Executive Principal/Chief Executive Officer

Education has changed much in a generation, in content, in teaching and learning practices, in the use of technology, and in the expectations of society in general. Just as our education systems have changed, so too has society, our economic outlook, job security, our expectations with respect to ‘what is a life well lived’, and the pressures on families to provide and sometimes to be seen to be providing or living a certain lifestyle.

As a boy, I was broadly sheltered from the financial pressures of my parents but knew that they did not have a great deal. Family holidays were rare, but our home was a happy one. It seems that nowadays, however, our children are far more aware of family pressures and the challenges faced by their parents. Our parents feel the pressure of rapidly advancing changes, the need to give their child the very best start and sometimes, dare I say, protect their child from all possible obstacles.

History has certainly known significant challenges including the ‘Great Depression’ and the horrific and far-reaching world conflicts. Through these challenges Australians have rallied, united and been strengthened in community. Our lives and our access to global opportunities have, however, taken us far away from family, friends and possibly the communities in which we once felt secure. The reality is that educational communities have played an increasingly important role in the lives of young people and their families and may potentially be one of the few remaining societal networks for families in this transient age. The added responsibility that this places on a school is significant. This is not to say that educational communities cannot be such a cornerstone, but be able to provide the training and development for our future workers, artists, designers, leaders, researchers and innovators.

The question is that if society now accepts that educational communities are the centralised and dominant network for families, how can we as a society best support these communities and the people within them. The need to support people has been significant in recent years and with the challenges around climate change, and what seems increasing levels of natural disasters, there is a need for people to be supported. The question of who should provide such support is indeed interesting – should it be our governments? Should it be individuals in society?

The current issues around our response to the global pandemic of COVID-19 raises so many issues that need to be publicly debated. How can our education system better provide for Australia’s future? Can education be a guiding opportunity for our economy? How do we engage with and relate to other economies? What degree of reliance should we have on international economies? To what degree or extent should we be self-reliant? How can we future proof ourselves? Should we have a stronger manufacturing sector in Australia? What do we do with our plentiful resources? What do we need our nation to be able to do into the future and how can education assist?

There are so many questions, but regardless of the question, it is clear that our education system needs to not only be a cornerstone for society, but be able to provide the training and development for our future workers, artists, designers, leaders, researchers and innovators. Diversity in education is in fact the foundation plinth of so many independent schools, and long may
it continue to be so. Sadly, not all people can afford the school of their choice and I truly wish that this was not the case but it is reality. As a College we strive to provide a diverse, holistic and in depth education – one that not only aids individuals but also benefits our society. How can government funding be better spent? Applied? How can we have greater understanding of the models used for such funding? How can the funding truly be applied to benefit the individual child? Sadly, politics seems to get in the way of achieving what is needed.

I hope that the challenges faced by our Nation in recent times cause us to reflect on our place in the international economy, but also what we want as a Nation. Education and the opportunities provided by a diverse and robust education system are indeed essential to driving our National Agenda. It is also my hope that the acceptance of the need for such diversity will finally lead to an end to the adolescent territorial disputes between (and about) the various education sectors and we will finally be united in one common goal – serving our Nation’s children and our National Agenda.

I would also hope that our political leaders would broaden the scope of feedback they receive and open their minds to new and perhaps alternative approaches from those responsible for the education of young people, and not only from select public figures. Our Nation needs serious introspection and I hope we have the courage to do this.

BRIAN GRIMES
Executive Principal/Chief Executive Officer
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Teachers of the Future: The changing face of STEAM
Year 5 teacher Judy Russell explores how STEAM, and its integration into curriculum, is evolving at A.B. Paterson College.

Setting the Stage for Success: Justin Wise – Class of 2017
Old Collegian, Justin Wise shares his journey from a young boy with stage fright into a budding musical theatre star and reveals his dogged determination to overcome years of knockbacks.

The Why of Jolly Phonics
Head of Junior School, Simon Edgar explores how our highly skilled teachers are using the system of Jolly Phonics to develop confident readers and writers.

