special generic skills:

You can achieve things – not like a normal English class, you can actually see what you're doing. Like, just improving your skills.

You don't have to write all the time. You can plan and get things happening, and see a result.'

There is a lot of group work. In the senior centre, Year 11 and 12 students were working in informal groups, helping each other. There are other more formal opportunities to work in groups, as described by these Year 12 students.

We had to do group projects to improve the school. Our program was to get the silver tables and chairs – there's some just out there. It was to improve the school. So we organised to get those. We had to plan how we were going to do it. What we had to do: how much money it was going to cost, who we had to involve. We went to staff meetings, Council meetings. Then we had to ring up all the places to get them in. At the end of it, we assessed ourselves. How well we thought we'd gone.

And how did you think you'd gone?

Our group actually didn't work all that well together – so we sort of gave ourselves a B. But that we actually got them here, as the teacher pointed out, was probably better.

Other students were aware of generic skills they learnt through VET courses and on work placements:

What do you feel you've gained from having done that VET program?

J: A lot actually – personal skills. Knowing how to handle a situation. Last year we did job seeking skills. It was good. We learnt through work experience. We did one day a week for the whole year [*this is the Industry and Enterprise program*]

K: We learnt how to communicate – how to talk on phones properly, writing job applications. It just helps you when you're trying to find a job.

Information literacy

Information literacy seems to be an integral part of most classes. Students are comfortable with accessing information in many different ways. There is a strong focus on finding out for themselves rather than relying on the teacher as an information provider. There is also a conscious attempt to encourage the students to become familiar with the Internet. Teachers seem aware of the need to introduce these approaches gradually and to plan use of the web so that students will access information without overwhelming frustration. As one teacher described:

What I actually did . . . was that they studied a model, and all the tasks were on the Intranet so all they had to do was go to the Intranet and get the information. For that particular task, they actually had to present part of their response as a web page as well. So by setting it up as a web page gave them a sample of how it could be presented and set up at the same time.

Students learn how to use the Intranet and email in a responsible way. Indeed, use of email to provide assessment feedback can encourage more reflection and formative responses rather than the ‘what did I get out of 10’ kind of approach.

Questioning, reasoning, evaluating

Students are encouraged to reflect on what they have done. For example, the Industry and Enterprise teacher describes how he encourages students to reflect about their work placements. I asked him how he helps the students to reflect:

The diary. Through their diary. I make that an assessment task. They come back on Tuesday and what they’ve got to be able to tell me is what they actually did for the day. It’s a writing exercise in terms of being able to quite clearly write what they’ve done. Then they’ve got to try to write down, what they actually learnt. Sometimes it’s repetitive – they didn’t learn much new. But quite often there’s a new skill. Now it doesn’t come to them like that [*snaps fingers*]. You’ve got to talk to them about it.

Students are also encouraged to evaluate or audit their skills so that they are aware of the skills and knowledge they have.

They have got lots of skills, but they don’t know how to audit the skills that they have achieved. You know, you’ve got a farm kid who helps Dad on the weekend – I mean, if you did a skills audit on that it’d be enormous! So I try and break down their tasks that they’ve done into smaller parcels and then push it in front of them and say, you just did that – do you realise you did all those steps? Like a kid said to me the other day, I took a cutting deck off a [*brand name*] rider mower. That’s all he wrote. I said, how do you do that? And I got my pen. And he said, you do this, you take these bolts – and I said, what bolts, tell me exactly what you’ve got to do, so that if I was going to do it . . .and we wrote down 19 steps.

Self concept

There is much recognition of the importance for students to have a positive picture of themselves – as learners, and as members of the community. There are many ways that the school encourages the development of a positive self concept. There was a lot of discussion about ways students are helped to see themselves as good learners, even if they have experienced feelings of failure in the past. Two main ways in which this is done is through a special learning caravan and through work placements coupled with opportunities for reflection such as the Industry and Enterprise class already mentioned.

The caravan was set up six or seven years ago, based on the Bridges model of reading intervention. But it now has a very much broader use. Students can be time-tabled to go to the caravan or they can go there from a class if they feel they need one-to-one help. Students decide, through negotiation, to participate in the program provided in the van. A staff member is in charge of the van, but she cannot be present all of the time because she has other teaching commitments, so a School Support Officer is employed. There is also some parental support, although with both parents working in most households it is difficult to get parental support. Other students give a lot of the assistance – sometimes these are students who were themselves helped in the caravan.

The teacher in charge of this program, points out the impact that confidence in one's learning can bring:

We are not just supporting the learning needs of the students but also the social and emotional and a lot of the other needs of the students. A lot of the kids who have come through our program are the toughest kids in the school. Perhaps a lot of that toughness comes from so many years of failure that they have developed a lot of these strategies and this shell so that they don't get hurt by failing again, and again and again. . . .

I don't believe that we can address a lot of the actual learning until we get underneath the other needs of the students, until we get underneath the behavioural problems, and underneath the emotional needs and underneath the social problems and underneath all of the self esteem issues. You need to be able to establish a relationship with them. We certainly do have interventionist programs and so forth and we do make differences with their learning, but a lot of the energy that we put with the kids is actually put into developing a relationship and establishing strategies to network a little more closely with the school and to feel more comfortable where they are and to try and overcome some of the barriers that a lot of these kids have in place and I think that many of those things aren't measurable.

We work always on the positives. We don't allow students to put each other down. We don't allow students to put themselves down. We work on a supportive scaffold thing; where they are at now and just taking a risk and analysing what they have done and taking another risk and analysing where they have gone to from there. So we just try and provide them with, basically, lots and lots of support and nurturing.

Along with this kind of nurturing students are taught learning strategies such as processing tasks like taking a task and breaking it down, or organisational strategies (such as flow charts) and communication strategies. Students are encouraged to bring work from class to the van.

Students are encouraged to reflect on and acknowledge their strengths

I think that one of the things with many of these students is understanding that just because they may learn differently from other kids, it doesn't mean that they are wrong. I try and work on getting them to recognise what their strengths are and use their strengths to try and overcome their weaknesses. So if they are strongly visual people and they rely on flow charts, they might rely on pictures and they need to draw diagrams of things, to use them to memorise facts. If they are kinaesthetic types of people, they use body motions. I work on just getting them to understand what is going to help them learn the best and that that is OK.

This approach is viewed as a part of 'lifelong learning':

We also try to get them to realise that this isn't a quick fix thing, they are always going to be learning, there is always going to be opportunities for them to learn and if they can understand how they learn now, then that is going to benefit them in ten years time and twenty years time and they will still be able to use the things that they are good at to overcome the things that they find difficult.

One might imagine that there could be a stigma attached to working in the special caravan, but the school seems to have successfully prevented this by having students in there for a whole block -- not being withdrawn from class. The learning van is well regarded. There are social events, and students who received help in the past return as mentors for younger students. The culture of the learning caravan is congenial and cohesive. It is important for these students not to feel isolated. There is a strong sense of belonging.

Thus some students develop strong self-concepts as learners by working in the caravan. Some gain confidence by participating in work placements where they can achieve success without having to display poor literacy skills. The Industry and Enterprise teacher stressed this:

Traditional schooling that we talk about has ruined these kids' confidence. For reasons of their literacy skills – it's purely their literacy skills. When they're asked to do anything in any class they have to write it. And when they can't write it they are told off and they are made to feel that they're 'dumb'. All we're doing here is undoing the damage that's been done beforehand. It's pretty sad in some ways that that's what happens. But until we can get kids who've got literacy, we're still going to have the problem.

As well as undertaking work placements outside the school, these students can opt to run the school canteen – a \$55,000 operation. They run it as a business.

The following is from a conversation with two Year 10 students in an 'Industry and Enterprise' class. They would normally find any form of written work quite challenging. There is a suggestion that they feel reasonably comfortable and have not needed to have good academic records to feel accepted and confident.

What sorts of things do you do in the classroom here? What are you doing now?

C: We're doing some projects, like job description things. We've got to say what's the job we're doing now, and write it out. Take pictures of what we do.

So it encourages you to do a report of the work you do on Fridays?

C: We're doing a curriculum vitae. . . .

Are you both the kind of people – like – school's not for them?

C: School work?

D: Yeah.

And is that the way you've felt most of the time you've been in the school?

C: At the start it was all right, but I got sick of it.

What kinds of things did you get sick of?

C: Well – Maths and English was pretty – not my favourites.

Is there anything you've liked about what this school does?

C: Probably just the people. They're great people. I get along well with them.

F: They've targeted us with this class, and a few others to really try to get our CVs and whatever else up-to-date so we've got like a foot in the door when we go for interviews and stuff.

Another student from this group had gained confidence from working on his grandfather's farm:

On the farm I learnt heaps. My Pa – he sort of looked after me a bit. He made me feel good, cos I feel like I've actually achieved something.

That's terrific. How did he do that?

He always made sure I had stuff to do. So I wasn't just sitting around doing nothing. He's getting a bit older now, so I did jobs that he used to do. So I feel like I've helped out and actually done something.

Another way in which students develop positive self-concepts is through a special sports leaders program, which was mentioned by some Year 12 students:

B: You work with younger students in sporting situations. You're the coach. You can take a whole team, a couple of you, or just one of you and take them onto another level. For example, I took softball for two or three years and you coach them and you organise them. Like you make sure they're at the right place at the right time. Make sure they've got all their skills, and you do all the time management and stuff. So most of the sports programs are actually run by students.

A: A lot of coaching.

B: A lot of coaching, yes.

So what are the things you get out of doing that?

A: Probably just confidence.

B: Yeah – more confident in yourself.

A: I wasn't really part of the program, but you learn a lot more yourself. Because you're out there doing it rather than having a teacher standing there preaching. And you're also getting experience for the future and stuff like that.

Oneself and One's Learning

The school respects the need for students at all levels to study in depth areas that they find important. Students from Year 8 upwards talked about trying things out. Much of the program involved forms of work experience because this made many students feel that they were doing something worthwhile. This philosophy was summarised in a conversation with the principal:

This notion of the broad general education to Year 10 is, I think, a thing of the past. I don't believe it's sustainable, and I don't believe it's what the kids want. You've got to be able to give them some in depth area where they're not burning their bridge if they say, 'No, that really wasn't for me. I'd like to try something else.' That's why we're finding a lot of Year 10 students are doing the one unit of VCE and getting right into it, or VET. And seeing whether it's the area or industry they actually want to be in.

By providing these sorts of opportunities we're finding that the traditional discipline problems that schools have at Year 10 – and I put it down to boredom and lack of challenge – has gone. Kids are far more focused in terms of where they want to go.

