This publication comprises articles written by senior staff for the School’s weekly newsletter, the BGGS News. Together they provide the opportunity to reflect on the educational landscape of 2013 and the values, philosophy and direction of Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

This edition also provides a platform for the voices of our students to be heard through their ‘Perspectives’ articles.

The images in this edition of Insights are works produced by our creative and talented Visual Arts students in 2013.
## Contents

**INSIGHTS 2013 | BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A WAR BRIDE’S STORY</td>
<td>Jacqueline Colwill</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE STUDENT VOICE</td>
<td>Pauline Harvey-Short</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUNFIGHT AT ‘THE A-E CORRAL’</td>
<td>Stephen Woods</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMOTING THE ‘3 RS’: REFLECTION, RELATIONSHIPS AND RESILIENCE</td>
<td>James McIntosh</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIRROR, MIRROR ON MY (FACEBOOK) WALL, WHO IS THE MOST ‘LIKED’ OF US ALL?</td>
<td>Jody Forbes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILD A BRIDGE...</td>
<td>Alison Dare</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN SCHOOLS TODAY, EVERYTHING IS ‘ON THE TABLE’</td>
<td>Shane Skillen</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW TERM’S RESOLUTIONS</td>
<td>Dr Ann Farley</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDING WAYS TO FIND THEIR WAY</td>
<td>James Seaha</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARING FOR POTENTIAL</td>
<td>Louise Lockyer</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE TIMES THEY ARE A–CHANGIN’</td>
<td>Judith Tubb</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE CHANGING FACE OF PARENTING</td>
<td>Karen Belbin</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE GLOBAL ARENA</td>
<td>Susan Garson</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESILIENCE EDUCATION</td>
<td>Anne Ingram</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN THE MIND’S EYE: VISUALISING TO LEARN</td>
<td>Dr Sally Stephens</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE DEFICIENCIES OF DISCIPLINES</td>
<td>Stephen Woods</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAINING TOMORROW’S TECHNOLOGIST</td>
<td>Brendon Thomas</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANNERS? LOL!</td>
<td>Violet Ross</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIND THE GAP</td>
<td>Natalie Smith</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE CHOSEN</td>
<td>Sybil Edwards</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PERSPECTIVES

Fresh Perspectives
A Matter of Opinion
Raising Awareness, Promoting Understanding, Taking Action
Tales from The Chosen
Women’s Sport Stuck on the Media Sideline
Life After High School
Becoming a Grammar Girl

NURTURING THE INTROVERT
WARM HEART, COOL HEAD, BRIGHT FUTURE
NIL SINE LABORE — TALENT’S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT
GROWTH THROUGH ADVERSITY
GROWING UP TETHERED?
THE ARTS AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SKILLS
FROM THE PLAYGROUND TO THE BOARDROOM:
ARE OUR GIRLS PREPARED TO BE LEADERS IN SPORT?
BLESSED Bs
THE NEW INFORMATION PARADIGM
BIRTH ORDER AND SIBLINGS: POP PSYCHOLOGY OR REALITY?
INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN
MOTIVATION: THE INNER GAME
THE ACT OF REMEMBERING
IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT THE TEST
CREATING FUTURE SELVES
WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS GREAT?
NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF RESPONSIBILITY
CELEBRATING FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS

Jacinda Euler, Principal
Madalyn Conwell, Year 12
Anna McArthur-Dowty, Year 10
Freya McGrath, Year 11
Nikola Gow, Year 12
Téa Angelos, Year 12
Alexandra Wilson, Year 9
EMMA LOWRY
JAN O’SULLIVAN
STEPHEN FOGARTY
LAUREN PHILLIPS
SARAH BOYLE
LOURNAE THORNQUIST
SALLY NORTHcroft
RUTH JANS
KRISTINE COOKE
LYN CHAKRAVORTY
TRENT DRIVER
MARK SULLIVAN
STEVEN WOODS
MARGARET GUNN
DR KAY KIMBER
MARISE McCONAGHY
ANNE STUBBINGTON
HAZEL BOLTMAN
The tradition of noting the 26th of January as Australia Day began early in the nineteenth century and refers to The First Landing Day or Foundation Day.

This was the day in 1788 when Captain Arthur Phillip arrived at Sydney Cove to raise the Union Jack as a symbol of the British occupation of the eastern half of the continent. Prosperous immigrants in Sydney, especially those who had been convicts or the sons of convicts, began marking the colony’s beginnings with an anniversary dinner to celebrate their love of the land that they lived in. People have continued to migrate to Australia ever since. This is the story of one of them.