Dennis House Sleepout & Lawson House Talent Show
A magical night of camaraderie, supporting charities – Orange Sky Laundry, Youngcare and The Salvation Army.

A Beautiful Collaboration
A.B. Paterson College Alumni parent and Custodian of Lady Elliot Island, Peter Gash shares his remarkable life story, after being recognised with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2020 Australia Day Honours.

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Sascha Lawton
2020 College Captain

I have been able to seize so many opportunities during my time at A.B. Paterson College. This year, I am looking forward to serving a community that has given me so much. I am so grateful for every opportunity I have been given and I hope to inspire others to take as many of these as they can. Being able to make a difference in someone's life, whether it be through delivering a speech that makes someone think or beginning an initiative that brightens someone's day, has always resonated with me.

Parker Britton
2020 College Vice Captain

To me, leadership is all about communication. It’s the ability to bring people together and unite them towards common success. I have been enrolled in the College since Prep 2008 and have always enjoyed the sensation of watching my teammates succeed. As College Vice Captain, most of my duties are behind the scenes – supporting my fellow captains and the rest of my cohort. This fits perfectly with my idea of leadership, striving to unite everybody, much like a family. I believe that with communication, any challenge can be overcome through teamwork and collaboration of every individual and their insights.

Harrison White
College Leader – Sport

Leadership, to me, is a responsibility to inspire others to reach their goals and achieve greatness in whatever they are passionate about. I believe that being a leader is all about respecting those around you, always doing the right thing, and spreading your passion – mine is for sport. Nothing feels better than to create an environment for people to have fun and do what makes them happy. Having students of all ages come up to me and say that I made their day is why I serve as a leader. I want my actions to inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more than they were before.

Our Vision is to develop young men and women of character – leaders now and for the future. With this at our core, I think it is safe to say that the nurturing of leadership potential is very important to us here at the College! As our newly inducted 2020 leaders embarked on their final year at our College, I asked them to reflect on what leadership means to them.
Jorjia Rogers  
*College Leader – Sport*

I hope to bring a sense of support and empathy through my position so that I can help people feel comfortable to push their boundaries, mentally and physically, and forget about the intimidating stigma that surrounds sports. I was inspired to take on this position as I had younger students who looked up to me for advice on coping with their struggles; they trusted me. Sport, to me, is all about supporting your team and helping everyone to discover their potential.

Rianna Webster  
*College Leader – Arts & Societies*

I believe my role is to show younger students the wonderful opportunities and experiences that can be achieved through co-curricular activities. From being in the Singing Koalas Choir in Grade 3 to Chamber Choir now, I can wholeheartedly say that my love for being in choirs and singing stemmed from my idolisation of the older students in their dark green blazers and ties singing beautifully at events like Anzac Day and Speech Night. Now, it’s my turn to show others the way.

Rose Hackett  
*College Leader- Spirit & Community*

I am extremely passionate about fostering a sense of community and spirit within all my endeavours. I felt this way from a very young age – always wanting to spread some glitter over the world and brighten people’s day. One person who inspired the leader I am today is Peterson Chiu, Spirit Captain 2019. Peterson’s drive and enthusiasm motivated me, which is exactly what a good leader should do. He taught me to believe in myself and believe that my passion for our school’s spirit would supersede any obstacle I faced. I hope, through my zest and enthusiasm, that another young student looks up to me and sees what I saw in Peterson.

Hannah Marshall  
*College Leader – Interact*

Leaders aren’t perfect, but they are always willing to learn and improve themselves. Going into 2020, I made it my mission to become more reflective and instil this aspect of leadership in others.

I remember in Grade 6 I had a Grade 12 Buddy by the name of Zoe O’Dwyer. Although her acts of kindness were small, the effect they had on me, and countless others, was immeasurable. Zoe inspired the next generation of leaders, and I can only strive to have the same ripple effect on the leaders of the future.