The school was about to introduce a 'Personal Best' program for Year 9 students which the principal described as a way of overcoming 'that dip in the curve in terms of student engagement' that often occurs in Year 9. Students are asked to learn a new skill – they choose what this will be. They don't need to learn it on the school premises. They choose, they organise how they will learn it. They need to be able to demonstrate it six months later.

'Seamless' transition from primary to secondary

These approaches fit in with the school's 'seamless curriculum'. As a member of the Tallangatta cluster, the school took part in research into reforming the middle years of schooling that was conducted by Eddie Braggett and published in 1999. The curriculum is 'seamless' in a number of ways. Firstly in its fluid approach to transition.

The school (in co-operation with the cluster primary schools) has a middle years program, embracing Years 5 to 9. Staff from the secondary college meet with the staff from the feeder primary schools on a regular basis throughout the year. At one meeting attended there was discussion about curriculum material and about the best way to prepare primary students for 'short sharp pieces of work' in the 42 minute blocks of the secondary time-table. There was discussion about information literacy issues, such as note taking and of how to get upper primary students into habits that will help them in VCE. There had been a transition Information Day, where Year 6 students from the feeder schools had visited the secondary college (this is not a 'one off', as is the case with many primary to secondary arrangements – it had been held in the middle of the year). Other areas discussed were literacy issues, shadowing (where a secondary teacher is teamed with a primary teacher for a day and vice versa), bullying (with the aim of giving consistent messages across the cluster), drug education and feedback from a P – 12 curriculum day, an initiative of this group which has been held for the past four years.

In addition to the cluster group meeting there was a meeting of assistant principals of local primary and secondary schools hosted by Tallangatta Secondary College. As well as some issues discussed at the cluster meeting, other items included a special program for boys disengaged with school, a health issues program, issues concerning community – school relationships, outline of the 'personal best' program mentioned above, and discussion that students taking responsibility for their own learning (Plan, Do, Study, Act).

Once students come to the secondary college they spend only one semester in Year 7 groupings, then they move into a combined Year 7/8 structure which allows for flexible groupings and catering for students' independent needs.

'Seamless' transition from school to the world beyond

There is also a 'seamless' approach in the tracking of students who have left the school. There is information readily available from exercises that involved tracking students – for example, percentages of former students who remain in rural as distinct from urban areas and percentages of students who undertake further study or complete university. Along

with six other colleges, the school participated in a tracking project in partnership with the Upper Hume Community Health Services which focused on a particular cohort of students. Data were gathered about these students' school career and about employment, life style and further education for up to four years after leaving school. Involvement with work engages most students on pathways which they will 'try out' and then ultimately find one that will lead them to tertiary studies or the workforce.

The school's interest and concern for former students seemed to be encapsulated in a discussion that took place about a former student who had dropped out of an apprenticeship and was unemployed. The school felt a responsibility to counsel him.

'Seamless' relationship with the local community

As described elsewhere, the boundaries between the school and the rest of the community are transparent. Students at all levels work or investigate matters outside the physical borders of the school. There is also a lot of communication by telephone and internet. Staff send their children to the school, so the worlds of the school and the community are blended through family activities, particularly week end sport.

Values, Dispositions and Attitudes

From Year 7 onwards students are encouraged to think about their own particular attributes. The idea of multiple intelligences is accepted and students talk openly about their strengths and weaknesses in these areas. As one of the teachers said:

It is something that we are starting to look at, particularly with the Year 7s and 8s. One of the first things that we do with the Year 7 class is do a survey to see where their strengths are and we encourage the students to develop strength groups and when they are working on a project to incorporate within their strength group to bring in someone who is not strong in that area so that that person can have a different input into their project.

. . . The kids have lists of who has similar strengths to them and who has different strengths to them. So if we are working on a mathematical problem or a logic sort of problem, then the people who are musical or arty type of people they actually have to draw these people into their group so that they can maximise their chances at succeeding.

Staff and Staffing

There is what the principal describes as a 'no blame' mentality, which encourages staff to be innovative:

We worked very strongly on a no blame mentality about things. And the staff then gained some confidence. They tried things because they knew if it was a disaster they wouldn't be crucified because of it.

Staff are role models as learners. They are open about the fact that they are continuing to learn. They seem to be role models and facilitators rather than providers of knowledge. One of the teachers said:

One thing that really stuck out here as far as I am concerned is that the staff aren't frightened to let the kids know that they are learning new things too and to set an example regarding how ever long you have been doing something you are still always going to be learning something and you have always got to be willing to tackle new things.

Organisational Stresses and Pressures

Influences of high stakes assessment

One difficulty, according to some teachers, is the need to try to blend a student-centred in-depth approach to learning with the competitive outlook towards assessment which is strongly influenced by the high stakes at Year 12 and a mentality, possibly encouraged by parents' experiences as students, where the award is more important than the feedback. This was summed up by one of the teachers:

Certainly the students have not yet come away from the idea that the A or the grade is the thing that matters and I don't know if in reality they ever will. I think that it is so deeply entrenched in our society that it comes through from primary school, you know, you get one sticker or two stickers on your homework sheet.

This approach is unhelpful to the learning approaches encouraged in the school.

If schools place academic expectations of excellence on students then suddenly you have a whole group of students who don't bother to try any more because they know that they are never going to get there so what is the point? And so you just completely disengage them from learning. . . . The kids do expect a grade. If they get a piece of work back with just a written assessment on it they say, where is my grade? There is your grade, this is what you got. No, but it doesn't have an A or a B or a C on it, where is the grade?

But it was also noted that the lifelong learning skills acquired by students at this school will help them succeed at VCE in spite of the system.

Reluctance to Change

Of course not everyone will be swept up with enthusiasm to change habits that have been entrenched over many years. Although most teachers at Tallangatta seemed enthusiastic about the approaches to learning and their roles as facilitators and mentors, there were exceptions, as one teacher said:

The whole idea is that you don't force it down people's throats. It is a different approach and it is easier to adapt to some subjects and as I said, I was fully accepting of what I felt was the right philosophy to go. It is often very difficult to see how you can apply an innovation in a classroom. What I've started doing is I started doing bits and pieces before I took on the whole approach. In the finish the ones who will make it go ahead at school are the students. . . . Obviously some teachers take more from it than others and that is OK. As long as the kids are being exposed to it at some stage in at least one of their subjects, and then if they can transfer the skills, if the students benefit then they can transfer the skills themselves.

Burn-out

Most of the teachers seemed so committed to the school and to helping the students, it is inevitable that there will be 'burn-out'. Many teachers seemed to be living their work every minute of the day, and at weekends. The results of this, on the one hand, are invaluable. Students frequently said that the best thing about the school is that they feel they belong and that people care about them. Inevitably this takes its toll on teachers. The only obvious solution is more money so that there can be more teachers to take on these roles.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is a very significant part of the school. There is concern for all students and, as mentioned elsewhere, a belief that the school has an obligation to help every single student. There is a sense that it is a caring environment. Students care about each other – it does feel a bit like a large family. This may be helped by the fact that many staff send their children to the school.

There is a strong home group system and Year 11 and 12 students have their own senior centre. One teacher describes it:

Our Year 11s and 12s are predominantly housed there and that's where they can do private study. They gravitate back to that centre. It's big enough to handle our spare periods for those kids. There's always a teacher there on hand for assistance – sometimes a couple of teachers [*and, from observation, these are teachers who have their offices there, eg the careers co-ordinator*]

I spoke with some Year 12 students about the centre:

When I came in you were both working on something together. Does that happen quite a lot?

B: It does a fair bit, I think.

A: Especially in here [*the Year 11 and 12 Centre*] where you've got a chance to be in a group with friends. We've also got a room [*in the Centre*] where you can go if you want to be silent [*work in silence rather than helping each other*]. There are comfortable chairs where you can just sit and read if you want to. And they supply newspapers.

So does it work pretty well?

Yeah.

But pastoral care at Tallangatta goes a long way beyond setting up home groups or a special senior centre. There is a feeling of obligation to help every student, particularly those who have difficulty fitting into the school community. As the principal comments:

I've often argued that I don't believe there should be expulsion from schools. I believe whatever the situation is, we have to keep on trying. But we need the resources to do that. I can understand why, if they don't have the resources, schools find it very difficult to cater for kids who don't fit into the mainstream. And that, to me, is where the resourcing needs to be put. I don't care whether it's through the Department of Health, or whatever. Something has to be done to stop kids falling through the cracks. It might be that the mutual obligation has to be put back onto schools to provide the courses – not the old CES – because we're the ones who know.

This sense of belonging was endorsed by a couple of Year 12 students who had moved to Tallangatta from other schools when they were in Year 10:

If when you started in Year 7 or 8 someone had said to you, what do you think you'll be doing in four or five years' time, are you doing what you would have expected then?

J: No

K: When you first got into Year 7 I would have because I was full of enthusiasm, but further on I just thought I'd be out as soon as I was 15.

So what has made you change your mind?

K: Coming to this school, actually. At my old school it was just too big. A lot of the teachers were afraid of the kids. It just wasn't a very good school. . . .

That's why this school is so good, because it's so small. The teachers can give attention and any problems can get sorted out pretty much straight away. Everyone in the school, practically, knows everyone. . . .

J: I was hoping I'd be leaving after Year 10. I was keen set on that. But once I sort of got into things I started enjoying school more. I started thinking about it more and wanted to keep going.

So – you said – once you got into things. What did that actually mean?

J: Like working harder, trying to achieve better grades. Just having an interest.

So, what in this school encouraged you to work harder?

K: The fact that the teachers want to help you and they really show a keen interest.

Some of the teachers, they're pretty keen to see students succeed. So they help you set up your own goals. I know if I didn't come here, I wouldn't be doing much. I'd probably be sitting at home doing nothing.

