

COURAGE

THE STORY OF PRESHIL'S FOUNDING
PRINCIPLES AND WHAT LIES AT THE CENTRE
OF ITS EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

COURAGE

Core Elements of
Preshil, The Margaret Lyttle
Memorial School

Created by Work Party A, 2010



Dedicated to the Lyttles' philosophy and educational vision, to honour and celebrate their achievements, and as part of Margaret E Lyttle's Centenary celebrations. Margaret was the Principal of Preshil for fifty years until her retirement in 1994, and is acknowledged globally as a pioneer of progressive education.

A passionate and indomitable woman, Margaret continued to build upon her aunt Greta's work at Australia's first and foremost progressive school, developing the principles that were well ahead of their time and which are increasingly accepted today as best practice. This monograph is a tribute to the Preshil community and the many members that contributed to it along the way.

First published by Preshil, The Margaret Lyttle
Memorial School, May 2013

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INTRODUCTION

CAPTURING PRESHIL'S HERITAGE

In September 2008 I was asked by the Chairman of the School Council if I would act as Head for a period of time while the school found a new Principal. On my return it became clear to me that most of the staff did not know Margaret Lyttle and they were eager to understand the heritage of Preshil and the roots from which it had sprung. In December of 2008 I sent out a letter to the entire community of Preshil calling for anyone interested to come together as Work Party A to read the original source documents of the school and to distil them into a succinct statement of the principles of Preshil.

Gary Levy had read widely from the past in his role as archivist and so it was to him that I turned to ask for help. Gary gathered together material beginning with Greta Lyttle's remarkable essay written in about 1940 entitled 'Discipline Within the School'. This was sent out to a large number of people and then at the beginning of 2009 we began our fortnightly meetings in the Hall.

The main task of these fortnightly meetings was to study a selection of essential readings from the archives and work towards a distillation of the essence of Preshil. There was a core group of regular attendees at meetings but others came and went throughout the year as their circumstances permitted. Everyone's input was welcomed and ownership of the work remained communal.

The fortnightly meetings were ceaselessly charged with a deep love and passion for Preshil's past, as well as a determination to bring the irreducible elements of this past into both the present and future life and direction of the school. Dozens more people maintained regular contact by email and made valuable contributions through this medium. Some also contributed to an online blog we established. Special guests included past teachers, past parents and grandparents, an early boarder/pupil and the one person to thus far complete and publish a history of the school, Naomi Rosh White. The dedicated group of members gradually worked on their primary task, a working document which would encapsulate and reflect the core elements of Preshil. This would be rooted in the archival material which included substantial and invaluable writings by both Margaret J R (Greta) and Margaret E (Mug) Lyttle.

A draft was produced towards the end of 2009 which was made available to the school community for feedback. It was also included in the information package sent to all intending applicants in September 2009 for the new Arlington Head of Campus position and the Principal's position advertised in late February/early March 2010.

While Work Party A did not officially reconvene in 2010, some key members worked with great determination to prepare a final copy of the document to accompany a motion at the Preshil Association AGM on 29 April 2010. *Courage*, the school's motto, was recognised as the most suitable name for this document. The following motion, proposed by Frank Moore and seconded by Eliza Bram, was passed unanimously:

“That the document ‘*Courage*’, written collaboratively by Work Party A at the instigation of the Principal Frank Moore and the Preshil Council, be endorsed by The Preshil Association as an encapsulation of Preshil's enduring educational philosophy and ethos. While the document is not meant to be prescriptive, it is intended to reflect the founding and guiding principles that have always and will continue to inform the practices at and culture of Preshil.”

The endorsement of ‘*Courage*’ at the AGM brought the passionate and sustained endeavours of Work Party A to a satisfying and fitting climax. Thanks are due to each and every person who cared enough to involve themselves one way or another. A full list of those people appears below.

—Frank Moore and Gary Levy, November 2010.

1.

THE LYTTLE VISION

The name Preshil derives from Priesthill, a hill that rises up behind the old mining village of Muirkirk in Ayrshire, Scotland. On that hill is a farm, also called Priesthill. One can visit this farm today and be guided to a lonely grave out amongst the heather and gorse, where John Brown, a carter and crofter, was buried in 1685.

Brown was one of a stalwart band of Scottish Covenanters who were demanding religious and political freedom from the British overlord. One morning Graham of Claverhouse, one of the King's men, rode up to Priesthill and challenged Brown as to his loyalties. After a brief interrogation, he shot Brown dead in front of his wife and child.

