

BRIGHTENING THE LIVES OF SHY BUSH CHILDREN: THE VISION OF BALLARAT TEACHERS' COLLEGE PRINCIPAL WILLIAM HENRY ELLWOOD 1926 - 1931

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Abstract

Ballarat Teachers' College was established in 1926 to provide trained teachers for rural school positions. The principal, Bill Ellwood, was an inspirational and dynamic educator who imbued his students with the importance of social and community service. This ideal would equip the young teachers with an attitude that would attract the esteem and respect of the rural communities to which they would be assigned upon completion of their course. The ethos of service that was taught to and embraced by the students at the college between 1926 and 1931, as well as the history of the institution during those years, is focused upon in this article.

Introduction

Frank Tate, who had been appointed Director of Education of Victoria's State Schools in 1902, believed that rural school teachers could culturally transform the communities in which they lived. In 1928, shortly before his retirement, he explained to a gathering of Ballarat teachers that '*all education [should] aim ... at training citizens for service*', and argued that they could play an exemplary role in popularising this belief. (*Courier*, 26 July 1928) The Director acknowledged with pleasure that teachers had already '*set a splendid example*' of promoting moral and artistic betterment throughout country Victoria and he emphasised the importance of trainee teachers embracing this '*vision*'. (*Courier*, 26 July 1928) Tate was acquainted with the extra-curricular objectives of the Teachers' College at Ballarat and was publicly endorsing goals that he shared with the principal, William Henry Ellwood. As a former student, Arthur Ward, (1981, p. 6) recalled:

At the college, the staff had aimed at inculcating certain attitudes and ideals of service; ideals we were to carry into the big, wide educational world, and to apply them with patience and dedication in all our work with children, and in our service to the community as a whole.

The Establishment of Ballarat Teachers' College

Ballarat Teachers' College was created in May 1926 in response to an urgent need for more rural school teachers. (*Courier*, 20 January 1926, 21 January 1926, 29 January 1926) The Education Department had advised that '*We need as many teachers, especially men ..., as we can get*'. The withdrawal of junior teachers from schools '*could not be contemplated*', so the initial intake was limited to applicants from outside the service. The old Ballarat East Town Hall in Barkly Street was available and leased, but classes commenced at Dana Street State School while the Town Hall was being renovated. (V.P.R.S. 3853/1/ 24 February, 1926; V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 26/1978)

Most of the enrolment for the seven month course came from Western Victoria, with about a quarter from Ballarat. An allowance was provided upon the trainee agreeing to teach in the Department's schools for three years. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/26/9758, 8 December 1926; *Courier*, 30 March 1926, 17 April 1926)

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Bill Ellwood, the thirty-seven-year-old college principal, was an outstanding exemplar for the young trainees to emulate. When teaching in a small rural school in Gippsland in 1914 Ellwood had been evaluated by an inspector as

an enthusiastic, cultured and capable teacher. Has ... done much to make [his school] a centre of educational interest. His wide reading, energy and versatility make his lessons entirely beneficial. (D.S.E. Record of Ellwood)

Ellwood had attained the rank of Major and had been awarded the Military Cross during the Great War, and by 1922 he had been appointed a lecturer at Melbourne Teachers' College where he was assessed as '*a teacher of fine sympathies with a high conception of his profession and duties*'. Two years later he was a school inspector in the Ouyen-Mildura district. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 12 April 1926, 26/5370, 26/2865; D.S.E. Record of Ellwood; Ward, 1981, p. 2)

The students at Ballarat Teachers' College agreed with the above assessments. One recalled that Ellwood was a '*fine gentleman*' who set '*high standards*' but was '*extremely fair*', and another stated that he was '*very dignified but not pompous or autocratic*'. He was remembered as being '*gentle, a humanitarian, democratic, reserved, and an idealist with very high moral precepts*'. (Law, 1997; Mehan, 1997)

Anna Bouchier, a thirty-two-year-old former Princes Hill State School teacher was the first lecturer at the college and the second lecturer was Arthur Jones, aged thirty, who had previously taught in High schools at Essendon and Bairnsdale. Both lecturers were skilful and capable. (Law, 1997; Mehan, 1997; V.P.R.S. 10536/5/30/1899; D.S.E. Records: Bouchier, Jones.)

