Educational rationale for

2014-15 Centenary Theatre

prepared for the Project Management Committee
by Alan Clifford Educational Consultancy
May 2012

It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process.

(Henry James, US novelist)

Project Summary

This project was formulated in 2011 in the context of planning for the Centenary Celebrations of Williamstown High School, to be held in 2014-2015. The proposal aims to construct a performing arts facility at the senior campus in Pasco St Williamstown, Victoria, which would represent a legacy project, marking one hundred years of service to education in the Williamstown community.

School Background

The borough and local community had founded the Williamstown Grammar School in 1867. In late 1914, the senior school was absorbed into the expanding state education system that had accepted responsibility for senior education in 1905.

Williamstown High School has served the post-primary educational needs and aspirations of young people in Williamstown and surrounding suburbs for the last 100 years. The current school has two campuses -- the junior on Bayview Street catering to students from years 7 to 9 and a senior campus on Pascoe Street providing education for students in years 10, 11 and 12. The school has more than 1440 students and more than 100 staff.
The school’s website states that:

“Williamstown High School was established in 1915 and today it is one of Victoria’s oldest and most distinguished secondary schools. Its crest, which features an anchor and the motto ‘Hold Fast’, speaks eloquently of the school’s historical significance, its importance to the local community, its key values and on-going success at charting a course for life for its diverse and ever evolving student body. Proud of its past, but with an eye firmly on the future, Williamstown High School prepares students so they may become productive adults and responsible citizens.

Williamstown High School offers a diverse curriculum and a variety of educational resources with a particular focus on developing each student’s potential. Two nearby campuses combine Williamstown High School’s tradition and reputation with unique programs and spacious settings and offers quality resources and facilities that only established growing schools can.”

The school boasts excellent academic results and a broad range of academic and applied learning subjects. Its enrolment is currently capped due to demand for places, indicating the high regard in which the school is held within the community.

The Proposed Project

The following outlines the original proposal to create a Creative and Performing Arts project at Williamstown High School:

A purpose-built creative arts facility

It is proposed that Williamstown High School develop and build a state-of-the art facility to support its performing arts and award-winning visual arts programs to mark its first 100 years as a government secondary college.

The various products of the arts, such as a performance, a musical composition, a painting, a film, or a design, are all created to be seen or displayed in some form. It is from this display that students appreciate the wider impact of their work and from which they can critically evaluate their own and others’ work in a more meaningful context.

Students at WHS would testify to the immense satisfaction and sense of completion that comes from displaying their artwork to the public.

The facility would ensure a performance space that could be used for all school productions, any Media showings, Art exhibitions, future VCE Dance workshops, Music/Band rehearsals and concerts, a Live Production learning centre, Theatre Studies classroom and show-case of future class work.

The design of the facility would (1) encourage involvement in the performing arts from the students and the community; (2) involve students in all aspects of theatre production (including future introduction of Certificate 1 and 2 in Live Production); (3) increase numbers in VCE students opting to participate in Theatre Studies, Music, Media and Dance subjects; (4) provide a lecture space for such events as VCE masters series, for students of WHS and neighbouring schools; and (5) provide assembly space for between 275 and 780 students and staff.
This facility would be an asset to the wider community and bring revenue to the school through hiring to external groups.

Educational Rationale for the Proposal

An education rich in creative arts maximises opportunities for learners to engage with innovative thinkers and leaders, and to experience the arts both as audience members and as artists. Such an education is vital to students’ success as individuals and as members of society, emphasising not only creativity and imagination, but also the values of cultural understanding and social harmony that the arts can engender.

(MCEETYA and Cultural Ministers Council, 2007, p. 5)

As is indicated by its VCE results and enrolment cap, Williamstown High School is a highly successful government secondary college. It has a strong focus on educational excellence in general and a commitment to arts education, in particular. The quality and range of performing arts education at the school is limited by inadequate facilities, particularly in the drama and music areas, in spite of the quality of those curriculum areas. Research both within Australia and overseas, clearly underscores the importance of arts learning for students. The research highlights the beneficial impact of quality arts education, including:

1. The value of arts education to students’ intellectual development [the close correlation of and inter relationship between success in music and mathematics is a case in point].
2. The vital role arts education plays in personal development for students, particularly in regard to skills such as individual creativity, the promotion of team work, the capacity of students to engage enthusiastically in shared endeavours such as performances, and the ability of students to find great enjoyment, success and satisfaction in their school lives.
3. The wide range of career pathways associated with the arts enables many students to pursue further studies and employment opportunities.
4. The creation of often-lifelong interests in various aspects of the arts. This can include the production of art, participation in community groups focussed on the arts and the pleasure associated with viewing and participating in, a wide range of artistic activities [concerts, plays, exhibitions.]
5. Quality arts programs deepen students’ understanding of and empathy with their own culture and, in a multicultural society, the cultures of other Australians. This can assist with both community understanding and tolerance of difference.
6. The arts enrich the lives of all of us and quality school arts programs play a major role in enabling students to lead richer and more fulfilling lives, both at school and in later life.
At present in Australia and in some other countries, the place of arts education is under some stress in schools. A preoccupation with national testing, teaching to the tests and narrowing the curriculum, has in many schools, undermined the important role arts education plays in the development of young learners.

Quality music, drama and even visual arts programs are becoming increasingly rare and this reality is both a marked and deplorable one in our government school system. It is no accident that successful government and private schools develop and maintain, high quality arts programs. The drift from government to private schools in Victoria over the last 20 years can in part at least, be explained by the desire of parents to ensure that their children gain the advantages of an excellent arts education.

In spite of this trend, Williamstown High School has deliberately prioritized the arts as a flagship area. The school aspires to retain the excellent programs already operating in the arts and to extend them further over time. This proposal is a key aspect of this endeavour on the part of the school.

**Organisation of the Project**

In late 2011, the Williamstown High School Council determined to establish a Project Management Committee to scope the proposal. The following is the brief progress report to school council on the activities of the Project Management Committee as of April 2012:

“The Project Management Committee [PMC] for this project has held seven meetings to date. The committee is made up of Hugh Jones [Council Chair], Jim Williamson [parent and council member], Lisa Sperling [School Principal], Gino Catalano [Senior Campus Principal] and Alan Clifford [Executive Officer and Facilitator].
The role of the committee is three fold. Its task, on behalf of college council, is to:

1. Determine the nature and scope of the proposed centre.
2. Oversee a major fundraising and marketing program to enable the construction of the centre
3. Oversee construction of the centre, once sufficient funds have been raised

Key Activities:

1. The committee convened in November 2011 and employed a project facilitator on a small time fraction for the initial six months. The committee has undertaken extensive discussions in respect of the nature and scope of the project.
2. It has agreed on an implementation plan for the roll out of the project, including committee structures, agendas and minutes and roles and time frames.
3. It has documented the progressive activities undertaken, in an action plan.
4. It has prepared, reflected on and discussed in detail, a range of papers on aspects of the project [e.g. role in relation to the centenary celebrations, project scope, approaches to marketing].
5. It has employed an architect [pro bono] to advise on the project -- options, facilities, site determination, costs.
6. It has consulted with key teachers about the project and what they would like to see included in the facility.
7. The Performing Arts staff have visited schools in Melbourne with strong arts programs and facilities and documented their needs in terms of curriculum and spaces.
8. A Fundraising and Marketing workshop has been conducted for invited school community members.
9. A list of fundraising and marketing ideas and possibilities has been collated, growing out of the workshop.
10. The PMC continues to discuss the feasibility and scope of the project and is currently looking at centres such as the one envisaged, both in Victoria and New Zealand.
11. The facilitator developed a short scoping paper which includes the consideration of options for moving forward, in light of what the PMC has learned, through its activities and considerations, so far.’
12. The PMC has overseen the production of an Educational Rationale designed to explain and promote the project.

The Proposed Scope of the Project

In May 2012, the PMC discussed a range of options to recommend to school council on the way forward for the proposal. The issue confronting the PMC and school council was the contradiction between the desire to create a comprehensive centre, meeting all the facility and equipment needed, with the difficulty of raising significant funding from largely local sources.
The options considered in summary were:

1. A minimalist option to upgrade current facilities to create a performance centre.
2. A middle option that would see the creation of a stand-alone performance facility [auditorium] with the capacity to add other spaces subsequently [e.g. instrumental music rooms.]
3. A comprehensive facility as outlined in the architect’s preferred option.

It was the judgement of the PMC and subsequently school council, that the middle option be the initial focus of the project.