It is this event that resonated down the years, generation after generation, to John Brown's distant relative, Margaret Jane Ruth Lyttle, who founded Preshil in 1931 with the motto 'Courage'. The twin themes of compassion and social justice have characterised the school since its inception.

The school's symbol, a golden eagle and the school motto 'Courage', were inspired by the events at Priesthill and by a children's story 'The Wings of Courage', written by George Sand. In this story the little orphan and cripple, Clopinet, finds the courage and desire to grow up and learn to fly ...

It was Miss Lyttle’s hope that at her school ‘children would grow in self confidence, independence and a feeling of ease and security which would be apparent in all their work.’¹

—Margaret E Lyttle

This document identifies and illustrates the guiding principles of Preshil for current and future generations of children, teachers, parents and all other members of the Preshil community. It is intended for circulation and continual use as a reference and springboard for discussions and ongoing practices in the life of the school.

At Preshil each and every student is valued for who they are. This unconditional acceptance nurtures and inspires individuals with the courage to be and become themselves, just like John Brown and Clopinet.

Preshil, too, must have the courage to remain true to its founding principles, resisting fads and fashions and continuing to grow courageous young people.

Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with tenderness and treated as equals. They should be allowed to grow into whatever they were meant to be – the unknown person inside each of them is the hope for the future.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

‘The school’, said Sanderson of Oundle, ‘should be a model of the world as we would love to have it’.²

—Greta Lyttle c1940

We, the Preshil school community, acknowledge the great debt we owe to the school’s founder Margaret J R Lyttle, and her niece and subsequent school Principal Margaret E Lyttle. Without their vision, leadership, extraordinary humanity and tireless hard work, we would not

be the unique and much-loved school that we are today.

Margaret J R Lyttle, or Greta as she was known, established Preshil in her own home in 1930. “The climate at the time was one of intellectual ferment and examination of social values...which was given added impetus by the damage inflicted by World War 1 and the confluence of the Depression and the rise of fascism in the 1930s”.³ Greta was 55 years old and had been teaching primary-aged children since she was sixteen. She had immersed herself in the philosophy of progressive schooling and was by all accounts, a formidable intellectual and a wonderful and intuitive teacher.

The founding principles, or core elements of Preshil were established in the pioneering work of Greta Lyttle and fully embodied by Margaret E Lyttle (affectionately known as Mug - young boarders in the 1940s called her Magpie, contracted to Mug) during her 50 years at the helm after her aunt’s death. Both Margarets had an association with the progressive education movement of Australia and for many years Margaret E Lyttle and Preshil participated prominently in the activities of the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in Victoria. Mug was a member of NEF and WEF (World Education Fellowship) from 1938. Mug travelled to Germany in 1955 to the NEF conference and visited schools in Europe and the UK, including A S Neill’s school Summerhill in England. Educational thinkers such as Froebel, Montessori and Dewey as well as the post Freudian psychoanalytic movement influenced both Margaret Lyttles.

The core elements of Preshil continue to animate, direct, enrich and distinguish the school today. Why have these elements remained unchanged even though the world has changed so enormously since the school’s inception almost eighty years ago? We feel the answer to this is that people have remained, essentially, the same.

2.

THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH CHILD

As far as is humanly possible the children are seen only as individuals, each one very different from every other one, with varying rates of growth and abilities. To work with them as individuals there must be real warmth and complete acceptance of each child as he is, all his goodness and badness.⁴

—Margaret E Lyttle, mid-1960s

Preshil regards all children as unique and precious individuals, to be cherished and celebrated for their own selves: their strengths and weaknesses, their quirks and their differences.

Greta Lyttle believed that each child contained an “element of the Divine”. Such a phrase highlights the almost reverential feelings she had towards children. Now, the greater part of a century later, although we may choose to express such belief in a more secular manner, the underlying sentiment, that children have something exceptional and mysterious within, remains constant.

The current community at Preshil is committed to renewing an ethos more consciously attentive to the revered potential within each child. This does not reflect any interest in promoting organised religion within the school. Rather, there exists a strong and reliable current of need to honour the inner world of the child with its many intangibles and even mysteries. A belief in the essential goodness of each child and his/her

right to be accepted as he/she is, constitutes elemental thinking, in policy and practice, at Preshil.