Beryl was born in London on 29th April 1926.

World War II started in 1939 when Beryl was 13 years old. This was a time of great anxiety and, due to the close proximity of the continent to England, the threat of invasion was ever present.

Many stories circulated among the civilian population about the atrocities perpetrated by an invading army. Beryl’s mother told her that she had had visions of the German Army coming over the hill at the back of the house, and advised Beryl that, should this happen, she would be forced to shoot all the children beforehand. This scenario never eventuated, but you can imagine the terrors engendered by such a statement.

In time and as the war progressed, Beryl joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the women’s branch of the army. There were opportunities for leave from her post, so she and a girlfriend decided to go south to Plymouth.

Plymouth as a naval port had sustained very heavy damage during bombing raids and the whole centre of the city was rubble. But Plymouth was also home to the Navy, Army and Air Force Institution. Most importantly, for two young women on leave, there was also a club and dance hall for service personnel.

The two friends went to a dance where, unbeknown to her, Beryl was noticed by two Australian sailors. Apparently, the boys decided to toss a coin to see who would get to ask her to dance. Despite the fall of the coin, the loser refused to accept the situation so he and his mate went outside for a fight to decide the ultimate winner. The victor was Trevior. He and Beryl were both 19.

Beryl invited Trevior to visit her when he was on leave in London. Despite the burgeoning romance, the war persisted leaving few opportunities for any real relationship. Finally, the war in Europe came to an end and Trevior was ordered to return to Australia. Beryl was sad to see him go, but during war time goodbyes were commonplace. As Trevior was returning to Australia, Beryl felt she would never see him again.

Beryl continued to serve in the ATS and assist in the long, slow efforts to rebuild life as the English had known it before the war. Many service personnel from around the world remained in London and, despite the ongoing hardships, there were many opportunities for socialising at dances like the one where she had met Trevior.

Then Beryl received a cable from Trevior stating briefly, ‘Make wedding preparations, arriving in so many weeks.’
She was shocked. She remembered having a very casual discussion with Trevior on the topic of marriage, which was soon put aside due to the inevitability of his return to Australia.

Trevior, however, had his English girlfriend very much on his mind, despite his family’s disapproval of this very brief relationship with a woman living many thousands of miles away. Determined, he managed to get himself transferred to a ship bringing a contingent of service personnel back to London to march in the Victory March.

As he was to be there for only a month, he needed to act quickly in trying to convince Beryl to marry him. It took a lot of talking, but she finally agreed. Unsurprisingly, her mother was not keen as Beryl was under the legal age to marry. A long series of negotiations followed culminating in her mother’s signed permission — but also the words, ‘I want you to leave this house tomorrow and never come back.’ This marriage between two young people who barely knew one another and lived on opposite sides of the world was to cost Beryl a great deal.

The couple were married in a registry office in London, Beryl wearing borrowed clothes as she had little clothing other than her services uniform.

They honeymooned in a crowded house with friends, as accommodation was very difficult to find. Shortly afterwards, Trevior had to sail back to Australia. Beryl decided to attempt to reconcile with her mother, as she knew that soon she would be leaving England to be reunited with her husband in Australia to begin a very uncertain future. More significantly, she found herself to be pregnant.

Almost 50,000 women came to Australia during the twentieth century because they fell in love with an Australian serviceman in a time of war.

Beryl left England with a white embroidered tablecloth that her mother had given her from her sideboard drawer and 40 pounds pinned to the inside of her bra. She felt nothing but sadness at what she was leaving behind. War causes so many heartaches, and a longing for the land of her birth would never completely leave her.

Beryl arrived in Australia in November 1946. She was a young mother with virtually no support in a hostile environment. She had to learn to cope in the heat of Australia with a premature baby, very little money and completely inexperienced in homemaking and motherhood. Family life and a normal adolescence as we know it did not exist for her growing up during a war. She had no role models to measure herself against — no knowledge of how to care for a baby or how to be supportive of a similarly young and inexperienced husband trying to find what little work was available or create a viable home life.

Accommodation was scarce and the young couple started their married life in a shared house. While Trevior left to find work, Beryl found herself physically abused by a tyrannical landlady who terrorised her and the other occupants, forbidding others to speak to her and locking out tenants that she disliked.