TALLANGATTA SECONDARY COLLEGE ON THE JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

| | Commentary on the stage of the journey for Tallangatta Secondary College | |
|--|--|--|
| ownership of need to learn with teacher | There is a strong sense that students control or 'own' their need to learn. This does vary and there are some instances of more traditional teacher-controlled approaches. But in many cases teachers are guiding students and opening up pathways for them. | ownership of need to learn with students |
| compartmentalised according to age | There seems to be practically no compartmentalisation according to age. From Year 7 onwards students have the opportunity to pursue knowledge at whatever level is appropriate. | links vertically and horizontally between age groups |
| what to think | The endorsement of 'Plan, Do, Study, Act' orients learning away from being told 'what to think'. This approach seems to be followed in every classroom. The code is displayed on each classroom notice board. | how to think |
| needs of organisation | Although VCE requirements may impose some boundaries, there is a strong sense that students are encouraged to try things out and pursue meaningful pathways that they have discovered. | desires of the individual |
| authority decides where, when, why and how | There is a strong sense that students are empowered to control their learning. | learner is empowered to decide where, when, why, how |
| failures are separated from successes | Staff seem very aware of the negative effects of 'failure'. Considerable steps are taken to ensure that all students experience achievement. There is however an awareness of the powerful influence of the VCE system and parents in demanding grades. | emphasis on encouragement |
| reactive | The school seems to be as proactive as possible, given its obligation to help students gain VCE and TAFE certificates. One gains the impression that students are encouraged to explore almost anything that interests them. | proactive |
| educates and trains for short term | There is a strong sense that the school has a 'long-term' approach and an interest in students long after they leave school. | educates for employability in the long-term |
| work-based | There is a 'life-based' approach, helped by close links with the community. Understandably many students do not seem to look past obtaining their first job. | life-based |
| inward looking | The school is very strongly outward looking. School/ community boundaries are transparent. | outward looking |
| learning satisfies the present | There is a strong orientation to the future. | learning prepares for the future |
| received wisdom | There may be a few teachers who see their role as imparting 'wisdom', but overall learning in the school is fun, participative and involving. | fun, participative, involving |

The next school has an inner city location. It is a catholic college but it is different from Caroline Chisholm in that it is a girls' college. Its students come from a wide range of backgrounds but there do seem to be fewer socio-economic difficulties and hence a possibility to look outwards as well as at the more immediate local community.

ST. ALOYSIUS COLLEGE

'If you've got staff who are lifelong learners, then it will permeate your community.'

Introduction

St Aloysius College is a Catholic Girls' R – 12 college established by the Sisters of Mercy in Adelaide in 1880. It is located in the Adelaide CBD. The school charter describes the Catholic culture as 'shaped by the tradition of Mercy' and 'challenged to empower young women to play a vital part in the world of the future'. The Mission Statement outlines the school's strong commitment to the wider community from the vision of Catherine McAuley and its responsibility to an ever changing society. These features, which are integral to the school, provide an essential basis for its orientation to lifelong learning.

An example of the school's practical manifestation of Mercy is seen in the fact that even in the 'packed' Year 12 program, students go out into the world on a voluntary basis. They are encouraged to put themselves in a challenging situation. This going out and practising Mercy is seen as a culmination of a student's time at the school.

St Aloysius is a school that models lifelong learning in many ways. The school is involved in the promotion of international education, and 40 to 50 students 'from all corners of the globe' receive their education at St Aloysius College. There is a lot of interchange with South East Asian countries, such as exchange programs with sister schools in Indonesia, China and Japan. Staff members are encouraged to study in South East Asia and other overseas locations. This promotes an interchange of cultures. The school encourages lifelong learning by reaching out into the community and making connections between the classroom and the outside world, and by encouraging teachers to be model learners. As the Deputy Principal suggests, it is a way of thinking, a way of approaching things rather than sweeping the old away with a new broom:

What is the essence of lifelong learning? . . . You've got to create that environment. You can still be a school, you don't have to suddenly be different, it's just the way you look at the way you do things. That's really what it's all about. It's not about somebody saying that what we have been doing over the past umpteen number of years is wrong. It's just the way you go about doing things.

When the Year 12 students go out into the world they are 'women of Mercy' which in a very real sense means lifelong learners. The Religious Education Co-ordinator explained how being 'women of Mercy' at this school applies to people of all (or no) religious backgrounds and it is a manifestation of the learning and the connections that have been made so far and that are to be continued in life after school.

In Term 4 they [*the Year 12s*] are preparing for their formal Liturgy. It is a big deal for them, where they take the lead. It's not an issue. It's structured around them.

What is involved?

They might be involved in presenting readings. Others might not want to be so up front, so they might write prayers. We look at the school Mission statement. The final Liturgy is what we call a 'missioning' of Year 12s. And a 'commissioning' of Year 11s. So they move into becoming leaders of the school. . . . At the end of the Liturgy the Year 12 students are called by name and they stand, looking down at the whole community. Their candles are lit and they proceed symbolically 'out'. So they have been charged to take on all that is 'Mercy'. That's their last official day of school before their exams. So they go through all of that before they start their exams. . . .

So it's encouraging them to reflect . . .

On the broader things of life. And they also receive a scroll which declares them to be women of Mercy, with the words of Catherine McCauley. . . .

A lovely thing too is that with those values statements, even those girls who are not of Christian background will be able to reflect on those.

Yes – we make no distinctions. I have to laugh every now and then, because sometimes some of the best 'Catholics' will be Muslim! I guess we're very sensitive about being inclusive. As inclusive as we can be.

Curriculum

Students come from families with a professional, academic focus. In keeping with this, up to 90 per cent of school leavers go on to a form of tertiary education and 80 per cent of school leavers go to university.

The Years 8 – 10 handbook states that at these levels there is emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills, oral communication skills and research and information skills. The handbook suggests a strong orientation to the development of lifelong learning skills:

Students are challenged to be resourceful and develop skills in working independently and co-operatively. Students are also encouraged to be creative and independent thinkers and to take responsibility for their own learning.

The location of the school in the CBD is put to advantage. Recently, students worked with the Adelaide City Council on how to make the CBD more accessible to youth.

In the tradition of reaching outside the school, Year 9 students help the nearby Moore Street Day Centre by supplying eggs, cheese and margarine on a weekly basis. Money for this is raised through various class-based activities. Each week the students meet the people they are helping.

There are many opportunities for Year 10 students to gain a wider perspective of the world outside the school walls. They are joined by Japanese students through co-operation with the SA Adelaide Language Centre and there are opportunities to participate in Amnesty International activities, Global seminars and United Nations programs. Another initiative for Year 10s to experience the outside world is through participation in Australian Business Week. Students go through a simulation of setting up a business, creating a product, designing their product, marketing their product and in the end dissolving the company and then evaluating how the company has gone. 'Mentors' from business assess the activity.

Years 11 and 12 focus on the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). A range of VET programs is available including modules in tourism, word processing and retail. Hospitality is popular. The college is a part of a cluster that works together to share facilities. Most courses are taken at the nearby TAFE college. These programs are seen as important ways of gaining lifelong learning skills and are given a high priority in the school.

The Community Studies unit within SACE is popular. It is a unit which offers particular opportunities for independent learning and for students to become responsible for their own learning – there is a lot of flexibility.

Learning how to Learn

Teachers as models

A very strong feature of St Aloysius College is the role of teachers as model learners. An English and LOTE teacher describes her experience when she was involved in the Integrated Studies program (which has been discontinued, for reasons outlined later):

That's where I've learnt how to become a resourceful teacher and that's where I learnt how to really learn. . . . I think that's where I learnt to become resourceful, that's where I learnt that it's OK if I haven't studied it or if I don't know because I know how to go about learning. These are the resources you can go to, this is where you can get information, this will help you out, building on your resources as well.

With the Integrated Studies program, teachers enjoyed the opportunity to learn about new areas through teaching them and students found that learning could be fun. But in the long term, maybe because it is a school with high academic expectations, the program did not provide enough rigour, particularly for 'middle level' achievers (as discussed later).

Students are empowered to develop their own programs

One example of how students learn through the Year 11 Community Studies program was outlined by the Deputy Principal Curriculum:

Students choose a subject focus . . . in terms of their interests and what they like, their gifts. . . . Then we work with the students, we say 'what is it specifically that you would like to learn about?' So we sit down and we plan their learning. Part of that learning is arriving at some outcomes at the end of that. We really need to see you've achieved something, it's not just a matter of finding out some information and that's it. We actually sit down and plan what they are going to learn, their skills, their knowledge, the experience. There's a large experience part of it, where they have to go outside [*the school*]. One student was doing something about body piercing, that was her interest and it was the art of body piercing. She really looked at that from the point of view of business. She looked at it in terms of art at first, so, that was the history part of it, then she had to do some visits, so she actually went out and found out where body piercing was done. The whole part of that was part of her learning. She became a subject expert on body piercing.

She was probably very highly motivated!

She was highly motivated, because that was her interest at the time. So, that's coupled with an assessment plan. We negotiate how we are going to assess the students. Everything is done in consultation. All of that is then put on paper and submitted to the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia for official acceptance and moderation.

Skill Sets beyond the Basic

There is a special seminar program for Year 10 students which aims to prepare them for Year 11 and 12 study. This program includes setting and achieving goals and time management skills.

At Year 10 level students are expected to organise their own Work Experience which involves learning various communication skills, and when to use them.

Peer support

There is a strong peer support program in the school in which Year 8 students are teamed with Year 11s. It is clear that the Peer Support program provides many opportunities for students to acquire generic skills, such as planning and organising. The program aims to:

- encourage team building and learning
- improve self esteem and confidence
- create friendships across year levels
- provide models for younger students
- provide a forum for discussion and activities
- develop social skills and foster a sense of belonging

The co-ordinator of the program discusses the criteria for selecting Year 11 students to run the program. It provides many opportunities for learning leadership skills, communication and working with others.

Basically [*we select*] anyone who wants to, who has shown leadership skills or is willing to learn to become a leader. A lot of the girls have had some sort of experience being leaders either outside of school or to do with their sport or social activities. Some wanted to develop their confidence, wanted to develop their leadership skills, wanted an opportunity to work with their peers or with...it's about giving those ones who already have the skills opportunities to develop them further but it is also about giving some the opportunity to get those skills. I think you've got a mixture of both.

Obviously they gain the leadership skills simply through being part of the program. Are there any other ways that you try to help those people who haven't had any leadership experience before, are there any other ways that you try to gain experience?

Within the program?

When they're applying to be a part of that program if there are some who can't give you examples of leadership experiences that they've had, how do you help them?

We run a one-day seminar, to start off with. They all attend and we go through what is leadership, what are the qualities you need, how do you deal with situations like this, so there is role playing, a lot of discussion. Then because they work very closely with a teacher, it is that teacher's task to make sure that those girls are developing the appropriate skills and making sure that they guide them in that direction. That's ongoing throughout the program. Plus the girls work with each other, there is a lot of discussion amongst them in their planning and organising as well.

Another teacher commented on the generic skills gained by Year 11s from participating in the peer support program.

What do you think that the Year 11s get out of doing this?

The thing that would come up the most is that they learn to work with a group of younger people, who initially may not want to co-operate. And I guess they see a bit of what they do in class. That's a thing that comes up, 'how do you control the class?' We really work for them to resolve problems that come up, for them to be leaders. They learn to work, they're never on their own, so they're always working with at least one other girl. So, it's co-operative and at times they don't agree with something that their fellow leader might want to do. There are a lot of things they have to work through.

Information literacy

It seems that students are developing information literacy skills in every subject. As one walks around the school one sees groups of girls working collaboratively with little need for supervision.

The Library appears to be well staffed so that there is always someone on hand to help students seek information and to assist teachers when they bring classes into the Library. Teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively with Library staff when planning units of work. Most assignments seem to be placed on the intranet.