Children learn when they are ready to do so and in their own way, and therefore we do not try to hold any child to a rigid timetable of expected learning for their age. Given the natural differences between children, competition between peers is deemed counter-productive to learning. In a co-operative environment children can be encouraged to learn from their teachers and their peers without the pressures of feeling “behind”, or the need to “get ahead”.

3.

FOSTERING LEARNING AND GROWTH

The important thing about learning in the non-compulsion way is that the children – strange fact! – grow to love learning more and more, and when they leave school wish to continue it.⁵

—Greta Lyttle c1940

Preshil believes that children's capacity to learn is innate and, with encouragement rather than coercion, children will learn eagerly and in a self-directed manner. The school believes that encouraging children in their interests will lead them to excel in those areas and to gain confidence in *all* areas. Therefore class learning is facilitated by the teachers to incorporate, as much as possible, things that are of interest to each individual child.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

The Preshil environment has always sought to accommodate the various needs of each child, rather than expecting the child or adolescent to fit into the mould of the school. Formally and informally this attitude generates considerable freedom for, and flexibility in relation to each child. Astute teachers discern when a child is ready for some new learning. They remain sensitive to the fact that some children don't work well in groups and have differing needs. They are also skilled in judging when to leave children alone and just let them be who they are. This approach has been continuously and successfully employed since Preshil's inception and is still considered innovative today.

In formal learning, children and adolescents are genuinely encouraged and supported to discover their own ways and rhythms in relation to how, when and even what they learn. For example, if a child has a better chance of learning some maths by building a cubby house than by more conventional methods, then they are encouraged to do so. Equally,

an unhappy teenager may be given time to immerse themselves in a personal creative endeavour, excused from other classes until they are ready to rejoin the group and the regular work of the class.

Teachers remain highly responsive to these individual needs and preferences, knowing that the more their skills and the overall environment can be tailored to meet the individual, the greater the likelihood of their successful learning and general flourishing within and beyond the school. Preshil teachers trust this process, while the children and young adults thrive from being supported to explore, learn and grow in their own unique ways. Through this approach, the ends of learning are achieved without the usual stresses and anxieties caused by models fixed on competitive and comparative success. Parents, too, learn to respect and value the emphasis placed on the processes of learning.

SOCIAL LEARNING

The school understands, equally, that children are very receptive to learning from each other. Mixed-age classes give children opportunities to learn from peers who have more experience, knowledge or confidence in certain areas. Children can inspire and influence one another naturally and without fear of judgment.

Children are helped to understand that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, so that it is natural for children to find some areas of learning easier than others.

Testing is only used as necessary for diagnostic purposes, not for ranking students or pitting them against one another. Any assessment or reporting given prior to Year 12 is richly descriptive rather than focusing on a simple bland grade.

THE PLAY WAY

Play is children's work.⁶

—Friedrich Froebel

It was hard to define work and play in those days. We worked alright, but it was a game of learning and our play was an intense finding out about life.⁷

—Former student

Children learn many important things through play. Formalised games either known to all or created by the children teach co-operative skills and the notion of fairness. Imaginative play teaches understanding and empathy as children try out other roles and imagine themselves to be other people. Co-operative endeavours initiated and managed by the children as a group, such as 'Digging the Yangtze' (a long tradition of water play in the 5s) or building cubbies, help them grow to understand their own and their peers' strengths and weaknesses as they each find their own niche within the group.

Through group play children learn negotiation skills, appreciation and respect for their peers, the confidence to express themselves and their ideas, and a growing sense of competence and confidence in all that they attempt.

As children mature their play becomes more sophisticated to the extent that they will object to the use of the word "play" to describe it. But their exploration of the world through questioning, examination, hypothesising, and hands-on experimentation both individually and co-operatively will continue through all their years at Preshil.

TASK-ORIENTED LEARNING

It is easy to lose sight of our approach to education, which is not that of a ‘child-centred school’... [but] a ‘task-centred school’ with its emphasis on learning through research, exploring and discovering, and drawing conclusions about the problem from which the challenge or interest has arisen.⁸

—Margaret E Lyttle 1978

Why do there have to be arbitrary learning areas when this has no relationship to all the knowledge that has been gathered over centuries into the ways in which children learn?⁹

Preshil promotes hands-on, task-oriented or project-oriented learning as much as possible. We believe that learning by doing leads to a deeper understanding of what is being studied, especially when children are allowed to experiment and even fail. When children do complete a task, they have not only learned more across a wider range of disciplines but they also express considerable satisfaction with their achievements.

