



ABBOTSLEIGH

Clippings Designing for a culture of deep, engaged learning



Contents

Developing a culture of deep learning Megan Krimmer, Abbotsleigh Headmistress	5
Lessons that last a lifetime Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation.....	6
Learning dispositions	8
Architecture and pedagogy in dialogue Sally Ruston, Head of Junior School	16
Partnerships Framework Terri Moore, Head of Research, Learning and Enrichment.....	18
Connectedness in the Nursery Lisa Davies, Early Learning Nursery Teacher	20
Cultural nourishment Claire Drury, Early Learning 1-2 Room Teacher.....	22
Create, construct and deconstruct Beryl Cappello, Early Learning 2-3 Room Teacher.....	24
Tinkering with technology Enza Puscas, Early Learning 3-4 Room Teacher.....	26
Learning to love a phasmid Linda Mathews, Early Learning 4-5 Room Teacher	28
Leveraging digital for deep learning Nicole Hunt, Digital Learning Innovator	30
What will your professional digital presence look like? Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation.....	32
Partnerships for wellbeing – laying the foundations in T-2 Peita van Bussel, Transition to Year 2 Coordinator.....	34
How to fetch a pail of water Rachel Mitchell, Transition Teacher.....	36
Creating Connie Confident writers Melissa Tilbrook, Kindergarten Teacher	38
Integrating First Nations teaching and learning experiences Emily McMahon, Kindergarten Teacher.....	39
Partnerships in PDHPE and sport Mr Paul Guirrerri, Head of JS Sport and PDHPE	41
The write stuff Carrie Alker, Junior School Teacher Librarian.....	43

Year 1’s mission to Light up Vanuatu	
Peita van Bussel, Transition to Year 2 Coordinator.....	44
Rosie crosses the curriculum	
Amber Thomson, Year 2 Teacher	47
Year 3 Wellbeing Day	
Murray Keating, Year 3 Coordinator, Year 3 Teacher	50
Exploring empathy	
Ronelle Tang and Meg Lim, Year 4 Teachers	52
Kindness is Year 5’s superpower	
Amelia Love, Year 5 Teacher.....	54
Courage under fire – deep learning by design	
Kylie George, Year 5 Coordinator, Year 5 Classroom Teacher.....	56
Progressive feedback on the learning continuum	
Victoria Rennie, Deputy Headmistress and Head of Senior School	58
Writing and producing a musical from scratch	
Lynette Clarke, Head of Music	60
Collaborating for camp	
Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation Nicole Hunt, Digital Learning Innovator	61
Fostering empathy through creative writing	
Brett Kriedemann, Assistant Head of English	63
Leading by example	
Alison Fell, Dean of Middle School Clare Haymen, Year 9 Coordinator	64
Intergenerational connections and wellbeing	
Annette Ware, Dean of Senior College	65
Pushing the boundaries	
Rob Winslow, PDHPE Teacher	67
A place for learning, imagination and positive engagement	
Mary Faith, Head of Visual Arts.....	69

Clippings showcases diverse professional practices from across the Abbotsleigh teaching and learning community.

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This edition of Clippings has been produced by Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation and Sally Ruston, Head of Junior School.



Developing a culture of deep learning



‘Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere’

Deep learning is at the very heart of who we are at Abbotsleigh – Abbotsleigh girls really do love learning and they especially love to ask questions, grapple with ideas, debate, take risks and reflect on their learning. Indeed, as curious, highly motivated and engaged learners, our girls love to learn deeply; so too, do our dedicated teachers. As such, Abbotsleigh has a culture of very deep learning which permeates both within and beyond our classrooms.

‘Learning anywhere, anytime, and in any place’ has been an educational mantra for many years now – and Abbotsleigh girls demonstrate their enthusiasm and thirst for learning continually. However, this is not ‘surface level’ learning, or learning at ‘face value’; this is authentic, meaningful learning that requires our girls to delve deeply, solve difficult problems and develop sophisticated conceptual understandings. This is particularly important for our world that is beset with increasingly complex challenges with which our young people will be required to grapple and solve in the years to come.

Fundamental to deep learning at Abbotsleigh also, is educational research, both national and international, as well as action research within our classrooms and across the School. The importance of research informing educational

practice in our ELC, Junior School and Senior School is clearly demonstrated in the articles featured in this edition of *Clippings*.

Research also, is fundamental to our girls’ learning, and the depth of research in which our girls engage, from the youngest girls in the Junior School to our oldest senior girls, is quite exceptional. In fact, the original research undertaken by our girls studying subjects such as English Extension 2 and History and Science Extension for the HSC, is both captivating and very often ground-breaking. So too, is the research conducted by girls at all year levels.

The articles in this professional journal demonstrate our girls’ and our teachers’ love of and passion for deep learning and research, as well as the lived belief of our girls and staff, that learning is most definitely ‘a treasure that follows its owner everywhere’.

Megan Krimmer

Mrs Megan Krimmer
Headmistress

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Lessons that last a lifetime

Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation



What are the skills that students should be learning?

Over the past five years, within an increasingly uncertain, complex and volatile global environment, this has become one of the most asked questions in society and education. What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will today's students need to thrive in and shape their world? Mark Scott, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sydney and previous Secretary of the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education is firm in his belief that the fundamentals of education will not change. The 'three Rs' are the building blocks for higher order learning, upon which more complex skills are developed. He says that while we cannot predict the future or the skill requirements of employees of the future, we do know the type of learner that we want to develop – '...students who are critical and reflective, open to a lifetime of learning and relearning, who are comfortable with change and have empathy and a global outlook.' (Loble et al., 2017, p. 98)

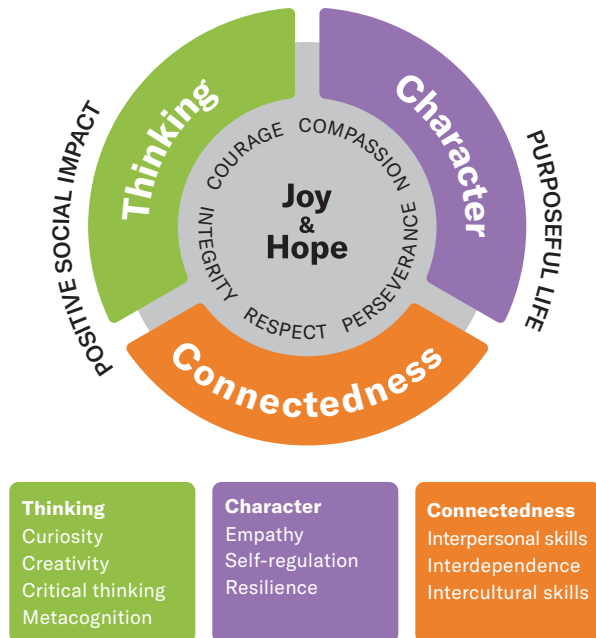
At Abbotsleigh, we have been responding to this challenge through developing a learning framework that has our School Values at its core and focuses on the way students think rather than the right answer. Our Kindergarten children of today need to be powerful learners who will be able to make their way and find

purpose when most of their working life will be spent in the unimaginable second half of the 21 century. They need to be active contributors to whichever community they find themselves in. They need to be able to deal with issues critically, listen to other people's ideas, empathise and act accordingly. They need to be able to take risks in their learning and innovate, to know how to communicate their message and collaborate with others. They need to be curious and show character through adversity.

Transferable skills such as these are a very important part of Abbotsleigh's Learning Framework. The framework, which is divided into the three main areas of thinking, character and connectedness, targets the explicit teaching and learning of a number of learning dispositions: The learning dispositions that form the basis of Abbotsleigh's Learning Framework are those that are recognised by academics and industry, and in research as being important for citizens of the future to be productive, innovative problem solvers. Most importantly, the framework does not take the focus away from academics, but rather seeks to place learning dispositions alongside knowledge as necessary to prepare our girls for tomorrow. It aims to create a culture of learning that makes explicit our desire to have a positive social impact and a purposeful life.

No longer can we expect our students to develop empathy or foster their creative skills incidentally. We need to teach learning dispositions explicitly alongside content.

To thrive, a learner needs both breadth and depth of learning. Such knowledge should encompass attainment of the basic literacies and numeracies and mastery of discipline or domain knowledge. But it should also include knowhow in applying knowledge to create value for society and competence in general, transferable capabilities and dispositions. (Milligan et al., 2020, p. 5)



In doing so, we have been supported by a partnership with the Association of Independent Schools NSW and New Pedagogies for Deep Learning. This is a global partnership including more than 1,800 schools across 17 countries where educators are continually developing their knowledge of learning and assessment processes to meet students' diverse needs and interests, so that they can design learning that is a 'fusion of the most effective pedagogical practices with emerging innovative practices that together foster the creation and application of new ideas and knowledge in real life.' (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 84)

Entering our fourth year of this partnership, Abbotsleigh's Learning Framework is now well established, and our focus has expanded to an exploration of how success is currently defined and recognised. How can we give prominence to and validly assess soft skills such as the learning dispositions? How do we recognise the whole student and not just what they have shown on pen and paper tests that emphasise the knowledge component of learning? These are the questions that we are grappling with along with many other schools both nationally and internationally:

- New learning ambitions
- New assessments
- New standards
- New credentials
- New partnerships
- New metrics

On the following pages you will see how we have visually represented the learning dispositions mentioned above in such a way that students can measure their growth along a progression – no matter the year group. You do not ever 'complete' a progression. Rather they are revisited numerous times in different subjects and contexts.



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Learning dispositions

Thinking:

The process of considering and reasoning about something

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I may be interested in a topic but I am not sure about how to really explore it.
I need help to know how to find further information and what to look for.

With help, I am learning to ask relevant questions about topics that interest me.

I can identify real-world and controversial issues and define what the challenge is.
I understand the issue from different perspectives and come up with important questions to help design a solution.

I can identify real-life issues or challenges and come up with good inquiry questions to address them.
I still need some help to design an inquiry or problem-solving process.

I am good at framing problems and can pose questions in ways that open up thinking and possibilities.
I can generate and work with "big ideas" using reliable thinking processes.
I am curious and believe that things are not "carved in stone".
I can challenge what exists and make it better.

Curiosity



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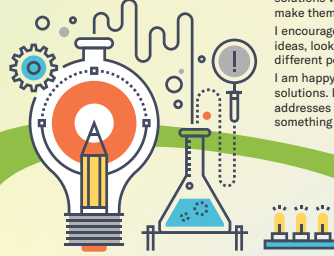


When I face a challenge, I look for what others did or the tools they used to solve it. If a solution looks like a good one, I will use it without considering other ideas.

When facing a challenge, I look for different solutions that may have been tried. With some help, I try to adapt these to suit my goals.
I know and can use some strategies that help me work or think in new ways.



When facing a challenge, I think about how and why previous solutions worked and what I can do to make them even better.
I encourage and consider other people's ideas, looking for opportunities in the different points of view.
I am happy to take risks in creating solutions. I ensure that my solution addresses the issues and adds something of real value.



When facing a challenge, I can imagine and create new solutions or ideas.
I can organise my creative thoughts in a way that helps me come up with promising ideas.
I often use "what if" thinking to create or add value to what already exists.



When facing a challenge, I not only come up with "game-changing" solutions but know how to build a plan and use the right resources to make it happen.
I can change problems into opportunities and develop solutions based on multiple perspectives.
I think outside the box and my solutions make a real difference in people's lives.



Creativity

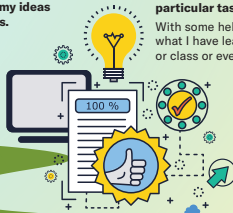


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I can understand the task but often don't see how it fits in with who I am and what is important to me.
Sometimes, with help, I can test my ideas out in different and relevant ways.



I am beginning to learn how to experiment with different ideas and figure out what works best for a particular task.
With some help, I can see how I can use what I have learned in a different subject or class or even outside school.



I can think about the impact of my ideas and design new courses of action to improve outcomes.
I use what I have learned in one task to solve new or different tasks.
I use techniques I learn in class to solve problems in my life and the world.



I can test and evaluate my solutions in diverse settings to find out which are most effective.
I reflect on my work and can explain why it is successful and how I can apply what I learn in different situations.



I can regularly apply what I learn in different contexts, adapting and transferring my knowledge as needed. **I understand how to evaluate ideas and their potential for success in new contexts.**

Critical Thinking

Experimenting, reflecting and taking action on ideas in the real world





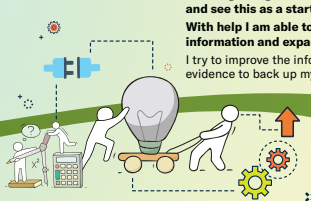
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I can find information on a topic, but have trouble engaging with the information in a meaningful way.

I have trouble making connections between different pieces of information.

I understand what I see or hear, but don't think about how to improve it.



I am beginning to be able to explore what I already know and see this as a starting point for new learning.

With help I am able to make connections between pieces of information and expand my understanding.

I try to improve the information I see or hear, but don't use evidence to back up my thinking.



I can use a number of strategies to find and create new knowledge and beliefs.

I am able to make some difficult connections, such as across classes, cultures, periods of time or multiple key learning areas.

I try to improve the information I see or hear and use evidence to support my thinking.

I am able to think about topics in new and exciting ways and can explain why my new knowledge is useful.

I am able to make connections between and across subject areas. I make meaningful connections and clearly understand they are important in my life. I consider different points of view when looking at a topic or task.



I have the skills to find and create my own learning opportunities.

I am continually building the knowledge and skills that help me succeed in life. I create meaningful solutions that impact my life and the world. I actively seek out feedback and use it to better understand how I learn and what helps me grow. I look for any opportunity to learn something new, even when it's challenging. I balance work with play.

Critical Thinking

Meaningful knowledge construction

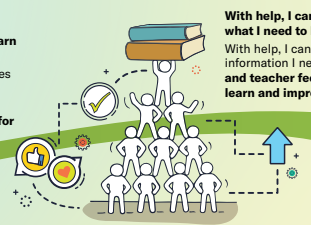


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I am not clear about what I need to learn and why I need to learn it.

I can complete tasks my teacher prepares for me, but I need help to reflect on and understand how I am doing with a task. Learning is not a positive experience for me yet.



With help, I can identify what I know, what I need to learn and why.

With help, I can choose a topic and find the information I need. I am learning to see peer and teacher feedback as opportunities to learn and improve. I think I can learn and achieve.



I can describe what I am interested in, what I know, what I need to learn and why I need to learn it. I can choose a topic and create/design a project to help my learning.

I listen to peer and teacher feedback and use it to improve the way I learn. Learning is a positive experience and it leads to a feeling of accomplishment and achievement.

I understand what I need to learn and am skilled at working out how to learn it.

As I learn, I reflect on my progress and seek feedback to improve my learning.

I use what I learn to help improve current and future projects. I enjoy learning and see it as a way to improve my life. I try to balance work with play.