Emily Thomas  
*College Leader – Prep to Year 3*

When I was in Junior School, I remember being so excited to see our Year 12 Buddies. As a College Leader, I couldn’t wait to think of exciting and fun new ideas and activities to get Senior and Junior students collaborating. I have learnt from helping out at Junior School MakerSpace that younger students may not always remember your name, but they always remember the impact and impression that you made on them.

Mia Burtenshaw  
*College Leader – Years 4-6*

In Year 8, I became an Assistant Dance Captain. I fell in love with teaching younger students and motivating them to try new things. Since then, I have made many strong relationships with them acting as their older sister, offering advice, direction and support. Becoming a College Leader is a true blessing. Not only can I build more positive relationships with the younger students and watch them grow, I also have the opportunity to motivate other Seniors to do the same.
My hope is to build on the legacy of past College Leaders and be someone that students of all ages can confide in and see as a friend.

Akina Kinja  
*College Leaders – Years 7-9*

As a Senior, it sometimes seems unbelievable that simple things like talking to or encouraging Junior students could have such a big impact on them. This realisation has made me want to be a better person for those who look up to me. I believe that the relationships we build during school are for life and the impact we have on each other in the community is immense. I hope to achieve a greater sense of community and trust within the College and year levels, and to build upon the support system for younger students.

Ella Gerardis  
*College Leader – House Captain (Dennis)*

Imagine this; a little girl dressed head to toe in green, screaming at the top of her lungs on the sidelines, supporting members of her House, most of whom she had never seen before. She is telling the older students that they are doing an amazing job and to keep pushing just a little while longer. Yes, that 11-year-old was me! I may have looked extremely silly but my passion for my house was, and still is, immense. My zest for life has always been accepted by the College. My goal for the year is to motivate and inspire students to be active House members, regardless of their sporting abilities.

Gabriella Alfieri  
*College Leader – House Captain (Mackellar)*

‘29 January 2008 was the scariest day ever!’ said 5-year-old me. I remember the gigantic green gates that separated me from my parents, the crisp oversized uniform that wasn’t my usual Hannah Montana pyjama set and the chaotic emotions that filled the air. However, 5-year-old me did not know that my scariest day ever, would later be looked upon as my best day ever. My first day of Prep was the start of a journey that would define who I would be as a person and now as a leader.

I aspire to create a sense of family and belonging, encourage an eagerness towards school-based events – to change the have to into want to.

Caitlin Ireland  
*College Leader – House Captain (Lawson)*

For me, the word ‘impossible’ continues to surface in terms of leadership. I was told that it was impossible to be Lawson House Captain in Year 6 and Year 12. However, I soon realised that it was possible, because of previous leaders such as Tess O’Dwyer, who paved the way. Her hard work and devotion to all leadership activities inspired me to persist and to believe in myself. I am so fortunate to have grown up with such inspiring leaders within school, my family and the wider community. These leaders remind me that anything is possible.

Brooke Whittington  
*College Leader – House Captain (Wright)*

Barack Obama is someone I look up to as a leader and watching his compelling speeches was the first time I realised I wanted to be a leader. His conviction and perseverance to bring about change was inspiring. Most importantly, I admired his communication. Communication is key between the leader and followers as nothing will be completed if it is absent. He is able to talk to any person or audience no matter their age, gender or background. I strive to have clear communication at all times with the people around me.

As you can see, leadership means different things to different people, but we can all agree that leadership is so much more than a badge.

Leadership is about having the courage and strength of character to formulate a vision, to take action, to get back up after a set-back, to collaborate, to care, and to be the best version of yourself whilst never losing focus of the goal at hand.

Certainly, a successful leader is one who adapts to change, and during a time of uncertainty this skill is more valuable than ever. I look forward to watching our student leaders work together to continue to build our sense of community, by using their creativity, innovative thinking and adaptive leadership skills. Together, they will overcome the challenges that 2020 will bring and will, no doubt, flourish.