There was evidence of students seeking and using information in many different ways, such as going outside the school grounds to talk to appropriate people, telephoning and using the Internet. Students seemed to have well developed IT skills.

Self concept

As one teacher said, learning provides a basis for developing one's self esteem.

What do you think are the most important things to gain at school so that you are going to keep on wanting to learn?

For me it would have to be confidence, self-esteem, more personal type skills. . . . By learning and by developing and gaining knowledge your confidence grows, your self-esteem grows.

Peer support

The peer support program, already mentioned, and discussed in greater detail below, provides opportunities for Year 11 girls, who might not normally be expected to take leadership positions, to gain in self esteem. This is described by the teacher responsible for the program.

There are certainly some girls who we have accepted as leaders only on the reassurance of one teacher who would say 'I'll stick through' because they wouldn't be the sort of girls that would be a good leader.

What have been the things that you have been worried about?

Some of the girls, a couple of them, have very poor attendance at school, difficulty sticking to school rules, responding to teachers, behaviour problems. Not the model leader.

So you see them as role models for the Year 8s?

Yes. At the same time we want the Year 11s to get something out of it. So we put some faith into these Year 11s, and of course team them up with someone we think has the strength and confidence to work with someone like that. That's where we've seen the greatest growth.

Trust and respect

‘Old scholars’ (former students) commented on how self esteem was built by the teachers having respect for the students:

The kind of trust they placed in us led us to have a lot of trust in our own initiative and be responsible – they’ve let us do this, we need to show a certain responsibility.

Oneself and One’s Learning

Making Connections

There are links made all the time between the classroom and the outside world and between different subjects. The multicultural nature of the school provides an opportunity for making significant connections as described by the RE Co-ordinator:

We have a significant number of students who have no connection with any church. A lot of students have Asian backgrounds. Some of them are Buddhist. A lot of students nominally have a Christian background but they have no experience of that outside of school. The school is the church for them.

All of these students do RE?

Every student. It’s a part of the conditions when they are enrolled. We’re not about changing or indoctrination. We can understand something and develop our own abilities and faith through what we hear about others. So at Year 10, a significant part of our program looks at new world religions. We’ve got such a wonderful mix. We’re such a multicultural place anyway. We’ve got the diversity. We are teaching that here is this richness. We have things to share. We can learn from each other. . . . Even the relationships that students have. The structures within the school. How people with authority, with power, deal with those who in theory don’t have power – we all have power. We treat each other with respect and dignity.

Curiosity

The school is in touch with former students – known as ‘old scholars’. I spoke with two of these women who described how they were encouraged to be curious when they were at school:

A: We seem to do exciting things.

Why do you think that is?

B: I feel that school taught us a lot of independent learning skills – a lot of evaluation. A girlfriend said once that when she was doing honours – she was doing honours Classics and it was the first time in her life that someone suggested to her that she couldn’t do something – I think that kind of sums it up. . . .

A: I think we’re also trained to be curious – it seems that we’ll never stop trying to work out what’s going on.

What were some of the things they did at the school that helped you to have that kind of approach?

B: I think the school has a really strong social justice ethic. I suspect that’s partly due to the Mercy foundation – the kinds of teachers that the school attracts and that the school hires. We did a lot of community service without realising that’s what it was. In Year 10 I remember my class decided it would be a really good rule for the school to ban all

hairsprays that contained fluorocarbons. We were just really encouraged, that if you could make a positive difference – if it sounds like a sane idea, run with it.

Values, Dispositions and Attitudes

The integral religious philosophy of the school is seen as lifelong learning. The RE Co-ordinator said:

Religious education – that’s something that should – ‘should’ in inverted commas be something they take with them for their whole life. How they live their life. In fact, how they choose their career. How they use their leisure time. Their values -- in their relationships. Their values being applied to their political views. It is that you’re hopefully stirring something. There’s so much knowledge nowadays. You can’t know it all.

By Year 9 students are seen as being able to think beyond their own needs. The RE program has a practical orientation:

I think Year 9 is a ‘doing’ year. They can start to talk about issues. Our program at Year 9 includes a lot of fund-raising for the Adelaide Day Centre. It’s just over the road. They have a drop-in centre for homeless men. They serve lunches. It’s a strong focus for the ‘doing something’. By Year 9 they have sufficient experience.

Staff and Staffing

It is clear that the school values its staff. There is a pleasant recreational staff room with comfy chairs, newspapers and magazines, which looks out onto a very peaceful courtyard. It is agreed that staff don’t work in here (there is a more traditional ‘working’ staff room elsewhere). This peaceful staff room provides an opportunity for reflection and ‘time out’.

Learning paths for teachers

There is a system of mentoring new teachers, with opportunities built in for reflection and review throughout at least the first year. But there is encouragement for all staff to reflect and an awareness of every teacher’s learning path, as outlined by the Principal:

What happens in August is that I see every member of the teaching staff for half an hour. It takes me a couple of weeks but I get to see everybody and those who are on leave come back and have an interview. We have a sheet that they fill out ...it’s a check list that says, ‘what have been the good things about this year, what have been the frustrations, what was your teaching load like, what sort of professional development have you done in school time and in your own time, what sort of study.’ They write responses to that and bring it to the discussion, with a copy for me and we use that . . . There is an expectation. If there is a blank in the study part, I’ll say ‘we’ll talk about future career paths and where they might be headed...maybe a leadership course might be appropriate’ . . .

It also provides an opportunity for reflection. I’m sure a lot of teachers don’t think they have time to reflect about where they’re going.

Another bit is, ‘what would provide a challenge for you?’. Some might say ‘I’d really like a leadership position and I’d be interested in a couple of areas.’ Those who have been in positions of responsibility have another sheet that they fill out that talks about their achievements for the year and whether they achieved their goals and where they might have left room for improvement and whether they are interested in a position for the

following year and what their vision will be, where they might take the faculty. So that's just an automatic thing that happens every August.

Teachers as models of lifelong learning

There is a strong sense in the school that the teachers are models of lifelong learners.

The principal's view is that learning goes on forever:

Learning goes on forever. I think its very important that teachers and staff in general model that for students, so if the students are aware that teachers and other staff members are also continuing to learn, continuing to upgrade their qualifications, then I think that has to have an impact.

These feelings are also reflected by the Deputy Principal:

I still believe very strongly, that it's the individual teachers in the end who are the ones who can model the Lifelong Learning. If they've got the skills, and those experiences, they will bring that forward in their lives and will say 'yeah, I can do that, I know.' The bits that I think are crucial in those teachers who give that gift, in my view, are the teachers who have given students that individual attention, have recognised in students their potential and have articulated to those students that they have that gift for learning. They are the teachers who are always prepared to take their students beyond what is the accepted norm, really take them beyond what they can do, really stretch their minds, really challenge them to do more. The teachers who succeed very well [are] the teachers who through their teaching can make relevance in their subject area. I think gone are the days when we are front loading students with knowledge. It's really the teachers now who can draw the connections between what they are doing in class with what's out there in the world.

A maths teacher outlined how she is continuing to learn:

I don't think I'll ever stop learning. . . . At the moment I feel more like learning through my teaching, that's certainly going to be a big focus for me for the next few years. I'd like to learn to teach better. When I was at university there was a huge gap between the lecturer and the students. You couldn't ask questions. It wasn't a two-way process. Although I passed, I didn't feel I learned a lot that way. I really feel today that I could learn better, having taught Maths. I certainly think that in terms of wanting to learn more and wanting to understand things that I'm a lifelong learner.

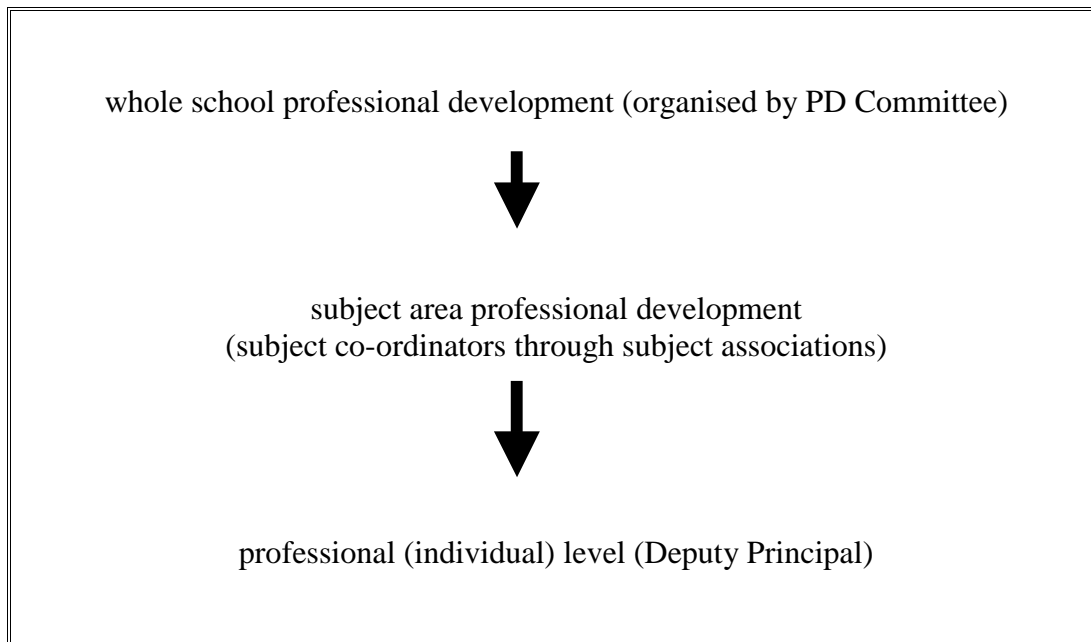
Were there any particular things from your schooling that made you like that? [she had attended St Aloysius College as a student]

That environment where everything was discussed openly and your opinion was valued – that certainly gave me the confidence to think – oh yeah, I've got something to say here. That makes you more keen to engage in the learning process, I think.

The professional development program

Professional development for teachers is a hallmark of the college. The school is prepared to put significant resources into the professional development program. Teachers are encouraged to take up studies following their own interests and to keep abreast of what is happening in their subject fields. There is a three-tiered model of professional development for all teachers.

Model of professional development at St Aloysius



On an individual level teachers are encouraged to attend conferences and for each year they are asked ‘What professional development have you done this year? In what ways was it helpful? What are you thinking about doing next year?’. Thinking in this way is a part of the culture at St Aloysius.

Teachers are also models of combining family and work. A high proportion (60 per cent) teach part-time, combining their teaching with parenting responsibilities.