Forty-one students enrolled in the course - later increasing to sixty-one. Fifteen lived with their parents in Ballarat and the remainder were accommodated in boarding houses and hostels. Six female students lived at the Girls' Friendly Society Lodge in Lyons Street, Ballarat, and two stayed at the Sacred Heart and three at the Loretto convents. The male boarders were all accommodated individually or in pairs with local families. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/26/5158; *Report of the Minister, 1926 - 27*, p 32)

The academic standard of many of the students was not high. Fourteen had failed their Intermediate Certificate and only twelve had their Leaving. The course of study was modified to cater for the unique learning needs of the intake. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/26/5158; *Report of the Minister, 1926 - 27*, pp. 31- 32)

School teaching experience was important in the college. The special rural schools located within a number of Ballarat's larger schools constituted a popular teaching round destination for many of the student-teachers. During the end of year round the trainees taught the first five weeks of the following year's program. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/26/11430; *Courier*, 30 October 1926; Sweetman, 1939, p 116)

Most of the exit students at the end of 1926 were assigned to small rural schools throughout Victoria. The twelve students who had their Leaving Certificates were provided with permanent positions on salaries of £192 per year for the men and £156 for the women. The twenty-six who had their Intermediate Certificates were also appointed to permanent positions but were paid reduced salaries of £168 or £132. Those who had failed their Intermediate Certificate examinations were appointed to temporary positions but could obtain permanency upon passing. Ten students were required to continue attending the college until Easter 1927. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 26/7576, 26/12794)

Ballarat Teachers' College 1927 - 1931

At the beginning of 1927 the college was moved into the old Ballarat East Town Hall. There were two spacious lecture rooms connected by a staircase, along with a sitting room for the female students and a common room for the males. (*Courier*, 10 April 1926, 16 April 1926, 29 July 1926, 9 September 1926, 8 December 1926, *Report of the Minister, 1927 - 28*, p 28) Ellwood later established a library and contributed many of his own books to the collection. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 27 July 1929) In 1930 the college Magazine *Extra Muros* (p 39) outlined further improvements that had been made:

The first was the purchase of a ping-pong table and set, which resulted in the formation of a committee, and later, tournaments. ... New ... show-cases displaying views of Versailles, Waterloo, Napoleon's Tomb, and even of different country schools, have been erected; whilst on our walls have been hung many pictures such as "The Fighting Temeraire" - Turner, ... "His Mother" - Rembrandt, [and] "Mona Lisa" - Leonardo da Vinci.

But Ellwood's main concern remained the creation of excellent school teachers, committed to the service of the children that they were to teach and the community in which they were to live.

Eighty-seven students had enrolled at the beginning of 1927. Sixty-one were primaries, including ten from the previous year, and twenty-six were Manual Arts students. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 22 February, 1927) All newly admitted primary trainees from 1927 onwards were required to have completed at least a year's service as junior teachers. The 'Trained Primary Teacher's Certificate' course that they studied consisted of 'professional subjects', which included 150 hours of teaching experience, with thirty devoted to the study of rural school organisation, and 'cultural subjects', such as English literature, history, geography, music, drawing, nature study, horticulture and agriculture. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 27/1975) The three year 'Trained Manual Art Teacher's Certificate' was designed to prepare students for secondary school teaching. Most of the Manual Arts classes were undertaken at Ballarat's School of Mines. (Pascoe, 1997) A former student elaborated:

We ... belonged to the Teachers' College where we did our Theory of Teaching. For two half days we attended the college morning lectures and for another half day sport. ... We did our Teaching Practice later at Ballarat H. S., Ballarat G. S and State Schools where they had grades 7 and 8. (Cummins, 1992)

Some Manual Arts students shared lodgings with the primary teacher trainees. (Pascoe, 1997)

A local teacher, Monica Miller, was appointed to lecture at the college in 1927. She taught music at the institution and also served as a 'district supervisor of singing'. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4, 18 July 1927; *Courier*, 19 May 1928, 18 May 1929, 15 October 1931) In the same year Bouchier transferred to a school at Portland and Prue Hamono, a literature specialist from Warracknabeal High School, replaced her. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 27/7050, 27/7051; *Courier* 9 July 1927; *Report of the Minister, 1926 - 27*, p 32; D.S.E. Records: Bouchier and Hamono)

The students regarded all of their lecturers as inspirational and dedicated educationalists. They emphasised the ideal that teachers should embrace the concept of service to others. A student-teacher concluded: '*In every way we are preparing to take our places, not only in school, but also in the community in which we may be working*'. (*Extra Muros*, 1931, p 20)

Ellwood advised his new students that they should '*enter into the full community life of the college, because there was no better method of building up character*'. (*Courier*, 15 February 1930) Sport was an important aspect of this. Tennis, athletics, football, hockey and swimming

were all played. The annual competitions with the Bendigo and Melbourne teachers' colleges were highlights of the year. The 1929 issue of *Extra Muros* (p. 30) stated that *'these intercollege visits are instrumental in promoting a fine spirit of comradeship between students'*.