**Design Parameters of Preferred Option**

The project will, subject to funding, have two stages. The first stage involves the construction of an auditorium/theatrette on the site facing Railway Place and adjacent to the current Senior Study Centre. The façade of the building will be designed to enhance the presentation of the school to the Williamstown community. The facility will have the following features:

1. It will sit 250-300 people.
2. Subject to detailed cost estimates, it will have retractable seating in order to create a large practice/classroom space for drama and music.
3. It will have a large stage area to facilitate productions and concerts.
4. It will include significant storage space.
5. The theatrette will have comprehensive sound and lighting infrastructure.
6. It will have heating.
7. To facilitate community use out of school hours, the building will have toilets and a small servery for refreshments.
8. The theatrette will be available for all school faculties and activities [e.g. year level assemblies, VCE lectures, student activities such as debates, parent meetings, careers presentations and so on.]
9. It will have a foyer which can be used for the display of student art work.

It is estimated that this first stage of the project will cost approximately $1.5 million dollars. This will be the target amount for the first stage of the project.

Stage 2 of the project, which will be designed at the outset by the selected architect, will be sited behind/adjacent to the theatrette. Its completion over time will depend on either further fundraising or grants. The performing and visual arts staff have provided detailed facility and equipment specifications for their teaching and learning requirement for both stages of the project.
Fund Raising and Marketing

On March 27th 2012, the PMC conducted a workshop with invited school council and community members. The workshop generated a list of potential fundraising and marketing ideas. Potential sources of revenue for the project included:

1. School council funds, either through a voluntary fee levy or redirection of school funds.
2. Seeking support from the broader Williamstown community through donations.
3. A range of fund raising schemes such as ‘buy a brick’ [which have proved successful in other schools visited as part of the planning process].
4. Approaching local businesses for sponsorship.
5. Raising funds through student concerts and performances.
6. Seeking funds from community groups who may seek to utilize the facility, once constructed.
7. Applications for grants from philanthropic organizations, relevant government agencies and other potential sources. Whilst state and federal education funds are not currently available, this could well change over time and the school will be well placed to promote this project as an educationally desirable and well conceptualized one.

A Fundraising and Marketing Committee has been formed and is currently finalizing a policy and program for acquiring the funds to enable the project to proceed. The PMC and school council has determined to employ, on a part time basis, an experienced fundraiser for the project. This person would expedite the work of the committee and would develop a detailed fund raising plan during Term 2/3 2012.

Time Frame

2011- Project proposed and agreed

November 2011- Project Management Committee established and Project Facilitator appointed

May 2012- Educational rational for the project approved and published

June/July- Formal Launch of the project

June/July 2012- Fundraiser appointed and Marketing and Fund Raising Plan developed and approved

2012/2013/2014- Fundraising

2013- Architect selected to develop Stage 1 and 2 design and detailed drawings

2014/2015- Construction
Conclusion

The mission statement of the South Australian Education arts initiative ARTSsmart proclaims that the Arts:
... play a major role in defining and interpreting our culture, heritage and society and in celebrating our diversity as a nation. They inspire, entertain, transform, instruct and challenge the way we see, listen and comprehend. The arts expand our understanding, knowledge and creativity. When young people are engaged in the arts something changes in their lives.

(Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2002, p. 1)

It is fitting that the Williamstown High School community has determined to mark its centenary celebrations with an exciting legacy project. The development of a two-stage plan for the construction of the Creative and Performing Arts Centre of Excellence by 2015, the Centenary Year, is a viable and realistic one. In the research undertaken in 2012 by school arts staff and the Project Management Committee, there was clear evidence that school communities can, with will, enthusiasm and proper planning, achieve success in such projects. A number of government schools boast facilities such as the one envisaged, funded entirely from locally raised money.

While the centre in question is designed to enable arts education at Williamstown High School to reach a standard of excellence among the top ranks of Victorian schools, the facility has other purposes and benefits. It will be a centrepiece for the upcoming centenary celebrations and it will affirm again, the wonderful role the school has played in the education of Williamstown young people for one hundred years.

The centre will be of benefit to all staff and students at the school, surrounding schools and to organizations within the local community. Finally, the successful creation of the centre will reflect the esteem within which the school is held and the determination, not just to retain arts education but to expand and deepen it for the benefit of students, both current and for those in the future.

Williamstown High School
Creative and Performing Arts Centre of Excellence
Project Management Committee- 2012