Organisational Stresses and Pressures

The pressure of the expanding curriculum

Teachers are pressured by the increased amount of information available, as noted by this Maths teacher:

Being a Maths teacher, with all the developments in the new framework. You keep asking, what are we taking out? And that’s always a difficult question. Yeah – I do think teachers have a sense of – there’s so much to be covered in a limited time. Those decisions of what stays and what goes are really significant.

The minute you get into a secondary school, it’s – what do they need at Year 12? [all is governed by that] That downward filtering, it’s just so senseless! Who is to say that that endpoint is the right one? Who is to say that what’s in that Year 12 curriculum is what students need when they leave school? The universities say that’s what they need - but what about all the students who aren’t going to university? I find that more frustrating than anything. I’m teaching the two extremes: Year 8 and Year 12. In Year 8 I try to encourage students to put ideas together, rather than just presenting them with something. At present the curriculum doesn’t allow for much personal interpretation. We need to get rid of the textbooks a bit more. We need to let kids learn things more through curiosity.

The pressure to achieve – assessment

It seems that the need for excellent SACE results played a significant part in the disbandment of the Integrated Studies program (mentioned above). Students need to be ‘stretched’ both to reach their full potential, but also to achieve good results that will reflect well on the school. This is a practical and understandable outcome for a school where 80 per cent of school leavers go on to further education. It is necessary to continue to attract students to the school and the net of St Aloysius seems to rely heavily on parents who want professional, academic courses for their daughters. There is a suggestion that Integrated Studies was not sufficiently rigorous. It was also expensive, and the business side of a school cannot be ignored, as the Principal pointed out:

I think it was probably, the talented ones went off and did the interesting things, and they achieved. It was those in the middle and lower group that, to me, seemed to miss out. . . . There didn’t seem to be any rigour in what it was they were doing. Kids had a lot of fun, there were extravaganzas, we join in anything that...there was a lot more extravaganzas that occurred week by week than we would have now. There was no homework set...

I suppose they were meant to be continuing to explore whatever it was...

Now that just doesn’t happen. We also became tagged as a school that was slack, that didn’t have homework, we became seen as a bit of a risky bet.

Thus parental pressure was a significant influence in the abandonment of the program. It is apparent, however, that there are still ample opportunities for students at St Aloysius to develop a love of learning and to have experiences similar to those that were provided through Integrated Studies.

A teacher who had attended St Aloysius College as a student regrets the fact that these days students are under so much pressure to achieve. This can sometimes override the development of other valuable skills that are not a part of the public assessment system.

Kids are under a lot of pressure to achieve, they tend to forget that other stuff or they don’t have time for that other stuff.

For example, she mentioned how important it is for students to gain a sense of achievement from assessment tasks rather than a sense of failure that has a negative influence on students’ self esteem. But the grades required by the system at senior levels can work against this.

I provide lots of activities that are attainable, like its about sitting a test where students can achieve, it’s not about ‘well let me see how difficult I can make this.’ OK, you’ve got to give them a bit of a challenge, especially the brighter ones to make sure they reach their potential. But it’s not about allowing the slower or the weaker or the average ones to keep failing. It’s about giving students the opportunity to be able to succeed. When I was at school I never ever felt like I failed at anything, it was always about giving it your best, reaching your potential, it’s always about encouragement. I never felt like I’d failed in that respect. So, I think that’s the important thing, giving students the opportunity to be able to achieve.

I believe parents have in fact been asking for grades so how can you reconcile having to give students grades and yet giving them a sense of achievement?

I don’t. At Year 10, 11 and 12 we have to.

Reporting

Another closely related assessment issue is the time taken to write good descriptive reports. Sometimes they are formulaic and are seen as providing no more information than parent-teacher interviews. But parents continue to demand comparisons with other students, as the Deputy Principal Curriculum noted:

I think there are great benefits for descriptive reporting. Descriptive reporting needs to be done well, and I don't believe teachers today are good at writing descriptive reports. What is it that inhibits them writing good reports? It's time. We are putting more and more on our teachers all the time. . . . So what happens is that we now start having descriptive reports and we come up with systems where we have common phrases and we start putting things together and suddenly you start thinking 'how good is descriptive reporting?' That's really where it's come from, parents are seeing descriptive reports and saying we're having parent-teacher interviews, you've already told me...what I really want to know is how well is Mary going and whereabouts on the scale is she, and is she really up to it? As far as an outcome is concerned, can you tell us where she's at?

The school has arrived at a compromise that combines descriptive comments with a grade.

Pastoral Care

The tradition of Mercy in the school is evident in the focus on pastoral care. All members of the school community take responsibility for Pastoral Care, but in particular there is a Deputy Principal for Pastoral Care, each year level has a co-ordinator and each class has a homeroom teacher. There is also a school social worker. Most of the Year 8 students' lessons are conducted in their home classroom to facilitate the transition from primary to secondary education.

The school as a family

There is a sense that the school is a large family:

Walking around the school and seeing clusters of students working together, where as in some schools they would have to be supervised by a teacher, by a teacher's presence actually there. That doesn't seem to be necessary here.

There seems to be, again in the culture, a great spirit of co-operation between the students and staff...a very strong bond, so our disciplinary measures are minimal. They say that when you come here to teach you can really get on with your teaching.

Why do you think that is?

It has a lot to do with the student-teacher relationship...I think it's probably the way that teachers treat students. It would be very rare that a teacher would yell at a student. It's a very welcoming, large family atmosphere that I think we've created. We'd expect that teachers would treat students with respect and that in turn students would give respect, and that happens.

The sense of family or 'fellowship' was implied in comments by Year 10 students:

When you do finish school, what are going to be some of the most important things you're going to take with you, from having been in this school?

T: Kind of not just relying on one group of people. You have groups of friends but it's . . .

E: Interconnected! *[laughter]*

T: It's like, if you go out you just rely on a little group of three or four people. . . *[the implication that at school it's a bigger group, maybe something like fellowship]*

E: Yeah – I think it's the friendship.

You'll have particular friends, but what you were saying, I think, is that you're part of a bigger group. Is that right?

Yes.

Being respected and valued

These suggestions are endorsed by comments of the 'old scholars':

B: There were a lot of very good teachers.

A: You just felt comfortable with everyone. Relaxed. There were teachers you could approach with certain things.

B: I used to feel I was meeting them on the same intellectual level. I never felt that they were looking down. If I wanted to talk to them on an intellectual level, they were approaching me as an adult. . . .

We were never patronised. We were always made to hold ourselves to high standards.

You wouldn't not do your homework, not for fear of punishment, but you'd just feel bad about it.

Because of the model the teachers set?

A: Yes.

How did the teachers model this?

A: I think it was because they took so much care. They went to so much trouble. So if we didn't do our homework, we weren't holding up our side of the bargain.

B: They were always consistent. If a teacher was suffering a tragedy they didn't hide it from us. We appreciated that. . . . The impressions I get most of all are social justice and compassion and humour. We were never upbraided for being lively – that kind of thing. And knowing that teachers were fascinated by new knowledge.

Peer support

The peer support program (discussed above), in which Year 8 students are teamed with Year 11s assists the Year 8s in their transition to secondary school and provides an opportunity for the Year 11s to develop leadership skills and other skills involved in directing programs. In 2000, 42 out of 120 Year 11 students took part in the program.

Some Year 8 students' reflections on the program were published in a school newsletter:

Our leaders were Year 11s. They spoke to us about being teenagers. They taught us how to be ourselves around people we don't know. Peer support made us comfortable to be ourselves.

At first we thought it was going to be boring but after a while we felt comfortable talking in front of others. We all enjoyed it a lot!

Students can undertake peer support training when they are in Year 10. Some comments from Year 10s reported in a newsletter are:

We enjoyed the program, even though for some people it is difficult to communicate with others.

Peer support was a great experience and I would recommend it to everyone who wants to build their self-confidence and have some fun.

It is a good experience to find your inner self and to co-operate with others more effectively.

These comments are endorsed by one of the teachers:

So would it really be a situation where you have Year 11 students helping Year 8 students learn how to learn?

Very much so, learning how to learn, learning how to work with others, learning how to deal with problems, learning how to resolve conflict, learning how to deal with their own emotions, learning how to interact with their peers or with adults. It's really wonderful, by the end of the program you will see that the Year 8s will seek out these Year 11s even in their own time. The Year 11s love it because they know they've been successful as leaders.

Once the program has finished for the year, the pastoral group teachers have a role in encouraging the relationships to continue.

Do you follow that up at all? Have you got any idea of the extent to which those Year 8s do go and seek support and help and things from the Year 11s?

Yes, because each group of two or three Year 11 students has a peer support teacher, that they meet with once a week and again after the program is over. The girls keep a journal and they'll speak to the teacher about how things are going. We encourage them to seek out the girls in Year 8.

ST ALOYSIUS COLLEGE ON THE JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

| | Commentary on the stage of the journey for St Aloysius College | |
|--|--|--|
| ownership of need to learn with teacher | There is a strong sense that students control or 'own' their need to learn. They gain this from the teachers who are models. The need to achieve excellent SACE results necessitates some imposition. | ownership of need to learn with students |
| compartmentalised according to age | Although there are 'traditional' year levels there is a sense of fluidity, for example with the peer support program. | links vertically and horizontally between age groups |
| what to think | Independence is encouraged. Students are guided. There is no 'indoctrination'. | how to think |
| needs of organisation | SACE does pose some limitations, but students are strongly encouraged to follow their own interests. | desires of the individual |
| authority decides where, when, why and how | There seems to be a balance between the 'authority' providing guidance and students having a 'free rein'. | learner is empowered to decide where, when, why, how |
| failures are separated from successes | Teachers seem very aware of the negative effects of 'failure'. But they are also required to maintain high standards in preparing students for SACE. Within these limits there is emphasis on encouragement. | emphasis on encouragement |
| reactive | The philosophy of Mercy is interpreted in a way that encourages students to reach out and take initiative in a proactive way. | proactive |
| educates and trains for short term | This school has a very strong 'long term' focus. | educates for employability in the long-term |
| work-based | The outlook is very strongly 'life-based'. | life-based |
| inward looking | The school is very strongly outward looking. There are strong links with the immediate local community and also with overseas countries. | outward looking |
| learning satisfies the present | There is a strong orientation to the future. | learning prepares for the future |
| received wisdom | There was no evidence of teachers imparting 'received wisdom'. But the Integrative Studies program (which would have been an excellent model of learning as fun, participative and involving) had to be abandoned due to the school having to maintain standards in keeping with the expected academic standards of professional families. The school is an interesting example of a balance between provision of excellent high stakes achievement and empowering students to follow their interests. | fun, participative, involving |

The last case study describes a senior college where students are returning to study sometimes after a long period of time, sometimes to improve their tertiary entrance chances.