Ellwood believed that *'the civic and social aim of education seemed to be the most important of all'*. (*Courier*, 23 January 1932) Hence the emphasis that was placed upon the principle of service was sometimes overt. Ballarat's mayor visited to discuss *'civic pride'* at the beginning of 1927. He explained to the students that *'Teachers have a wonderful opportunity for fostering this spirit in the citizens of the future'*. (*Courier*, 19 March 1927) The importance of serving others was to be emphasised throughout the year and to future intakes of students by the lecturers. As Bill Ellwood explained to the students in 1929:

the nature of our work is such that each one of us is enabled to assist others along the road at some time during our training period. This helps to engender in all that spirit of good comradeship, helpfulness and service, which is so desirable. ... It will be found a great asset next year, when we emerge from this College of ours, qualified to teach the citizens of tomorrow, yet able to be real 'lights in dark places' to the citizens of today. We can make social service a most valuable part of our activities, from which we ourselves must reap great rewards. (*Extra Muros*, 1929, p.6)

The college principal provided his students with fourteen 'points' as a basis for their future careers. They were

1. FAITH in my work, in the ultimate goodness of things.
2. COURAGE to say and do right even when it hurts.
3. STEADFASTNESS and INFLEXIBILITY in the face of trial.
4. UNSELFISHNESS that always thinks first of others.
5. SELF-CONTROL which alone can make us free.
6. RESERVE in speech, in judgement, in action.
7. TRUTH, JUSTICE and TOLERANCE in all my dealings.
8. CHEERFULNESS and KINDNESS even when sorely tried.
9. CONCENTRATION on the work in hand.
10. THOROUGHNESS in every detail.
11. INDUSTRY which drives the furrow to the headland.
12. METHOD which economises my daily effort.
13. HUMOUR which brightens the day's work.
14. ACHIEVEMENT which aims at faithful endeavour and sees it through. (Ward, 1981, p 9)

The students were well suited for their future roles as rural school teachers because most came from rural areas. Common home addresses included Ballarat, St Arnaud, Horsham, Hamilton and numerous smaller towns and communities throughout Western Victoria. In most years only about 5% of students had metropolitan home addresses. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 27/7113, 28/5939, 5/ 29/12025, 30/9436, 31/4768) Moreover, many of them were experienced rural school teachers. Between 1928 and 1930 more than 90% had served their junior teacherships in rural or regional Victoria. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 27/7113, 28/5939, Unit 5, 29/12025, 30/9436, 31/4768) The occupations of the students' parents also uniquely prepared the young trainees for isolated rural school positions. In 1927 the most common was farmers (25%), followed by railway employees, blacksmiths and contractors. (V.P.R.S. 10536/4/ 27/7113)

The teaching capabilities of the young trainees were confirmed in Ellwood's end of course individual evaluations. His comments included:

manages a rural school with confidence ... manages a rural school in an efficient manner ... a conscientious student ... should do outstanding work ... has a high conception of her work and shows finish and thoroughness in every detail ... [and] a student of fine ability. (V.P.R.S. 10536/5/ 31/1143)

In December 1931, a district inspector, Norman Heathcote, examined thirty Ballarat Teachers' College students who were teaching in the ten local rural practising schools. He agreed with Ellwood's assessments and elaborated:

... the training and instruction received have been of a very high order. ... There is no doubt ... that the presence of a teachers' college in Ballarat has meant much to the schools of this district. The work done by the students and the originality frequently displayed have been a source of inspiration even to supervising teachers in practising schools. (V.P.R.S. 10536/5/ 31/11439)

The students not only understood the techniques of teaching in a bush school, but also the need to integrate into and serve their community. The Teachers' College booklet *'Hints for your Rural School'* provided the following advice under the heading: *'These will bring success'*:

*Create a pride in your school - build up a tone. The conduct of the pupils is your concern. ...
Be keen, thorough, cheerful, and encouraging. ...
Make your school a little social community. Encourage mutual helpfulness.* (V.P.R.S. 10536/5/ 28/4240)