The couple left to share the same house as Trevior’s parents. Here, she was to find out how much her mother-in-law disliked her. She was referred to as a ‘Dirty Pom’, asked how often she washed and compared unfavourably with an ex-girlfriend of Trevior’s who his mother had hoped he would marry.

Trevior was then given the opportunity to go to the Antarctic for twelve months as a weather observer on an early expedition. Conditions on Macquarie Island in those days were very primitive. The families of the men had very little and limited communication. They were only able to use codes, for example, ‘xyz’ meant ‘uncle is well’ and ‘abc’ meant ‘I love you’. The messages were read by all at the destination, so any intimacy was impossible. Beryl returned to England with her young son.

Beryl and Trevior’s story does not, of course, end there, but the tale so far does create a picture of the lives of two young people coming together despite extreme hardship and distance, both physical and emotional.

It also says something about the immigrant experience. Migrants coming to Australia under any circumstances must experience a complex process of cultural adaptation if they are to establish a new life in Australia. This adaptation...
may involve obtaining employment, housing, health care, and child care; learning English, if necessary; linking into a social support network; and having qualifications assessed.

Most significantly, they must take on the ‘cultural’ tasks of becoming familiar with dominant Australian values and customs. The new Australian must accept the shared meanings, values and practices of a culture, and adjust to new and changing circumstances. This is as challenging now as it was for Beryl then, and she had the advantage of a shared language and the support of a husband.

Contemporary Australian cultural identity may be defined as the right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion (Burnett, 2009). Our understanding of social justice defines the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, and culture (Burnett, 2009).

Our celebration of Australia Day is a good opportunity to reflect on this.

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (cited in MyJewishLearning.com, n.d.) states that reason lives in language and that we communicate with others even before we start to speak. Whenever you look into the face of another person the fact that this is another human being and that I have a responsibility for them is instantly communicated. I can turn away from this responsibility but I cannot escape it. Nothing else in our lives so disrupts our consciousness as an encounter with another person, who simply by being there calls to us and asks us to account for ourselves.

If we go back to the beginnings of the celebration of Australia Day, we must acknowledge that, apart from our indigenous population, we are a nation of immigrants and that, in celebrating our love of the land that we live in, we recognize a commonality between ourselves and all those who come to our shores as new Australians. We look into their faces and speak to them as they speak to us.

And, yes, Beryl and Trevor are my mother and father.

REFERENCES


It is an interesting phenomenon that, in each year of my experience co-ordinating the Year 12 cohort, the incoming Student Council expresses surprise and wonder at the intensity of the role and responsibilities of the Council. This body, and its predecessors, have existed for many productive years and is the ‘engine room’ of the student body.

The Council’s role is to provide a voice for the students; act as role models; be the prime conduit between the students, staff and community; and nurture the spirit of Girls Grammar. Its composition has varied over the years and is currently a manageable size of twenty-six elected members; the Head Girls; the eighteen House Captains; two Service Captains; the QGSSSA and Club Sports Captains representing all elected sporting captains; and two Arts Captains representing debating, music, art, drama and publications.

The concept of the voice of students is a very important one. By providing students with an opportunity to articulate concepts and opinions and see ideas come to fruition, Bahou (2011) states that a school environment may be enriched twofold. It can provide teachers with insights into learning, teaching and schooling with students acting as ‘expert witnesses’, and it can empower students to ‘actively shape their education as citizens’ (Bahou, 2011, p. 3).

The Student Council environment aims to provide a forum where students can express opinions, formulate ideas and plan implementation, thus playing an active and meaningful role and making a significant contribution to the fabric of the School. However, the School must guard against exclusivity where the ‘authorised’ student voices limit, rather than enhance, opportunity and efficacy. One method to ensure an inclusive voice is the suggestion box, which this year’s Council is enthusiastic to reinstate. This provides an opportunity for all students to express their concerns, to have these issues discussed at the Student Council table, and to be dealt with in a meaningful and efficient manner.

The Council is also a legitimate attempt to increase student participation in decision making within the School and reflects the eight levels of Roger Hart’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ (cited in Bahou, 2011, p. 6). The lower three rungs indicate non-participation where students are tokens or decoration. The Girls Grammar Student Council operates within the top five rungs of this model, resulting in student-initiated and -directed concepts and outcomes.