Metacognition

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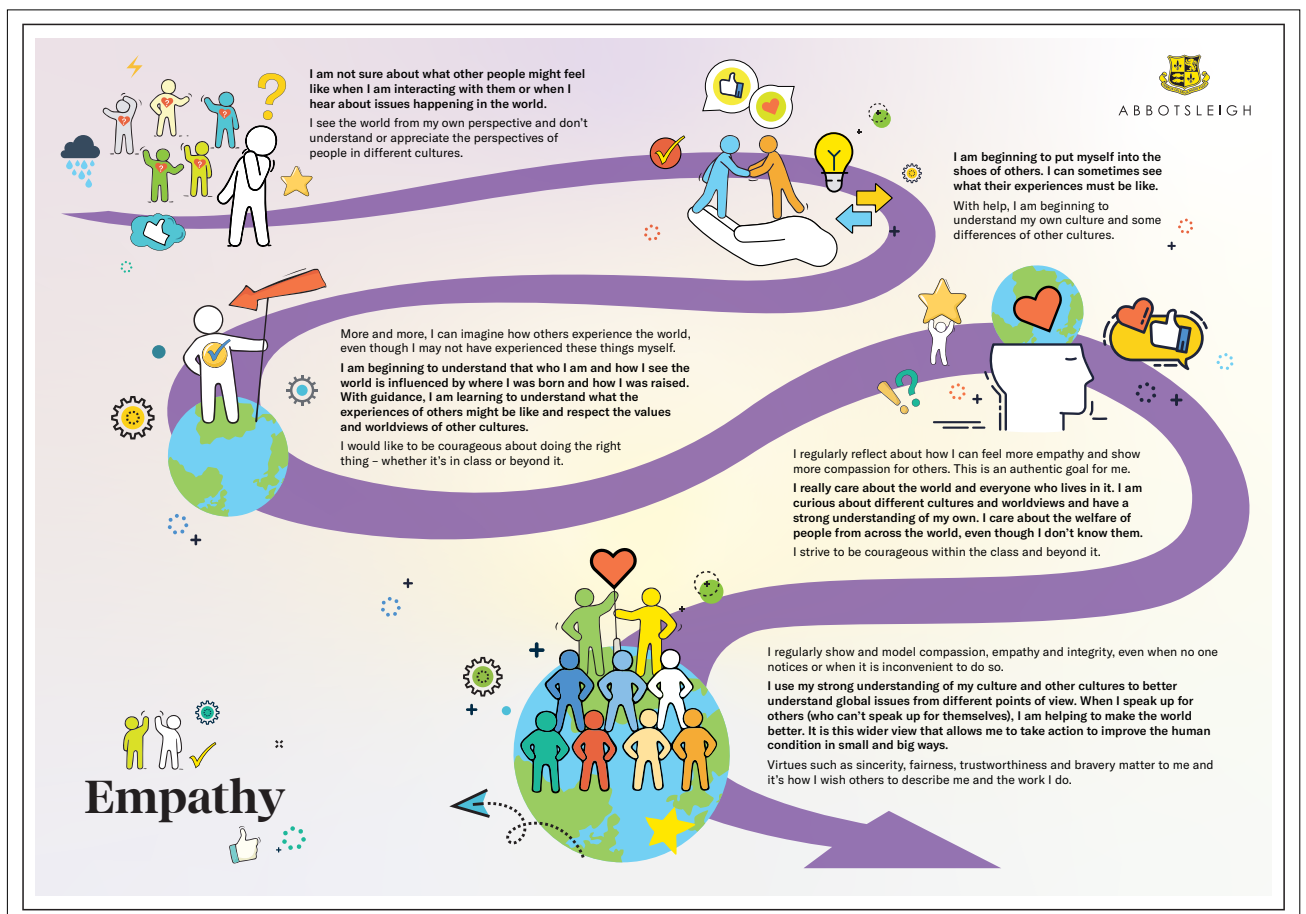
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Learning dispositions

Character:

The combination of mental and moral qualities of a person





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When given a deep learning task, I need a lot of help to get started. I need my teacher to guide me through important steps and decisions.

I am starting to plan and make decisions about my work and how to approach it. I still need a lot of support to get started and work through big decisions.

More and more, I am taking responsibility for my own learning when I work alone and in groups. With support, I am able to plan my approach to tasks, monitor my progress, and reflect on how to improve my work.

I take responsibility for my own learning. I know what I need to learn and how to learn it. I make decisions about my learning and take ownership of my tasks.

I understand and manage how and what I need to learn and take responsibility for my own learning. I can explain how taking responsibility for my own learning allows me to create solutions that impact my life and the world. I understand the importance of learning and see myself as a lifelong learner.

Self-regulation



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I usually give up when I face an unexpected challenge or receive constructive feedback. When a task or experience is too hard, I am unable to work through the challenge to find a solution.

I need a lot of support to deal with setbacks, constructive feedback, and difficult challenges.

I am starting to work through challenges, but still need to be supported and encouraged not to give up.

I persevere and rarely give up even when working on the most challenging tasks.

When faced with major setbacks or constructive feedback, I pause, reflect, adapt and work through the challenge to find a solution.

I understand and can talk about why character qualities are important for my life.

I am learning to persevere and not to give up even when tasks are challenging. Major setbacks or difficulties may throw me off track sometimes, but I can deal with small or medium challenges by pausing, reflecting, and finding new solutions.

My grit, tenacity, perseverance, adaptability and resilience allow me to work through any challenges or setbacks, and to help others do the same. I seek out feedback and use it to help my learning.

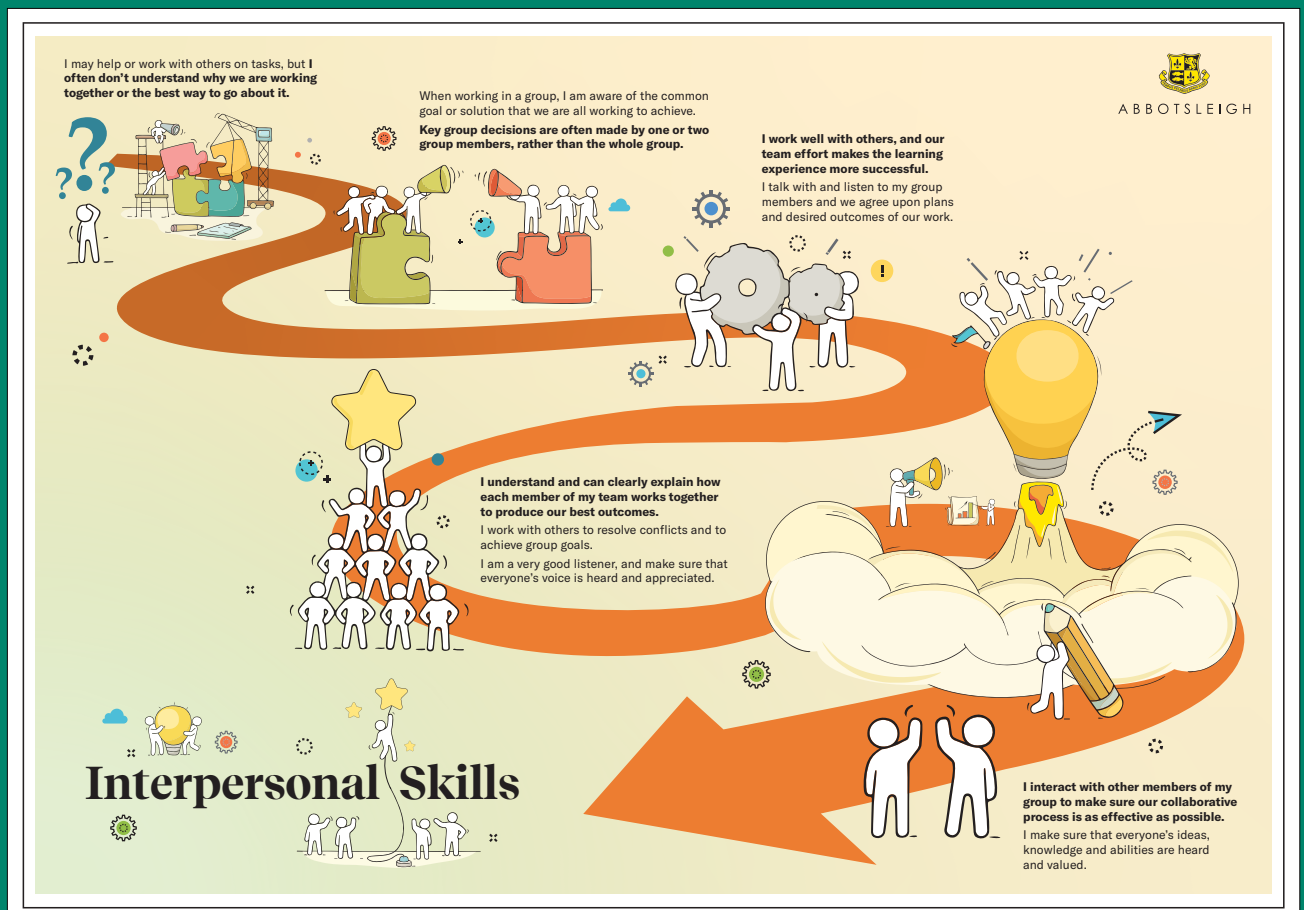
I understand that these character qualities are essential for creating meaningful change in my life and the world.

Resilience

Learning dispositions

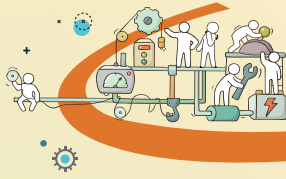
Connectedness:

A willingness and openness to develop relationships and build shared understandings





ABBOTSLIGH



When working on a group task, I often work by myself instead of working together with my team. I discuss some of the work with my team but do not discuss many important decisions.

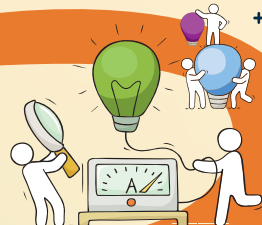


I can work with others to successfully complete a team task, but we have a hard time making sure that every group member is able to contribute equally. Important group decisions are usually made by one or two members instead of the whole group.



When I work in pairs or in a group, we agree how to share jobs fairly so that the group achieves its best work. We involve all group members in making important decisions about the task.

I can explain how my group uses all our strengths in the best possible way to develop our solution. Each team member clearly contributes to the final product or solution.



When working in groups, I find ways not only to use my own and others' strengths but also to build on our strengths and learn new skills. I understand the importance of group decision-making and make sure that all team members are able to contribute to our solutions.



Interdependence



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I am beginning to see that my behaviour has an impact on others but still have trouble seeing things from other people's perspectives.

I sometimes struggle to form positive relationships with my group members.



I am developing a better understanding of who I am and what I am interested in.

I see how my behaviour affects others and know that people may have different feelings and opinions than my own.

I understand who I am as a person and why I have my perspectives.

I listen to and understand other people's viewpoints, and I value their perspectives even if they differ from my own.



I have a strong sense of who I am. I fully understand my own perspectives and why they differ from the perspectives of others. I listen to the emotions and viewpoints of others and use them to improve my own learning. In teams, I work in ways that help me grow as a person, and that help my team members grow as well.



My social and emotional skills show that I have a strong sense of myself and my culture.

I communicate respectfully with everyone and form positive relationships with team members. I understand other people's perspectives and am able to change my behaviour after listening to others.



Intercultural Skills

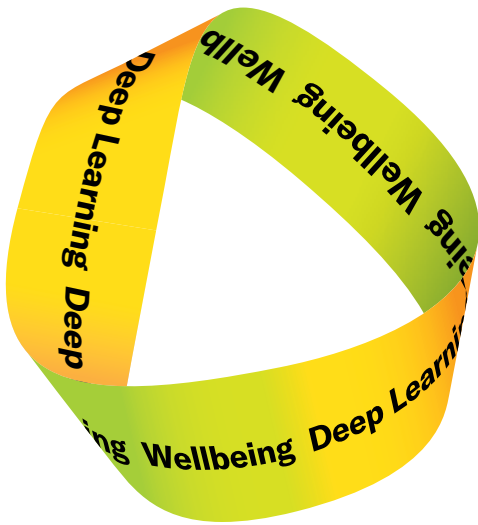


Architecture and pedagogy in dialogue

Sally Ruston, Head of Junior School

How does one take raw building materials and produce a learning environment that educates and enables children to thrive? I argue that it takes a collaborative process where the learner is considered capable, the architectural expertise is visionary and the building process highly consultative.

In building a centre for information, research and innovation in the heart of the Junior School, a once in a lifetime opportunity existed for us to transform outmoded 1950s classrooms into spaces that invite enquiry, curiosity and connection. We wanted to build a learning environment that educates as well as nurtures. We see our girls' wellbeing and learning being inextricably linked, just as the metaphor of the mobius strip models. It is therefore inherent upon us to find means of using architecturally designed built environments to provoke and enable circumstances that see our girls thriving and learning.



Stakeholder input right from inception was paramount. We see our girls as capable learners who are well placed to identify environments that respond to their learning and wellbeing needs. Thus, it was through our Student Representative Council that girls provided input through description and drawings of their ideal literacy environment. Similarly, staff were consulted so that their study, work and teaching spaces would be enabling, functional and fit for purpose. Equally important was the need to create aesthetically stimulating areas that mirrored and were informed by the stunning natural environment already present. We wanted learning and being to seamlessly transition from the indoor to the outdoor spaces that captured the imagination of the young.

Essential to 21st century learning was the remit to create technology and resource rich spaces throughout, including an immersive dome enabling augmented reality experiences to be routinely integrated. Rooms needed to be flexible and able to expand in size to seat from one in an inviting nook to 300 in the auditorium. Bookshelves, desks and furniture had to be moveable to enable optimal flexibility responsive to changes in learning needs. We were determined to create an interconnected space; one where girls could congregate, engage and collaborate as we know this is essential to their learning and wellbeing. Equally, wanted to build a transparent space where innovation is visible both inside and out.

We value space, to create a handsome environment and its potential to inspire social, affective and cognitive learning. The Space is an aquarium that mirrors the ideas and values of the people who live in it.

Loris Malaguzzi (Founder of the Reggio Emilia Philosophy)

The reality of this build is that the outdoor footprint of repurposed spaces is actually larger than the indoor. We are excited to have been able to respond to the girls' requests for outdoor spaces that are both playful and functional for learning. Science and Art classes can be outdoor events. Performance areas abound on the terraces and in the amphitheatres. Imaginative and robust play is well catered for with extensive scooter paths, climbing nets, tunnels and an inground trampoline.

We were inspired by the Reggio Emilia concept of the environment being the third educator. We took this to heart in creating a stunning landscape that responds fulsomely to the learning and wellbeing needs of our girls today, tomorrow and as they become leaders of thought and action into our future.



Partnerships Framework

Terri Moore, Head of Research, Learning and Enrichment

“New partnerships have significant potential to reframe learning by connecting learners to authentic opportunities locally, nationally and globally. As learning becomes more relevant and authentic, it moves beyond the classroom walls and builds on student needs and interests more organically. This new focus on relationships is an accelerator for learning but does not happen by chance.” (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 61)

Since the design and implementation of our new Learning Framework in 2019, we have continued our journey to reimagine learning and design deeper learning experiences so our girls can have a positive social impact and lead a purposeful life. With this as our foundation, a small team of teachers from the Abbotsleigh Research Centre turned their focus to one of the four elements of learning design from the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (Fullan 2014), learning partnerships. Our team of Teacher Librarians, Research and Support Staff had been seeking to support learning beyond our physical and virtual library collection to assist our teachers and girls as they conduct research and enquiry projects. We enthusiastically began investigating ways in which we could intentionally create and enhance learning partnerships across the School with the goal to facilitate growth and build new relationships between and among teachers, students and the community.

The ‘why’ of partnerships – what the research says

- 2021 The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Department of Education, Skills and Employment)
- 2020 Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training
- 2018 Prioritising School-Industry Partnerships in Australia’s Education System (Tori, Mitchel Institute)
- 2018 Gonski Report – Recommendation 8

Increasingly, evidence points to the role partnerships play in enhancing learning outcomes and creating future pathways for students. This is not a new idea; teachers have always engaged support beyond the classroom to enhance the design of their learning experiences. What we are more conscious of today is intentionally curating experiences than allow our learners to identify, document and articulate their skill development from these experiences. If we want to prepare our girls for the real

world, we must provide them with experiences that are in it. In designing learning that allows our students to engage in authentic experiences, we aim to prepare them for life beyond the school gates.

“Partnerships engender support for the development and wellbeing of young people and their families and can provide opportunities for young Australians to connect with their communities, participate in civic life and develop a sense of responsible citizenship.”

(Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 10)

Our Abbotsleigh and AIS NSW consultancy – developing the framework

Through initiatives across a range of departments, our small team soon realised the magnitude and potential of the program. We were reaching beyond our current resource capabilities and knew the potential for this to grow. Seeking some professional learning and support through the Association of Independent Schools NSW, we were joined by Education Consultant: Pathways and Partnerships, Angela Schumacher to guide us through developing the framework. The team then expanded to include teaching and non-teaching staff from across the School including our Early Learning Centre, Junior and Senior Schools and our Development and Community Relations teams. Expanding the expertise has enabled us to begin to develop a Partnership Framework for our community that will foster existing relationships, build new connections, and broker partnerships with potential partners.

Partnerships@Abbotsleigh – Our vision and goals

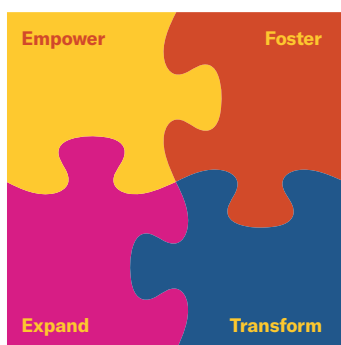
At Abbotsleigh, our vision is to foster authentic partnerships, expand opportunities and transform learning to empower our girls to lead lives of purpose. We seek to engage in mutually beneficial partnerships within and beyond our community.

- Our aim is to inspire students by enriching their curiosity, knowledge and resilience through contextual learning. The integration of real world learning into the curriculum will provide the opportunity for students to experience activities that will help to shape their understanding of potential societal and workplace demands.
- Our intention is to promote development, training, mentoring and career opportunities for our girls to become lifelong learners. At the same time, our goal is to empower teaching staff to create new pathways to develop innovative practices.
- Our desire is to enable students and staff to explore new horizons through meaningful collaboration and to develop the confidence and courage to grow in their faith, leadership and service to be agents of positive change in the global community.

In so doing, we aim to deepen our reciprocal relationships to enhance learning and wellbeing.

Looking forward – Expanding the horizon

Taking a whole school approach to partnerships means that we are still in the early days of developing our Partnerships Framework. As it is a priority project within our strategic plan, we are expanding our resources to explore opportunities for this venture. We continue to investigate workplace opportunities and alternate pathways for our learners to develop industry and workplace skills and an alignment with micro credentialing of these skills. Our hope is to inspire, excite and ignite passion in our community of learners by expanding horizons for personal and professional growth. With a new lens on the relationships that we foster and build for wellbeing and learning, we aim to create opportunities that are an accelerator for learning that do not happen by chance.



Overarching goals

- **FOSTER** a culture of deep and engaged learning
- **EXPAND** opportunities for learning within and beyond school
- **TRANSFORM** communities by being agents of positive change
- **EMPOWER** individuals and groups to develop innovative practices

FETE – A festival, celebration (of learning)

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Connectedness in the Nursery

Lisa Davies, Early Learning Nursery Teacher

“It is certainly clear that infants and toddlers are, in no way, the solitary, egocentric learners that they were thought to be in the past.” (Degotardi & Pearson, 2015, p. 105)

Historically, infants and toddlers have been perceived as egotistical and solitary and thought unable to empathise with others. Recent research challenges this notion, offering great insight into the social behaviours of infants evident from the first six months of life (Degotardi & Pearson, 2014).

This research strongly supports consistent patterns of behaviour noticed in the Nursery, from mutual gazes and smiles to initiating and imitating joyful, playful exchanges. These behaviours are observed daily, and as the children get to know each other and develop a greater sense of ‘togetherness’, these behaviours become increasingly prominent.

As the year progresses and the children spend more time together, we notice sophistication in their interactions. As they begin to read each other’s signals and cues, their interactions become more nuanced. Inquisitive gazes across the table gain complexity and become intentional bids for connection.

The children begin to use exaggerated facial expressions, gesturing and posturing with great intention. These ‘over-exaggerated’ expressions are distinctly different to natural expressions of emotion. Salamon et al. (2017, p. 1) frame babies’ intentional use of emotionally evocative communication as ‘emotional capital’. The interplay between social and emotional wellbeing and academic outcomes is well documented. Salamon’s work reinforces this, “The early social and emotional skills babies learn, some of which they are experts at by one year old, are the foundations of all other development and future academic success” (Salamon, 2020, para. 5).

There is a paradigm shift in early learning as we uncover the underrated social capacity of infants and toddlers. Beyond the individual, collective emotional capital builds togetherness. It is the foundation of community. Through a “willingness and openness to develop relationships and build shared understandings, the group and the individual continue to grow” (Costa & Kallick, 2014, p. 63).



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Cultural nourishment

Claire Drury, Early Learning 1-2 Room Teacher

The appetite to deepen cross-cultural knowledge and bolster multicultural exchanges was highlighted after Harmony Week was celebrated in the Early Learning Centre. The necessity for children to build intercultural skills was emphasised recently in the 2021 Australian Census. The results show that 49% of Australians have at least one parent born overseas, and a further 27% of Australians were born overseas themselves (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). These statistics are mirrored within our context in the Abbotsleigh Early Learning Centre.

These reasons, combined with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority's encouragement to develop strategies to increase social equity across early learning, became a programming priority. This was because we wanted to promote positive and respectful relationships that celebrate different cultures. The initial programming dilemmas we grappled with were: *How do we actively involve families in our program during Covid when they cannot be on campus? How can we support children in making tangible meaning from the exploration of culture?*

After much deliberation, we decided to ask each family to share a recipe that is dear to them, their tradition or their culture. Along with the recipes, we invited families to share why the dish was poignant to their culture. The stories behind each recipe were ingeniously renamed by one of the children's fathers as 'food memories.'

Each week the children would learn about a new family food memory. As they listened, they worked collaboratively to cook the corresponding recipe. This process allowed each child's story to be heard and the class to listen to their peers, learning that everyone's knowledge is valuable.

The children took great pleasure in the conviviality that came from sharing a meal they had the joint responsibility in preparing. Throughout the cooking program, Nursery learners demonstrated an open-minded curiosity about their peers' differing cultures as they developed a sense of their individual and cultural identities.

Food is considered an important element of culture because it is a tangible and very visible element that can be tied to a cultural group or region. To understand the traditions and significance behind the foods we eat and why we make them is to gain a deeper appreciation of the role food plays in helping us relate to and share our cultural identities (Rock, 2020., para. 2).

Respect – we value everyone for who they are.
– Abbotsleigh School Value



Some of the dishes the children made include:

- Kheer
- Biscuits
- Sticky rice balls
- Tamale pie

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Create, construct and deconstruct

Beryl Cappello, Early learning 2-3 Room Teacher



Creativity and innovation abounded as we watched the children play and engage with loose parts. They manipulated them and moved them around the room. From the floor to the table, from the table to the mat. Blocks and magnets, natural objects and plastics were mixed. We were interested in how we could define and report their work. There seemed to be a definite creative focus based on their imaginations and individual thinking skill sets.

While we could find no specific origins in this type of play, we felt it could be linked with the work of Reggio Emilia in Italy and the idea of environmental art or 'land' art, where creativity is viewed as a vehicle for learning. "A lively process of engagement...that is sensual and reflective, creative and deliberate, and deepens and extends children's learning" (Pelo, 2007). The concept is that whatever is created is ultimately only temporary. It shifts the idea of art away from children creating a defined end product to art as the essence of a creative process.

The children show through their actions that they can think critically and reflect upon their ideas with logic and understanding. Not being told what to make or how to make it leads to a creative process that engages them in the opportunities to identify what they know and question what they are yet to understand. The language they use to describe their thinking is both intentional and directive, as they share their thoughts and ideas with us and with each other.

The children are beginning to understand the ideas of experimenting and finding new ways to test their theories. They try different strategies to respond, react and adjust their thinking. As they do this, they become more in tune with what is working and what steps they may need to take to succeed. They show that they transfer their knowledge from one situation to another.

As our children think about redesigning, they construct their ideas about the world around them. Open-ended learning of this type leads to a greater understanding of the value of collaboration, creativity and empowerment. Children can flourish and extend their ideas when they feel empowered.

Teaching our children to share their challenges invites them to seek assistance and become co-creators of knowledge. By seeking the ideas of others and taking responsible risks, they can create solutions that work and make a difference for everyone.

The future is about creators and innovators who can consider a problem and develop solutions to adapt and change the world. When we provide children with time and space, we empower them to expand their creativity and curiosity, leading to more significant learning opportunities and promoting positive change to assist themselves and others.



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Tinkering with technology

Enza Puscas, Early Learning 3-4 Room Teacher

Early learners thrive within an innovation-friendly environment where they are encouraged to work collaboratively, test new ideas and engage in active learning. Enticing provocations are essential to this process. Being curious, asking questions and exploring multiple solutions are all vital to lifelong learning. Introducing innovative practice is essential as it encourages children to develop higher-order thinking skills including problem solving, decision making and creativity.

Enquiry learning in Early Childhood

“Enquiry learning is a dynamic process of being open to wonder and puzzlement and coming to know and understand the world” (Galileo Education Network, 2022, para. 1).

Vygotsky’s (1978) theories stress the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. He strongly believed that community plays a central role in the process of ‘making meaning’. Early learning teachers plan, document and reflect through an enquiry-based lens. It begins with a question, problem or an idea. It involves the children in planning and carrying out investigations, posing solutions and communicating their understanding in multiple ways.

Collaborative partnerships

At the ELC, enquiry-based learning evolves rapidly. When enquiries gain momentum, reaching out to the broader school community is beneficial to draw on a more comprehensive range of resources. From the beginning of the year, the children in the 3-4 class were curious about robots, specifically how they work, move and interact with child input. After several weeks of the robot enquiry, I reached out to our Learning Innovator, Nicole Hunt. Following a collaborative planning meeting, we identified several ways that technology could deepen the children’s thinking.

The focus was to empower children to:

- Tinker with materials to design and adapt toys
- Investigate toys, including taking them apart
- Pose a hypothesis about the behaviour of the toys
- Collect data to test this hypothesis

Developing an understanding of technology

“Techno toys are a new generation of toys that incorporate technologies such as embedded electronics, response systems and microchips in their design” (MacDonald, 2016, p. 60).

Our enquiry began by introducing responsive dolls. These toys react to a child’s input. The responsive dolls immediately captured the children’s attention as evident from these statements, “Look, her eyes open and shut... she’s talking, look, her mouth is moving too!”

After a couple of minutes of playing with the responsive doll, the children had more questions about the mechanisms that made the doll move and respond.





Armed with these questions, the children began hands-on investigation and trial and error. As the dolls started crying and moving, the children quickly picked up milk bottles, spoons or a dummy. Using their knowledge of babies, the children identified that crying meant the doll was 'sad' and the doll needed something to feel 'happy' again. Through active collaboration, the children took turns to 'settle' the doll, and test their theories, knowledge and understanding of how the doll moved. We used probing questions to provoke the children's thinking in order to add complexity to their interactions with the dolls such as, "How do you get the doll's eyes to move?"

The children quickly discovered a button on the doll's tummy to make it move. They needed to push it firmly to get a response. The children came to a consensus that batteries made the dolls operate. The children were curious as to how the doll knew the bottle was in its mouth. They decided to examine the doll more closely to find a solution. This led to a robust debate about whether inanimate objects can sense things in their environment as the children continued to tinker. It is essential to guide this thinking, for it prompts us as educators to research with the children to find the solutions, making learning meaningful, purposeful and fun.

With insight to how robots work, the children applied their prior knowledge to create new understanding. Exploration and investigation go hand in hand as we strive to support children in their learning.



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Learning to love a phasmid

Linda Mathews, Early Learning 4-5 Room Teacher

We welcomed seven phasmids into our class at the beginning of the school year. Curious to know and understand more about these exciting insects, we embarked on an investigation into phasmids. As teacher-researchers, we listened to the children's questions, gathered their ideas and wonderings, and provided various media for the children to represent their understanding.

Our thinking routines made it evident that the children were personifying the phasmids. "I think she's marching or doing a handstand...her exercises", "I wonder if it's a girl because it has white hair." "I wonder if they want to get married.", "I wonder if they like building with sticks and digging with dirt". They were interested in the gender of the phasmids, giving them names and wanting to know more about their relationships with each other.

Analysis of their initial observational drawings highlighted observable features of the phasmids. Subsequent drawings emphasised details that had emerged in their wonderings, such as the phasmids getting married, wearing clothes and hanging out with their friends in the playground.

We noticed that some of the children would leave a gift or offering for the phasmids at their cage each day. They made food and toys from playdough, drew pictures for the phasmids, cut them out and stuck them to their cage. Concerned for their wellbeing at night, they hung curtains to the screen of the cage.

The lens of curiosity through which the children initially viewed the phasmids had shifted to a relational lens. The children were developing empathy for them. Demetriou & Nicholl (2021), "argue that an essential aspect that influences invention and creativity is the empathy factor" (p. 4). The more the children observed, learned and cared for the phasmids, the more they developed empathy for their situation, fuelling their creativity.

Plucker & Beghetto (2004) suggest that creativity is the interplay between the ability and process by which an individual or group produces an outcome or product that is both novel and useful as defined within some social context. One such project highlighted the children's keen observation and ability to identify novel ideas and real solutions to perceived problems.

Concerned with the living conditions of the phasmids and inspired by a freshly stacked loose parts trolley, a small group of children collaboratively designed and built a hotel for them.

Revisiting their building, the group thought of new ideas, sourced the needed materials and supported each other in their constructions, actively pursuing innovative ideas that reflected their appreciation of the phasmids' situation.

The children's investigation into the phasmids encouraged a connection to them that we had not predicted. The

curious and scientific lens we had anticipated shifted to an empathetic, creative exploration driven by the children and supported by the teachers.



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Leveraging digital for deep learning

Nicole Hunt, Digital Learning Innovator

Digital technologies have become an essential part of the everyday learning environment. It is "impacting every aspect of life, and schools are no exception" (Fullan et al., 2018). This has been made particularly clear during a time when we have been forced to leverage digital technologies to participate in school or work during a pandemic. To support students during these changing times, educators are continually searching for ways to utilise new and existing technologies to enhance, support and further student learning in an authentic way.

At Abbotsleigh, a key component of our Learning Framework focuses on how to leverage digital to design for deep learning. This is frequently used to assist students in finding a solution to a problem, to create a working model or more generally, to facilitate, amplify or support student driven learning (Fullan et al., 2018). This has included a range of coding activities and investigating the use of augmented reality technologies. Some of our most recent learning experiences have included integrating Merge Cubes for interaction with digital 3D objects in Science and History, to recreating a nostalgic child toy – the Tamagotchi, designing and coding products to help in a natural disaster using Micro Bits and creating interactive maps and posters using Makey Makey kits.



As we leverage digital when designing for learning, coding seems to be playing an expanding role. This is increasingly considered as a great way for students to understand how things work and further develop problem solving skills (Videnovik et al., 2020). In the Junior School we go from coding the Blue Bots to move around objects in Infants, to exploring Scratch to create interactive posters, then moving to using block coding to design and create prototypes using Micro Bits in Geography. Through these experiences our students are actively participating in their learning; exploring, discovering and problem solving as they code to find solutions or to develop creative products. For example, the Micro Bit market in Year 5 (see article page 58), saw students seeing a need and going through a design process to meet that need using technology. They were given some basic examples of code, but then worked to add, change or adapt these to develop it further. Students added alarms, sensors and used extension kits and radio components to add complexity. The engagement, conversations and active learning that occurred throughout this process was key to developing their problem solving skills (Videnovik et al., 2020).

The use of virtual and augmented reality is also becoming part of the learning experience of students at school. During a Living Things unit in Year 3, the students explored the use of augmented reality through use of the Merge Cube. They created a 3D digital image of various animal habitats and used this as a tool to explore and express their understanding. Research has suggested that by interacting with technology in this way increases student comprehension, memory and imagination (Cheng & Tsai, 2013). This is particularly seen in the learning of scientific concepts.

