

From left, Nick Lovering and Conor Fennell (Katherine High School); Carolyn Blanden (Warakirri College) and Paul Watson (Emmanuel Catholic College), participating in the panel discussion with Louka Parry at the 2022 ACEL National Conference held in Sydney.



FutureSchool: Australian case studies

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Background

During 2022, the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) was delighted to partner with the Australian Learning Lecture (ALL) to engage, share, and learn from schools that are making significant changes in schooling to meet the needs of the future.

ALL is a ten-year initiative by Koshland Education Innovation (KEI) designed to bring big ideas and new approaches in education to national attention. Each lecture around a big idea is delivered by an international thought leader and then supported by a two-year impact program.

In 2019 ALL commissioned Valerie Hannon, a United Kingdom-based thought leader, to conduct a global scan and analysis of the nature of the future school. Valerie's research showed that many schools around the world were already re-designing and transforming their purpose, operational mode, pedagogies, and curriculum. Her research revealed more than 50 FutureSchool models are operating already in many countries and that despite differences in circumstance and purpose, there were key design principles common to all of them. In late 2020, the Australian Learning Lecture delivered its third lecture presented virtually by Valerie Hannon: *Seeing is Believing: The Future School is here* and a number of international case studies were published. ALL also supported Valerie Hanon and Julie Temperley to write a book based on their research, *FutureSchool*, published by Routledge in May 2022.



In this paper, I begin by identifying the three design principles that emerged from Hannon and Temperley’s research. I then provide a discussion of the collaborative relationship between ALL and ACEL that led to the selection of three schools in Australia. A snapshot of each of the schools constitutes the rest of the paper.

Design principles

Three clusters of design principles were identified through Hannon and Temperley’s (2022) research:

1. The values that future schools ought to manifest;
2. The operational philosophy that demonstrates these values in practice; and
3. The learner’s experience.

Each of these is now discussed.

Values

According to Hannon and Temperley (2022, pp. 30-31), the values cluster can be understood in terms of five core principles (See Figure 1). FutureSchools are *purpose driven* which means they are concerned with both individual and collective purposes; *equity-focused* so that schools are focused on social justice issues and addressing inequities; involved in *promoting identity* for each learner so that they feel valued and a sense of belonging; *strength-based* in terms of

acknowledging that all learners bring with them strengths and assets which need to be developed; and focused on *relevant learning* not only for learners but also the local and global community.

Figure 1: Values Cluster



Adapted from *FutureSchool* (p. 31) by V. Hannon and J. Temperley, 2022, Routledge.

“We’re looking for sustained change to improve the engagement of students and thus the outcomes with the belief that the traditional model isn’t working and we’re looking to do better by them and by our teachers as well.”
 (Paul Watson, Principal of Emmanuel College).

Operational Philosophy

FutureSchools are those that translate values into practice and this is referred to as the “operational philosophy.” Within the operational philosophy, Hannon and Temperley (2022) identified four principles and these include schools that are learning focused, flexible/dynamic, technology enhanced, and ecosystemic. *Learning focused* refers not only to student learning but also staff learning that draws upon up-to-date and relevant research in the learning sciences. *Flexible / dynamic* refers to schools being responsive and adaptive to the dynamic and changing needs of learners and the wider environment. FutureSchools are schools that are *technology enhanced* since they appreciate the value of technology and use it extensively to support learning for personal and collaborative ends. The final principle within operational philosophy is *ecosystemic* which “asserts the school should be seriously porous with many active partners in organizing learning” (p. 31). These partners include members from local and global communities that can provide meaningful learning experiences for learners.

Figure 2: Operational Philosophy



Adapted from *FutureSchool* (p. 32) by V. Hannon and J. Temperley, 2022, Routledge.

The learner’s experience

As can be seen in Figure 3, there are five design principles that govern the learner’s experience. These principles are personalised, integrated, inclusive, relational, and empowering. *Personalised* refers to the

central place of the learner so their needs, interests, and development are of prime importance to the functioning of the school. *Integrated* refers to learning that goes beyond a single discipline focus to opportunities for connections being built across disciplines. *Inclusive* refers to the wider culture which is welcoming and respectful. *Relational*, as the term implies, emphasises the importance of strong, supportive, and collaborative relationships for learning. Finally, FutureSchools are *empowering* in that they enable learners to be active agents of their own learning.

Figure 3: The Learner’s Experience



Adapted from *FutureSchool* (p. 33) by V. Hannon and J. Temperley, 2022, Routledge

ACEL and ALL partnership

ACEL and ALL established a cooperative relationship to actively engage the ACEL community in discussion of the principles and ideas of the future school, with a focus on identifying a number of Australian schools to lead the discussion and to share their learning. An expression of interest process was conducted, with schools asked to:

- Identify their future-focused mission;
- Describe how the design principles have been put into practice;
- Demonstrate how learning has been transformed; and
- Explain the leadership that has been required.