The 2013 Student Council, inducted today, has prepared for the coming year with intensive sessions in Year 11 assemblies on leadership, by attending the Halogen Young Leaders Day in November 2012, and a two day conference held at the School in January. The School Student Council Conference is in its fourth year and seeks to provide time for establishing the year’s theme and motto, further developing required skill sets to enhance each leader’s abilities, and discussing each individual’s strengths, thus understanding what they bring to, and the subsequent power of, the Council.

The blend of power a group can possess is elegantly expressed by Bahou (2011, p. 7) when she quotes the educational and peace activist, Miriam Starhawk. Starhawk expounds three types of power: ‘power over’, ‘power-from-
within’, and ‘power with’. ‘Power over’ is of a hierarchical nature characterised by dominance and control; ‘power–from–within’ relates to the individual connecting with others and the environment and capitalising on personal skills and strengths; and ‘power with’ refers to the power created by a group of equals communicating and forming alliances to achieve collegial outcomes. The Student Council strives for a combination of the power–from–within, that which each individual brings to a group, and the power with, the corporate power created by a group of equals. It will be through this collective force that goals will be achieved in 2013.

The conference also provided shared experiences to enhance bonding and reflection about the organisation of 2013. This experience was enthusiastically received by the girls who were most positive in their feedback.

I think the most effective aspect was the discussions run by the Head Girls... We came up with so many ideas, and the Student Council knows where it wants to go in 2013. Also, we had to work in an environment where everybody had to voice their opinions and at first it was difficult but, by the end of the conference, we had learnt a lot about how our particular Student Council will operate.

The girls gained much from the open forums and discussion.

The most effective aspect of the two days was the planning session of the motto, theme and goals in the coming year. This gave us the chance to bond and work together properly as the Student Council, providing ideas and making group decisions.

The 2013 Student Council combines the dominant strengths — explored with the expertise of the School Psychologist, Mrs Jody Forbes — of fairness, judgement/open–mindedness, kindness, curiosity and the capacity to love. Interestingly, fairness, curiosity and capacity to love have been dominant strengths of the Student Councils over the last three years. These strengths coupled with this year’s goals of grade integration, innovative ideas for a new era and School spirit resulted in the 2013 motto announced by Head Girls Elizabeth Redmond and Sophie Weir:

**Embrace the new! Link the Blue!**

The Student Council has the challenge of conveying the goals and theme to the student body, providing interesting experiences to engage the School, representing each Grammar girl, giving each one a voice and ushering in a new era.

The School has the challenge of embracing the ideas and, perhaps, broadening the brief of the Student Council. There is a genuine opportunity to expand the role of the Student Council, utilising the student voice, taking the role from comfort issues, entertainment and spirit to impacting more powerfully on learning and exceptional scholarship by engaging the students in more educational dialogue.

REFERENCES


Gunfight at ‘The A–E Corral’

STEPHEN WOODS, DIRECTOR OF ENGLISH | 14 FEBRUARY 2013

Six times every year, as an English teacher — and, therefore, a white–hat–wearing good–guy — I find myself cast as the villain in a Western film. I push through the swinging saloon doors of the classroom, and the happy chatter stalls. Twenty pairs of eyes fix on me in a small–town silence tainted with a palpable dread. The beribboned townsfolk gasp as they realise I have come among them armed not with the usual arsenal of whiteboard pens, PowerPoint presentations, and lame jokes, but with the scourge of English students everywhere: a sheaf of graded papers.

The overstatement in this tortured spaghetti–analogy is, unfortunately, mild at best. There really are gasps — ‘he’s got our assignments’ and ‘oh, nos’ — followed by the ubiquitous ‘omigod–omigod–omigods’ when I walk around the room dispensing assessment (in)justice. The return of graded work is fraught with expectations that will be met, exceeded, or disappointed. Sometimes there are squeals of delight, at others tears, and after a few there are urgent missives from parents seeking redress. My contention here is that the anxiety felt by girls and often by their parents over grades, is understandable, but — other than in Year 12 — a possible impediment to genuine learning. Grades have a tenuous connection to learning, and can even be inimical to it. They serve a purpose, but this is tangential to the ‘exceptional scholarship’ and ‘life–wide learning’ our School aims to inculcate.

