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The principles of learning

Mr Cain McDonald | Principal

In a dynamic and ever-changing world, the best opportunities we can give our children are to equip them with interdisciplinary skills to enable them to seamlessly move from one vocation to another, one conversation to another, one community to another.

Teaching and learning is the core ‘business’ of the College; the process of understanding that we are all learners, the transference of skills and knowledge and the development of individuals who are capable, considerate and wise, ready to live, work and communicate in a global world.

The College Learning Principles give effect to the College Mission and Vision for each student and staff member. From these Learning Principles grow the programmes, practices and procedures which form the teaching and learning, wellbeing and service learning directions of the College. Learning values God-given talents which involves the spiritual, academic, physical, emotional and social development of an individual and builds wellbeing proactively.

In our work with students, we use strategies that reflect evidenced based, best practice. By placing the learner at the centre of our teaching and learning, we see them and listen to them, as important citizens of the future. We believe that all learners come with prior knowledge and that they can, and have the right to learn. We understand that learning is a process that stimulates the learner’s appetite for learning and we recognise that as staff we too are learners.

Professionally, we seek to refine teaching and learning through the adoption of researched strategies and reflective practice, with an understanding that teaching is a process of shared learning. We recognise that learning is a primary purpose of the College and that all members of the College are involved in learning. All activities in the College contribute to a love of life-long learning and the development of the skills and talents of each learner.

At Tatachilla Lutheran College we believe that:

• Learning occurs in a safe, secure environment where all learners are valued.
• Learning occurs through collaborative enterprise and individual endeavour.
• Learning is constructed by each individual, as learners make sense of the world.
• Learning occurs at different rates, in different ways and at an individual point of challenge.
• Learning through concepts promotes deep understanding, connection and transfer of knowledge and skills.
• Learning occurs when thinking critically and creatively.
• Learning promotes thoughtful reflection and response.
• Learning is supported by timely and specific feedback.
• Learning occurs through intentional and focussed time.
• Learning occurs in spaces that promote collaboration, flexibility, creativity, independence, curiosity and inquiry.

This edition of ‘Beyond the Ridge’ captures just a small amount of the transformative learning occurring in our community today. Of focus in this edition is the development and impact of concept-based learning – noting this is a key factor in the learning process as signalled in our Learning Principles.
A concept is an abstract idea, a plan or intention that guides the development of something. At Tatachilla, concepts are used in learning to guide and promote connections across the curriculum. Conceptual inquiry helps students see the links and relationships between facts, content and skills that lead to a depth of understanding.

Similarly, in building design, the architect and client will have broad concepts in mind to guide the design on the building. When approaching the renovations to the Reception Learning Centre, the architect and College staff worked closely together to set the direction for the alterations and improvements, keeping the following concepts mind: the design should be child-centred, flexible and have close connections to the outdoors.

These directions are supported by recent research by the University of Salford (Barrett, 2015). Their study identified a relationship between the physical characteristics of a building and student achievement. Light, air quality and temperature had the greatest influence in the study, followed closely by the flexibility to offer different modes of learning, and what they termed as ‘ownership’, meaning that the children identify the classroom as being ‘theirs’.

The Reception Learning Centre has good natural light coming through the large windows on at least two sides of each classroom, and lovely soft light through the overhead south light. Light from both sides of the room reduces glare, and the subtle changes in the colour of the light and intensity during the day can be experienced by the children. The automatic air conditioning system provides a constant air flow if the doors are closed, but for much of the year, the large sliding doors can be left open for fresh air.

The spacious rectangular rooms have been divided into smaller learning activity zones that accommodate a range of instructional strategies. The large sliding doors between the classrooms, and the team-teaching approach taken by the Reception teachers, do not constrain the children to a single classroom and encourage the children to think of the whole building as their learning space. Student work is displayed prominently throughout the building, and the floor to ceiling whiteboards allow children to write, draw and create to show their thinking. A neutral and functional palette of materials and finishes allow students’ thinking to be a focal point of the classroom and learning to be messy when required.

A wide, sheltered veranda wraps around two sides of the building, giving ready access to the outdoors and sheltered spaces. The large windows help the teachers monitor all children whilst providing views of nature from the classroom at the children's eye level.