While we look to consider the innovative and creative ways to use digital resources within the classroom, we do so while seeking to deepen the learning experience of students. The focus has become less on the tools available and more on how they can be used in an authentic way as part of their everyday school experience.



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What will your professional digital presence look like?

Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation

Digital portfolios offer unique learning opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning, their achievements and their growth. They provide a range of options for recording and presenting artefacts in electronic form and are widely recognised as adding depth and understanding to learning through the process by which students interact with the portfolio (Young, 2002). As well as supporting a range of multimedia, opportunities for reflection and comment lead to much greater author and audience interaction (Norton & Wiberg, 1998) than would occur with a paper portfolio. Indeed, there is strong evidence that digital portfolios help to refine students' thinking, challenge their beliefs about their learning and how to present themselves to an audience, as well as developing technological skills (Woodward & Nanlohy, 2004).

As formal written reports are, by nature, quite static documents, we have been developing our emphasis on digital portfolios as a way of capturing a student demonstrating skills in a dynamic way, a way of capturing the whole story about a student. Digital portfolios allow us to work with students in a reflective manner that celebrates students' learning (Wall et al., 2006). It is an area that we have wanted to focus on and that has been facilitated by the increasing emphasis on digital technologies brought about by two years of managing learning through a pandemic.

The Early Learning Centre (ELC) has been using digital portfolios for several years, with StoryPark as the means by which educators document what children know, can do and can make. In Semester 2 last year, we launched digital portfolios for our Kindergarten to Year 2 families and this year, all Junior School families have had access to their daughter's digital portfolio using Seesaw.

When we began work with the Junior School teachers on digital portfolios, we had many discussions about the place of the digital portfolio in facilitating a feedback cycle. Most importantly, we wanted to reverse the trend towards a social media feel, preferring that there is purpose and intention behind every post.

It is important to note that our digital portfolio platform changes in different sections of the School in order to accommodate for the age and developmental differences of the students. In the ELC, we use StoryPark and in K-6 we use SeeSaw. In the Senior School, digital portfolios

take on a different feel again. In appearance, they reflect a student version of LinkedIn. This digital portfolio is part of our Canvas environment and we selected it based on the way in which it can connect students to mentors at universities which use Canvas.

The focus for the Senior School girls is on posting evidence of the way in which they are developing learning dispositions as well as social and emotional skills, especially those from our Learning and Wellbeing Frameworks. For Year 7 students, the first post in their digital portfolio was all about teamwork. Having identified their own character strengths and where they sit on a learning progression for interpersonal skills, the girls reflected upon their experiences at camp. This reflection now sits alongside photographic evidence and a learning progression on interpersonal skills as the first post in their digital portfolio.

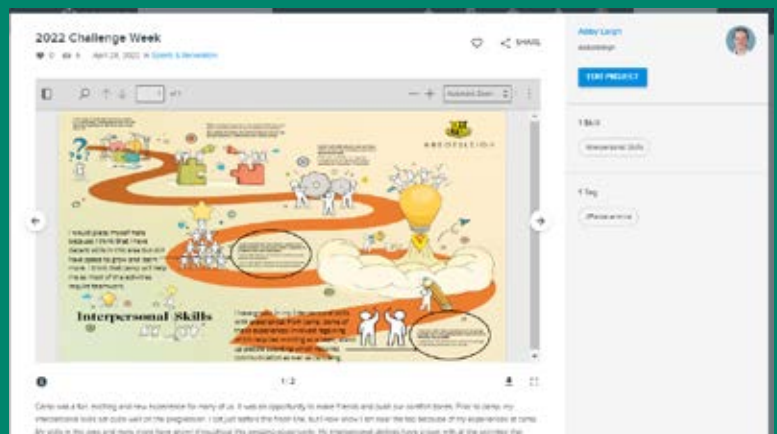
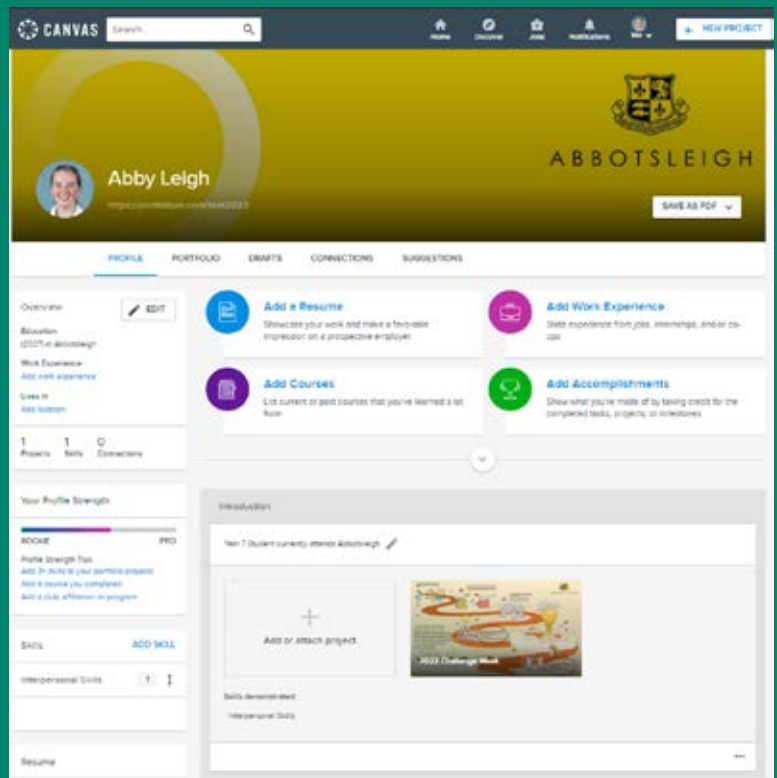
In Year 10, the first post in the digital portfolio was related to work experience. When the girls returned from their work placement in Week 5 of Term 2, they reflected upon the skills that were most needed and how they developed those. In talking with Year 10, we shared a video of an Abbotsleigh Old Girl, whose strong recommendation was to focus on the soft skills, especially looking out for your team and staying curious.



The importance of the soft skills that form the basis of our Learning Framework cannot be overestimated and it is important that our students learn to identify experiences where they have engaged with and developed these dispositions. In a recent job advertisement for Apple for a leader of business partnerships, the key qualifications were listed as:

- **Know people:** what drives, motivates or derails them
- **See around corners:** keep one eye on the future... while managing the myriad demands of the present
- **Approach problems flexibly** and generate a range of solutions
- **Drive what matters and** know what matters
- **Stay curious:** about the untold or undiscovered story
- **Education and experience:** We anticipate you will have a Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience

Increasingly, it is soft skills such as those listed above that are recognised as essential work and life skills. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in its Skills for 2030 report (OECD, 2018) lists cognitive skills such as critical and creative thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation alongside social and emotional skill such as empathy, responsibility and collaboration as essential for successful engagement in the workplace. Academics and researchers are consistent in their recognition of the importance of such dispositions as are the tertiary institutions to which our Year 12 students aspire. For many years, educators in the Senior School have helped Year 12 girls individually with applications that require evidence on capabilities such as creativity, problem solving, teamwork, sporting endeavours and community service. Now, the girls will be able to develop their own curatorial skills as they build their professional digital presence and skills that will last them a lifetime.



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Partnerships for wellbeing – laying the foundations in T-2

Peita van Bussel, Transition to Year 2 Coordinator



In the early years of school, laying a strong foundation for wellbeing is central to developing strong and curious learners who are well supported in engaging fully at school and beyond. Work in the field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) emphasises the need for these well established social foundations in supporting learner wellbeing. Given this, student wellbeing is planned for and evaluated with as much emphasis as the academic programs are at Abbotsleigh. Without students feeling connected and empowered in themselves, they cannot flourish socially, academically and emotionally.

Integral to the Transition to Year 2 wellbeing program is ensuring that all spheres of influence for a child are considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Social connections, including family and community, as well as the broader influences such as the current social investment in mental health and consent education are harnessed to ensure that student wellbeing is reflective of our cohort of girls and the wider world priorities that influence their lives.

By leveraging the partnerships available to us, programs are developed to cohesively support students and parents in wellbeing education through a range of in-school and external providers. Rice (2006) highlights the importance

of families and the school working in partnership towards a common goal. To achieve this, parents are provided with multiple opportunities to engage formally in student wellbeing. The wellbeing booklet for the early years of school has been deliberately designed to highlight what is in place across Transition to Year 2, rather than focusing on a specific year group. In this way, parents can see the progression of wellbeing initiatives, as well as specific focuses as their daughters develop. In addition, parent information evenings are run for either each year group separately, or as a T-2 group as a whole. The wellbeing focus for each of these sessions is responsive to the needs of the cohorts at the time. Previously, these sessions have been on topics such as the importance of not over-scheduling students in cocurricular activities, ways parents can be responsive and supportive during conversations with their daughters, adopting a growth mindset (Dweck, 2012) and providing information on the changing nature of friendships as the girls grow and change throughout the Infants years. External speakers from researched based programs such as the Act for Kids and Life Education parent seminars are also provided each year to ensure that families can use the same language of wellbeing and support with their daughters as that used at school.



Deliberate consideration is given to which wellbeing programs are the best fit for our students. All programs included have a strong foundation in research and acknowledge the important role of the teachers in the success of these programs.

The You Can Do It! social and emotional wellbeing program (Bernard et al., 1987) has long been used in the Junior School. The research behind the YCDI! program acknowledges the multiple facets of a strong sense of wellbeing and frames the program around explicit teaching of Five Keys to Success: resilience, persistence, confidence, organisation and getting along. At Abbotsleigh, we have also included the need to innovate, to be responsive to the changing world and revel in failure and success as solutions are proposed and adopted. It is in these six areas that explicit and systematic teaching is provided. Students are taught the language of a positive mindset as well as strategies to use when facing social and academic challenges. The program is delivered by both the PDHPE specialists as well as the classroom teachers. The common language used across the School ensures a consistent message and expectations that we view the students as capable of responding to their emotional ups and downs with gradually greater independence.

Act For Kids is a protective behaviours program, run across five sessions. Both the classroom teacher and Act For Kids facilitator run the sessions, acknowledging the significant relationship the girls have with their teacher, and also harnessing the expertise of the external provider. Throughout the program the students learn how to identify safe and unsafe situations, understanding the early warning signs in their bodies and what to do when faced with an uncomfortable or dangerous situation. Over the five weeks, the students explore scenarios relating to consent, trusting relationships and their bodies. The program has been run for the Year 1 students over a number of years. In 2022 Transition will also be involved in the program, through the newly launched Early Years program. Acknowledging the important role parents play in conversations around child protection, the Act For Kids facilitators also run a session for families so they understand what content is covered, and how to allow time and space for their daughters to initiate conversations should they find themselves in an unsafe situation. This lays the foundation for dialogue to continue throughout primary and secondary school, fostering a safe conversational space for families. This is paramount to the wellbeing of young people and adolescents.

The wellbeing program from Transition to Year 2, and indeed throughout the School, recognises that education and social growth do not occur in isolation. It is through explicit instruction, partnerships with families, external organisations and between the girls themselves that the students develop empathy and a strong sense of self. This in turn allows them to be well connected, empowered to help themselves and others and to flourish now and throughout their lives.

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How to fetch a pail of water

Rachel Mitchell, Transition Teacher

The National Early Childhood curriculum is a very flexible framework for contextual learning. In Transition this enables us to follow the children's interests and explore new and interesting pathways.

At the beginning of the year, we were relating to the students' prior knowledge by singing nursery rhymes. When singing 'Jack and Jill' I posed the problem, "I wonder how Jack and Jill fetched the pail of water". There were various explanations and we tried out the students' hypotheses by using large garbage bins full of water and small buckets. At the beginning there were more questions than answers as the girls wondered how to get the water out of the 'well' as it was too deep for their reach, and the buckets were too heavy to lift.

Young children are naturally curious learners and through exploration, investigation, discovery and hands on learning, they develop an interest in the world around them. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics are often collectively referred to as STEM. When educators intentionally consider these STEM domains while supporting children's play, they help to build the foundations to problem solve, think critically and take an active part in the process of learning (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, n.d.).

After some experimenting in Transition, one of the students suggested using a rope tied to the bucket handle

which we then tried lifting from a variety of positions. This made it easier to reach the water at the bottom of the bin, but strength was still required from above to pull it up, which the girls solved by standing on tables. Finally, we tried placing a rope over a bar which made the bucket easier to pull from the ground.

In Transition our goal is always to help the girls learn how to work together. Being actively involved in helping one another to solve problems develops collaborative skills and the ability to recognise the strengths and ingenuity of one another. Through the Interpersonal Skills learning progression, the girls were exposed to the language of collaboration and began to use this in their discussions on the way others had helped them to reach a common goal.

As a further provocation, we read a book called *Tikki Tikki Tembo* (Mosel, 1968/2007) about two boys who fell down a well. We acted out the story with some dolls. We wondered if we could find an easier way to pull them out using the rope and noticed that in the illustration of the well in the book, there was a wheel which the rope went through. We experimented again this time using some pulleys. While we observed that the friction was lessened, we also noticed that when we tried out the pulley with something heavy such as stones, the weight meant that the stands holding the pulley started to tip over. We wondered how we could stop this. We asked Mr Howard, our Abbotsleigh Groundsman, if he could help us make some



sandbags to hold down the stands and counterbalance the weight of the buckets of stones. Through our experimenting we explored technology, using tools and engineering, acquiring habits of mind (International Early Childhood Stem Association, 2019; Hammond, 2022).

To further extend this learning, we wanted to take the activity to the outdoor environment. After all, young children thrive, and their minds and bodies develop best when they have access to stimulating outdoor environments for learning through play and real experiences (Warden, 2020).

The students had been asking for water to use when playing in the sandpit and bark chips at the ACEE (Abbotsleigh Centre for Environmental Education) which we had been visiting weekly at the Senior School. There were no taps located close by, so we thought about how we could create our own well using the technology and skills we had been investigating. We installed some ropes and pulleys with a counterbalance which allowed the girls to access water from a 'well' making the experience of simple machines meaningful and useful.

Our pulley investigations reached new heights when we took an excursion to Treetops Adventures at St Ives Showground. Outfitted in helmets, gloves and safety harnesses, we clipped on to steel wires strung between the trees and set up our individual pulleys to zipline through the canopy. It was an extremely exciting and satisfying finale to our learning.

"Being in contact with the elements and the natural world, experiencing new perspectives and sensations all contribute to young children's learning" (Warden, 2020).



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Creating Connie Confident writers

Melissa Tilbrook, Kindergarten Teacher

Inspire, excite and engage; this is the magic we aim to instil in young learners when creating writing experiences. Kindergarten girls have been immersing themselves in writing through an in-depth study of the text *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. Our purpose is to create writing opportunities that promote Connie Confident, Pete Persistent and Izzy Innovate students who see themselves as writers.

The hook

Music plays while toy boats travel between the girls as they move around the classroom, imagining a destination. Where are they going? Who is there? What will they do there? The music stops and the students find a peer to discuss the place their boat has taken them. This process of *oral rehearsal* gives students the opportunity to 'write aloud' before they write their ideas down on paper (Fisher et al. 2010). Students hear from multiple peers and can begin 'magpieing' ideas. They are encouraged to collect words and phrases from their peers, adding to their own.

The innovation

After exposing girls to the text and discovering the land of the Wild Things, the girls become storytellers. They learn to retell the story orally with actions by following the images on the story map. The toy boats reappear, and the girls are provided with writing opportunities to become Izzy Innovate. They complete a variety of writing pieces based around the book, creating their individualised Wild Thing, describing the setting and sequencing ideas. Finally, the girls begin to write their own story, changing and adding to the storyline of *Where the Wild Things Are*. They demonstrate Pete Persistent as they make spelling choices for wonderful vocabulary in the inclusion of their story.