This may seem heretical coming from a teacher who spends a great deal of time grading, but there is a significant body of research and literature testifying to the problematic relationship between the allocation of grades and learning. To borrow a metaphor I picked up at a conference: the latter is a course of treatment; the former an autopsy result. Morbid imagery aside, the distinction is clearer if we regard a grade as only one point on a continuum of feedback. In their seminal work, Inside the Black Box, Black and Wiliam (1998) posit that ‘when anyone is trying to learn, feedback about the effort has three elements: recognition of the desired goal, evidence about present position, and some understanding of a way to close the gap between the two.’ Grades may satisfy the second of these criteria, but not the third: a box with a C+ in it does little to show the way to one with a B in it. Black and Wiliam (1998) assert that ‘feedback has been shown to improve learning when it gives specific guidance on strengths and weaknesses.’ Unfortunately for those of us working, studying and parenting in systems where grades are mandated, the research suggests also that the presence of a grade alongside more useful feedback tends to nullify its positive, learning–inducing effects (Lipnevich and Smith, p. 35).

The deleterious effects of a grade sitting alongside much more useful feedback are enacted each handback day. A sizeable proportion of girls look first — and some only — at the grade on their paper. Some turn up just enough of the page to allow them to see the grade in the bottom right corner, then turn it back down with a muted grin (nobody likes a show–off), relieved satisfaction, or tight–lipped, nostril–flaring pique. This is regrettable because — unlike the ’16/20 Good Work’ of days gone by — English criteria sheets are a rich source of the kind of useful feedback that can guide a learner from their present to their desired position. The criteria are laid out in spectrums, which offer a description of their present achievement in each aspect of the task. By looking
leftwards from that position, students can see a description of the next step up on this mastery spectrum. As well as these ticked dimension spectrums, girls are provided with written feedback that balances description of their achievement on that task with prescription for improvement in the next one.

The demotivating effect of a disappointing grade is readily understandable, as ‘pupils who encounter difficulties may attribute these to a defect in themselves about which they cannot do a great deal’ (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Equally troubling, and perhaps counter-intuitive for many, is the finding repeated in many studies that ‘receiving a satisfactory grade may prevent students from channelling their effort toward further mastery of their work’ (Lipnevich & Smith, p. 36). This finding highlights for me the key difference between the quantitative imperatives of grading and the qualitative quest for mastery.

The power exercised by grades over nascent teenage identities was underlined for me a few years ago when a student remonstrated with me over a disappointing grade. Her argument was based not on the feedback she had received, nor on the requirements of the task itself, but on her stated belief that she was, and I quote, ‘a B student’, and that she was ipso facto incapable of earning the C+ her most recent work had received. Leaving aside the fatalism of this assertion, and the implicit limitation this girl had placed on her own achievement, the notion of grade-consistency in English is illusory. The range of skills, genres, roles, and contexts that students have to write and speak in is so diverse and challenging (as it should be), that the likelihood of a student performing consistently across an entire course is low. The rhetorical skills that deliver a high grade for a persuasive speech are not those called for in an analysis of a print advertisement.

Having realised that it is unlikely that I will be changing the regulatory mandate on twice-yearly A–E reporting anytime soon, I turned to an article by Alfie Kohn (1994), who suggests that ‘while conventional grades persist, teachers and parents ought to do everything in their power to help students forget about them.’ I agree with Kohn’s assertion except for that bit about forgetting. The dismissive passivity of forgetting is not what is required. Instead, teachers and parents must help students to place a grade — good or bad — in perspective, and in a context centred around learning and improving. This is what we try to do in English, and we do it in several ways.

Following the Stalinist model, we run our (compulsory) subject as a Five Year Plan. At mass rallies, the girls are helped to understand that Years 8 to 11 have been designed with the express intention of delivering them to Year 12 — and thence to the tertiary world — with the requisite skills, habits and knowledge to perform their best in English. The message is that, although we report on an A–E scale twice yearly, all of the assessment we do is essentially formative. (Your feedback to the contrary is welcome, but I have never heard of anyone missing a scholarship, tertiary place, job, or party leadership because they scored a D+ on their Year 10 Macbeth essay.) Each year is an opportunity to build by thoughtful risk-taking, by constructive failing, and by tailored feedback, the skills that will serve them well in the summative environment of Senior. Because our English curriculum is reducible to four genres: imagining, persuading, reflecting and analysing, these are the areas to which we return again and
again. This iterative approach is informed by the principle that ‘new understandings are not simply swallowed and stored in isolation; they have to be assimilated in relation to pre-existing ideas’ (Black & Wiliam, 1998). When our Year 12 girls set about writing their Persuasive Speeches in August, they will each have a bank of skills, trials, and errors to draw on that stretches back to Year 8.