The acid test of whether or not the original concepts have been achieved is to ask the daily users of the building. What do the Reception children like about the building? They like the “nice soft walls”, being able to write on the whiteboard walls and cupboards, the cosy places to read, the carpeted common area and the flow and connection between the classrooms.
Innovative learning

Tatachilla has formed a connection with educational researcher and innovator through the Independent Schools Association, Charles Leadbeater. Charles writes that the core purpose of education needs to shift from teaching students to follow instructions to identifying and solving problems. Charles explains that this has been at the core of mass education and driven its success. However, in a more volatile, uncertain world, characterised by innovation and entrepreneurship, we now need to equip young people to solve problems of all shapes and sizes. Problems that will not come with instructions.

This is why we have focussed on conceptual understanding as a core focus for units of learning for our young people. A conceptually driven curriculum enables students to transfer their understanding and skill into real action, through a process of deep learning and exploration. We believe in the Middle School that a rich concept should enable students to make links in their learning across multiple learning areas. The relevance for students is higher and connections in learning spiral.

Here are some real-life learning opportunities through a conceptual lens that our young people experience in the middle years:

**Year 9 Art and Humanities**

During Year 9 Humanities, students inquired into the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and developed their conceptual understanding from the perspective of an African person; taken, sold and slaved to the Americans. In conjunction to this, Visual Art students researched the art of an African American artist who represented the stories and perspectives of individuals who experienced the Civil Rights Movement. Furthering their conceptual understandings of perspective and representation, students were given the task to develop an artwork that showcased a social comment on an issue that they felt strongly about.

**Year 7 and 8 STEM project based learning**

Through an interdisciplinary approach to learning in Mathematics, Science, Technology, English and Humanities, our Year 7 students develop a proposal to the National Resource Management Board to build an enclosure in our EcoClassroom to help save the bandicoots that are an endangered species. This STEM project was introduced in 2018 and a group of wildlife warriors in Year 8 called BRAG (Bandicoots Recovery Action Group) continue to work with rangers and researchers in Kuipito Forest setting up cameras to identify if any bandicoots or other native animals live in particular areas. In Term 3, our Year 8s will deepen their understanding of creating a sustainable community by inquiring into our Global United Nation Sustainability Goals, where they create real and local ways that will future proof our environment.

**Year 9 Specialness Project**

Charles says that to make the shift in education that we need to, we need to provide dynamic experiences for young people where they can learn to practice how to deploy knowledge into action, to work with others and to develop critical personal strengths such as persistence and resilience; to learn from feedback and overcome setbacks. The Year 9 Specialness Project is one of these dynamic experiences that challenges our young people to create, make and innovate through pursuing their passions, learning new skills from mentors in the wider community and making an impact on other’s lives through this process. We are so proud of our Year 9 students in the way they have embraced the challenges of the Specialness Project. Each project is unique and has captured the voice, heart and talents of each individual Year 9 student.

A conceptually driven curriculum challenges our young people to engage their hearts, minds and hands to create, make and innovate possibilities that can change the world they live in now and the future. It is our hope that this dynamic approach to learning will prepare them for the future workforce that they will enter and lead a fulfilling life of service to others, whatever their pathway may be.

Twenty first century learning and preparing our young people for the future workforce requires more than knowing information and facts. In seeking fresh horizons at Tatachilla we are committed to providing an innovative approach to learning, and taking our staff and students on this journey.
As the world of work changes on a global scale in both rapid and dynamic ways, education is challenged to meet the requirements of these needs. Response, change and continuous improvement have long been the characteristics of education and the business of schools. However, perhaps not since the industrial revolution has the world seen such a rapid development in technology that has accelerated the need for a vigorous reinvention of the world of learning. Simply put, we can no longer rely on established historical methods of preparation for the world of work when the work that will be required of young adults will be significantly different now and in the future. In other words, we cannot prepare young people for occupations that will no longer exist. So how do we prepare learners for an undetermined future?