TONI KIRTON  
*Director of Positive Education & Leadership*
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In my early years of schooling in Western Australia I had some struggles with learning English, particularly reading and writing. The stand and deliver style of teaching did not seem to suit how I learnt. What was the missing link in my learning of how to read and write well?

Along came a teacher in Year 2 who changed everything for me. I vividly remember the ‘brown paper covered’ exercise book I had, titled – Phonics!

I grew to love Phonics as we learnt rules, exceptions to rules, played educational games, did role plays and used actions to learn about the English language.

My teacher at that time was innovative in the 1980s as the phonics she was teaching is what is considered synthetic phonics. This is the cornerstone of the Jolly Phonics program that we are embedding in Prep throughout 2020. The recent move to online learning has demonstrated that Jolly Phonics can also be implemented through a blended learning model.
You might ask yourself, what is synthetic phonics? Synthetic Phonics is a part to whole approach to teaching phonics. Students are taught that sounds are represented by letters (PART) and that letter sounds can be blended (or synthesised) to form words (WHOLE).

Jolly Phonics is an independently researched program where students achieving excellent foundation skills has seen widespread adoption across many countries. Early instruction in synthetic phonics provides students with the necessary skills to become fluent and competent readers and spellers at an earlier age than other approaches to teaching literacy. As a result, students can “more quickly go about the job of reading to learn” which is the ultimate goal of any literacy program.

Jolly Phonics is a fun, child-centred approach to teaching literacy through synthetic phonics. With actions for each of the 42 letter sounds, the multi-sensory method is very motivating for children and teachers, who can see their students achieve. The letter sounds are split into seven groups:

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. c, k, e, h, r, m, d
3. g, o, u, l, f, b
4. ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
5. z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar
The sounds are taught in a specific order (not alphabetically), enabling children to begin building words as early as possible. Using a synthetic phonics approach, Jolly Phonics teaches children the five key skills for reading and writing, then continues through school enabling the teaching of essential grammar, spelling and punctuation skills.

We can already see how this amazing program is helping our students – they are excited to learn a new sound each day. Students particularly like the songs and actions, taught in classrooms and online.

The five skills taught in Jolly Phonics

1. **Learning the letter sounds**
   Children are taught the 42 main letter sounds. This includes alphabet sounds as well as digraphs such as sh, th, ai and ue.

2. **Learning letter formation**
   Using different multi-sensory methods, children learn how to form and write the letters.

3. **Blending**
   Children are taught how to blend the sounds together to read and write new words.

4. **Identifying the sounds in words (Segmenting)**
   Listening for the sounds in words gives children the best start for improving spelling.

5. **Tricky words**
   Tricky words have irregular spellings and children learn these separately.

This program has been enthusiastically driven by our highly skilled Prep teachers. Early indications are that a strong foundation has been built from which the Prep teachers and students can launch into the next stage of their ‘reading to learn’ journey – the introduction of decodable readers.

**What are decodable readers and what is the difference between these and ‘whole language’ or traditional readers?**

Decodable reading books are specifically designed for early readers, whereas whole language books are levelled readers based on word frequency and language complexity with no consideration of sound-letter (ie phonic) structure of words.

The decodable reading material which enables students to apply their alphabet sound skills, their early phonics knowledge, phonemic blending and decoding skills will gradually increase in length, complexity and include high frequency words. These decodable reading texts will become an integral part of our structured synthetic phonics approach to reading instruction. The research is clear that a structured synthetic phonics approach is the ‘gold standard’, the most effective method for teaching reading. These decodable readers are best thought of as a form of scaffolding that can be gradually phased out as students develop the ability to read more complex words.

**The ultimate goal of these decodable readers is developing students who have independent word attack skills and are fluent readers.**

With the added dimension of online learning, we are all excited to see the development of students into confident readers and writers through this proven, fun and multi-sensory synthetic phonics program.

SIMON EDGAR
Head of Junior School
Dennis House Sleepout &  Lawson House Talent Show
40 years on, this A.B. Paterson College Alumni dad has been recognised with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2020 Australia Day Honours for his service to eco-tourism and aviation.