In task-oriented learning children quickly come to understand that there is not just one way to carry out a task or solve a problem. There may be multiple routes to success or, conversely, none at all. Children learn to examine, analyse, and think things through rather than waiting to be spoon-fed the answers. Children develop as lateral thinkers. As they mature these lessons learned early help them to think critically rather than blindly accept what is presented to them at face value in the wider world.

CHOOSING AND RESPONSIBILITY

... most of our groups have time during the day when children are in charge of their own choice of activities, when they own their own work, so that during skills time essential to all progress – spelling, tables, correct use of pencil, correct letter formation, grammar, poetry, debating, etc etc – the children are receptive. If the children are busy working at their own rate in a task-centred situation, all learning is of a very high level...¹⁰

From the earliest years, children at Preshil are encouraged to choose. In the 5s this takes the form of a simple “choosing time”, where children can decide how to engage themselves for the next part of the day. In later years, children are encouraged to choose and pursue one or more special interests and a regular and substantial part of their day or week is set aside for them to do so. This tradition of choosing special projects and electives continues throughout the school.

Preshil believes that providing children with the choice to follow their own interests leads to a more compelling and rewarding learning experience for both child and teacher. By taking ownership of their education children invest more of themselves and are more motivated to learn.

By learning to make their own choices in ever more significant ways, children begin to learn the importance of making good choices and taking responsibility for them. When children can understand that their every action is the product of a choice they themselves make, whether consciously or unconsciously, they become more empowered to direct their own lives.

By choosing to pursue their own interests children solidify their unique strengths and the growing expertise that will aid them in their later studies, as well as in their vocations as adults. By choosing to control their own behaviour, they learn to live in (relative) harmony within the Preshil community, their own families and the wider world. By choosing to stand up for their own deeply held convictions they add their voices to those who call for justice and the betterment of the world and the human condition.

DISCIPLINE: ALL BEHAVIOUR HAS MEANING

If you did something unacceptable, you got a very quick and clear sense from all the teachers, but from Margaret in particular, that they were disappointed with you. She would make that quite clear by saying things like ‘I wouldn’t have expected that of you.’ It was very much on a personal level. There was tremendous understanding of and emphasis on why children did things, of the reasons behind why they did them, rather than punishment for what they had done. They’d help children work their way through the problem.¹¹

From the very beginning of Preshil my aunt consulted experts in psychiatry, or psychology, about children who were unable to cope...I cannot ever remember an incident in which she sought solutions for unhappy children by talking to parents about school work, behaviour control, or management techniques.¹²

We place high expectations on children and adolescents at Preshil. They are expected to respect boundaries, both physical and behavioural. In the main, children and adolescents treat these boundaries very seriously and want to live up to these expectations.

Preshil does not believe in punishing children if they challenge or breach boundaries. Given the inherent goodness of young people we work to understand the origins of their behaviour from a psychological perspective. We are careful to distinguish between the children or young adults themselves and their behaviour: there is no such thing as a “bad child”.

Teachers help children to think about the complexities of behaviour. The individual is taught to think about the impact of his or her behaviour on interpersonal relationships and on the whole group. This cultivates self-awareness and self-discipline. Equally, the group is encouraged to think about behaviour and to develop empathy and respect for the individual.

Such an approach also increases the children’s awareness of themselves as part of the Preshil community and the privileges and responsibilities that membership of such a community brings with it.

Although the Preshil way is to try to understand and work with difficult behaviour it does not accept persistent transgressions. Strategies are employed at all age levels to promote behaviours that are pro-social and in the best interests of the whole school community. Preshil also has an Anti-Bullying policy that favours a model of restorative justice. When required, this policy can inform and shape very firm consequences.