The affirmations

Affirmations are positive statements that can be beneficial in the classroom and empower students to be Connie Confident. "Positive education is a methodological approach to implement a policy of viewing the students as a full human being in order to promote an education that allows the student to reach their full potential" (Farrell & Sox, 2021). Reflecting on writing and responding to affirmations is an important part of the writing process. Girls read their work to a peer and share affirmations. These statements begin with "I really like how..." and "I love..." This sharing of feedback enables the girls to reflect positively on the writing they have created and see areas for improvement.

With ongoing immersive literacy experiences such as character exploration with props, dramatisation of story events and storytelling opportunities, our positive culture of writing in the classroom will enable students to succeed and flourish. Our students demonstrate an approach to writing opportunities with inspiration, excitement and engagement while displaying confidence, persistence and innovation.



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Integrating First Nations teaching and learning experiences

Emily McMahon, Kindergarten Teacher



The teaching of First Nations people, culture and history has been viewed as important in working toward Reconciliation (Mooney et al., 2003). However, it is often expressed that teachers are lacking confidence in teaching about our First Nations people, culture and history (McMinn, 2022). This lack of confidence stems from their concern around making a mistake or being culturally insensitive (McQuire et al., 2021). The common message expressed during the Australian Reconciliation Convention (2021) was for teachers to 'have a go', be open to discussions with First Nations individuals within their community when a mistake is made, and to discuss how to further improve the programs that they are teaching.

Embedding a deep learning project has become an essential part of our curriculum. Through integrating a learning disposition, our students are exposed to the opportunity to further develop their social capabilities that promote an inclusive school environment (AISNSW, 2022). Furthermore, Durlak et al. (2011) has demonstrated that students involved in social and emotional learning show an overall development in their attitudes, behaviour and academic performance.

The importance of delivering engaging teaching and learning experiences to students is essential. This becomes imperative when teaching about First Nations people, culture and history as, for some students, this may be the first time they are exposed to learning about

our First Nations peoples (Trindall et al., 2021). Considering this, the Kindergarten Geography program Special Places was formed and integrated with the learning disposition of empathy, as this unit aimed to explore special places on a macro-level where students would learn to identify what makes a place special to specific people and how to look after people's special places.

The unit worked on alternative weeks. On odd weeks, students explored a different picture book authored by a First Nations individual, illustrated by a First Nations individual, and/or is based on a location in Australia. On even weeks, students viewed a different Disney film clip and explored the location the film is based on as a special place. During exploration, students participated in class and small group discussions, recording their responses. Specific discussion questions targeted an empathetic perspective and included: Can we have a special place within our home that's different from our family members; How can we look after the mid-north coast of New South Wales even if it's not a special place to us? How can we look after Moana's special place even if it's a place we can't visit? How do our First Nations people cherish Country in this text and why is cherishing Country important to them?

Throughout the unit, students also revised how First Nations peoples use symbols to depict different people, animals and things in their artworks. During the odd weeks, students listened to a text and generated their own symbol to represent the story. For example, with the text *Our Island: Children of Gununa*, by Alison Lester and Elizabeth Honey, a student selected the sun to represent this book as the text states, "The glowing sun drops behind the sea". Another student selected a shark fin in water to represent this book as the book specifically says, "Sharks and stingrays patrol the channel". The symbols that the students generated were recorded and accompanied by the original Country name on their map of Australia.

Finally, students explained what makes the place special to the people who live there and to the people who visit that location on a video, and selected the image they wanted as their background that they felt most appropriately showed the 'special place' studied.

Integrating teaching and learning experiences of our First Nations people, culture and history throughout the Kindergarten Geography program developed a better understanding of our First Nations people in our students. Students also demonstrated a heightened understanding of what it means to be empathetic toward others. This was shown through their responses to discussion questions and recording of their answers. It is certainly exciting to see this 'have a go' program in action and for the opportunity to reflect on how to better improve the integration of First Nations education within our programs in the future.



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Partnerships in PDHPE and sport

Mr Paul Guirrieri, Head of JS Sport and PDHPE



Always a constant hive of activity, Junior School Sport and PDHPE programs are full of fun and excitement, where our students can engage in a multitude of rich and rewarding learning experiences. As well as building fundamental skills in PDHPE, these opportunities also develop dispositions such as character, resilience, trust and empathy which are common to both our learning and wellbeing frameworks.

When designing deep learning experiences in PDHPE, our environment is characterised by an ever evolving landscape. Within this realm, the Junior School Sport and PDHPE Department relies on a range of strong learning partnerships to facilitate the delivery of a well rounded and holistic program, allowing Abbotsleigh girls to be empowered global citizens who flourish and shine.

Judith Krause, our Personal Development expert, works with openness and care while sharing her wealth of knowledge with our Years 4, 5 and 6 girls in a safe and supportive environment. Junior School girls are also given the tools to

make wise choices about their health and bodies during our Life Education and Act for Kids programs.

At Abbotsleigh, the girls' overall state of wellbeing and health is central to Junior School life. Programs such as URStrong empower our girls to navigate challenging friendship scenarios with confidence and empathy. As a school, we have worked closely with AIS NSW as part of the Compass Project to ensure that we employ wellbeing initiatives founded on the most current trends and cohort data.

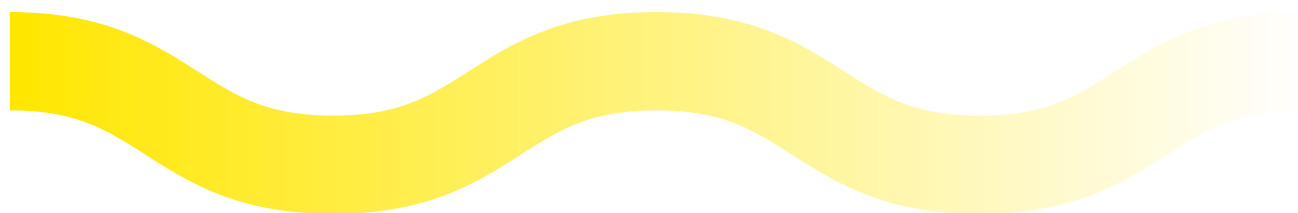
In the physical realm, our outdoor education providers facilitate a range of invigorating, exciting and challenging hands-on learning opportunities for all girls. SEA Australia Surf Educate programs upskill our Stage 3 girls to ensure that they are water safe in the coastal environment; and girls learn to be independent users of their bikes, building an understanding of road safety through our Year 2 AusCycle and Year 5 CARES Cycling Education programs.

With a deep passion for physical activity among our students, we have seen numbers surge in our IPSHA Saturday Sport program where specialised coaching staff work so positively to upskill our girls. Targeted Year 2 programs run with the support of Netball NSW and Cricket NSW, with the aim of facilitating a lifelong love of exercise and physical activity.

The strength of our partnerships with parents is integral to the running of our major sport carnivals throughout the

year, where we are fortunate to have such generous and willing helpers to ensure the success of each event. Girls increase fitness and engage in Service Learning initiatives through the Heart Foundation's Jump Rope for Heart program biennially.

We look forward to maintaining our current partnerships and building new ones, where opportunities arise, to ensure that we continue to provide every Junior School girl with the tools required to be the very best she can be.



The write stuff

Carrie Alker, Junior School Teacher Librarian

“Reflective action is bound up with persistent and careful consideration of practice in the light of knowledge and beliefs, showing attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness.” (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 34)

Guided by a desire for continuous improvement, reflection and a wish to be at the forefront of good practice and pedagogy, we have spent the last 18 months taking a closer look at the learning experiences enjoyed by our girls, specifically in the domain of writing.

As educators, we have embarked on a journey of discovery as we look to determine our philosophy and approach to the teaching of writing. We recognise that while the current standards of writing in the Junior School are impressive, it is of the utmost importance to consistently assess our practice and aim for improvement. With a new English curriculum on the horizon, this audit and planning seems timely.

Initial conversations with classroom teachers and specialists across the School were carried out in order to survey the landscape, identify strengths and determine areas for growth. From here, we were able to distil four key areas that encapsulate our approach to the teaching of literacy, and in particular, writing. We have developed the 4Ms of Literacy: Magic, Mechanics, Mastery and Moderation, which we believe should underpin our programming, teaching and learning experiences as well as provide a framework for reflection. Work on further developing our 4Ms, the co-construction of our philosophy and the creation of guiding tools continues with small working groups of passionate teachers meeting regularly.

Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that our girls leave the Junior School with strong foundational writing skills, the confidence to write for a range of audiences and purposes and most of all, high engagement with the craft of writing.



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Year 1's mission to Light up Vanuatu

Peita van Bussel, Transition to Year 2 Coordinator

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.” Romans 12:11

The connection between a strong sense of self and outward service has long been acknowledged (Malti et al., 2016). As Year 1 teachers, we wanted to build on the empathy learning disposition that has been integrated into the History and English unit, to build a real-world application for 'stepping into the shoes of another'.

As a Year 1 team, it was important to find a project that 6 and 7-year-old girls could connect with, as we knew that the success or failure of a service project was based on how engaged and self-motivated the students were to embark on the research, fundraising and finalisation of the project. Through Solar Buddy and IPSHA, Year 1 joined the Light Up Vanuatu initiative.



Stage 1: Getting the girls motivated to help others

Van Winkle et al. (2018) articulate the impact of service on empathy and understanding; however, central to their research is the importance of critical reflection and explicit discussion around service and personal wellbeing. Acknowledging this, an essential component for Year 1 would be repeated analysis, reflection and revisiting of the project throughout the year. The project begins each year with our hook: *Imagine not being able to read after dark because you had no lights. Imagine if the light source you were using was actually damaging your physical health.* Our girls are avid readers and genuinely wanted to help the children in Vanuatu to read with a safe and economical light source. In this phase of the project, the girls watched documentaries about the Solar Buddy project and Vanuatu more broadly. They looked at the remote locations and the types of dwellings within the villages, genuinely interested in looking for similarities between their lives and that of the Vanuatu people.

Stage 2: Spreading the word and fundraising

The students were tasked with a financial goal: 50 individual solar lights required more than \$1,600 to be raised. It was decided early in the project that the students should have ownership of this fundraising so that they would be truly invested in every component of the initiative, reflective of the research of Body et al. (2020). In 2021, the students initiated DEAR time finger knitting, where the Year 1 students taught the older Primary grades how to finger knit for a gold coin donation. While this itself was not enough to reach our goal, the students were truly invested in watching the money grow after each session and increased their motivation to keep finding ways to donate. A collaborative fundraising video was made with Knox Prep, encouraging families from both schools to donate. Through this and the finger knitting, the girls raised enough to send 50 lights to Vanuatu in our first year.

Having watched their peers complete the project the year before, the 2022 cohort were ready to raise the stakes. The girls organised a glow stick disco for K-2 students for a gold coin entry and the opportunity to purchase additional glow sticks. Further donations were achieved through the students' skills in persuasion, providing QR codes and very convincing rationales as to why parents should donate at the Infants Athletics Carnival, Year 1

Celebration of Learning and the whole school GLOW festival. This year, the students raised enough to build 75 solar lights so that children in Vanuatu can continue to read and learn long after the sun goes down.

Stage 3: Hands on learning

The final stage of the project is the collaborative building of the lights. Having worked so hard to purchase the solar light kits, the girls understood their responsibility in ensuring that they were correctly assembled. They were careful to follow instructions so that the lights were functional, and no pieces were broken or lost in the process. Our first Build Day had a Covid slant. Instead of the planned combined building of lights with the Year 1 Knox boys, we remained on separate campuses to do our constructions. The girls worked in rotational groups to build the lights, expertly handling screwdrivers and electronic circuits. They also explored other facets of life in Vanuatu, including learning elements of Bislama and French, which along with English form the three national languages of Vanuatu. The picture book *Taf Tumas! Different journeys, one people* (Naupa et al., 2020) shares the stories of significant change makers in Vanuatu's history. The girls devoured the stories of faith, arts and technology evolution on the islands, again connecting points of significance to their own lives.

It was exciting to see the Year 1 girls work with the Knox Prep students to build their solar lights. With great effect, they were able to work together for a common goal, fostering another important element of empathy: seeing the strengths in others regardless of preconceived ideas.

The strength of the Year 1 Light Up Vanuatu initiative lies in the foundational element of empathy. Had the need to help others access books after dark not resonated as deeply as it did, the project would have run its course after a year. However, seeing the excitement and passion of the new cohort of Light Up Vanuatu recruits this year solidifies the importance of the project.



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A Place for Everything and Everything in its Place

“We have worked together to solve problems while we were building our house. My partner and I both had good ideas to try out.”

– Imogen

At Abbotsleigh, on the North Shore of Sydney, Year 1 students engaged in a deep learning project where students worked together to create a miniature town in their classroom, exploring and identifying the ways in which people interact and care for places and spaces. Importantly, the students had to ensure that the town met the needs and wants of the small people living within it. The project aimed at developing students’ geographical skills, tools and understanding through the lens of creativity.

The project was launched with **Henry’s Map** by David Elliot. Teachers opened discussions with their students around the concept of place and positional language. Time was spent exploring concepts in the real-life context of the school, focusing on mapping, aerial views and identifying 3D objects. The project was enriched in the initial stages through literature and integrated digital technologies. The students were then introduced to their Lego Minifigure and the concept of designing and building a home for them. The home the students created required them to demonstrate an understanding of scale.

Opportunities for learning partnerships were developed within the local community when students were visited by a local builder. COVID-19 forced teachers to think creatively too! When social distancing meant a visit to Wahroonga was impossible, they leveraged digital technology to deliver a virtual tour of the village.

One of the most exciting things has been the growth mindset shown by students during this project. They were able to stop and reflect on the progress of their creative thinking at milestone points in the project. Gallery walks and peer review meant that students were able to share with each other incidental problem-solving situations and ask for feedback and support from each other. Digital technologies allowed the girls to record their thinking in a much deeper way than their written capabilities allowed.

A key impact on teaching practice has been for teachers to embrace the role of facilitator for learning rather than that of the director. As the project deepened, teachers found that they were working as coaches with their students, posing problems in order to generate ideas.

As the town project developed, students regularly posed new questions related to what facilities their mini people might require. They were encouraged to consider the value of green spaces and the importance of light and sound on town life. The use of a time-lapse video enabled us to record the development of the town, and also provided a lasting visual representation of the developing creative thinking skills of our students.

[#AISNSWdeeplearning](#)

Rosie crosses the curriculum

Amber Thomson, Year 2 Teacher

As educators, we are not only responsible for ensuring student academic gains, but we have a much greater accountability in understanding the complexities and implications of capabilities in the lives and education of students (Lucas, 2018). The social and emotional development of all students plays a vital role in enabling children to be prepared for an ever changing world. These skills determine social, educational, economical, health and wellbeing outcomes a person can achieve throughout their lifetime. Educators play a significant part in fostering and developing these skills (OECD, 2015).

What are some of these important skills with which we hope to arm our girls? Empathy, self-regulation, resilience, curiosity and interpersonal skills are highlighted as some of the essential long-standing capabilities that will serve our girls well (Lucas, 2018). In conjunction with these capabilities, we strive to ensure that the competencies of collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, citizenship, character and communication permeate all that we do (Quinn et al., 2020). Within the Abbotsleigh context, we have adopted these key competencies as well as others identified in leading research, referring to them as dispositions in our own Deep Learning Framework that sits alongside our Wellbeing Framework.

With this in mind, Year 2 embarked upon a new unit of work based on the character Rosie Revere, from the book *Rosie Revere Engineer* by Andrea Beaty. In developing this unit, which was aimed at connecting great reading with purposeful writing to engage our students, we were determined to explicitly focus on helping our girls develop the character trait of resilience. Through well considered, deep and meaningful experiences, the students were able to explore this disposition, not only supporting great learning, but building mechanisms to support a positive wellbeing.