His remarkable story – one he shares with wife Julie, and Old Collegian daughters Amy (Class of 2009) and Chloe (Class of 2014) – is a lesson for us all in persistence, and a shining example of the positive change that comes about when generations listen to, and learn from, each other.

Very few world events have managed to push climate change from news headlines in recent years.

But just as Custodian of Lady Elliot Island, Peter Gash speaks passionately over the phone about his lifelong conservation crusade, an enormous new threat is descending – coronavirus – a threat that will devastate many operators in the eco-tourism industry.

Peter’s battle armour is prepped and ready – it has been forged during combat with Bird Flu, coral bleaching, SARS and the Global Financial Crisis. Is he worried? Absolutely, yes. Is he defeated? Definitely not!

‘Our daughters Amy and Chloe have seen the knocks we get, almost daily, things you didn’t see coming. They have seen how Julie and I, and our team on the Island, have had to pull in our horns and manage our way through a crisis. They know that it will go away. Coronavirus is just one more thing that will prepare young people to have the persistence, tenacity and ability to work their way through the challenges that they are going to face in life.’

As a just married couple in the 1980s, Peter and Julie set out to do ‘something special’ with their lives, and were inspired by a snorkelling adventure to Lady Elliot Island three years earlier when Julie was still a teenager, travelling separately to a then 20 year old Peter.

Peter recalls, while the reef was breathtaking, ‘going ashore, you were walking on razor sharp coral, like hell on earth’.

Since 1860, the Island had been mined – it’s spectacular forest cut down, and vital guano (seabird excrement, used as fertiliser) stripped. The wildlife sanctuary we see today is thanks, in part, to the initial conservation efforts of aviator Don Adams who, in 1969, began a revegetation program after converting the mining lease into a tourism lease.

In 1985 a low-key resort was opened by John and Judy French and was sold in 1992 to Bevan Whittaker.

‘Deep down inside we had a dream to build a business, to take people to Lady Elliot Island, and maybe improve it,’ Peter says. ‘It was a very long-term dream, but we were tenacious. We bought a plane, I learned to fly, we got an access permit where we could fly into Lady Musgrave Island – a destination with magnificent vegetation, 40 kilometres to the north-west of Lady Elliot Island – and take people snorkelling. Julie did the meals and bookings.’

In 1992, ‘Amy came along. By the time she was two years old, she was coming with Dad in the planes and boats. It was a tough road as Lady Musgrave was very weather dependent.’

Peter saw an opportunity to work closely with the new Lady Elliot Island resort lease holder, Bevan who had introduced glass bottom boat and reef walking tours. Peter and Julie worked tirelessly for the next 10 years, revitalising, protecting and promoting this unique patch of paradise, while investing in aircraft and welcoming a new little team member, Chloe.

With access to Lady Elliot’s overnight accommodation ‘we could now spend more time educating our visitors.’

‘So, we bought a share on the understanding that when the lease expired we would buy the resort. It was a long-term dream, all built on a handshake.’

In 2005, the Gash family took on a 30 year lease to operate the Eco Resort, and took on the challenge to transform this small player into a big competitor in the eco-tourism industry.
‘While the girls were at school at A.B. Paterson College, they spent every holiday on the Island. They learned about snorkelling and boat driving, running the boat shop, touring, all aspects of hospitality, even the cleaning.’

‘Family is everything, and we were all working towards the same goal of trying to make a difference on this planet.’

Amy graduated in 2009 and took on a six-month internship with Disney – ‘a brilliant employer,’ says Peter – where she learned all about the tourism industry and customer service. ‘She also sold solar panels, worked as a hostess on a boat and gained her private pilot’s licence, as she needed to understand how things worked from a pilot’s perspective.’

Since graduation in 2014, Chloe has passionately pursued her music career, but even while completing her university studies is still involved in reservations and administration on the Island.

‘I have a saying; Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Julie and I have taught our girls that you have to be determined and dedicated, and you have to work as a team,’ Peter says.