At the recent annual Institute for Educational Assessors Conference in Adelaide educating for the future was central to the presentations and collaboration of teachers present. Andreas Schleicher the Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) proposed a ‘global focus on capabilities that cannot be digitalised’. Professor Martin Westwell the Chief Executive of SACE also identified that ‘capabilities need to become the driving force for a focus on metacognition’ since ‘proficiency in subjects is necessary, but on its own no longer sufficient.’

As the future of education unfolds, the message is clear. Knowledge, understanding and skills remain valuable, but without the capacity to harness, invent, transfer, innovate, collaborate and imagine they will not be enough. The first-class employee of the future will stand out in the workforce because of what they are able to do with their knowledge and skills in any context. And it is our job to teach, develop and challenge students to master this behaviour.

As part of our journey toward the future of education, we have been introducing conceptual learning for students in order to encourage depth, breadth and transference of knowledge, understanding and skills. Big idea thinking that can be considered about areas of content within and across subjects fosters the capacity for the learner to see patterns and connections and enables them to transfer their learning and knowledge to new contexts.

In the last six months teacher professional learning has focussed on the presentation of conceptual learning as a model for inquiry and staff have been designing, experimenting and refining their curriculum by applying this lens to their teaching. It has been a challenging time and a steep learning curve for us all. However, it is important that we continue to explore quality, relevant and timely developments in our approach to teaching and learning in order that students graduate with the best possible capacity for personal success. Their mastered capabilities and competencies will make them a very desirable prospect in the future workforce.
Unlike education from decades past, a curriculum that focusses on content will quickly become superseded by new knowledge and instant access to the internet. Instead, concept-based learning equips our students with the knowledge, understandings and values to make connections and navigate their ever-changing and challenging world through their understanding of the big ideas that are important, irrespective of the topic, country or place in time being studied.

In the Junior School, concept-based learning permeates all areas of the curriculum and assists students to deepen their understandings by seeing the connections across subject areas. Mrs Crowe’s Visual Arts program is a wonderful example of ways that conceptual understandings for students can both link to their other learnings in Year 4, and add depth and rigour to the Visual Arts program. Mrs Schmidt and Mrs Schirmer’s Year 4 students are this term focussing on the concepts of Journeys and Time and Place across the curriculum. In Christian Studies students explore St Paul’s journey, recording it on Google Maps and in journals with skills they are developing in the learning area, Technologies. Similarly, Year 4 students are focusing on mapping and mathematical skills of location / co-ordinates and investigating time and place as it relates to family trees and what has influenced them on their personal life journey so far. These same concepts of journeys and time and place are being further understood through their learning about the journeys and contributions over time of Indigenous people in our local area (place) in HASS.

In Visual Arts, students are focusing on the artistic and personal journey of an artist of their choice, inquiring into how the artist’s art works were viewed at the time of their creation, and comparing that to how the same artworks are viewed present day. For example, students are incredulous that artist Georges Seurat’s paintings were rejected when he was alive as they were too colourful for what was perceived as being acceptable in Paris in the 1800s. So he created a club of other rejected artists called the Society of Independent Artists…that included Van Gough, Monet and Degas! Yet their paintings now are considered masterpieces. Journeys into time and place. Conceptual learning that enables students to understand the why, not just the what of their world.

Conceptual learning is a key factor in students’ ability to make sense of their rapidly changing world, by organising, retrieving, and connecting new knowledge to what is already known across a range of contexts.
STEM and project-based learning provides our students the opportunity to connect real-world concepts, and explore the four disciplines – science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The value of extended projects for learning is the opportunity for students to reflect, feedback and modify their thinking through various stages of the project. In addition, teachers play a crucial role in posing questions and guiding students through the stages of design thinking, leading to more independent problem solving.

Year 7 Design and Technology at Tatachilla aims to encourage each student’s interest and confidence in designing and creating product solutions using a variety of materials and equipment, incorporating a range of STEM concepts. During one project based learning task, students investigated the historical use of wind power and its use in modern wind generators. Renewable sources of energy were discussed and the amount of renewable energy generation in South Australia was researched. Students worked in pairs on the practical task and utilised Autodesk Fusion 360 to design the generator housing and turbine propeller. The designs were then 3D printed and assembled with plywood bases and rigid straws to the students chosen design. The students then tested the turbine with a blower and a fan to replicate different wind speeds. They collected and analysed data such as wind speed, revolutions per minute and the voltage generated. Students tested a standard two blade turbine propeller against their own 3D printed version and compared results. Working in pairs, a number of students managed to produce a more efficient turbine propeller, compared to the standard version, which was noteworthy.

