What should a 21st century classroom look like?

I began writing this piece based around the question ‘What does a 21st century classroom look like?’ The problem with that question is that there are almost infinite answers. Instead I think the question needs to be ‘What should a 21st century classroom look like?’ To answer this question one must also ask; what is the purpose of education?

In December 2008, Education Ministers from around the country met to formulate the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Two key goals were developed during this time. The first being that, ‘Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.’ The second I believe answers the question of the purpose of education beautifully. It states that ‘All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.’ With that in mind we can start to delve a little deeper into what a 21st century classroom should look like.

In our classrooms at Turner we are no longer content with a model that is based on being consumers of basic factual knowledge. We could all learn that the highest mountain on the Australian mainland is Mt Kosciuszko at a height of 2228m above sea level. Instead we build skills that will allow us to find the height of any mountain, how it was formed, significant cultural beliefs, the effects of altitude on climbers and anything else we may wonder. We learn essential literacy and numeracy skills and build proficiency with the use of IT, so that we can locate information on a basis of need, be critical users of information, solve complex problems, and share information through creative mediums. We are not bound by the constraints of the textbook of old. We are successful learners.

In our classrooms at Turner we develop skills to show initiative, to create, to be enterprising and entrepreneurial. We engage in open learning with things like ‘Genius Time’ and ‘Strategic Thinking Time.’ We write about things that matter to us, and share it with others so that we have a voice. We set up our classrooms to look different, to be flexible and fun. Our classrooms provide spaces for collaboration and spaces to work alone. We are confident and creative individuals.

While of course we celebrate the achievements of individual students, at Turner we collaborate and work on the mantra that we can achieve so much as a team. We learn to negotiate and build an appreciation of the diversity of knowledge and ideas that working in a group brings. We recognise that Turner is a community and as such we work towards a common purpose and have collective responsibility for maintaining and improving the natural and social environments. We are active and informed citizens.

What should a 21st century classroom look like? Drop into any classroom at Turner and you’ll see firsthand.

The Melbourne Declaration can be viewed in full at:
http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/national_declaration_on_the_educational_goals_for_young_australians.pdf