MARDEN SENIOR COLLEGE

The teachers care about where you want to go.

Site and Administrative Information

Marden is an adult re-entry college. Most students have been out of traditional high school for at least six months. The main age group is 17 to 22 years. Retention is a significant issue for the school. At the beginning of a school year there are about 700 EFT students (many are part-time). This number drops to about 500 by fourth term. This drop-out rate has been researched, and most students leave for family or social reasons that are not directly related to school. Compared to a traditional high school, it is much more difficult to predict numbers for the purposes of forward planning. The principal points out that, in terms of lifelong learning, having a reduced number of students in the school at the end of the year is not necessarily a bad thing because it often means that they have found employment.

We've got to be very careful to understand 'success' in terms of lifelong learning, in terms of what that person wants. It looks nice if you've got lots of students at the end of the year – but that doesn't necessarily indicate success in terms of the outcomes for those students.

Most students come to Marden with the aim of accessing tertiary courses. It is a 'centre of excellence' in South Australia. Since its inception in 1992, Marden has become recognised for its success in the SACE (Year 11/12 certificate). The very fact that students enrol suggests that most are interested in lifelong learning. The principal describes the broad range of students who attend the school:

From those who are perhaps coming back to do Year 13 to improve their TER score and whose requirement for support mightn't be all that great, to a person who has been out of school for a significant period of time – perhaps left when they were 13 or 14, they have low self esteem and their skills are perhaps at the lower end of the continuum – they require both appropriate courses and significant support and nurturing so that they can be successful in achieving their goals

Nearly all of the students are attending of their own volition, such as this 19-year-old student who returned to improve her TER:

I attended Salisbury High last year and I got into university, but I didn't like the course that I got into. I got into Human Services and I wanted to get into teaching, so I decided to come back here so that I can improve my points.

This student had been a Year 8 drop-out:

Being told to go to school is different, because people look at you and think – yeah – he's going to school because he has to. But if you're going to school because you want to, making an effort, and no one is telling you to, it's a lot better, and people will, like, respect you for that.

In keeping with a senior college, there is a well-staffed resource centre which is open until 7.00 pm three nights a week. There is a good gymnasium and a Learning Support Centre, known as the Tutorial Centre.

The curriculum

Most students attend Marden to undertake SACE. In addition to a broad range of SACE courses there are VET programs and students can also take the Certificate of Adult General Education, which enables them to gain a Year 10 level of education before they start on Year 11. The Canberra Institute of Technology developed this certificate but it has been refined by Marden. The Assistant Principal outlined a range of 'update classes' in science, mathematics, English and ESL, to help students bridge the gap from where they come in and stage one (the first stage of SACE).

The curriculum is structured in blocks of two hours per week. Some VET courses run for two full days per week. This suits adults better than having lessons placed across each day of the week. Access is the main reason for structuring the curriculum this way, although it was also noted that adults have longer concentration spans than younger students, so they can cope with the longer blocks of time. Classes are run most nights, particularly in subjects that are not widely available in other schools – such as Classics. Most staff teach day and night time classes. They have time off in lieu to compensate for teaching at night.

There is a system of trimesters rather than semesters. As the Assistant Principal says, this makes it a bit more 'pressure-cooked', which suits some students. It also means that there can be three entry points during a year rather than just the two offered with a semester system.

Learning how to Learn

The focus on integration of technology into courses has been a catalyst for helping students to learn more about how they learn. It encourages them to be independent learners and students gain satisfaction from immersing themselves in the subject. As the Assistant Principal pointed out:

Students gain meaning from it themselves, rather than the teacher being the fount of knowledge and saying, 'I've got the knowledge and this is what you need'.

Students receive a great deal of support from the Tutorial Centre. The assistance ranges from help in reading faster to computer skills. There is a shelf of self-help sheets on reading skills, writing skills, essay planning and memory skills.

It is clear that the Centre is popular with students:

Does the school help you get an idea of how you can learn best?

J: Oh yes! In the Tutorial Centre there are shelves of papers: how to write an essay, how to manage your time, how to do an oral, how to do an argumentative essay, how to do a comparative essay . . .

D: They've got so much helping stuff!

J: They've also got a sample book of how to do this . . . and I'm proud to say that one of my English essays is in it – how to write this sort of essay. This is part of what they do. I have no idea how much they do this in other schools.

These comments were endorsed by another group of students:

M: I find there's a lot of help. I mean, so much help. The teachers go out of their way to help a lot more than I found last year [*doing Year 12 at another high school*].

What particular kind of help?

M: Like they had special sessions at the beginning of the year on how to write essays

W: Yeah – you can go to the Tutorial Centre whenever you want. [*and there's always a teacher rostered on to help*] Like you feel more free to do it [*seek help*] and more relaxed about doing it.

K: They treat you with more respect – like an adult.

The Tutorial Centre has facilities, such as voice-activated computers and screens for reading large print, to assist people with various disabilities. There are well-publicised 'focus tutorials' on topics where students need help – this could be a content area or a method of learning. There is also a holiday revision program.

The Centre seems to be very well staffed with subject specialists and teachers with 'special education' skills at publicised times. Students can make bookings for particular kinds of help, but there is always a teacher there who can provide general assistance.

One gets an impression that learning is very directed – very focused. The aim is to get good marks in SACE. That is why many of the students attend. Unlike some other schools oriented to lifelong learning there seems to be less time spent exploring links or learning for the pleasure of it. But with this focused kind of learning students will be developing habits that will help them in their future learning. Although they didn't talk much about their different learning styles, one feels that, particularly in the Tutorial Centre, they are getting a lot of individual help to discover how they learn best.

In spite of the strong motivation among students to learn there are some – mainly from the Year 10 certificate or stage one/ Year 11 – who are reluctant learners. The coordinator of the Tutorial Centre describes how these reluctant learners appreciate the flexibility offered which contrasts to a traditional high school.

I think that they see that we are reasonable and so they can say to us 'Look I haven't even started the assignment' or 'I hate this assignment' or 'I don't really know what you are talking about, it is bloody stupid' and you can sit down, somebody here will go through it with you and so you can switch some of them, so that they just love it. I think that they respond to the flexibility.

The first assignment for the Year 10 certificate is an analysis of one's learning styles. So students start reflecting about their learning at this early stage in their 're-entry' to learning.

Skill Sets beyond the Basic

There is a lot of encouragement to work in groups. Sometimes this is organised in a formal way. Sometimes it is informal:

Student: In English, we all have each others' phone numbers – and we all ring each other up and say, do you understand this homework? Or, I missed – fortunately one woman in the class takes everything down in shorthand! So I ring her up and ask what exactly did the teacher say. We all interact away from the school. On the phone, or they come to my place. We try to nut things out together.

Staff model working in groups. For example there is a lot of collaboration in developing units of work that integrate information technology. Several staff members expressed excitement at being involved in this sort of collaborative work.

Information literacy

There is a high level of information technology literacy in the school. Most classrooms have a large computer screen at the front so that there can be extensive use of the Web or other facilities via computer. As the principal comments, staff know how to use technology appropriately and the professional development provided goes well beyond how to use a particular software package.

Indeed, staff can be seen as models of learners who are information literate. There is a high level of information technology professional development. One staff member who worked at another school for two years, then returned to Marden, describes the change:

There was always a push in terms of learning technology. That was probably the biggest focus in the school, so all our training and development [*equivalent of PD*] kind of hinges around that. There were greater improvements in – just – the access to technology, having computers in your classroom and the multi media VET course was new.

There is a strong sense that information technology must be integrated into teaching:

It should really be an element within your teaching program. The Training & Development program is just trying to enhance that and build it up so that it becomes a natural aspect of your teaching.

So have you been one of the people who has helped other staff who are less familiar with technology?

Yeah – this year I've been involved in the mentoring program. We take a unit of work and try to integrate a technology aspect.

Teachers are encouraged to use email for communication with students. Indeed, this is sometimes the preferred way to give students feedback on their work. This is two-way. Students email teachers with any queries that arise in their work. It is thought that extensive use of computer technology may help to retain students at the school. If they are unable to physically attend the school they can keep in touch through email and the Intranet. At present some courses are being designed so that they will be available solely through the Web.

One staff member describes how he helps a new staff member through a ‘buddy’ system:

Rachel -- who’s taking Drama – I was her buddy. It’s probably fair to say that coming into this college you can be overwhelmed by it. The expectation is that you’re familiar with e-mail, that’s how we communicate, be familiar with the absentee system, which is all computerised – that’s kind of what the buddy is there for, just to try to help you through those initial stages. Initially you can be overwhelmed with the amount of technology that you’re supposed to be familiar with. So if there’s something you’re not clear about, there’s a person you can go and see. Although there’s an expectation that learning technology should be utilised, really, it’s up to the individual – the degree of involvement. But it would be fair to say that there’s kind of a pressure that you would be thinking at some stage to try to include something. But the idea is not that you suddenly transform everything you do, or that learning technology is necessarily appropriate for every activity. But the expectation would be that you’d be thinking of ways to implement it.

One program had been developed using Web Quest. The aim is for students to gain resources from the Internet without having to spend a long time searching. The program involved students examining women’s identity in advertisements and further to a consideration of women’s identity on the Net. The teacher had identified appropriate resources and incorporated them into a web page with focus questions.

One teacher described how he integrates learning information technology into his classes:

My own kind of approach tends to be – if some learning technology is required then it kind of gets built into the task in hand. If I want to use an Excel spreadsheet for something, I won’t teach them Excel, but I’ll teach them this little bit that they’ll need in order to complete this task. It’s not teaching applications but teaching the bit to realise what is the aim of the lesson.

There was another example using hypertext:

I’m interested in identity, the way people see themselves and how they position themselves – so in English I created an exercise where they had to explore identity, but I like the way you can explore it in indirect ways. If you do things directly, people become very self-conscious about it. So they had to choose a public figure they could identify with, and they would have to research this person then we were going to create a hypertext assignment where they would need to establish four or five connections with this particular person and to explain them. In this case, the research is up to them. So I’d be saying – have you tried this particular search engine? and I’d explain why I think it’s useful.

This approach also involves students making connections and applying what they learn for one project to other situations:

You might be introduced to a few things but you’ve got to kind of put it all together. So even with the multimedia components that I teach we basically construct it around projects. So in the project – for those who don’t know – you can teach, like, how to create a web site. The students are usually relatively familiar with the technology, but not, as a student, in terms of the questions that surround it. What makes a good web design? Why would we want red text on a yellow background? They’re the kind of questions you raise and you keep talking about them.

It is apparent that students are expected to evaluate sources and to be questioning and curious when seeking information. For example, talking about students' use of the Internet, the Assistant Principal commented:

[*Students are expected to make*] proper use of the Internet for research, not just for the regurgitation of facts. The way in which we structure the questioning and the lessons so we're not just looking for an answer.