Lead teacher, Mr Ian Proeve, has been developing the Design Technology unit throughout the year, exploring ‘best practice’ for the integration of technology with science and mathematics concepts.

Connecting with real world concepts

Mr Ian Proeve | Key Teacher
Ms Jodi Gordon | Innovation, eLearning and Technology Coordinator
Students in Year 12 have spent time exploring the concepts of Hope, Resiliency and Transformation during Year 12 Retreat.

These concepts are drawn from the Easter story, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the most important Christian festival, and the one celebrated with the greatest joy. The concepts are timeless, universal and somewhat abstract for students of all ages to understand. Exploring this content through a conceptual lens allows for depth and breadth of student understanding and enriches connections to previous understandings and bonds it to new learnings.

Staff and student peers witnessed the deep and broad mental processing between the factual stories of staff when things go wrong, and life takes unexpected or challenging turns. The conceptual levels of knowledge and understanding in relation to the Easter story were connected, allowing students to understand why learning this content is crucial for lifelong development.

Drawing on the basic idea in Christian theology that God and mankind need to be reconciled, the evening candle lighting ritual included chances to repair broken relationships, and to celebrate and encourage each other with affirmations. An idea more greatly understood as the “Why” of learning is identified through the exploration of concepts in story-telling.

Linking the foundations of what students know and understand improves long-term retention and application of ideas. The Retreat is a part of a series, which allow for the opportunity to reflect and remove any misconceptions along the way.

A visit from Daniel Kirk, a Para-Olympian, who shared his own journey through loss of physical abilities, despair and then new-found hope and direction through sport, drew together the concepts of Hope, Resiliency and Transformation on the last day. When given the opportunity to reflect, student responses included: “Daniel was different from the staff stories but relevant and inspiring” and “I liked the opportunity to mend relationships.”

In the Australian Curriculum, capability encompasses knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions required to equip people for success. Students develop capability when they apply knowledge and skills confidently, effectively and appropriately in complex and changing circumstances, in their learning at school and in their lives outside school. The use of the conceptual lens for learning in all contexts allows for the transfer of understanding through time, across cultures and across situations forging links across and between disciplinary subjects. Likewise developing capability in our young people, better equipping them for life beyond school.
What inspired you to work in the field of education?

I had lots of fantastic teachers throughout my own school journey but two in particular stand out as having a pivotal role in steering me on the path to becoming a teacher. My Year 5 teacher was an incredibly kind, patient and stable figure in my life. This was during a time when my parents were going through the separation of their marriage and, as a ten year old boy, wasn’t sure how to channel all the emotions I had swirling around in me. A year later, in Year 6, I had a teacher who just seemed to fill up the room with her passion for learning and her incredible enthusiasm for every single subject she taught. Combined, these two teachers inspired and challenged me to become a teacher through the effect they had on my own life at this time. I am still deeply inspired by both these teachers and my ultimate aim is to have a similar effect on the students in my classroom.

Describe the pathway that led you to becoming a teacher at Tatachilla.

After graduating from the University of Wollongong I started my first full-time position as a Year 5/6 teacher in Cootamundra, NSW. I taught for two years in this small country town and loved the sense of community and support I experienced as a beginning teacher. From Cootamundra I moved to Randwick, Sydney which was definitely a change of environment and pace of life. I taught at Claremont College in Randwick for the next seven years. I loved my time at this school and learnt a lot from many great teachers I taught with and opportunities I was given. In 2017 my girlfriend (now wife) Natalie and I decided to quit our jobs and go travelling through Europe, with the view of settling in Adelaide, close by her family when our trip was finished. Whilst we were overseas and sailing in Croatia I received an email that I would be interviewing for a job at Tatachilla over Skype. Once we docked in Split, Croatia I managed to purchase a business shirt, a tie and was then ready at 5am the next morning for my interview which, thankfully, was successful!