Engineering, innovating and creating were central ideas that connected our writing and shared reading for the term. Rosie Revere became the key focus in this unit of work, and we leveraged off this rich fictional character to not only build students' understanding of engineers and innovators, but to encourage creative thinking in many areas of the curriculum including English, Science and within HSIE. This theme was linked to our HSIE unit with the overarching idea that the girls would become 'Izzy Innovators'. The students delved into a variety of books during class and library lessons, reading and writing texts that were closely linked to authentic examples of innovating, engineering and designing. The exploration of the attributes of the characters in these texts, such as being resourceful, mistake makers, resilient and persistent, supported students to draw on examples and come to their own conclusions about the traits required to be engineers or innovators.

When asked to describe what an engineer does, the students' responses began to take the form of the language and examples found in the literature explored,



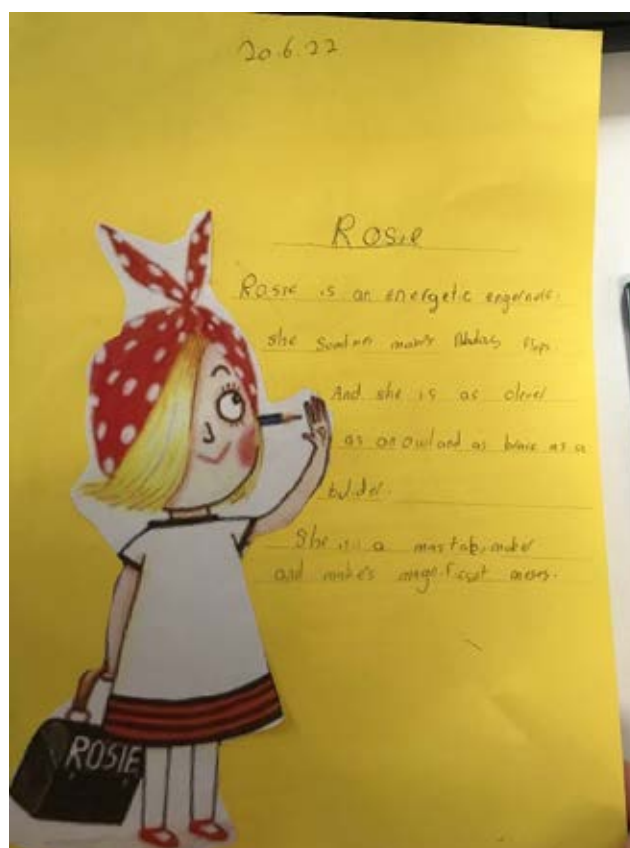
including statements such as, “they make mistakes”, “they are creative”, “they are resilient” and “they never give up”. Through this, students began to understand that they too can be like those characters. The dialogue created an environment where the girls were given permission and felt empowered to take risks, fail and try again.

The students’ writing soon took on an additional layer. Not only were they writing about what an engineer or innovator does, but they were also using language to describe what characteristics they demonstrated. Their writing became more reflective and embedded in the ideology of resilience. Within the HSIE unit, the students embarked on a design process task that allowed them to explore the older gaming technology of a Tamagotchi. Adding depth to this work, in Science the students explored push and pull forces, which tied in with what mechanical engineers do, and they practised skills of hypothesising, experimenting and observing. The idea was for students to step into the shoes of an innovator to creatively adapt and improve on the old gaming technology of the Tamagotchi. Girls were given the opportunity to design a physical animal made from various materials and code a Micro:bit to enhance what they enjoyed about the Tamagotchi. The idea of resilience was ever present throughout this cross-curriculum unit of work, where the girls demonstrated resilience in writing, exploring, designing, making and innovating.

It became evident early that the students had begun to make connections with Rosie Revere and the character traits she possessed. They highlighted character attributes that made her a creator, an inventor, an engineer, a success and someone who had an abundance of imagination. The girls also recognised that Rosie was an individual who faced challenges, setbacks and failures as she embarked on a journey of learning about resilience. Within these areas, highlighted by the students, we began to see how the dispositions and character development intertwine with ideas of grit, perseverance, self-confidence and adaptability, evident in discussions and actions during student learning (Lucas, 2018). As aptly illustrated in the book *Rosie and the Raucous Riveters* by Andrea Beaty (2019), the students began to change their language from simply “it’s not working”, “I made a mistake” and “I can’t do it” to confidently owning statements of making a... “fabulous flop”, “magnificent mess” and “creative catastrophe”.

Students were so engaged and in touch with the nuances of the character, Rosie Revere, that they began to understand the complexities of emotional states of a person at various times. They could see that just like them, Rosie too faced obstacles and as a result, often felt vulnerable. With this, they were able to learn how to get back up and persist. The girls reflected on and learnt to try again with their thinking, problem solving, writing, designing and creating. They became free to take risks in their learning. This project provided the girls with a space to feel safe to try new things and begin to learn to navigate around the feelings of discomfort, as well as feeling success through persistence. Viewing being wrong or failing as an opportunity to take risks has the potential to build resilience and determination (Aronica & Robinson, 2015). Additionally, Aronica & Robinson (2015) caution that if you are not prepared to take risks and be wrong, you will not come up with anything original. Stimulating this thinking for the students, by encouraging freedom of expression and creativity, allowed such learning to take place in a genuine way.

It was with great joy that we saw the students applying their understanding about resilience to their everyday life and within other areas of their learning. Organic education promotes the development and wellbeing of the whole student; intellectually, socially, physically and spiritually (Aronica & Robinson, 2015). It is therefore a disconnect to separate deep learning from wellbeing, where in fact they are so closely aligned, and you cannot have one without the other.



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STORY OF IMPACT



Collaboration: “Explore and Discover”

“(Group work is important because) it leads to negotiating, cooperating and communicating clearly!” – Savannah

Students in Year 3 have been learning what it takes to collaborate effectively. Through careful planning and an integrated approach, the learning experiences have deepened the girls' understanding across a range of curriculum areas. The overarching concept of ‘Explore and Discover’ was used as a vehicle for understanding and growing in collaboration skills across a variety of settings and learning scenarios.

For the students to have opportunities to grow and develop their collaboration skills, we accepted as a teaching team that we would first need to collaborate effectively ourselves. As a staff, time was spent viewing the intended learning programs in all subject areas and the key learning intentions for the term were defined. The common thread bringing each of the learning areas together was the concept of exploring and discovering. This tied in beautifully with our Geography unit, but also with other learning areas such as Mathematics and Literacy. Using the 4 Elements as a guide, the Year 3 teaching team were able to decide upon the pedagogical approaches required to ensure authentic group learning tasks were to be incorporated, where opportunities for reflection could be provided and how challenging scenarios could be crafted for the girls in order for them to experience the necessity of collaboration.

At the heart of the learning experiences were the design tools of pedagogical practices and the learning environment. An important aspect of the learning journey was establishing a shared space for documentation of experiences, understanding and overall progress. This interactive “working wall” was comprised of a range of artefacts. Some of which included: photographs, student work samples, the learning progression for the disposition and provocations. In addition to the shared space, students were also provided with a “learning passport” which was used as a medium for reflection. Furthermore, the “learning passport” acted as a platform for students to draw connections between learning experiences, new understanding and a common language related to the disposition of collaboration. In order for students to gain insight into their own capacity to collaborate deliberate decisions were made around group organisation and the structure of learning experiences. This enabled students equal opportunity to draw on their strengths, take risks and develop their tolerance for ambiguity.



One of the most exciting things we have seen has been the transferral of our intentional teaching of collaboration to our student's social play and interactions beyond the classroom. One example of this was when a group of Year 3 students noticed an environmental problem, involving local wildlife. Across all three classes girls were united in their concern and desire to better care for our resident plover population. This initiative took the form of preliminary research, poster design and culminated in a student-led assembly announcement to raise awareness of the issue. Teachers were delighted to see students exhibiting collaboration in action and in response to a real-world problem. What was most surprising was the combination of students and the preparedness of girls to work alongside peers who would usually be outside of their social preferences. Also pleasing was the individual development of students along the progression. This development was not only recognised and appreciated by teachers but also identified in student reflections.

Whilst the learning experiences for the students were indeed deepened (due to our deliberate approach to teaching the skills of collaboration through an interdisciplinary unit) we as teachers have grown significantly in our professional practice and propensity to collaborate. Teachers across the school now genuinely appreciate the deep learning framework as they recognise how transformative this process can be for both students and those involved in facilitating their learning experiences.



Year 3 Wellbeing Day

Murray Keating, Year 3 Coordinator, Year 3 Teacher



At Abbotsleigh we recognise the important connection between wellbeing, learning and flourishing. We proactively strive to enhance the academic, social, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of each girl through our Pre K-12 Wellbeing Framework.

How much sleep should primary school aged children be getting each night and how does sleep affect wellbeing? What does it mean to grow your mind? How can different stretching techniques help relieve stress and improve general wellbeing? What are kites of kindness and how do they foster positive peer affirmation?

These questions and more were addressed during the Year 3 Wellbeing Day held in November 2021. This special day has been an important component of the Year 3

wellbeing program for several years. There is no doubt that 2021 was a year of great upheaval for students and teachers. Following the return to on campus learning after four months of online learning, the need for a Wellbeing Day was greater than ever. It was time to reconnect with friends and teachers, time to re-establish routines and time to build student support structures.

Dedicating a whole day to this wellbeing focus, highlights the importance we place on facilitating a variety of opportunities for students to connect, reflect and develop skills and strategies to promote personal wellbeing and contribute to the wellbeing of others. Some of the experiences in which the students participated are outlined below.



Grow your mind

Students explored the importance of developing a growth mindset. They were exposed to and became familiar with the terminology – the common language about what it means and feels to be mentally healthy.

Kites of kindness

Gratitude for others was the focus of the Kites of Kindness experience. Here, students learned about the value of paying compliments to each other. They wrote a positive affirmation for a peer on a strip of cardboard which was then stapled to the tail of that person's kite. Girls then enjoyed the opportunity to fly their kites in the school playground. Following that, student kites were proudly displayed in the classrooms.

Stretch and relax

The physical nature of this relaxation session was a highlight of the day, with the girls learning about the importance of various stretches, relaxation movements and breathing techniques that can relieve stress and improve general wellbeing.

Importance of sleep

With sleep playing an important role in the wellbeing of individuals, this session encouraged students to delve into the facts about sleep and how it impacts upon their physical health, mental health and general sense of wellness. The girls explored the positive impacts of adequate sleep and the detrimental effects of insufficient

sleep. Students also investigated factors that contribute to good sleep habits and created a doorknob hanger on which good sleep habits were listed. In addition, students designed a 'sleep friendly' plan for their bedroom.

Year 3 students were asked to reflect on Wellbeing Day, sharing the insights they gained from participating in a special day aimed at improving their wellbeing.

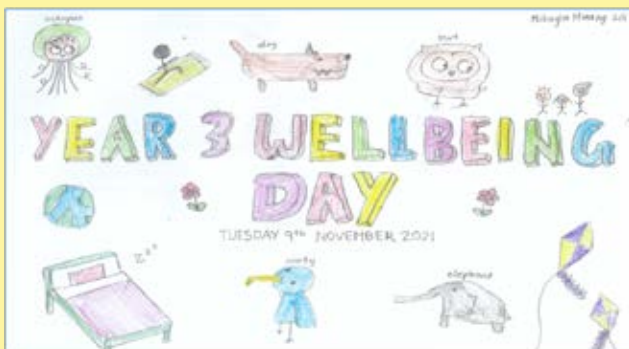
"I felt very calm and happy when I learnt about growing my mind. I learnt about how different things can give you different emotions. I also learnt how to change bad situations into good ones, shark moments into dolphin moments." – Mikayla

"I was surprised that I didn't know much about why sleep was important. I learnt lots of interesting facts. I learnt that kids need to get 10-12 hours of sleep." – Jessie

"I felt all calm and peaceful when doing stretch and relax activities. I learnt that stretching can calm me down. Some stretches were a little difficult, but I tried my hardest and eventually succeeded." – Cathy

"I felt extremely happy because when I saw the compliments people had written about me, it made my face brighten up. I learnt that compliments are not all about how people look. The best compliments are about a person's personality." – Jacqueline

Year 3 Wellbeing Day 2021 was a great success. Students and staff shared engaging experiences and opportunities for self reflection and gratitude, which fostered the development of important skills and strategies in maintaining wellbeing.



Exploring empathy

Ronelle Tang and Meg Lim, Year 4 Teachers

How can our younger learners recognise empathy in others when they are still learning what empathy looks like for themselves?



Through a deep exploration of concepts in History and Geography, our Year 4 students engaged in a journey of discovery and personal growth.

The Abbotsleigh Learning Framework emphasises the importance of transferable skills that prepare students to take on our increasingly complex world. With this in mind, developing character through exploring the disposition of empathy was the focus of our unit of enquiry into the Age of Exploration. Students delved into identifying what empathy looks like for themselves as well as imagining what the early explorers experienced on their expeditions and how this impacted indigenous people all around the world.

To begin with, the students developed their understanding of what empathy was and considered where they might place themselves along the empathy progression (see page 11).

Throughout the study of many influential explorers including Zheng He, Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus and Captain Cook, students were constantly reflecting on how or if the explorers were successful at demonstrating empathy towards the people they came across on their voyages.

This newfound knowledge and understanding allowed the students to reconsider empathy in their personal context and transfer this to their interactions in the classroom and the playground.



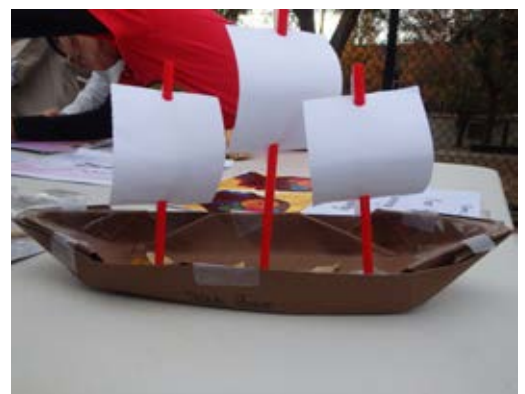
Students celebrated their learning journey by stepping into someone else's shoes and presenting to their peers, parents and teachers. They spent time dressing up, adopting the persona of an explorer and sharing their recent knowledge of how the world changed through exploration. An important element of this showcase was the students, acting as their chosen explorer, sharing their reflection of how empathetic they were as they explored the globe.

With the assistance of Nicole Hunt, the Digital Learning Innovator, the students selected various natural or human landmarks related to one of Australia's neighbouring countries, which the explorers visited hundreds of years prior.

The girls engaged in self driven research and they recorded and constructed 3D models of landmarks, identifying its location on a map. Following this, they used Scratch and Makey Makey to code this information and present it to their peers in an interactive and engaging way.

By the end of term, the students were well on their way to developing greater empathy, as they searched for and identified this characteristic in the stories of significant people.

Empathy can only be found by looking outwards!



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Kindness is Year 5's superpower

Amelia Love, Year 5 Teacher



In Year 5, kindness is fostered within and beyond the classroom through learning opportunities promoting empathy and social awareness. Kindness (as defined by Year 5 students) is the act of emotional or physical support that helps build or sustain relationships with other people. Teaching kindness has been recognised as an important practice that provides direct instruction in the skill of self-awareness and builds better classroom relationships, translating into more academically productive learning environments (Kaplan et al., 2016). By equipping students with opportunities to demonstrate kindness, they develop a sense of globalised social justice and equity.

Kindness within

Dr Robert Roeser, Professor of Human Development and Psychology at Portland State University, states that being able to recognise our emotions is the same skill that develops kindness (Tomich, 2017). To build kindness in students it is important to make sure they understand their own emotions before moving on to empathise with others. In Year 5 we scaffold daily opportunities for greater emotional awareness through gratitude journals,

a kindness jar and deep learning units focusing on the dispositions of courage and empathy.