There is a lot of help for students in the Resource Centre. One Librarian is always available to assist students, during the hours of opening (which extend to 7.00 pm three evenings a week). The catalogues are Online Public Access, which means that all students can access them from home. A Librarian creates bookmarks linked to students' subjects.

Some might see this approach as a form of 'spoon feeding' – locating references for students – finding websites for them. The resource centre manager indicated that this question has been considered:

We've been through that dilemma but we feel it will be far more beneficial for them to be successful in the early stages, to keep them here because retention is a huge issue. Rather than sitting on the Internet for half an hour finding one or two pages, which in the end are totally irrelevant. From there, they have to go through and select what is really useful for the assignment.

Part of the role of the Tutorial Centre is to help students develop information literacy skills – in particular to evaluate sources of information:

In the Tutorial Centre they learn various skills and that would be one, evaluating the authenticity of the site. There are ways now of looking at the address of the site to see how authentic it is, [*the librarian*] is writing guidelines to share with students about that very fact.

Self concept

The learning environment is one where students feel comfortable about asking questions, revealing ignorance and seeking help at many different levels. A sense of feeling comfortable (and the importance of this) in the Tutorial Centre is expressed by this student:

W: From my angle, I think it's really cosy. You sit down there and it's really soft and hummy type –

M: You mean like the computers?

W: Yeah. Like people with low muffled voices. And the teacher will come up to you.

M: There's a teacher on duty who would help you. And they've also got those leaflets that help you with essay writing and things.

Students, particularly in the Year 10 certificate group, expressed surprise and delight at discovering that they were not 'dumb' and it was clear that they had gained considerable confidence in themselves as learners. There were several models of recent 'success' stories – known to staff and students. For example, someone who had been a Year 8 drop-out ended up studying International Law at university.

The Students

The age range of students is from 17 to about 60. As noted by the principal, some attend in order to increase their TER for a particular university course. Some have left school for various reasons and have now decided that they want a chance to learn. All students are motivated to learn, as described by this group:

W: At [*mainstream high school*] you're a kid, you're bad, and that's it! [*laughter of agreement*] Here, everyone's laid back and you just get to wear casual clothing.

M: Also, like, you're here to learn, so there's no one to muck about. You're all here to learn something.

W: That's true. You don't get people mucking around in the class. There's a lot of drop-out, because you are here to learn. If you come to muck around, it's just not worth it, because everyone will be, like, you shouldn't be here. So they just leave. . . .

As well as the importance of learning from one's own choice – rather than through compulsion -- the importance of teachers' caring approach and genuine interest in students' pathways is evident:

When I was at school [*previously*], I was just bored. It's not that I couldn't do it. I didn't want to. I didn't like being shouted at for not doing it. If you didn't do it and they just said, look, zero for you, that's like, well, maybe I should do it and get a good mark. Being shouted at makes you not want to do it even more – in spite of the teacher, because you get a bit of a conflict going there.

Students see themselves as united in their will to learn. United across ability groups as well as age groups:

K: There's not like the dud group, or whatever.

W: You're all here together, you all want to learn.

K: You could have someone who's 26 and someone who's 18 on the same table chatting.

What's it like working with older people?

K: It's interesting – you hear their views. A lot of them say they like hearing our views.

Staff and Staffing

Teachers as model learners

Teachers are highly valued at this school. It is seen as a place where teachers come and don't want to leave. Staff attracted to the school have special interests in teaching adult learners whose needs are very different from younger students in a traditional high school. These diverse skills are mentioned by the principal:

Staff need to be willing to be creative and flexible in terms of supporting students through times that are difficult. It's critical that staff are aware of pathways and options for support and have a range of skills to support adults when difficulties do arise as they do for a lot of our students on occasions.

Teachers need to be models as lifelong learners, as the principal notes:

I mean good teaching methodology is about adult learning principles, taking people from where they are, and constructivism – but it's very much about people wanting to be here and coming in and, I guess, willing to model the notion of lifelong learning themselves, because they won't necessarily be doing the same thing in three years that they're doing now and there has to be a willingness to engage in training and development.

This is endorsed by the assistant principal:

If you are looking to engage students in their learning you really need to engage staff in their work and their own learning and develop or enhance the motivation for the work they do.

Because staff don't need to spend time on student behavioural issues there is more time to devote to their subject areas and the craft of teaching – encouragement to be lifelong learners. One staff member described the pleasure of working with 'such terrific practitioners'. Indeed, several teachers said that they had been attracted to this school because it enables them to practise their craft and pursue their love of learning.

Professional development

There is a carefully structured induction program for staff and various professional development initiatives. In 2001 the equivalent of 0.8 of a staff member was allocated for a special mentoring program on technology.

Twilight workshops (from 4.00 to 5.30 pm) run as needed – but these seem to be pretty much on a weekly basis, where staff give presentations of their work. Thus staff members' innovative work is show-cased and valued. For shorter presentations there are 'spotlight' sessions at staff meetings. Each term two Friday afternoons are set aside for specific training and development activities.

The Assistant Principal described how there is a learning community in the Marden community of teachers:

Last week at the staff meeting we had three people show us the work they've done in the mentor program at the beginning of this year. It's wonderful, it's diverse and it's different. . . . They were little pockets of best practice that other people sat and looked at. We look to others outside, but we're not always looking for the big expert to come and tell us what to do, we're actually sharing amongst ourselves and building up that level of confidence as a community here.

There are mechanisms for obtaining staff feedback about a range of issues. There is also a lot of support in the classroom, for example, if there are students who haven't been involved in learning for some time.

Organisational Stresses and Pressures

Whereas other lifelong learning-oriented schools have mentioned the Year 11/12 certification as being a form of limitation, this was not an issue at Marden because a majority of the students attend for the purpose of gaining the SACE.

Pressures are of a different kind, particularly the diversity of backgrounds of the adult students. A very important issue is student drop-out. When teachers' classes diminish in size the teachers tend to blame themselves for not 'holding' the students. But, as senior staff were quick to point out, most students' decisions to leave the school stem from factors that are beyond the school's control, or else for the good reason that they have obtained employment.

Pastoral Care

One might expect a re-entry college dealing with adults to be less involved in the pastoral side of students' education. But at Marden there is a keen interest and concern for the students. The principal noted that he would like the school to do more in tracking students' pathways when they leave the school. But even without formal procedures a lot is known about former students' post-school activities.

The assistant principal outlines the approach she encourages teachers to take:

It's really important in the first place that the students are able to experience some success, it doesn't matter at what level, so they feel comfortable, and that it's not a risky place to be. That it's OK to make mistakes, it's OK to be old, it's OK to be young, it's OK to be tall or thin or fat or whatever, it's OK to be rich or poor; an environment that focuses on that. Also an environment where the students themselves are supported in their individual learning.

Students comment on the value of being in a learning environment where everyone wants to learn. In relation to the staff, one student commented: 'They care about where you want to go.'

This caring about students can be seen in a response to a student who was drunk in class. In most traditional schools this might attract suspension or at least some form of severe punishment. A fellow student's description of the incident indicates the different 'adult' but caring approach which makes the school attractive to students who were formerly reluctant learners:

W: One of the things I realise is different. One of my friends drank some alcohol before he came to a class and he ended up like having a bit of an argument with the teacher. And he said to her, like, do you want me out? Do you want me to leave? And she goes, yes, yes I do. He goes fine, stood up, walked out. And he said, that's it. I'm not coming back to school. But the next day he realised he'd brought it on himself. When he was drunk he was saying, every school I've been to, they've asked me to leave. But he realised that this school was different and that they want him here. They want him to succeed. That's the contrast – this school compared to the other schools.

If he just walked out of the class, would the school have followed that up?

W: Yes.

What would they have done?

W: They called him.

M: Yeah – teachers ring you.

So they're concerned about you?

M: Yeah

W: And they want to know what's going on.

MARDEN SENIOR COLLEGE ON THE JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

| | Commentary on the stage of the journey for Marden Senior College | |
|--|---|--|
| ownership of need to learn with teacher | Ownership of the need to learn is very much with the students who have chosen to return to learning. | ownership of need to learn with students |
| compartmentalised according to age | Not really an issue at Marden, being a re-entry college. People of all ages are mixed together. | links vertically and horizontally between age groups |
| what to think | There may be some 'prescription' because of the strong focus on SACE. But students start by reflecting on their learning styles – how to think is encouraged. | how to think |
| needs of organisation | The students are strongly motivated to learn. | desires of the individual |
| authority decides where, when, why and how | There is no compulsion for students to learn at any particular time or place. If students miss classes, teachers are concerned in a 'pastoral' sense, and follow this up. | learner is empowered to decide where, when, why, how |
| failures are separated from successes | There is a lot of encouragement. Because of the 'high stakes' nature of SACE there is competitive grading. | emphasis on encouragement |
| reactive | Learning is as proactive as can be managed with a prescribed syllabus (SACE). | proactive |
| educates and trains for short term | Difficult to assess in some cases – typical students' goals are to get into a university course (and therefore continue learning) or to gain a particular kind of employment. | educates for employability in the long-term |
| work-based | As above | life-based |
| inward looking | It seemed that most students had long-term goals. | outward looking |
| learning satisfies the present | As above | learning prepares for the future |
| received wisdom | A certain degree of 'received wisdom' because of the nature of SACE. But a lot of former 'reluctant learners' discover that they can enjoy learning. | fun, participative, involving |

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APPENDIX 1

THE JOURNEY TO BECOMING A LIFELONG LEARNING SCHOOL

The following instruments can be used in various ways to audit the extent to which a school is orienting towards lifelong learning. Below are questions for the school as a whole (perhaps to be considered by senior teachers), questions for teachers and for students to consider. The final instrument more explicitly conforms to the idea of a journey. All of these instruments draw on the work of Norman Longworth(1996; 1999).