What do you enjoy most about your role as a Year 5 teacher?

When children are in Year 5 it is such a fantastic age to be involved in their learning. Generally they are very enthusiastic, positive, creative and will give anything a go. They have begun to be curious about the wider world and the conversations we have in the classroom can be incredibly informed, mature and thought-provoking. Children in Year 5 have also reached a level of independence where, as a teacher, it is exciting to encourage this and to step back and help them further develop their initiative and problem-solving strategies. Being a Junior School teacher, I also enjoy creating lessons and experiences across a range of subject areas. Across a day I may teach Maths, Reading, Science, Technology, Writing, Christian Studies or several other subjects and I enjoy the variety that every day brings. Teaching across these subjects also gives me the opportunity to encourage students to see the links between different ideas, knowledge or concepts.

What is one way that you have included conceptual learning in your teaching?

As a Year 5 teaching team we have been challenging ourselves to step back and look for opportunities to connect ideas across the curriculum. We have found that by connecting ideas, knowledge and concepts together - rather than teaching them in isolation - the depth of student understanding has increased. For example, a concept we explored last term was ‘systems’. We used a system-thinking approach to first define what a system is and what can make it effective or ineffective. Once students had a clear idea about systems they were pointing out examples of systems everywhere! We then applied this to our ‘Technology’ unit on ‘computer systems’ and our ‘HASS’ unit on ‘systems of government’. It was impressive to see how the students were able to visually represent the Australian Government as a system and the different interactions that exist within this system.

Tell us about your passions beyond work.

My wife and I recently bought a house and a puppy. I have discovered that both of these involve a major investment of your time! We have also loved getting to know our community and exploring up and down the Fleurieu Peninsula over the last 18 months. I have always been a passionate reader too and, although this can take a back seat during the school term, I try to make up for it in school holidays. Sport is the other area that I am somewhat obsessed by, particularly cricket and rugby league. My favourite team is the Sydney Roosters and, luckily for me, they actually do play one game each year at Adelaide Oval.

What do you enjoy about working at Tatachilla?

I start every day with a short drive to work that involves first driving past the beautiful coastline at Port Noarlunga and then through the vineyards of McLaren Vale. Upon getting to school I know I’m working into a workplace that is professional, encouraging, friendly and child-centred. I know that every day will be busy and some days will be challenging but that every member of the Tatachilla staff genuinely care for, and want the best for, our students. Mostly though, I enjoy working with the kids. Even if I’ve woken up on the wrong side of the bed or had a bad night’s sleep, I know they’ll put a smile on my face pretty quickly.
What sparked your interest in a career in education?

My father, Mr. R. C. Sharma, is the one who inspired me to choose education as a career. He got his National Teaching Award from the Government of India and he got V.I.P. status in India for his contributions to the community. He is not only a great man, a very successful sports man (who earned many national awards), but is a very committed educator as well. Teaching is not only a profession for my father, but it is a service and that’s what I believe.

Pastor Joseph, who made a huge impact on my life and changed my entire thought process, also inspired me. As a teacher, I feel I am in a role that allows daily problem solving, exploration, research and development. God has given me this opportunity to do a job that is influential to young people, to have them look back in years to come and remember me as a mentor. We all have those teachers that we remember fondly as being life changing.

Who, or what, inspires you?

I have many people and things which inspire me, including my parents, my husband, my kids and my friends, my colleagues and students, smiles from strangers (as they give me hope that this is indeed a world of love and respect), nature, waves from the ocean, light blue skies, science and new discoveries, and experiences / reflections.

What do you enjoy doing beyond work?

Spending time with my family. My family balances my life. I really like cooking for them. I enjoy reading books with my kids. We spend an hour every day talking about random things.

My husband and I really like travelling and now the kids are in our team as well. They love travelling and visiting different places. We have a long list of destinations in our bucket list. We have travelled so far to Singapore, Thailand (Phuket), California, British Columbia and New Zealand (North Island). I like buying books so that I can use these resources in my Science class.

Dancing gives me my time to relax. Every week for at least an hour I dance. I feel that I have detoxified my body and it gives me peace.