The comments of an ex-student in 1931 confirmed that the young teachers were embracing Ellwood's ideal of community service. He advised:

Go forth into the world made kindlier and wiser by the example and co-operation of your lecturers. "The vision splendid" beckons you, calls you to make of life a nobler thing; and your share will be to brighten and expand the lives of shy bush children. (Extra Muros, 1931, p 62)

The Closure of the College

From 1929 onwards acute unemployment and economic depression was widespread. In Ballarat hundreds of unemployed voiced their grievances at public meetings. Some men resorted to rabbiting while others became derelicts. 'Ballarat's railways workshop dismissed workers, attempts to cut costs at the Ballarat hospital were *'found seriously to interfere with the workings'* of the institution, and the prevalence of unemployed female factory workers was *'deplorable'*. (Courier, 13 March 1929, 25 April 1929, 7 August 1929, 25 September 1930, 7 January 1931, 10 January 1931, 9 June 1931)

Teachers also suffered. In 1931 *'unnecessary'* schools, consisting mainly of small rural establishments, were closed, travelling expenses for teachers were cut back, salaries were reduced, promotions were curtailed, and adults were forced to remain on junior wages. (Courier, 27 May, 1931, 22 June 1931, 4 August 1931, 13 August 1931, Hyams and Bessant, 1978, p 142)

On 9 September 1931 the *Ballarat Courier* announced that the principal of Melbourne Teachers' College had told a Board of Inquiry into government expenditure that there was room for one hundred additional students at his institution. (Courier, 9 September 1931) A week later an interim report recommended that the Ballarat and Bendigo colleges close. (Garden, 1982, p 141)

Following the closure of Ballarat Teachers' College at the end of 1931 Ellwood was appointed an inspector of schools in the Maryborough district, Hamono became the first mistress at Ballarat High, and Jones was transferred to a high school in Geelong. (*Courier*, 23 January 1932) Eighteen months later Ballarat's Town Clerk was informed by the Education Minister that '*in view of the fact that it is not likely that there will be, for many years to come, any need for a Teachers' College at Ballarat, it is not desired to renew the lease*' on the old Ballarat East Town Hall. The institution was not to reopen until after World War 2, thus severely restricting the supply of teachers who had been specifically trained to teach rural school children. (V.P.R.S. 3853/1/ 2 May 1933)

Ellwood had promoted the need for a more unselfish and caring society in his farewell editorial in the 1931 issue of *Extra Muros*. (p. 12) He had also conveyed a sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the future. He had stated:

We are living in perilous and tremendous days - days of despondency and despair for many of our fellow citizens. In Australia to-day, as indeed in most countries, there are few homes which are not in one way or other feeling the effects of the world-wide depression. But adversity, though a severe schoolmaster, employs very salutary and effective methods for our ultimate good, and many of us cherish the belief that out of these sad times there will emerge a new world, better adapted to man's needs; and that there will be engendered a kindlier, more tolerant spirit expressing itself in works of mutual helpfulness and co-operation.

The students also took the message of their 'rousing' college song, *Extra Muros*, with them. It had been composed and written to cater for Ellwood's values, and as former student-teacher Arthur Ward (1981, p 6) recollected, it '*helped to instil ... ideals of service*' in the trainees. Sixty-six years after the closure of the college several former students could still remember the words of the song, and Ellwood's lofty and uplifting notions of service were remembered by all of them. The first verse of *Extra Muros* consisted of:

*"Extra Muros" rings the cry and echoes through the halls,
There's a vision splendid set beyond the College walls,
Through the happy days of now, the common tasks that bind
There's a gladness found alone in service of our kind.
(Souvenir of the Reunion of 1933)*

Ballarat Teachers' College had been a dynamic institution under Ellwood's leadership. Arthur Ward (p 8) stated in 1981: '*Everyone I have contacted, from 1927 onwards speaks in glowing terms of the dedication of the staff members and of Mr Ellwood in particular as an inspiring leader*'. In interviews former student-teachers who had been taught by Ellwood related how he had influenced them to serve the communities in which they had taught and lived. Generations of rural Victorians had thus benefited from Bill Ellwood's direction and advice to the trainee-teachers at Ballarat. As Ward (1981, p 6) explained: '*from what I can gather, the aims and hopes of the college have been fulfilled completely by the many who stayed in the teaching service until retirement*'.

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