A gratitude journal is used as a self-reflective tool encouraging the students to focus on the positive aspects of their life while simultaneously connecting their thoughts and feelings. The journal contains a range of thinking routines supporting the expression of gratitude. This act of gratitude develops deep self awareness and internalisation, resulting in greater social awareness as exemplified with the class kindness jar. The kindness jar requires students to write anonymous notes highlighting acts of kindness either received or witnessed. Kindness is also embedded within our deep learning units; *Courage Under Fire* (see page 56) and *We Get Up, We Don't Give Up!* In these units, students were provided with opportunities to analyse acts of kindness demonstrated by ordinary people in response to global problems. For example, Jack Berne created the Fiver for a Farmer charity to support farmers affected by droughts, fires and COVID-19. Furthermore, students were given learning opportunities to demonstrate their kindness by proposing innovative solutions using 21st century technology, to address current world problems.

Kindness beyond

The superpower of kindness extends well beyond the walls of the Year 5 classroom. An example of kindness towards the local community and a practical application of the Abbotsleigh value of compassion is Year 5's Service Learning project. Students connect with local nursing home residents developing relationship skills, empathy and perspective taking. The girls demonstrate kindness in actions and words, as they engage with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and ages. Year 5 students also attended the inaugural Children's Kindness Convention at Pymble Ladies' College.

The girls were inspired by kindness superheros Jack Berne and Danny Mason-Kinder (creator of Fly High Billie charity). Additionally, students worked in teams with like minded pupils from other schools to propose pioneering solutions to current problems affecting people and the environment, where they capably applied their developed skills of empathy, gratitude and social awareness.

Kindness is the superpower of Year 5 Abbotsleigh students. Through diverse opportunities they are continuing to develop their emotional awareness and seek to extend kindness beyond the classroom.



Courage under fire – deep learning by design

Kylie George, Year 5 Coordinator, Year 5 Classroom Teacher

As educators we never teach the same unit twice – how simple our profession would be if this was the case! With every iteration, we always strive to deepen the learning for our students. But what does this actually mean? Essentially, deep learning is quality learning that sticks with you for life. As defined by Quinn et al. (2020), it is the process of acquiring the six Global Competencies; Character, Citizenship, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Collaboration and Communication – skills and attributes needed for learners to flourish as citizens of the world.

At Abbotsleigh, we pride ourselves on planning lessons that last a lifetime, but learning does not ‘stick’ by accident. It ‘sticks’ because we design it to do so, which is exactly what we hoped to achieve with the reimagining of our Year 5 Courage Under Fire unit. When we first embarked on the unit in Term 1 of 2021, it was a Geography program exploring drought and bushfires. Now, with just a few important changes, we have designed a fully integrated unit of work that matters; a unit that has enabled our girls to recognise that yes, they can make an impact and how to go about making that change.

What did we keep?

Key concept – Impact

Focus question – How do we make an impact?

Conceptual learning involves students engaged in quality learning experiences based around key concepts and central ideas rather than using the more traditional method of focusing on learning content and facts (Erickson et al., 2007). By hooking the learning onto the conceptual understanding of ‘impact’, the students understand that when they see a need, they have the skills to do something about it. A lifetime from now, they will not remember the names of Australia’s six climate zones, but they will remember how fulfilling it felt to pack hundreds of care

packages for the people of Lismore following the devastating floods earlier this year. That lesson will last a lifetime.

Learning disposition – Critical Thinking

At Abbotsleigh, our Learning Framework focuses on building a culture of deep and engaged learning. The primary way we do this is through the Learning Dispositions, also known as the Global Competencies in the Deep Learning Framework. By focusing on critical thinking, our students could see firsthand the skills and attributes needed to build this disposition. I want to make an impact, but how do I go about making that change?

Abbotsleigh Value – Courage

In Year 5, we also weave our Abbotsleigh School Values throughout our units of work. We wanted to retain the title for our unit as we believed Courage Under Fire encapsulated the essence of the unit – that with Courage (the ability to take risks) and Critical Thinking, no challenge is too insurmountable.

To put this idea to the test, our students took part in an immersion activity titled The Floor is Lava, which required the girls to act with courage and work in teams to get across the playground using a single sheet of newspaper. They were challenged with trivia questions and members of the team could be sacrificed along the way. The focus of the immersion was not to pre-test their Geography knowledge, but rather an opportunity to ignite our students’ critical thinking skills and reflect on where these might be currently placed using the learning progressions that have been developed to support the Abbotsleigh Learning Framework. Perhaps more importantly, it was also a lot of fun, which is essential for learning that sticks. In the words of Reggio Emilia’s Loris Malaguzzi (Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange, 2020) ‘nothing without joy’.



What did we change?

2021	2022
Linked to other KLAs	Integrated program

Our first important change was to create a fully integrated program. The learning taking place in Geography, Science, STEAM and Library now live in the one programming document, rather than across four separate documents that were loosely linked. As a team, we decided that it was important for each key learning area to have their own column in the planning documentation. That way, it was clear for every teacher involved, the learning being built upon and supported by one another week to week.

One of the most significant advantages of having the one collaborative program was that we were able to truly engage in team teaching. As reiterated by our Science specialist, Jac McCarthy, "I have been impressed by the engagement of the girls, but also the engagement of the staff who seem to feel a greater ownership of the integrated program". Integrating the learning across multiple disciplines also allowed us to make visible to the girls the dovetailing of concepts. As noted by one student, "It's clearer understanding the one topic because you don't have to store different information in different subjects and then it can get confusing". Simply put, the learning stuck because we were able to reinforce this one big idea that mattered at multiple touchpoints each week.

2021	2022
Critical thinking at the culmination of the unit	Critical thinking skills build throughout the unit

The second design choice we carefully crafted was the building of critical thinking skills progressively throughout the unit, rather than being tacked on at the end. Working backwards, we needed a culmination task that required our students to draw on the knowledge gained in each of the integrated disciplines, but also the critical thinking skills they had ample opportunities to review, rehearse and reflect on throughout the unit. With this in mind, the final challenge was for the girls to independently design and make a Micro:bit kit device that would help reduce the effects of



their chosen natural disaster before, during or after the event occurs. As expressed by one Year 5 parent in attendance at the Celebration of Learning Year 5 Micro:bit Market, "I loved the vision that each girl had to use technology to solve real world problems... it was also incredible that you consolidated the marketing, creativity and technology together as an integrated solution. There was one design pamphlet that was so good I would hire that girl to help with my own presentation slides".

Our students were successful in this final challenge not by accident. The design choices we made to make deep learning a priority meant that girls had multiple opportunities to practise and reflect on their critical thinking skills so that they were better prepared to solve problems during the culmination task. We facilitated this process by encouraging our students to use schemas, graphic organisers and visible thinking routines like the TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) Problem Solving Wheel, Engineering Design Process, Circle of Viewpoints and CSI (Colour Symbol Image) thinking routines.

2021	2022
10-week program	15-week program

The third significant change was the duration of the unit – if it matters, give it time. By shifting from a 10-week unit to a 15-week unit, we now have a quality Geography program that has given our students the time to delve deeper. Ample time for teachers to collaborate in the planning phase of the unit was also essential. Integrated units of this nature require hours of discussion and negotiation. This is no easy feat, but when given time, all the teachers involved had a collective understanding about the overall aim of the unit – we want our students to develop their critical thinking skills so that they can make a positive impact in this world.

Deep learning, the learning that lasts a lifetime, does not happen by accident. Actively designing and redesigning units of work that value big ideas and celebrate depth of thinking takes time, but we as educators must choose – do we want to teach content, or our students? It is our duty to prepare our students for the world they are inheriting, and they will need more than just content knowledge to be able to flourish.



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Progressive feedback on the learning continuum

Victoria Rennie, Deputy Headmistress and Head of Senior School

“To solely use standardised achievement tests is like casting a net into the sea – a net that is intentionally designed to let the most interesting fish get away. Then, to describe the ones that are caught strictly in terms of their weight and length is to radically reduce what we know about them. To further conclude that all the contents of the sea consist of fish like those in the net compounds the error further. We need more kinds of fish. We need to know more about those we catch. We need new nets.” – William T. Randolph, former Commissioner of Education, Colorado (as cited in Lucas, 2021, p. 3)

In 2021 Bill Lucas, Professor of Learning and Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester in the UK and advisor to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority in Australia, issued a paper echoing Randolph’s thoughts and calling for new ways of thinking about assessment that are aligned with the needs of the post-school world. Lucas wisely observes that assessment is needed of knowledge, of skills and also of character and that it needs to be highly nuanced, multimodal and focused on what young people can achieve.

At Abbotsleigh, we continue to undertake active and ongoing research into how we can best capture our students’ learning across all areas and provide them with rich, powerful and timely feedback. Indeed, in 2020, Abbotsleigh joined New Metrics for Success – a collaborative research venture between the University of

Melbourne and selected forward thinking schools to reimagine and influence schooling in Australia. Abbotsleigh is one of the 38 schools from across education sectors engaged in the partnership. The project aims to develop and embed ‘new ambitions’ for learning in assessment and recognition; seeking to define student success more broadly to encompass the whole child and what they need to thrive.

As part of the New Metrics partnership, we have been working towards generating new and validated assessment tools. Following participation in a pilot in Term 4, 2021 to inform this year’s trial, which we have now completed, we are about to begin analysing the findings.

Through our research, it has become abundantly clear that the future of sharing significant moments in learning is both digital and visible and that there is a move towards

using learner profiles, transcripts, records of achievement and portfolios, alongside whatever standardised data is felt to be important.

Much of 2022 has been spent, and will continue to be, considering the implications for future learning design of complex competencies and learner profiles, the policy environment, and progressing key discussions from our face-to-face seminar held earlier this year in Melbourne. With a focus on the production of initial learner profiles and building a fuller evidence base, there is much to do!

For Abbotsleigh, most importantly, our goal is to provide a contemporary and progressive system that captures time critical feedback, in turn supporting the students to understand where they are on the learning continuum. With this in mind, we will be moving toward designing e-reports for Year 7 2023 and then build on these. At the heart of all we do is a desire to facilitate student learning as they develop the skills and dispositions they will need to move from being dependent learners to deep thinkers able to contribute meaningfully to society.



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Writing and producing a musical from scratch

Lynette Clarke, Head of Music



For Year 8 Music students, the end of Semester 1 marks the exciting conclusion to an exploration of the topic, Musicals. Each Music class actively studies this topic in depth through writing and producing their own mini musical culminating in four premier performances for each other to watch. While the end-product of students shining in their roles on and off stage produces a sense of great accomplishment, it is the actual process of the converging musical elements over time, where the real student learning lies.

It is widely recognised by researchers in education that the more differentiated a classroom, the more its students feel successful and motivated. The following roles were required for students to select according to their interest and areas of strength:

- Directors
- Script writers
- Composers and lyricists
- Orchestra members
- Performers (acting and singing)
- Choreographers and dancers
- Prop and set designers
- Costume coordinators
- Lighting operators
- Audio visual designers

The students enjoy taking ownership of their chosen roles throughout the process, while developing their understanding of the content along with their listening, composing and performing skills.

Research also shows that increased opportunities for experiential learning may help students cultivate their musical identities and support the development of skills such as leadership, communication, collaboration and flexibility in a variety of settings (Bennett et al., 2017; Reid et al., 2018). When programming this activity, the Music

staff aimed to create an authentic, student centred activity that was driven by a clear goal and structured with a taste of real life theatre, facilitating the development of learning dispositions such as working collaboratively, problem solving and thinking critically and creatively.

“Something that I enjoyed most about the process of creating the musical was being able to work hard with others as a big group and encourage each other through the task. Another personal thing that I enjoyed was being able to be more confident in front of others and work on my social skills.” – Year 8 student

“Teamwork and cooperation skills are something that we constantly use in this project. It’s a lifelong skill that I feel we’ve been developing through organised and respectful discussion: learning to listen and respond in a constructive manner.” – Year 8 student

The Music staff are excited to see the Year 8 students continue to develop their learning dispositions and flourish in their performance skills throughout their years at Abbotsleigh.

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Collaborating for camp

Donna Moffatt, Director of Learning Innovation and
Nicole Hunt, Digital Learning Innovator



No matter your age or level of camping experience, collaboration is the one skill you are going to draw on time and time again. So, it was with this in mind that we set out to help the Year 7 girls prepare for their first ever Challenge Week in the Senior School.

Our intention was to facilitate teamwork and immerse the girls in a day of focusing on connectedness. We began by having them explore a learning progression based on interpersonal skills and reflect upon where they think they sit on that continuum of skill development. Such progressions are an integral part of Abbotsleigh's Learning Framework and exist for each of the learning dispositions which are essential for our students to thrive in an increasingly complex global society.

As the day progressed, the students were repeatedly provided with opportunities to reflect on their understanding of interpersonal skills by recording video blogs and submitting them via our Learning Management System, Canvas.

The highlight of the day was the LEGO Challenge. Continuing in their teams and using their interpersonal

skills, the girls had to design and build a superhero LEGO 'totem' that exhibited the character strengths they believed were necessary to survive and thrive on the Year 7 camp. The girls worked through the design process to decide on the particular character strengths they would like to include as well as how they could physically represent these in a LEGO creation.

Working as a group, each team had to decide how to use the limited number of LEGO bricks they had been given to create their designs. The team also had to consider how to use colour as symbolism, how each team member would contribute to the totem and how to ensure that the totem had a cohesive design. In a fun day full of ideas, communication, design and problem solving, there were many budding LEGO Masters!

On their return from camp, we introduced the Year 7 students to the first post on their Senior School digital portfolio. For this post, the girls were required to reflect upon their experiences during Challenge Week and most importantly, the development of their interpersonal skills.

“Connecting through meaningful relationships is integral to authentic learning” (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 63). The LEGO task was carefully considered as a means by which to build these relationships between students and encourage collaboration at a crucial point in time during their journey as Year 7 students at Abbotsleigh. This task, followed by Challenge Week, allowed for targeted reflection at multiple points in time, to facilitate a greater awareness of their interpersonal skills, encouraging them to actively grow and nurture these further.



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Fostering empathy through creative writing

Brett Kriedemann, Assistant Head of English

“You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive.” – James Baldwin

Every good writing journey begins with reading. The Year 9 girls in Term 1 read *The White Girl* by Tony Birch. Birch’s novel explores the experiences of First Nations people in 1960s Australia. The titular character, Sissy, learns much about her culture through her conversations and engagement with her grandmother, Odette. Through storytelling, Birch draws from his own life experience and the experiences of the women of his youth to invite his readers to better understand the complexity of First Nations history. Paul Daley, writing for *The Guardian*, describes Birch as one who “writes with razor’s edge emotional clarity and empathy about people and place – especially on those Australian margins, rural and urban.” (2019)

The Year 9 girls interviewed a family member or acquaintance, either as a first hand or a second hand account, of a significant moment of upheaval that defined a stage in the subject’s life. The transcripts of these interviews were then used as the source material and catalysts for fictional retellings of the events described, with the girls placing themselves, as Birch does, in the shoes of others, by conjuring something of the world described to them and thus giving life to authentic characters who inhabited those worlds.

Our aim was to have the girls move beyond their limited perspectives and develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the experiences of others; in so doing, crafting original narratives that reflected real world experiences and authentic characters born out of empathetic response through the act of perspective taking. This process has its roots in psychology, with Martin Hoffman (2001), defining empathy as “an affective response more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own.” To this end, theorists describe perspective taking as a process in which one might become “more aware of how the world looks and feels to somebody else with a different personal history and in a particular situation” (Leake, 2016).

Grace Li’s (Year 9) short story ranked third in the Nan Manefield competition. Her opening immediately ushers us into the domestic life of her protagonist:

Morgan Wood was 65 years old when the figure first came knocking at the door of her granny flat.

At the time, she was in the shower, belting out her favourite pop tunes. She savoured how the warm water massaged her back and slid like silk across her frail figure. Morgan loved music; she imagined that she was David Bowie, performing for thousands of adoring fans in Madison Square Garden. The bathroom lights were strobe lights, casting a warm and golden glow; the showerhead was a smoke machine, draping her in a veil of curling steam. Really, there was no way she could have heard the knocking, and even if she did, she could not answer the door.