‘I have 126 staff at the moment, and more than half of them are under the age of 30.’

‘I see them as my family. We collaborate, we compare notes and listen to each other – old listen to young and young listen to old.’

‘We are dealing with a lot of stuff that has never been dealt with before – this latest threat as well as climate change – so we need the best minds. The human mind is a remarkable thing and can solve any problem.’

‘We’re in a good battle now with climate change. I tell my children, “You know what’s great? We know what the problem is, we even know how to fix it. We just have to have the courage and persistence to get on and fix it, and convince our governments and corporate leaders to fix it.” It’s going to take some serious collaboration and partnerships, patience and persistence for the human race to work their way through this one.’

‘That’s why we picked up the baton 15 years ago with Lady Elliot. We thought, we’re not waiting.’

‘The young people have got every right to stand up and say, this needs to be dealt with! You could argue that, at times, their methodology is a bit fierce, but you could also say that if they don’t speak up, who’s going to?’

‘Personally, I’m more about action than I am about protesting. Let’s get in and do something! But there are still those who don’t buy the story, and don’t want to take any action, because they’re comfortably in a zone where the world is going along just nicely for them and they’re only going to be here for another ten or twenty years. The young people have got the right to say, “Grandad didn’t know, we can’t blame him, but we do know and so we need to take action!”’

‘We will beat this. We will beat climate change. The planet will go on and human beings will go on. There will be those who say, until the day they pass, I told you it was all rubbish! I told you nothing would happen!, because we are working on it now. But, are we working on it fast enough? That’s the million dollar question.’

To the future graduates of A.B. Paterson College Peter says, ‘We need to have people who can think outside the square, people who accept the past, understand it and learn from it and are prepared to do things that are different, because we are living in different times.’

‘It does require respect and humility. We can’t be arrogant about it, and that goes for all of us – young and old – we should respect each other’s views and opinions, and give it deep thought before we grab it or rule it out.’

‘We need young people who are self-confident, who are prepared to listen and learn, as much as they are prepared to speak up and say their piece.’

‘Be prepared to have a go, and be prepared to back yourself, but don’t be entitled. The world owes all of us and it owes none of us, meaning we all have the same right to the planet but the planet has its rights without us too. We can’t expect anything for nothing. We have to earn what we get, and the planet will reward us.’

Peter thinks back to one of the best business decisions he ever made – to bring internet to the Island, via an 18 metre water pipe with an antenna. He was inspired by a teenage staff member wanting access to Facebook, something Peter had not even heard of at the time. Daughter Amy then ran with it, building Lady Elliot Island’s online profile and going on to be recognised by Tourism Australia as a younger leader in tourism marketing with her early adoption, and innovative use, of social media.

‘The point is that a young person did something that I had no hope of knowing how to do.’

‘Again, that’s the sort of preparation young people need – to be open-minded, then hope that older people will give them the steering wheel and say, see how you go!’

‘Another ground-breaking thing like social media will come along, and young people will generally see it before the older generations. We need to be open with each other and accept that we don’t have all the answers and accept that we can collaborate.’

‘When you’re young, your enthusiasm is boundless. Young people can bring so much value to your business, if you’re prepared to let them.’

TAMARA HAMILTON
Manager of Marketing & Public Relations
Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Julie and I have taught our girls that you have to be determined and dedicated, and you have to work as a team.
We have created exploration and investigations which help our students be reflexive and adaptable collaborators who can use resources and solve real world problems.
There is no doubt that when STEAM is taught effectively through an integrated curriculum, that students think more, learn more and are more engaged in their learning.

Every 21st century career requires a blend of skills and flexibility, problem solving, sustainable processes and a futures perspective. Therefore, it is imperative that the teaching and learning practices at A.B. Paterson College help our students to learn how to adapt and apply these skills.

Considering career paths for the next 20-50 years has helped our staff to embed STEAM learning in the Junior School. Resulting in a change in the face of learning, we have created exploration and investigations which help our students be reflexive and adaptable collaborators who can use resources and solve real world problems.

