



Wild School - Philosophy and Programme

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A. Rationale

Wild School is committed to promoting wellness and wonder in children.

Each moment, every session, all conversations, each site, all four seasons, and each relationship is packed with potential for inspiring wonder and wellness.

Wild School exists to harness as many opportunities as possible to invest into staff and participants through our programmes.

B. Definitions

Whakatipu Wild School is abbreviated to WS in this document, and refers to staff or representatives of the Charitable Trust.

Wonder is defined as “a feeling of amazement and admiration, caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar” (Oxford Dictionary).

Wellness is defined as “the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.” (Global Wellness Institute)

C. Philosophy of Wild School

1. Promoting wonder in children through nature

WS programmes are nature-based. Learning takes place outdoors, where children can experience the utter magic of our planet. Our Values are Curiosity, Courage and Care. Nature is a perfect vehicle to explore and develop these core values.

We follow a child-led, play-based philosophy. Each child has open-ended opportunities to observe, discover, explore, experience, interact, create, connect and grapple with ideas in the environment. Our days are intentionally rush-free.

Connecting with nature inspires creativity. When we observe nature close up, we notice intricate detail, and fantastic design. Humans are able to see themselves within the

context of this beautiful enormous universe, and feel peace. When we feel safe, we allow ourselves to think beyond survival, allowing creativity to flow in an emotionally safe environment.

Connecting with nature is therapeutic and soothing. It is the perfect antidote to the often rushed, frantic, expectation-filled, perfectionist society we live in. Spending time in nature is an investment in short term and long term well-being.

Connecting with nature allows children to experience supported risk, push their comfort zones, experience the wind and rain, and realise that they have persevered through the challenges. This success can often spark greater resilience and self-confidence.

Underpinning WS practice, we believe that all learners are:

- Equal, valuable and unique
- Competent to learn and develop
- Worthy of respect and support. WS is inclusive of everyone.
- Worthy of developing positive healthy relationships
- Entitled to develop a meaningful, positive relationship with nature.

2. Promoting wellness in children

Relationships between children and WS staff are a beautiful connector to promote wellness.

WS staff are first observers, and then engage using various tools to create awareness and understanding in the child. These tools may include sharing observations, engaging through open-ended questions, and offering challenges. Self-reflection experiences allow participants to delve into their inner-workings. WS staff also encourage deeper social interaction, in order for children to build interpersonal skills.

WS staff foster a greater awareness of our senses, share problem solving strategies, bring understanding about managing our emotions, encourage self-esteem, share communication tips, develop leadership, and teach learning how to recognise and manage risk.

WS staff offer children opportunities to take supported risks to extend their comfort zones. These zones may be physical, social, mental or emotional. Resilience and confidence are outcomes that have lifelong benefits.

WS staff create a safe, non-judgemental nurturing environment for children to try things out and be experimental.

3. Promoting wonder in staff

Staff who experience nature themselves have a sparkle in their eyes, and a spring in their step. WS staff get their hands covered in autumn leaves alongside the children, in order to fully experience the moment together. This shared moment of connection brings community.

Staff are given full inductions, so they can begin their time at WS with confidence. New staff are paired with an experienced leader to allow support to flow in professional growth.

Professional development in various forms has immense value, and each staff member is supported in their professional learning. The sharing of varied experiences is invaluable for keeping at the forefront of best practice.

4. Promoting wellness in staff

All staff have the responsibility and privilege of supporting the team, and riding the challenges and successes together. In an outdoor environment, teamwork is essential. WS Trust provides opportunities for staff to connect socially.

During sessions at WS, each staff member is encouraged to contribute their personal creativity and skills to the group. Through sharing these hobbies, children will see adults modelling a passionate interest, and hopefully they feel inspired!

D. Programme

WS runs various programmes including One Day Nature School, Holiday Programmes, and Training sessions for teachers and parents. The following tenets are mixed and matched as essential components of WS programmes. The benefits of each part of the programme are outlined below:

1. Morning hui (meeting)

Everyone gathers to create a collective plan for the day. Any visitor introductions are made. The potential impact of the weather forecast is discussed, news or items that need addressing are brought to the groups' attention, and goals are set for the day. These goals or intentions may come in the form of a tangible outcome, or the development of a character attribute in an individual.

Please note that for long running programmes, such as One Day Nature School, parents' aspirations for their child's personal development are noted at enrolment. Staff are skilled at weaving the development of these aspirations throughout each child's daily routines.

The staff role during the Morning Hui time is to ensure everyone feels valued, heard and welcome.

The participants' role during this time is to actively involve themselves in planning the day, and listen to news that is shared (which may include new hazards).

2. Growing through learner-led experience

The majority of the session is hands-on learner-led experiences in nature. This is the best opportunity to make progress towards the goals or intentions set at the Morning Hui. Children are encouraged to collaborate, engage in creativity, and to develop self-awareness as they move through the session.

The staff role during this time is to maintain safety, offer appropriate support for risk taking, observe deeper learning and bring this to the attention of the learner in an encouraging way, and to celebrate the success of the learner. Staff are highly skilled at interlacing social and personal development through physical exploration. To illustrate this, a child may have the goal to construct a fort, and friends join in. Where needed, staff support the social navigation to ensure ideas are valued, staff support tool use and minimise risk, staff raise open-ended questions to extend learning, and celebrate child success. Underpinning all these interactions, staff are conscious of the character development journey that each child is on and respond accordingly.

Staff ensure that from a programme and individual child perspective, the cycle of planning, observation, adaption and review links each session.

The participants' role during the learner-led experience is to engage, collaborate, share frustrations and joys, and to immerse themselves in their senses.

3. Growing through relationships

Relationships and connection are the foundation of WS programmes. Through

connection, growth is incubated. Staff intentionally create rituals around greeting participants and eating times to develop a strong feeling of social unity.

Throughout the sessions, staff prioritise building stronger connections with participants.

The staff role throughout the day is to remain authentic, engaged, appropriate, interested, and encouraging with each participant.

The participants' role throughout the day is to be themselves, in all their glory!

4. Developing self-awareness

Often at the end of a session participants will be given the opportunity to reflect on their feelings and thoughts. Self-awareness can bring up a myriad of responses, and WS honours every emotion in the journey.

The staff role during this time is to share observations in an affirming way, raise questions that promote self-discovery, and appropriately support emotional responses.

The participants' role during this time is to be honest with themselves, and be aware that they are on a life-long journey of discovery.

5. Developing kaitiaki (guardianship)

The concept of kaitiaki (guardianship) for nature and for each other is especially key in human development. New born babies are characterised by vulnerability and ego-centrism. As humans grow, we need to develop strong feelings of acceptance, belonging, and kaitiaki of the people and land around us. WS intentionally and overtly develops connections with local land, stories, and nature to develop a sense of wonder and guardianship for our local environment.

The staff role is to continually learn about the natural landscape, flora and fauna, whakapapa of our land (genealogies related to this area), and local stories and knowledge.

The participants' role is to engage in experiencing nature, and naturally an appreciation will arise.

6. Communicating with whānau (family)

WS desires to maintain open and helpful communication with families. WS wants to engage in goal setting, development of character and skills, and communicating this progress back to families.

WS will share the successes and sorrows along the journey. At times, WS staff may share challenges a child is facing. These conversations will always be shared in the context that each child is worthy of respect and support on every stage of their journey.

The role of staff and families is to communicate openly, with respect, and in a timely manner to benefit the growth of the child.