Mug ‘punished’ children by having them sit on the front step of Arlington until they had thought things over and could discuss problems coherently, or by giving them tea and a biscuit and taking them for walks by the river with her and the incumbent dog. There were some secondary teachers, in particular, who disapproved of her methods as too “soft”, but these tactics usually showed obvious, as well as long term effects.¹³

THE ARTS — SELF EXPRESSION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

The children in our schools today... should be covering large sheets of paper with bright colours. They should be drawing knights riding to battle, fairies, witches, dragons, ships. They should be knowing the joy of creation. Every child is a potential artist, but in so many, alas, the artist is allowed to die. The children in our schools should be writing, acting, producing their own plays, writing their own poetry, painting their own scenery, creating their own dances. Art, music, drama are not the frills of education but an integral part of it; the part, indeed, which helps the soul to blossom.¹⁴

—Greta Lyttle

I believe that the best answer to any threat of a totalitarian society is a better democracy, and that we can have only by being better democrats. To this end, the education of children for self-control, sensitivity, both to others, and their own environment, and for clear and imaginative thinking, is best achieved through the arts.¹⁵

—Frances Derham

Preshil is well-respected in the artistic community for its approach to the creative arts. The arts are an essential part of educating the whole child. Art-making, including the visual arts/crafts, drama, dance, music and media studies can be open-ended and joyful activities. The creative arts are of equal value to maths, science, English and the humanities. Preshil has always employed talented and passionate teaching staff in these areas.

Preshil's visual art philosophy and methodology is underpinned by the theories of Frances (Frankie) Derham, an internationally respected art educator who taught at Preshil in the 1930s and maintained a life-long friendship with Preshil. Frankie was strongly influenced by Greta's ideas about creativity and was an instrumental child art lecturer at the Kindergarten Teachers College for over 30 years. She and Greta were ahead of their time and introduced notions of self-expression and discovery through open-ended exploration to Preshil. Frankie introduced finger-painting and clay manipulation, which are still offered in all primary classrooms at Preshil today.

We believe the process of creation is far more important than the final product. Open-ended exploration, persistence with materials, techniques, concepts, and reflection all build the skills of enquiry. This process of enquiry is a valuable tool for learning across all disciplines and ages.

From their early days at Preshil we encourage children to safely use tools of the manual arts such as hammers, saws and screwdrivers to both construct new things and disassemble old ones. In this way they gain a familiarity and understanding of how things can be put together, as well as being able to experience the thrill of building something physical and enduring.

In the primary years the creative arts are embedded in all classroom learning. Specialist teachers inject further ideas and expertise into the classroom activities. The creative arts are considered to be natural "languages" born with every human being. The role of the teacher is to provide meaningful, rich and wide ranging experiences. These experiences can be woven in to the curriculum or they may stand alone. The children have many electives involving the arts and are encouraged to follow their interests. Teachers do not impose their ideas about how things should be, preferring to offer steady support and guidance. Children are encouraged to create and present their own material, whether it is through dance, drama, music or visual art.

At secondary Preshil the creative arts are integrated in some study areas and also provided as separate subjects. Media, drama, music, art and studio arts can be taken through to Year 12. Each of these are offered and taught with the same spirit of practical support and deep respect for the young artist at work.

PLAYMAKING

If children are to be happy and adequate people they need to 'know and like themselves' and they experience this in the relationships with other people, with individuals and in their security in their particular social group. Playmaking and acting are some of the means by which these experiences are fostered and developed.¹⁶

—Margaret E Lyttle 1960

Playmaking has always been an important activity at Preshil. Starting as early as the 6s & 7s, children go through the process of putting on their own shows. Guided by the teachers, the children conceive of their acts or develop their scripts as a group, dye fabric to make their own costumes, rehearse and finally, perform before an audience of peers and sometimes parents.

The process of playmaking becomes ever more sophisticated as the children grow older, but even for younger children the whole experience is a valuable one. During the creation of a play, everyone quickly comes to recognise that the task requires the combined resources and cooperation of the whole group in order for the play to succeed. The group acknowledges and draws on each individual's strengths and talents in order to fill all the roles required to bring such a complex project to fruition.

As the children progress through the school they choose when they will be ready to perform in front of a wider audience. Cloistered from judgment, the children feel safe to take risks and learn from their mistakes. By the 10s & 11s they are open to parental support and the adrenalin from all quarters is palpable as make-up is applied and costumes are adjusted for the show.

In making plays, children from the age of five to the age of eleven think, plan together, use imagination, initiate ideas, solve problems and meet difficulties and mostly with very little reference to adults. They do all

these things at their level, with their living together centred around something of value to them.