For many people, understanding new technologies and embracing these rapid changes can be daunting and overwhelming. However, our students – who are digital natives – have already explored, played with, mastered and moved on from the many commercial platforms available to them. When creating authentic teaching and learning opportunities in these fast paced and rapidly changing times, staff are required to help students navigate their way from passive consumers to engineers and innovators who can critically review, ethically and morally evaluate and creatively design solutions to problems.

When designing the STEAM experiences, our teachers are considering how best to help our students to tackle the seemingly unsolvable, by creating solutions and testing their effectiveness. This is no mean feat for young people. However, it is vital that our future leaders develop a ready resilience for failing and re-thinking, discovering, testing and failing again in order to ensure their future success in collaborative design and critical and creative problem solving.

STEAM learning in its very nature allows students to experience these ups and downs and build individual strengths in perseverance, self-regulation, social intelligence and a love of learning, particularly when the solution is real, tangible, useful and aimed toward a better future.

Makerspace Programs

In addition to our curriculum integration, teachers in the Junior School have created Makerspace programs for students to have the opportunity to explore design, technology and innovation.

In P-3 Makerspace, held weekly during Term 1 in the Lilly Pilly Learning Centre, students have explored the scientific nature of solids, liquids and gases by re-creating an erupting volcano out of a lemon! The learning discussions about irreversible change were beyond their years.

In Years 4-6 Makerspace, held in the Winton Centre, students worked to improve their design resilience by understanding some basic engineering and problem solving. They worked to solve the following situations: Can I build a rocket that blasts off? Can I build the tallest tower using toothpicks and marshmallows? Can I copy a picture without a photocopier? Can I make my own hologram? All of these activities helped the students understand how and why we use design process and basic engineering fundamentals to solve future problems.

JUDY RUSSELL
Year 5 Teacher
This is Justin’s story of his evolution from a young boy with stage fright into a budding musical theatre star, and the dogged determination he showed to overcome years of knockbacks.

‘I had a feeling, for a long time, that I wasn’t on my true path,’ recalls Justin Wise, thinking back to the start of Year 11, in 2016 when his subject choices had him firmly on the road toward a career as a marine scientist. ‘I felt like there was something bigger out there, but I couldn’t grasp what it was.’

That was when he hit a very big fork in the road. Assistant Head of Performing Arts, Rachel Newcombe was about to turn Justin’s world on its head as she strode onto the oval during Physical Education and pulled him aside.

‘She told me she needed more boys for Choir and remembered that I had once performed in a College musical, in Year 4.’

‘The musical was Seussical, and it scarred me for life. I vowed never to do another musical. I was scared of being on stage.’

‘She caught me so off guard, and I was stammering, “maybe”, but she wasn’t going to take No for an answer,’ he laughs.

‘So, I joined Choir. I was thinking, “Hey, this is actually fun”. I was enjoying it.’

‘It was the sense of freedom to be myself. I was struggling to find who I wanted to be as a person. I was trying to be what I thought other people wanted me to be. As soon as I joined Choir, the sense of home and support that I felt in that environment was nice. Everyone was happy just being themselves.’

It was Justin’s mother, Lisa who encouraged her son to audition for the 2016 College Musical, High School Musical.

In March 2020, Class of 2017 graduate Justin Wise began studying a Bachelor of Arts (Music Theatre) in one of the world’s leading performance training institutions – Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), which boasts alumni such as Hugh Jackman and Tim Minchin – an opportunity he could only have dreamed about three years earlier.