I enjoy cooking and doing experiments with recipes. Sometimes I feel good about the outcomes and there are times when it is a complete disaster, but this provides me with an opportunity to start everything all over again and learn from my mistakes.

My passion for mathematics is transmitted through my teaching, where I help each student obtain the necessary skills and confidence to reach their full potential. My approach has always been to encourage each student to engage their curiosity when learning, as the conceptual understanding and application of what is being learnt is paramount when viewing the world through the eyes of a Mathematician.

Why do you enjoy teaching Maths and Science in the Middle and Senior years?

I’m not happy just accepting things, I want to know why! Science gives me the why! It’s not a subject that stops. I love teaching Science because I don’t believe it is enough to accept everyday phenomena at face value and I take great satisfaction from developing a deeper understanding of things we take for granted, whether they be on the scale of the stars and the universe, or as small as the inner workings of the atom.

The cognitive skills that students develop early on (in Middle School) will serve them for the rest of their lives, in all their personal and professional endeavours. The curiosity and excitement of the students is contagious. They often have a fresh perspective on problems and can ask questions I might never have thought to ask. I enjoy scientific experiments as much as the students and like seeing their excitement when they do something well. The fascinating part of teaching Science is sharing knowledge and ideas with the students. “Using science to solve global problems is the way forward” - and I am strongly passionate about this.

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I find it disconcerting that our time at Tatachilla only went for five years. Five years out of 37 on earth is short and it shortens still with each trip around the sun. Those five years are imprinted on me, are embodied, so that 20 years after we graduated, the experiences are like muscle memory, felt as much as remembered.

I don’t remember exactly what I was thinking that first day of Year 8, but I feel the closeness of so many new bodies as we are photographed in front of the transportable buildings that make up our school. Our first school photo. Tatachilla’s first too. It is only days after the official dedication, and gone are the pastors, the parents, the dignitaries. Just 67 teenagers and six teachers and three transportable buildings are here now, and we are becoming together.

I hear our singing, because now we are a choir. We sing about our differences and our similarities. Pieces of the whole. The song becomes our anthem, and because it is sentimental, we joke about it and roll our eyes. We ask to sing it again at our graduation. I can hear us singing, that final song, with more fervour than ever before.

I feel the love of our teachers. Maybe I don’t know it, but I feel it now. Years later, I leave a room, so my own graduating students don’t see me cry. In that moment, I see our teachers at Tatachilla and wonder how it was for them.

I smell the wheat. I see it in rolls across our paddock. I see it roll across our paddock as we discover how it conceals us. Being concealed is almost impossible in a place so small and so large. In winter, an entire class can hide in that growing wheat. I can feel its softness around my face. Smell its green. Hear the wind whispering and the teachers shouting for us to come out.

I smell new carpet and paint, because every year we have a new building. I hear the groans and grinds of saws and hammers and trucks because the school is always growing, extending, toward a future that feels abstract. It extends into the wheat. We are growing too, toward a future that feels abstract.

I feel the closeness of bodies, our grown bodies, as we are again photographed in front of the transportable building on our final day. I hear our laughs, our sighs, our excitement. Our feet imprinting in the grass. 🌾
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Little Mermaid

Twilight Food Affaire
Celebrating the past

Births

Courtney-Jayne Lawrie (2005 Lobban) and husband, Robert, welcomed their second child, Myles Hunter, born in Mount Gambier on 8 December 2018. Myles is a little brother to big sister, Eloise.


Marriages

Pierce Fakes (2013) married Molly Walton on 29 December 2018 at Hallett Cove beach front.

Engagements

Josh Smart (2007) got engaged to Catie Metcalfe on Christmas Eve, 2018. They hope to get married in McLaren Vale next summer. Josh was also recently appointed Deputy National Commissioner for Adult Training and Development at Scouts Australia.

Mike Klocke (2012) proposed to Allana Stangewitz on 15 February at Sellicks Beach. They plan to marry next year.

Camps years 7 & 8

Myles Hunter                                                             Mike Klocke (2012) & Allana Stangewitz                                         Josh Smart (2007) & Catie Metcalfe

Pierce Fakes (2013)       Mali Alessia
& Molly Walton