Self discipline, or better, cooperative living, **MUST** be in Playmaking/acting because it is a group effort for and by the group, at the interest level of the group, and it is not some activity or task imposed from above by some adult. The 'making' of the play (planning, preparing, rehearsing, stage managing, invitations and programs etc.) is as important as the 'acting' of the play itself.¹⁷

—Margaret E Lyttle

In the primary school, playmaking is about the process. By the time they reach secondary school, students are more interested in the final product. They study drama in a more formal fashion, and their teachers encourage risk and exploration in different theatrical disciplines. A more recent tradition of making and screening their own films is one way, however, that students in the secondary school transfer and continue to develop their original playmaking skills.

As a cooperative and group-directed endeavour, encompassing art and creativity as well as courage, playmaking in its various guises across the whole school embodies and represents the quintessential 'Preshil Way'.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN LEARNING

... adults, whether they are parents, teachers, childcare workers, leaders, or anyone who has responsibility for children [...] need to see themselves first and foremost as good listeners and observers. They need to respect their children in every way. They need a tremendous knowledge of child development theory. Then they need to be able to see these theories as observers and therefore gain some understanding of the ways in which children learn...The best techniques for all this to happen involve two principles. One is to have open-ended conversations; and two is to always have open-ended activities.¹⁸

—Sue Bebarfald 2009

Preshil teachers work to build an engaging task-based curriculum around children's interests. Such a curriculum needs to be flexible enough to follow where the children's interests lead, and is likely to differ widely from year to year. This need for teachers to constantly observe and plan what will come next was described by Margaret E (Mug) Lyttle as "leading from behind".

Preshil teachers work to build relationships of mutual acceptance and respect so that each child feels comfortable and secure within the classroom setting. Only then can children freely engage in inquiry, dialogue and discussion with both their teachers and their peers, without worrying that their input may be perceived to be inappropriate, or open them up to ridicule.

There has always been a healthy support network for teachers within the school. Teachers meet both informally and in general staff meetings to discuss any problems or issues from within the classroom with their peers, and receive constructive suggestions and feedback. When Mug was actively teaching, new staff would undertake an apprenticeship with her before being sent out into classrooms on their own. Mug would continually disseminate articles she had read or tracts she had written

on what she considered to be the fundamentals of Preshil, intended to help and inspire the teachers. Her door was always open for teachers as well as children.

This grounding in the practicalities of Preshil teaching, ongoing support from the school, and mentoring by the other staff is essential to the mental health and wellbeing of the teachers. This concept has perpetual relevance at Preshil. The need for the formal introduction of a Preshil mentoring/training program for new teachers was endorsed by a School Council resolution that was passed in 2006.

4.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

...at Preshil, we are, one and all, learning and living together
– teachers, children and parents.¹⁹

—Margaret E Lyttle

What we do as a small society within a school community
will shape and influence profoundly the sense of self-in-
community that our children will carry into their adult lives.²⁰

—Frank Moore 1995

When the school first began in Greta Lyttle's home, it operated more like a family than a traditional school. Although the school is much larger today Preshil still aims to function like a family or close-knit community with each child, teacher and parent filling a unique and important role within the school's social fabric.

There is a proud tradition of recurring events throughout the school year that bring members of the school community together to share common interests, develop and strengthen connections, offer expertise and build the character of the school. Events such as working bees, where parents, children and teachers work side-by-side to clean, build or renew parts of the school; school fetes, where the community works together over a span of days to provide food, entertainment, displays and activities for both the Preshil family and the wider community; end-of-term 'Doo-Dahs' where parents help to prepare a special morning tea and lunch for the children; and public lectures, where eminent ex-Preshilians talk about their discoveries and achievements both during and since their time at Preshil.

RELATIONSHIPS

You don't have to like everyone but you have to love them.²¹

—Margaret E Lyttle

A vital element here is trust: trust of the child in the teacher – which must be earned and immutable; and trust of the teacher for the child – which may be often broken but must always be renewable.²²

—Greta Lyttle c1940

Within the Preshil community, all individuals are valued and shown respect: teachers, children, parents, cleaners and administrative staff.

The relationship between teacher and child is crucial to learning and wellbeing. When children feel trusted and secure they will have the confidence to enthusiastically question, experiment and step outside their comfort zones to learn. Teachers work hard to build relationships based on acceptance and mutual regard with each child. The relationship is by its very nature an informal one, where child and teacher are on a first-name basis.