Eventually, the sound stopped.

Perspective taking allows the girls to be curious about different cultures and world views and develop a better understanding of their own. This is further enriched when the girls engage in peer review, extend their audience by entering competitions like the Nan Manefield and through self-reflection. Most pleasing were the comments from parents who enjoyed talking with their daughters about their own life experiences or spending time with of the girls’ grandparents talking about their experiences and learning about their family history.



Leading by example

Alison Fell, Dean of Middle School and Clare Haymen, Year 9 Coordinator

The structural changes made to our Senior School for 2022 and beyond, involving the role of the Dean of Middle School being expanded to include Year 9, have helped our tutors, girls and parents with continuity of relationships. In addition, the teaching team has been keen to capitalise on the authentic leadership opportunities associated with this structure.

All Year 9 girls have been encouraged in their 'everyday leadership.' As suggested by Bellack (2018), "Being an everyday leader is first and foremost about character, integrity and authenticity" (p. 131). A good understanding of values and ethical principles guides everyday leaders when faced with difficult decisions. The School Values encourage students to display integrity, respect, compassion, courage and perseverance in their interactions with others and are the foundations for all behaviours.

Currently, all girls are allocated to one of two tutor groups, Black and Gold, within a particular house. We decided that it made good sense to appoint a Year 9 House Leader for each of our eight houses. Rather than this process having a bearing on the selection of Year 12 Prefects, we made it clear that this was an opportunity for girls to develop their leadership skills.

All girls in Year 9 were invited to complete an online application which required them to address questions about leadership and our School Values. The stronger candidates were interviewed by the Dean of Middle School and the Year 9 Coordinator which provided them with valuable interview experience. The eight Year 9 House Leaders were announced in a school assembly.

We committed to training these Year 9 girls to lead the Middle School and met with them once a week following their appointment. It was important to emphasise to those selected a sense of building on everyday leadership for the greater good of the cohort. Santovec (2019) explains "Leadership is a process that ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. It is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that is available to everyone" (p. 7) Many of the strategies experienced at the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program' have been shared with these leaders. These include the following:

- Formation of a yarning circle and importance of culture
- Learning about and understanding of differing world views
- Use of Uncle Steve Mam's Cultural Action Plan
- Use of Ausidentities to understand similarities and differences in personalities
- Understanding of culture and creation of cultural norms
- Johari window activity and valuing of different types of personality and world views
- Importance of perceptual positioning in terms of stronger collaboration in groups
- Consideration of how teamwork, personalities and character strengths affect culture

Enabling the leaders to participate in meaningful decision making has many benefits, including "higher levels of wellbeing and empowerment, a deeper connection to their learning and school community and developing a range of skills and capabilities." (NSW Education, 2020)



Following the explicit teaching about leadership over two terms, our Year 9 House Leaders were asked to put some of their learning in practice. This has included:

- Building of culture in the Year 9 playground → Just Dance/playlists
- Canteen duty → assisting with the distribution of lunch orders
- Year 7 2023 barbecues → leaders welcomed girls and led games to help all feel welcome
- SWB → leaders to lead combined groups (teamwork, personalities, character strengths)
- Year 7 2023 Orientation Day → leaders keen to run games at lunch to help build inclusion

Future prospects include gathering student voice and feedback on pastoral sessions and whole year group activities. As outlined in the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (2020), student voice "provides opportunities for authentic student decision making over matters that affect them" and in doing so develops their interpersonal relationships and connections, ultimately enhancing year group dynamics and fostering a positive school environment.

We look forward to our continued partnership with the house leaders.

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Intergenerational connections and wellbeing

Annette Ware, Dean of Senior College



Abbotsleigh and Anglicare partner to develop a Virtual Visiting program

The disruptions brought about by COVID-19 in 2020 necessitated a new way of thinking about Service Learning programs at Abbotsleigh. We needed to find authentic programs that met a real need yet did not rely on 'in person' engagement between students and members of the broader community. This also coincided with Anglicare's growing interest in Service Learning as a distinct pedagogy that is characterised by rich academic frontloading and reflection, and with reciprocity being a key feature. A mutual desire to see young people develop into informed, service oriented, empathetic citizens was another factor that propelled us forward.

Anglicare and Abbotsleigh staff began to meet and talk. What emerged was the co-designing of a Virtual Visiting

program; a collaboration that was marked by mutual trust as well as a significant commitment of time, funds and people. Exciting days lay ahead.

Early 2021 saw the launch of a pilot program; pairs of Year 7 students were linked with an aged care resident from Anglicare's Warrina Village, while pairs of Year 8 students were linked with a resident from Anglicare's Donald Coburn Centre. The students and residents met online for 30 minutes across four consecutive Fridays to get to know each other. Anglicare invested in iPads for the participating residents and the students used their school laptops. Prior to the first meeting, the students learnt from an Anglicare aged care staff member about the joys and challenges encountered by many older people, including the high rates of loneliness and the propensity to feel as though they have nothing of value to give. Deep learning for our students was underway, so too was empathy development.

The students used scaffolded questions to guide their conversations week by week, and they were encouraged to jot down key ideas as they were shared. This helped facilitate a growing knowledge and understanding of their resident. Most students started tentatively, but it wasn't long before their conversations were relaxed and laughter was evident. The program culminated in students and residents meeting over morning tea where the students presented their resident with a handmade gift that reflected something of the resident's life and interests. While a very touching and meaningful element of the program, the value of the Virtual Visiting program was not dependent on this face-to-face meeting. Had Covid prevented it from happening, the virtual visits would still have had immense value.

Following the success of the pilot program, Year 7 students linked up with residents from Anglicare's Goodwin Village in 2022, supported by Anglicare Chaplain Jayne Dedrick, who helped prepare the students before they met their residents online.

Speaking to her own Goodwin Village community, Jayne said:

"If you wander past the Garden Room on a Friday after lunch, you might see an amazing sight. At first, it may seem like a crew of astronauts wearing headphones and speaking animatedly to their screens. On the screens you can just make out small people from another planet. The 'astronauts' are village residents sharing their life experiences and wisdom. The small people are Year 7 students from a galaxy far, far away – Abbotsleigh School in Wahroonga. All of them are engaged in getting to know each other by making meaningful connections, generation to generation."

The African proverb, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground" is very apt. Just as libraries connect people in the present with characters and events of the past, so older people are uniquely placed to pass on wisdom that has arisen from the accumulation of lived experiences. Sharing oral history is the most natural and powerful way to do this, yet when older people live alone or have little or no exposure to young people, making this happen can be challenging.

Everyday technology was the conduit through which wisdom and experiences were shared. Some residents, when approached about participating, felt they had nothing to contribute. Jayne Dedrick was able to remind them of how fascinating life in 'the olden days' is to the young people of Generation Z, many of whom have grown up swiping a mobile phone for as long as they can remember and find it difficult to conceive of a life before television. The life experiences of older people are fascinating and intriguing to them; the students' post program reflections certainly attest to this.

There were plenty of smiles and embraces when the residents and students met over morning tea at Goodwin Village. When it was time for the students to depart, tears were shed by both residents and students. They had given each other the precious gift of time and listening ears. The students had been able to help validate the worth and dignity of the residents by treasuring their stories, their interests and passions, and life's journey. Perhaps unknowingly, the residents had provided the students with one of the most profound and effective positive wellbeing experiences they are likely to encounter during their schooling days. The program allowed residents and students alike to taste afresh the joy that comes from connecting in meaningful ways with others, irrespective of age.

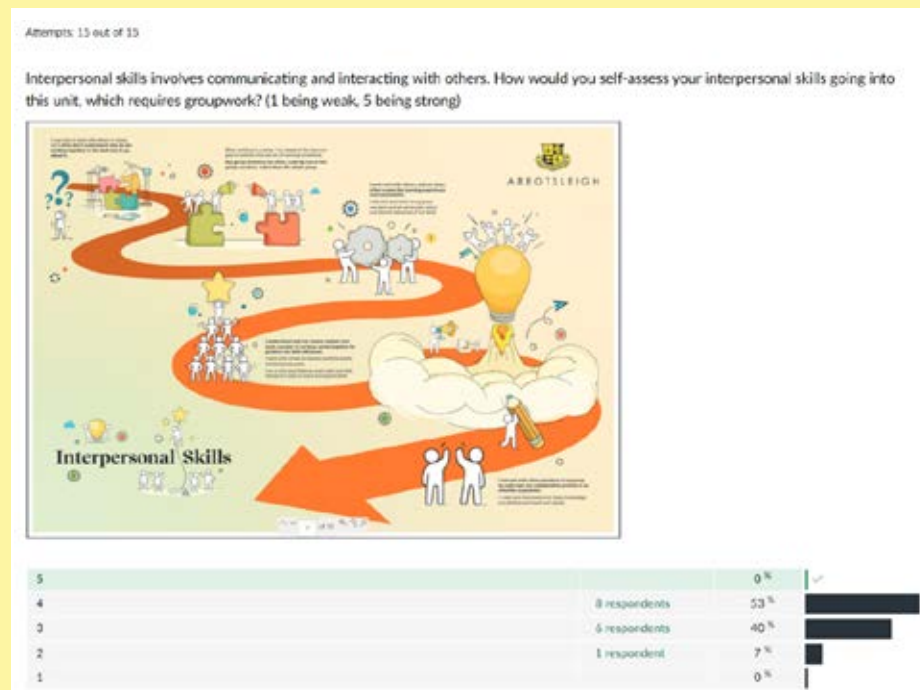


Pushing the boundaries

Rob Winslow, PDHPE Teacher

The Year 9 PDHPE project on sport aerobics is a rewarding, yet challenging combination of gymnastics and dance. During this unit, students are placed into small groups where they learn a complex Level 3 routine, with the final performance task involving the girls presenting it to their peers.

Throughout this unit, teachers encourage a culture of deep, engaged learning by focusing on specific dispositions from our Learning Framework – resilience and interpersonal skills. Resilience is built as students push themselves out of their comfort zone by performing a complex routine, managing setbacks and when facing constructive feedback, while interpersonal skills are developed as they work with others in the collaborative process. During the development of their routine, students work together in an inclusive environment and encourage each other to perform at their personal best.



As well as communicating in person, discussion threads are placed on Canvas for students to leverage technology. These discussion threads can include anything that promotes effective group work such as group Zoom meetings, or even uploading of resources such as practice performances. Leveraging digital in this way provides additional opportunities for student interaction to achieve the group's goals.

To document their learning and growth across dispositions, some classes have chosen to employ reflective surveys found on their class

Canvas page. These students document their feelings towards the unit in three phases (pre, during and post learning). The surveys provide evidence of personal growth of students and demonstrate the importance of being resilient in overcoming challenges, along with the significance of working with others in real-world contexts.

By creating a unit with a focus on physical skills as well as learning dispositions such as resilience and interpersonal skills, students are given a more wholistic learning experience.



A place for learning, imagination and positive engagement

Mary Faith, Head of Visual Arts

“The arts and humanities help us weather the storms of life, but more than that, they can help guide us to new possibilities as we imagine and create more fulfilling lives and thriving communities.” – Martin E. P. Seligman

There has been a consistent focus on contributing to the life and culture of the School by creating an inspiring learning environment and a welcoming destination for our students and the wider community since the bold foundation of the Grace Cossington Smith (GCS) Gallery in 2013. By providing a constantly changing exhibition program of works by national, local and student artists, the gallery exposes visitors to fresh concepts and ideas, inspires curiosity, encourages open mindedness, invites deep engagement and promotes discovery.

Exhibitions provide opportunities for visitors to interact with artworks, artists and spaces they may not otherwise encounter. The exhibitions curated by the GCS Gallery staff seek to embed inter-disciplinary learning through art as an integral component of the curatorial process. To be able to meet artists and view artworks in an authentic situation is a unique experience in a school environment and a genuine context for experiential learning opportunities.

Three of the exhibitions presented in 2022 showcased this curatorial focus and amplify the diverse approaches and opportunities Abbotsleigh provides. These exhibitions reflect the strong and effective relationships built with Old Girls, parents, staff and students. This creates rich opportunities for partnerships and connections with community and other schools, and the creation of relationships with local and national artists and groups.

Cross-sectoral experiences for Young Curators

The innovative Young Curators art program enabled students to participate in the authentic process of exhibition curation. Young Curators was created by Max Germanos, a businessman who is also a collector of art and the Director of 3.33 Art Projects (<https://www.333artprojects.com/young-curators>).



In 2021, Year 11 Visual Arts students were invited to partner with Hornsby Girls High School students to organise an exhibition of works by leading Sydney artist, Euan Macleod. The girls from both schools worked as a collaborative curatorial team to research, interpret and select the primary resources, as well as develop and stage the exhibition. They visited Macleod’s studio to investigate

and select available artworks, examine his painting process and develop a theme for the exhibition. The exhibition, Euan Macleod Plein Air, was held in April 2022, and the girls organised catalogue text and participated in the 'artist in conversation' at the lively opening. Young Curators enabled student voice and agency and the development of collaboration skills. The social and intellectual experiences accommodated students' different learning preferences and provided valuable insights into various perspectives and facets of the creative arts industry.

Recollections of First Nations female artists

In *Recollections*, the GCS Gallery staff proposed an exhibition fostering a breadth of learning and enquiry into contemporary Indigenous art, focusing on the ideas of creative women that would develop a connection between a federal institution and our community. From 2020, the GCS Gallery commenced negotiations with Artbank Sydney to host an exhibition of works selected from their collection. Established in 1980 by the Australian Government, the core objectives of Artbank are to provide direct support to living Australian contemporary artists through the acquisition of their work and to promote the value of Australian contemporary art to the broader public. The Artbank partnership eventuated in a compelling exhibition in May 2022, with a focus on First Nations female artists.



Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist, curator and educator Dennis Golding was engaged by the gallery to curate the exhibition and to work with Artbank staff. For Golding, "*Recollections* brings together a selection of works by First Nations women who trace generational experiences across time and place that link memory with traditional and contemporary expressions of artistic practice. Each artist's work extends stories of strength, resilience, cultural practice and caring for knowledge and children".

Rich connections were established across the school community. Students from our Early Learning Centre to Year 12 visited to engage, imagine, interpret, draw, photograph or create culturally inspired poetry. The exhibited paintings, sculptures and videos brought to life the histories and stories with which students had been engaging. A diverse series of community events was held throughout the course of the exhibition, including a parent and community evening for the opening in April, and Abbotsleigh Old Girls enjoyed their annual Card Day in the gallery. An afternoon public event featured curator Dennis Golding in conversation with Artbank Head curator, Dr Oliver Watts. Year 11 Visual Arts students and teachers visited Artbank and Dr Watts guided the girls through Artbank's vast collection in Waterloo, while Dennis Golding shared ideas about the significance and broader concepts of the artworks.

Recollections actively challenged and engaged students in their learning by providing the opportunity to engage deeply with artworks, find ways to respond creatively, and discuss observations and insights with others.



Ages, a survey of works from artist Stephen Hall

Stephen Hall is a local artist who has maintained a strong connection with the GCS Gallery as both an artist and a visitor. Curated by Mary Faith and Lisa Jones, artworks for the *Ages* exhibition represented a survey of Hall's practice since the 1980s. Hall did not see his exhibition as static, but rather continued creating work in the gallery, engaging in conversation and storytelling, thus enlivening the visitor experience. During the *Ages* exhibition, artist talks, drawing workshops, book readings and class tutorials provided many experiential opportunities for varied groups to deeply connect with art.



Abbotsleigh's dynamic school life is reflected in the daily interactions and exchanges that take place in the GCS Gallery. Public visitors and school classes are offered the opportunity to take time out to engage deeply with artworks, to respond creatively and to communicate observations and insights. The gallery programs have an interdisciplinary approach and are not confined to a fixed body of knowledge that predetermines each exhibition. While art is the subject of the conversation, it is the innovative, ambitious and adventurous approach of our teachers and tutors that brings the space alive.

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