Schools selected were then supported to present at the ACEL National Conference in Sydney from 28–30 September 2022 as part of a focus on the future led by Louka Parry from *The Learning Future*. In selecting schools, the diversity of Australian schools was considered with a range of sectors, school types, and locations being included. Three schools were selected and each school shared its practice through a panel forum facilitated by Louka Parry. Moreover, each school lead a focused workshop as part of concurrent sessions.

The three schools selected were Emmanuel Catholic College, Katherine High School, and Warakirri College.

Some observations

In selecting schools to participate, it was not expected that each school would have equal focus on Hanon and Temperley’s (2022) design principles described within each of the three clusters. It was

interesting to note, however, that each of the identified schools emphasised the values cluster, with a particular focus on their mission and vision which impacted all of the elements of their practice.

Both Warakirri College and Katherine High School were particularly focused on addressing disadvantage for students in their respective communities. Addressing diverse needs was also a key consideration for both schools. All schools identified workforce challenges. For example, Katherine High School's challenge pertained to attracting and retaining staff; Emmanuel Catholic College's focus concerned managing engagement and workload; and Warakirri College's challenge focused on building enhanced staff collective efficacy. Moreover, all schools underscored the centrality of the learner experience which saw staff listening and responding to students and developing constructive relationship with them.

After the conference, representatives from each of the three schools developed a case study that was informed by the design principles discussed earlier. In writing the cases, they were also asked to identify their challenges, sources of celebrations, and three actions that are currently making the biggest difference in their schools. What follows is a snapshot of each of the schools. More detailed case studies can be found on both the ACEL and ALL websites.

Case Study 1: Emmanuel Catholic College

Emmanuel Catholic College is a low fee-paying co-educational college in Perth with over 1,000 students from years 7-12. The college recognises the imperative need for a substantial shift in pedagogical practice and the structure of the school day, with a view to completely transform the educational experience for both staff and students.

Challenges

1. *Building a shared vision of transformation.* With a new principal at the beginning of 2022, change management has been central to building a new vision for transformation. The principal has been clear that staff are "encouraged to innovate and create but with permission to fail."
2. *Teacher workload and engagement.* The College has recognised that teacher workload is unsustainable if current practices are maintained. The impact on staff has taken a huge personal toll, with many opting or planning to leave the profession. The teaching role needs to change from being the instructor to the guide.
3. *Student engagement and learning.* In thinking about how Emmanuel College's students engage with school, the staff acknowledged that there is an enormous disconnect between what is said and what is actually done. For example, the traditional approach of sitting in rows, lessons in short blocks, a one sized curriculum, one subject area focus, lack of real-world application, teacher controlled, an emphasis on grades, and a general lack of learning relevance, are not working.

Celebrations

Staff at Emmanuel College believe that the teaching and learning program of the school must be strongly interlinked to the health and wellbeing of both staff and students to the point where they must be one. This was the focus of a "Think Next Community Forum" held in October 2022, bringing staff, students, parents, and industry across the community together to discuss the future of education. Based on the forum, the following changes will take place from 2023:

1. *A New Timetable Model.* The College is trialling a new timetable in 2023, with the traditional six-period day of 50/55 minutes

each being replaced with a combination of 100 minute and 50-minute learning blocks. This change requires teachers to be able to change their pedagogical practice.

2. *Year 12 Optional 4 Day School Week.* This is not a four-day week with a day off. Commencing in Week 6 of Term 1, Year 12 students will be able to come and go from school on a *buy in/needs basis* one day a week. This opportunity is designed to ease the transition between school and life. It will allow students further opportunity to develop independence and set priorities relevant to them as individuals.

Actions making the biggest difference

1. Asking staff to be creative and innovative but giving them permission to fail at the same time.
2. Never underestimating the power of student voice and treating it with the sincerest authenticity.
3. Being brave and acting. This involves not engaging in a conversation without the intent of actually improving the situation and implementing change.

"We're looking for sustained change to improve the engagement of students and thus the outcomes with the belief that the traditional model isn't working and we're looking to do better by them and by our teachers as well." (Paul Watson, Principal of Emmanuel College).

Case Study 2: Katherine High School

Katherine is located approximately 315km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory. Katherine High School aims to be a school for the future where every person is provided with the opportunity to learn and work in a supportive educational environment. Sixty percent of students are in the lowest quartile of the ICSEA scale. Sixty-eight percent of students are Aboriginal, with 31 traditional first languages spoken including four dialects of Kriol. The school currently has over 600 students. The schools is grappling with how to meet the needs of its First Nations students as well as building the cultural capabilities of staff.