This year, we have added to the Five Year Plan. To highlight the crucial role of formative assessment feedback, and to provide the girls with a powerful tool for learning, we are rolling out the My Learning database. Every time a girl gets feedback on a task, it will be uploaded to the Moodle LMS as a pdf file. As each girl progresses through the English programme, she will be able to consult the feedback she received on all the previous occasions she did something analytical or persuasive or imaginative or reflective. Our hope is that this repository of work and feedback will allow girls to do the best they can by focusing on steadily adding to and improving their performance in these key areas, long after the transitory effects of As, Bs and Cs have faded.

If our School and its broader community of students, parents, and supporters is to achieve for our girls the laudable goal of fostering life-wide learning, it is incumbent on the more mature and sagacious members of the community to help the girls — who have so much less experience to draw on — to understand the difference between achieving a grade and learning something. In my long-gone student days, when a corkboard above one’s desk was the nearest thing we had to Facebook, I had pinned a cartoon that I still have (and that I recently learned has spawned a line of merchandise). A postgrad-aged young man sits bolt upright in bed, his eyes wide with a terrible realisation. The caption reads: ‘Rude Awakening # 457: Nobody cares what your GPA was’. ■

REFERENCES


MILLIE NG / 8L (DETAIL)
Promoting the ‘3 Rs’: Reflection, Relationships and Resilience

James McIntosh, Director of Marrapatta, Memorial Outdoor Education Centre | 21 February 2013

After the announcement of ‘Embrace the new! Link the Blue!’ as the 2013 motto and vision for the School, Marrapatta staff considered how our thematic approach to the outdoor education programme could support the student focus for the year. During the student leaders’ induction, Head Girls Elizabeth Redmond and Sophie Weir articulated ‘Embrace the new!’ as seizing opportunity offered in the myriad of new situations and challenges which will emerge throughout the year: new subjects, new classes and classmates, and a new Principal, Ms Euler. Their phrase ‘Link the Blue!’ encourages a renewed focus on connection with and contribution to Girls Grammar’s spirit with specific mention of friendships across the Year levels being a key goal.

The Student Council’s choice of motto captures the message of many academics, educators, psychologists, and neurobiologists who emphatically advocate for thoughtful engagement with personal and community-focused themes (Deak, 2010; Hudson, 2012; Seligman, 2011; Siegel, 2012). ‘Embrace the new!’ echoes the current research on adolescent health and wellbeing, resilience, optimism and the benefits of developing a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), while ‘Link the Blue!’ relates to the innate human need for interpersonal connection and nourishment through tangible relationships.

These themes have always held a foundational niche within education but their revived prominence is, among other factors, a response to the rising epidemic of anxiety and depression (Mission Australia, 2011), the emergence of new understandings into the intricacies of the human mind and brain, and the continuing breakneck pace of technological advancement. These complex dynamics have combined to create a whirlpool for students, parents, school communities, and society to navigate.

In order to effectively navigate this whirlpool, Dan Siegel, author and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA, advocates greater attention to those influences which underscore academic achievement and fulfilment in life (2012). He provides a simple message for schools and communities to recalibrate applying what he refers to as the ‘3 Rs of resilience, relationships and reflection’ (2012). Siegel’s emphasis parallels the collective student voice of ‘Embrace the new! Link the Blue!’.

Resilience is often described as the ability to ‘bungy’ through life, rebounding from setbacks and failure in order
to build a more capable self. For the adolescent of today, it is an empowering ability which is vital in the modern world (Barrett, 2012; Seligman, 2011). Resilience is a process of developing coping strategies, protective mechanisms and relationships, cognitive habits, self-care skills, and the ability to look at the future with optimism while integrating lessons from the past (Hudson, 2012, p. 54). There are no shortcuts to developing a resilience skillset; it cannot be purchased or acquired simply by reading a book. Developed over time, it is shaped by the layering of experiences combined with the way in which individuals process and hardwire their thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

While the foundation of a student’s resilience is laid during the formative years, the unique combination of developmental abilities, adolescence, and the variety of new experiences afforded during the high school years, creates a smorgasbord of opportunity to shape personal flexibility — from the butterflies of starting at a new school to navigating new friendships and teachers; from subject selections to deciding what tertiary path to take; and the many twists and turns, bumps and bruises, failures and triumphs, sadness and joy along the way. These emotive experiences are the essential ingredients required for resilience to thrive and flourish.