Schools are a place of great social activity between children and rich, informal learning occurs in this context. Preshil encourages social activity in the classrooms as key skills are developed in this way. Children learn to cooperate, negotiate, resolve conflict and work together. Children group themselves according to their interests during periods of general play, choosing and electives, and naturally mentor and help each other in whichever endeavour they are currently engaged.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

“A group of girls wanted to introduce a uniform: a green gingham dress, perhaps a hat. Mug encouraged us to take our idea to the next whole school meeting. There was robust debate. We argued for a neater look; others argued that a uniform would undermine Preshil as a place where you could be yourself. In the end, a voluntary uniform was introduced. Everyone was satisfied. At Preshil, if we were passionate about something, we were encouraged to speak up. We were always listened to and taken seriously”.²³

—Eliza Bram

Children and young adults at Preshil have always been encouraged to assume ownership and responsibility for much of what takes place on a daily basis in the life of the school. From the earliest years through to Year 12, children are provided with formal and informal opportunities to express their points of view, initiate projects and work side-by-side for the benefit of all. Teachers continually welcome and encourage input from children to help them shape and influence their own experiences while at school.

Daily meetings take place within each class in the primary school, and there is a weekly whole campus meeting, where all present are encouraged to contribute via comments, suggestions, questions, or complaints. Project areas that an entire class may work on for a full term or even longer are suggested, discussed and voted upon by the children prior to the commencement of that term. All teachers, including the Principal, remain open to the approach of any child who has an issue to address or discuss.

In the secondary school weekly forums are held in the junior, middle and senior levels. The students chair these forums. Anyone can bring an agenda item, which may range from the personal to matters of world politics.

Much of the fondness with which past students remember Preshil is due to their feeling of ownership of the school. At her 97th birthday in November 2009, Mug implored the children to think of Preshil as their own, to be able to change it and improve it, and to make their world a better place. This has been her mantra and that of Greta. It is our perennial obligation to represent, maintain, nourish and keep alive the vision and wisdom of Greta and Mug.

5.

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Education is not just cramming facts into the child, teaching him to read and write, and what is the capital of this or that country. Education is the development of the whole individual. Education is a social business.²⁴

—Greta Lyttle c1940

... Education should provide for self-expression. Education should develop initiative, independence, imagination, love of beauty.²⁵

—Greta Lyttle c1940

It is assumed that the major aim of education is to prepare each student to be able to live his own life in a constructive and socially productive manner and to be able to minimise the tendencies to become a victim of his environment and its pressures.²⁶

—Greta Lyttle c1940

Preshil believes that education should prepare children to be thoughtful, peace-loving and active citizens of the world. We hope to equip our children with all the tools they need to successfully deal with the unknowable future, with all its opportunities and adversities.

Preshil acknowledges that everything children experience is part of their education, not just the parts that directly pertain to the official curriculum. The satisfaction of bringing a project to completion, the frustrations of working with a group, the sadness of a friend leaving, the anger of

receiving a personal insult, the shame and remorse at hitting a friend, the elation of conquering a tall tree... all these things are part of children's experiences, and therefore are valid parts of their education.

Teachers at Preshil value children's imagination, creativity and ability to innovate. Teachers appreciate the importance of mistakes. Children discover that making mistakes is a vital part of learning. They grow to love learning and find that learning never ends. They learn to get along with others, to work together, to give and take. They are able to think critically and speak their mind. They learn to take responsibility for their own words and actions and come to know themselves in the process. These are the skills that will equip them to successfully negotiate their future lives.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Children brought up in an atmosphere of unselfish love, become unselfish themselves. What a great difference it would make to the world if we could have a generation of unselfish citizens with social consciences who could realise the wrongs of a system which forces the greater part of the human race to live in want and poverty in the midst of plenty – and having become independent – decide to do something about it! ²⁷

—Greta Lyttle c1940

Preshil fosters tolerance and compassion in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Children and other young people at Preshil are encouraged to accept and value others for who they are – children and adults alike. We teach our children that they are citizens of the world rather than citizens of a particular country or racial group.

As global citizens we encourage an awareness of world issues and encourage effort to make a positive difference. Whether it is through

collecting clothes for children in a war-torn country, filling a shoe box with essentials for children in areas stricken by earthquakes, or putting on a cake stall for bushfire victims, these small actions provide Preshil children and other young people with the feeling that they are powerful and can help those less fortunate than themselves.