Challenges

1. *Equity and identity of First Nations students.* While understanding what equity means, the staff at Katherine High school consider that they do not have a full understanding of how to meet the needs of the population of Aboriginal students who make up almost 70% of the School. Staff at the school realise that they need to further their understanding of Indigenous students' cultural identity so that they can thrive. While there is an awareness and appreciation of the need to value and incorporate First Nations languages into the School's curriculum, at this stage the School is unsure of the next steps.
2. *Building cultural capability.* In response to the student demographic, Katherine High School is seeking to build the cultural capabilities of the staff. A deeper understanding of the bias within the current education system is needed to enable First Nations students to successfully share their cultural knowledge. Teachers in the school are building productive relationships with students that are allowing them to engage in deep listening and learning, while understanding that there is work to be done on the listening part. Staff acknowledge that a cultural shift is required to encourage more collaboration with students.
3. *Attaining and retaining staff.* Staff and student retention is a continuing challenge that is preventing the school from moving from surviving to thriving.

Celebrations

1. *Learning conversations, attendance, and completion.* Learning conversations are becoming the norm. The previous 12 months have seen a reduction in disruptive impacting student behaviours with students sharing new positive aspirations for their lives. A promising change has been an increase in Aboriginal students' attendance. Year 11 attendance has increased by 3.7%. Across Year 11 and 12, it is 6% higher for Aboriginal students than those in Years 9 and 10, meaning the messages about the benefits of completing school are reaching the target audience. In Year 10, there is a huge opportunity to continue to encourage student retention as the cohort numbers 114 students. The largest cohort of students to graduate from Katherine High School was 66.
2. *Team collaboration.* Phase 1 of the team collaboration strategy aimed at creating a work environment where staff are engaged and retained has been completed. Additional planning and preparation time have been provided to enable teachers to address the diversity of student starting points. Support is needed to enable staff to value the experience of living and working in a remote outback community.

Actions making the biggest difference

1. Clear, consistent expectations for all students and staff;
2. Needs analysis to target specific challenges; and
3. Wrap around support for both staff and students.

"It's the most dynamic and unique place to really close the gap."
(Nick Lovering, Principal, Katherine High School)

Case Study 3: Warakirri College

Warakirri College is a special assistance school with five campuses in Western Sydney and the first independent school in New South Wales (NSW) to be accredited to deliver the High School Certificate (HSC) by distance education. The school services disadvantaged students aged from 15 to 22 years. The school is striving to meet the current and future needs of young people disengaged from or disenchanted with mainstream schools.

Challenges

1. *Addressing disadvantage.* Staff and students are working together to break the cycle of welfare dependence, raise students' aspirations, and to change the projected futures for young people who face the challenges of mental illness and social disadvantage.
2. *Meeting diverse needs.* The challenge is to embrace a diverse and rigorous curriculum that sees 30% of HSC graduates receive university offers while meeting the needs of the 80% of students on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD).

Celebrations

1. *Engagement and wellbeing.* During their time at the College, students develop increased engagement, enhanced self-esteem, and a sense of wellbeing. Differentiated programs using the principles of Universal Design for Learning and individualised assessment opportunities have changed students' self-image as they taste success for the first time in their school lives.
2. *Learning and career aspirations.* Many students discover that they can learn, that they can demonstrate what they know and can do, and receive recognition as effective learners. Learning engagement improves and career aspirations change. Many students are the first in their family to achieve a Year 10 RoSA or HSC, as well as some students being the first family members enrolling in university or achieving their career goals.
3. *Attendance.* When enrolled in the mainstream education system, the attendance rate of some students was as low as 6%. At Warakirri College, students' attendance dramatically improves when students feel safe and affirmed, and make friends often for the first time. Some previous school avoiders now attend as much as between 80%-90% of the time.

Actions making the biggest difference

1. Building strong relationships characterised by acceptance, inclusion, encouragement and forgiveness;
2. Knowing and acknowledging each student's personal context and addressing their social, academic and physical needs; and

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3. Giving students an experience of success builds their self-confidence. Supporting students to meet high expectations encourages them to raise their aspirations to the point where many achieve beyond what they or their families had ever imagined.

“You need to give them a very clear image of a future which they choose which they see is desirable and I think you have to love them.” (Carolyn Blanden, Principal, Warakirri College)

Conclusion

Detailed case studies and interviews with the leaders of each school are now available on the ACEL website. It is hoped that the experience and learning documented in the three case studies will inspire more Australian schools to use the *FutureSchool* design principles to support them in developing their future-focused mission.

With sincere thanks to:

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