Complementing the need for resilience is Siegel’s second R, relationships, which is perhaps the most supported prerequisite for health and wellbeing and, given the heightened sensitivities associated with adolescence, a key element for parents and schools to contemplate. In her book How Girls Thrive (2010), educator and psychologist JoAnn Deak promotes the need for girls to develop nourishing relationships as the most significant factor in establishing and maintaining a healthy self-esteem. She implores girls to ‘expand the band’ of relationships through connecting and interacting with a wide range of people, both peers and adults (Deak, 2010). ‘Expanding the band’ develops the essential skills required in today’s increasingly connected global world and expands their scope of inclusiveness and social savvy-ness (Deak, 2010, p. 70).

Siegel’s third R, reflection, seems to draw his simple framework together though highlighting the lost art of slowing down, drawing breath, and reviewing one’s experiences. He refers to reflection as ‘time in’ (2012), where an individual consciously allows the brain’s central regulator, the pre-frontal cortex, to take separate elements and bring them together through the process of integration.

In his recently published book, Raising Resilient Teenagers, Chris Hudson describes self-reflection as one of the most difficult personal skills for teenagers to master, but one of the more valuable (2012, p. 64). By developing abilities to observe and evaluate their own thoughts, words and behaviours, adolescents become self-nurturing and able to manage their own circumstances. The role of parents and teachers is to provide encouragement, guidance, and enough personal space for these skills to develop so that adolescents become independent, confident, and self-reliant.

As students navigate the way through their adolescent journey, they are afforded many opportunities to develop their 3 Rs — and to ‘Embrace the new! Link the Blue!’ The School’s outdoor education programme at Marrapatta is one such opportunity. Through the process of being active and engaged in the outdoors, students are drawn to contribute themselves — their ideas, abilities and energy — to their group and their class. They are encouraged to stretch themselves, to be the best they can be, to contribute thoughtfully, and to reflect on their performance.

Brisbane Girls Grammar School has a proud tradition of educating the whole person and focusing attention on those elements which shape and sculpt a student’s character. From classes that promote strenuous effort to pastoral programmes that provide support and direction, each element contributes to enabling students to develop their social and emotional skills and abilities. The 3 Rs of resilience, relationships and reflection, together with the more traditional 3 Rs, are embedded in the core aspiration of the School to encourage the growth of young women who will flourish beyond the scope of Girls Grammar.
REFERENCES


Mirror, mirror on my (Facebook) wall, who is the most ‘liked’ of us all?

JODY FORBES, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST | 28 FEBRUARY 2013

Body image is a significant issue for teenage girls. Mission Australia has surveyed Australian adolescents (aged 11 to 19 years) annually since 2005 and has found that for the past six years body image has consistently been identified by teenage girls living in Queensland as one of their top two issues of concern (Mission Australia, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012). Last year 42.7% of Queensland girls aged 15 to 19 said they felt ‘extremely’ or ‘very concerned’ about their body image (Mission Australia, 2012).

For most children, their body is nothing more than something that helps them get from one place to the next. Around puberty, however, we can see a shift from happy disregard to obsession about appearance for some adolescents (Levy, 2005). Given the major physical changes taking place in the adolescent body, it is perhaps no wonder that this is precisely the time when young people focus on and fret so much about their looks. More puzzling perhaps is that forty-two per cent of teenage girls worry about their appearance compared to only nineteen per cent of teenage boys (Mission Australia, 2012). Concerns about appearance, feelings of anxiety and depression, disordered eating and loss of confidence are all more prominent in adolescent girls. Whilst many factors may contribute to this situation, one which deserves consideration is the concept of self-objectification, a term first coined by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997.

Considered a key issue for many females (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Tiggermann & Williams, 2012; Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011), self-objectification invites a person to view themselves as an object to be looked at, evaluated, or desired on the basis of their appearance. It is unfortunate that our current generation of girls are
exploring and developing their identity at the same time that we are seeing an increasing focus on sex and sexuality within popular culture. The objectification and early sexualisation of females by the media, together with the proliferation of social networking sites such as Facebook, has created an environment where adolescent girls find it extremely difficult to escape self-objectification and subsequent body image concerns.