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It was Justin’s mother, Lisa who encouraged her son to audition for the 2016 College Musical, High School Musical.
'She said, “This may very well be one of the last opportunities you get to participate in a school musical”.'
'I went back to being so scared and insecure that I almost didn’t audition.'
'When the cast list came out, it said Troy Bolton – Justin Wise, and I thought, “That can’t be right!” Even Mum said, “They’ve got it wrong!”' Head of Performing Arts, Sharyn Walker-Joyce remembers his audition clearly.
'No expectations, raw talent, just hoping for a part in the chorus.'
'He didn’t yet have the experience to trust the process or himself, but the fact that the role meant so much to him was all we needed to know we had made the right decision.'
'I realised how much I was enjoying myself,’ says Justin, ‘and I knew this was something I wanted to do outside of school as well. So, I reached out to community theatre.'
'I was discovering just what I could do in theatre and where it could take me.’
With immense support from his family and College mentors, Justin made the bold decision to pursue musical theatre as a career.
His mentor at the time, now Principal/ Head of College, Jo Sheehy was a steadying force.

'Once we knew this was not a fly-by-night idea, and that Justin’s family was one hundred percent invested in his new career pathway, we set about helping him to develop a body of work, a portfolio – he needed to gain experience, quickly. So, Justin’s workload outside school suddenly increased exponentially.'
'He was often rehearsing until midnight,’ says Jo, ‘so we were trying to relieve the pressure at school, by restructuring some of his assessments. We wanted to optimise his OP, to keep other study options open, but we also wanted to make sure he was really well prepared for the audition process.’
Justin recalls, ‘Having to finish school, with a heavy science workload, while also pursuing a completely different career was a challenge.’
’It was clear Justin’s work ethic would never be a problem,’ Sharyn says, ‘but the fact he was auditioning against students who had studied dance, music and drama for years, was definitely going to be a disadvantage.’
’It would have taken every ounce of strength and confidence he had to go to those auditions and to be judged in front of others, but that’s the industry.’
‘There was real naivety at the start,’ Justin admits. ‘I didn’t know what it took to make a career out of it. My first audition for Drama at Griffith University Conservatorium was in 2017. It was a big wake up call.’
Setting the Stage for Success

It would be his first heartbreaking rejection in an industry that says No far more often than Yes.

‘I know, as parents looking on, it’s hard to see your child fail at something and hard to see them miss out on something that you’d hoped for,’ says Jo.

‘As an educator of nearly 30 years I think, that’s where the best learning is. Those kids will now do anything they can to avoid being in that situation again.’

‘I was fearful,’ says Justin. ‘I thought, will I ever be good enough? Do I have what it takes to be here?’

“I genuinely thought that if I gave it my all that, yes, I was good enough. That’s what I’ve been doing for the past few years, giving it my all.”

‘I had to trust my gut instinct. I did feel like it was the right thing to do. I saw it as a foot in the door.’

‘It’s been the most fantastic decision I have ever made. It was exactly what I needed, at exactly the right time.’

‘It was a year of intensive dancing, singing and acting training. I felt like I could walk into any audition, for any school, and perform my best.’

His talent, but more so his drive and resilience, were rewarded when Justin was finally offered a place in his dream Bachelor course at WAAPA.

Three years ago, ‘I could never have imagined I would end up here,’ says Justin, who was also offered a place at NIDA.

‘I’m so proud of Justin, his tenaciousness,’ says Jo. ‘Justin will be a success because of his attitude.’

‘To think that two years after graduation he is now at this amazing university with the world at his feet, is not a surprise. He took risks and sometimes the knocks teach you just as much as the successes, if not more.’

‘Life is not a linear sequence. When Justin faced a setback, he took a different path. Whilst he may have wanted a trajectory to be straight and easy, life is not like that. That was something he learned at A.B. Paterson College – roll with it, don’t give up, and continue to pursue what you want.’

‘To say we are proud of Justin is, in every way, an understatement,’ says Sharyn. ‘We’re also very honoured to have been part of his musical theatre journey, and super appreciative of his Mum and Dad for letting their boy pursue his dreams.’

Looking back on those early rejections ‘makes me so much more grateful to be where I am now,’ says Justin.

He urges students to ‘pursue what you’re truly passionate about and surround yourself with people who want to see your success, in whatever area that may be. Be brave and work hard.’

TAMARA HAMILTON
Manager of Marketing & Public Relations
Special Moments from Term 1, 2020
PEOPLE WHO WANT TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

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