PRESHIL AND THE WIDER WORLD

Education must be in the vanguard of progress.²⁸

—Greta Lyttle c1940

No longer can the teacher be one who lives apart from the noise and strife of busy men and cities to instil into his pupils the wisdom of past ages. A knowledge of world affairs is as important to him as to the statesman. His job, among others, is to develop critical thinkers, for the children of today are the citizens and statesmen of tomorrow.²⁹

—Greta Lyttle c1940

Preshil has always concerned itself with developing awareness and understanding of the key issues of the times, and responding to them in concerned, imaginative and critical ways.

The school community of 2010 is no less concerned about the condition of the world at large than the two Margaret Lyttles were in their respective eras.

In Greta Lyttle's day it was the rise of fascism that most concerned her. She and her niece Mug translated this awareness of fascism and the importance of educating future generations able to resist such evil in future, into a unique school system which is as relevant today as it was in the 1930s. We must continue to honour and express the courage of

the two Margaret Lyttles nearly 80 years on, and understand their deep wisdom, goodness and idealism.

We remain concerned about issues such as greed, selfishness, war, poverty, global warming and the environment.

Preshil will continue to challenge its children to think and to question, to act and to speak out, and to ultimately grow into thoughtful, responsible, informed, passionate and articulate adults who will do what they can to influence the world for the better.

6.

CODA

There is a tremendous busyness among its kids, teachers and parents, not only in observable achievements, but more importantly in the many nattering conversations which have to happen constantly if we are to keep, or perhaps find, the ‘Group Mind’ which is at the centre and controls all that is challenging and valuable at Preshil. This urge which so many of us have to comment, question, suggest and negotiate can be exhausting, yet it is important indeed and is the basis of our achievements whether with relationships, schooling or buildings.³⁰

—Margaret E Lyttle 1986

Preshil has always occupied a unique and distinctive place within the educational landscape of Melbourne, and indeed Australia. The current school community is no less committed than any in the past to preserving the core values and distinctive character of the School. Activities and attitudes observed in the Preshil community demonstrate and reflect the individuals who are currently active in the life of the school. As such, it is an ever-changing environment, as each new year generates further evolution of what Preshil has been, is, is seen to be and wants to be.

Within this context of perpetual change, the principles underpinning the school and its community are perennial. Provided these principles are given sufficient recognition and weight, they can continue to support a structure and milieu that ensures Preshil remains true to its founder, its predecessors and itself, both now and into the future.

Work Party A: Peter Austin, Debbi Barnes, Simon Bebarfald, Sue Bebarfald, Kate Birch, Charin Blacker, Jan Blake, David Bottomley, Eliza Bram, Stephen Bram, Bernard Brown, Miles Brown, David Cobb, John Collins, Liz Dance, Louise Davidson, Kym Dennehy, Nic Dowse, Ruth Dunn, Carmel Flynn, Margaret Hepworth, Graham James, Sue Jollow, Roz King, Phillipa Klamus, Brett Kunkel, Faye Lee, Gerry Lee, Sue Leong, Heather Low, Meg Low, Helen Maskell-Knight, Fred McArdle, Sally-Anne Mill, Delphine Laboureau-Omancey, Victoria Osborne, David Potts, Kay Powlesland, Gillian Relph, Felicity Renowden, Judy Routt, Liam Routt, Jane Sawyer, Danniell Smith, Eva Strasser, Paul Talbot, John Taylor, Jackie Tranzillo, James Tucker, Luci Tucker, Ruth Walsh, Rodney Waterman, Naomi Rosh White, Jenny Zagroon. Apologies to any contributing member who has been inadvertently overlooked.

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- 25 Greta Lyttle, Preshil Archives, c1940
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- 27 Greta Lyttle, Preshil Archives, c1940
- 28 Greta Lyttle, Preshil Archives, c1940
- 29 Greta Lyttle, Preshil Archives, c1940
- 30 Margaret E Lyttle, Preshil Archives, 1986

In 2008, a collaborative council was established at Preshil to create a document that would serve as an encapsulation of Preshil's enduring educational philosophy and ethos. While the document is not meant to be prescriptive, it is intended to reflect the founding and guiding principles that have always informed the practices at and culture of Preshil.

'Courage' is the result of more than fifty voices - all champions of Preshil - coming together to articulate the heart and soul of this unique school, so that future teachers, students, parents and proponents of progressive education everywhere can learn about how the school came to be.