Looking at the school as a whole: to what extent are school policies and practices oriented to lifelong learning?

| Element | Do we do it? In what ways? | How could we do it? |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Does the school's underlying philosophy, or mission statement focus on lifelong learning? | | |
| Is the curriculum structured so that it is easy to make links from one field of study to another? | | |
| Is the importance of information literacy skills recognised in all areas of the curriculum? | | |
| Is learning that takes place outside of school (as well as in school) recognised in assessment policies? | | |
| Do assessment policies make explicit the importance of formative assessment? | | |
| Are teachers supported and encouraged to be lifelong learners? | | |
| Are there established partnerships with local/ community groups that support student learning? | | |

What is it like to be a teacher in the school? To what extent do school policies and practices support teachers as lifelong learners?







| Element | Do we do it? In what ways? | How could we do it? |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Are nearly all of the teachers lifelong learners? | | |
| Do teachers view themselves as mentors, facilitators, models, rather than 'dispensers of knowledge'? | | |
| To what extent do teachers encourage reflection and higher order thinking in students, rather than rote learning? | | |
| To what extent are teachers encouraged to develop their own information literacy skills? | | |
| Do teachers work collaboratively with each other, with specialist teachers, with librarians, students and community groups? | | |
| Do teachers engage in professional development activities which enhance their understanding of the learning process? | | |
| Are teachers given adequate opportunity to review the progress of their own careers and to set their own career goals? | | |
| Do teachers have mentors? | | |

What is it like to be a student in the school? To what extent do school policies and practices support students as lifelong learners?

| Element | Do we do it? In what ways? | How could we do it? |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Do students work in an environment where they feel safe to discuss and question? | | |
| Are students encouraged to make use of the community outside school as a source of knowledge? | | |
| Are students encouraged to examine their own learning processes? | | |
| Do students use aids to self organisation, such as a work diary? | | |
| Do students set their own achievable goals and formulate questions/ problems related to these goals? | | |
| Are students encouraged to evaluate the extent to which they achieve their goals? | | |
| Do students work collaboratively? | | |
| Are students encouraged to draw on their particular cultural or specialist knowledge? | | |
| Do students recognise that their teachers are learning as well as teaching? | | |

HOW FAR IS THE SCHOOL ON THE JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING?

This tool may be used as set out below for general discussion, or there is a rating scale version that follows.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Ownership of the need to learn and its content is with the teacher. |  Do students set their own learning goals? Are students given explicit assistance in planning and setting goals? | As far as possible ownership of the need to learn and its content is given to individuals. |
| Education is compartmentalised according to age and subject. |  Is there fluidity between year levels? Are students helped to develop 'helicopter vision' – to make links between different curriculum areas? Is there a Learning Centre or Resources Centre that is the hub of learning in the school? Is there explicit help to acquire generic skills – especially information literacy skills? | Learning is lifelong in concept and content, there are links vertically and horizontally between age groups. |
| Learning is about what to think. |  Are students given adequate time for reflection? Are students helped to reflect by aids such as a diary, which is regularly discussed with a mentor? Are students' ideas rigorously challenged? To what extent is learning seen as a form of problem-solving? | Learning is about how to think. |
| Teachers are dispensers of knowledge. |  Do teachers feel valued and supported? Are innovations valued and celebrated? Do teachers work collaboratively? Is there a system of mentoring? | Teachers are mentors and models of lifelong learning. |
| Failures are separated from successes. |  To what extent can it be said that all students in the school have positive pictures of themselves as learners? Are students grouped according to ability? Are some made to feel that they are 'failures'? Do assessment exercises take account of different styles of learning? Is most assessment formative rather than summative? How much self-assessment takes place? Are students able to discuss their progress with a mentor? Is it safe for students to take risks/ to expose lack of knowledge? | Emphasis is on progress and encouragement of further learning. |
| Learning is a difficult chore and is about received wisdom. |  Is there discussion about different styles of learning? Are students aware of their styles of learning? To what extent are classrooms communities of enquiry? Are there opportunities to celebrate learning? Is it fun to learn in the school? | Learning is fun, participative and involving. |

Rating scale for: How far is the school on the journey to lifelong learning?

Tick a box to indicate where you would place your school on the scale for each item then add the score. The highest possible score is 30 – but it is unlikely that there is a ‘perfect’ lifelong learning school. A school scoring 6 is at the very beginning of the journey.

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Ownership of the need to learn and its content is with the teacher. | | | | | | As far as possible ownership of the need to learn and its content is given to individuals. |
| Education is compartmentalised according to age and subject. | | | | | | Learning is lifelong in concept and content, there are links vertically and horizontally between age groups. |
| Learning is about what to think. | | | | | | Learning is about how to think. |
| Teachers are dispensers of knowledge. | | | | | | Teachers are mentors and models of lifelong learning. |
| Failures are separated from successes. | | | | | | Emphasis is on progress and encouragement of further learning. |
| Learning is a difficult chore and is about received wisdom. | | | | | | Learning is fun, participative and involving. |

APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire to 'mature age' students who intended to enrol for the Special Tertiary Admissions Test, 2000

At the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) we are undertaking a research project on the views of people who are interested in returning to study. The results will be used to help design better education programs.

If you would like to know more about this research, please contact Jennifer Bryce or Tracey Frigo at ACER, 03 9277 5555 or email: bryce@acer.edu.au

Who should complete this questionnaire?

- If you are 21 years or older (no matter how much older) we would be most grateful if you could complete this questionnaire and return it as soon as possible in the reply paid envelope attached to the information booklet.
- If you are not yet 21, please discard this questionnaire.
- Please note that your responses will have no bearing at all on your enrolment for the Special Tertiary Admissions Test or your selection into tertiary education. Your questionnaire responses are anonymous.

About you

Please tick appropriate boxes:

Male

Female

Age: 21 - 25

26 - 30

31 - 35

36 - 40

over 40

The location where you normally live:

Australian Capital city

Australian Provincial city (approx. > 25,000 people)

Australian Rural town (approx. 1,000 to 25,000 people)

Other rural area in Australia

Postcode: _____

Overseas (please name the country) _____

About you and work:

Working full-time at present

Working part-time at present

Not working, but looking for work

Not working and not looking for work

Studying full-time Studying part-time

If studying at present, please name the course: _____

What is your mother's present or last main occupation? _____

What is your father's present or last main occupation? _____

What is your present or last main occupation? _____

(If you, your mother or your father have never worked, please say so.)

Your education up to now

At what point did you *first* leave secondary education (for work, further education or training, or other reasons):

Year 9 or below

Year 10

Year 11

Year 12

What is your highest educational or training qualification to date?

Year 9 or below

Year 10

Year 11

Year 12

Post school (please give details): _____

Please give the year when you last undertook a formal course of study, such as secondary school, or a TAFE course: 19__.

About you and learning

Please indicate the extent to which each of the following statements applies to you: 1 = very little to 5 = very much. Please place only one tick in each row.

| | 1 very little | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 very much |
|---|---------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| I have high literacy skills | | | | | |
| I have high numeracy skills | | | | | |
| I didn't like school and wanted to leave as soon as possible. | | | | | |
| I usually study what is set, but nothing extra. | | | | | |
| I try to think how useful the material I'm learning will be. | | | | | |
| I often find the only way to learn is to memorise topics by heart. | | | | | |
| For me, new material often clarifies material I already know | | | | | |
| I find that many subjects become interesting once you get into them. | | | | | |
| Learning just facts is better than to have to do a lot of reading. | | | | | |
| I like to work at a topic until I can form my own point of view on it | | | | | |
| I find that studying some topics can be really exciting. | | | | | |
| I usually relate what I learn in a subject to what I already know | | | | | |
| I am returning to study to get a good job or enhance my career. | | | | | |
| I am returning to study for my own inner development. | | | | | |
| I don't spend time learning things that I know won't be assessed. | | | | | |
| I look forward to learning new things. | | | | | |
| I often think about why the world is in the state it is. | | | | | |
| I like to try to find out why something happened the way it did. | | | | | |
| If I don't understand something I like to inquire about it. | | | | | |
| I like to find out more about a new idea. | | | | | |
| I like to find out how something works. | | | | | |
| I expect to keep learning all my life. | | | | | |
| I used not to like studying, but now I'm motivated to learn. | | | | | |
| I really don't like study - it will be hard to complete the course | | | | | |

About you returning to study:

What has been the *strongest* influence that motivated you to return to study?

Please list any experiences at school that have *encouraged* you to return to study:

Please list any experiences at school that have *discouraged* you from returning to study until now:

Please suggest two things that secondary schools could do better to encourage their students to keep learning after they leave school, (attach extra paper if necessary)

1. _____

2. _____

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS.
YOUR ANSWERS ARE COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS.**

APPENDIX 3



LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: PRINCIPAL

Preliminary

How long have you been employed at this school/in your current position? Where were you beforehand?

School Policy and Curriculum

Do you have any documented policies or procedures at the school that specifically mention 'lifelong learning'?

Are there specific objectives that you want to achieve with students that particularly relate to life and learning in the world beyond school? How do you know if you are achieving these objectives?

Does the school adopt any special approach in supporting students to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies that they will need as lifelong learners (eg multiple literacies, technological skills, motivation)?

Is there any evidence regarding the effectiveness of this approach?

Are there alternate programs and pathways available for students who do not intend to go on to university? (eg VET in schools, school-based apprenticeships)

Does the school survey ex-students to find out what they are doing? How is this information used?

Staffing and Professional Development

Are there any particular ways in which school staffing is organised to support students in making the transition from school to work?

Are there professional development opportunities for staff in areas which may be associated with lifelong learning (eg information technology, information literacy, VET)?

To what extent are staff encouraged to be lifelong learners themselves?

Relationships with / involvement of community

What is the nature and extent of the relationship between the school and the local community? Do you have in place any strategies which encourage community input into curriculum development?



LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: TEACHERS

Preliminary

How long have you been employed at this school/in your current position? Where were you beforehand?

Teaching and Learning

Are there specific objectives that you want to achieve with students that particularly relate to life and learning in the world beyond school? How do you know if you are achieving these objectives?

Do you adopt any special approach in supporting students to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies that they will need as lifelong learners (eg multiple literacies, technological skills, motivation)?

Is there any evidence regarding the effectiveness of this approach?

Do you notice any differences in the learning styles of your students? If so, what are the strategies you use to accommodate these differences in your teaching?

What strategies do you use to make your teaching program relevant to students' lives outside and beyond schooling?

To what extent are you aware of/involved in alternate programs and pathways available for students who do not intend to go on to university? (eg VET in schools, school-based apprenticeships)

Professional Development:

Have you undertaken professional development in areas which may be associated with lifelong learning (eg information technology, information literacy, VET)?

To what extent would you describe yourself as a lifelong learner?

Relationships with / involvement of community

What is the nature and extent of your relationship with the local community? Do you have in place any strategies which encourage community input into your teaching program?

What is the nature and extent of your relationship with the local community? Do you have in place any strategies which encourage community input into your teaching program?

A 'lifelong learning' orientation to education is seen as vital if young people are to thrive in the knowledge rich, constantly-changing world of today and the immediate future. This report extends in a practical way the issues paper published by ACER: *The era of lifelong learning: implications for secondary schools* [Bryce et al, 2000]. Through discussion of case study research undertaken in seven secondary schools (catholic and government) in South Australia and Victoria, the report identifies ways that the foundations for lifelong learning can be built in secondary schools. To support this work, it provides instruments that can be used by schools to consider the extent to which they have oriented their programs to lifelong learning.

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