While the objectification of women by the media is hardly a new phenomenon, increasingly, the sexualised approach taken by modern advertising to sell everything from breakfast cereal to cars is concerning. ‘Raunch’ culture (Levy, 2005) and the saturation of mainstream media with erotic images presents teenage girls with confusing and damaging messages, constituting a level of pressure never before seen. Moreover, this is not balanced between the genders. Research has repeatedly revealed that women are portrayed in the media in a sexual and objectified way more than men (American Psychological Association, 2007). Models and celebrities are thinner and their images are digitally photo-shopping more than ever before. The shape, skin-tone, style and look to which girls are aspiring are far from real or realistically obtainable within a media environment which sends the message that appearance is a young girl’s most important asset. Self-objectification has been correlated with poor self-image, anxiety, depression, body image issues, eating disorders, self-harm and reduced educational achievement (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; American Psychological Association, 2007; Levin & Kilbourne, 2009; Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011; Tiggemann & Williams, 2012). Popular media then, from magazines and television to music videos and computer games, has a significant effect on shaping a girl’s perception of her body.

There has been an incredible rise in technology in the last decade and social networking has become rapidly woven into the fabric of everyday life, no more so than for our current generation of adolescents. Internet sites such as Facebook can be a vehicle for self-objectification in a unique and concerning way. Facebook allows girls to scrutinise their own profile page and photos on the screen in front of them as another person would, whether it is as a member of the public or a (Facebook) friend. By doing this, an adolescent girl can engage in self-objectification in a visual and immediate way. Girls can spend great lengths of time creating the perfect profile for their Facebook account, take and upload photos immediately to their profile due to smart phone technology, and constantly monitor the number of ‘likes’ received or comments offered on their posted photos. In fact, there is much competition and comparing occurring among girls to see who has the most ‘likes’ on the photos they post of themselves. Those girls with fewer ‘likes’ can be left feeling less popular, less attractive and less worthy.

Today’s girls for the first time are growing up with mirrors that talk back to them. Girls not only use Facebook to check up on how they look, they also use it to gauge how others see them. (Schryver cited in Steyer, 2012)

Females spend about thirty per cent more time on Facebook than males (Walton, 2012). Journalist Paul Gilbert (2012) has said of Mark Zuckerman, creator of Facebook, ‘A 17-year-old man with no children has more influence on young girls than any single human being on the planet.’ Dr Amy Slater from Flinders University (2012) found that girls in Years 8 and 9 were spending in excess of 1.5 hours per day on social networking sites and averaging 215 Facebook friends. Of concern, female Facebook users were found to feel less happy and less content with their lives than non-users (Walton, 2012).

Dr Harry Brandt, Director of The Centre for Eating Disorders at Sheppard Pratt in Baltimore (2012), asserts,
‘Facebook is making it easier for people to spend more time and energy criticising their own bodies and wishing they looked like someone else.’ A study in Israel has linked Facebook use to body image issues and disordered eating (University of Haifa, 2011). The recent timeline feature added to Facebook has further been suggested to add to body image issues due to the easier comparisons of body shape and weight over time (The Centre for Eating Disorders at Sheppard Pratt, 2012). For adolescent girls going through puberty and maturation, comparing their body over time can be fraught with anxiety. The more concerned a girl is about her appearance, weight and body image, the more she tends to check her Facebook profile (Steyer, 2012). Given the cultural climate, girls are invited to exhibit very slim photos of themselves on the internet via poses and camera angles. Some girls will photo-shop their own photos in order to appear thinner and receive more positive feedback publicly (Steyer, 2012). The ‘double whammy’ faced by this generation is that girls are not only aspiring to look like the uniform body type offered to them by models in the media, but now they are also aspiring to reach benchmarks in appearance and weight set by their peers on social networking sites, and these are often digitally altered unrealistic images.

Combating the prevalent images in the media may seem daunting, but it is important to understand that there are other powerful influences on our girls. Parents, friends and teachers all too have a role to play. It is interesting to note that sexualisation can also come from social influences such as peers and parents, so we all need to be mindful of the messages we send. How comfortable are we with our own body image? What do we model for our daughters through our comments and behaviours regarding our own appearance? What compliments do we give our daughters, and are they appearance-based, achievement-based or behaviour-based? Ensuring a balance is important. How do we spend time with our daughters? Shopping days and beauty treatments are a lovely way to be together, but need to be balanced with other less appearance-based pursuits, such as going to the beach, visiting a museum, or kicking a ball. Helping girls to focus on their physicality and strength and what their bodies can do when exercising, rather than how they look, is crucial. As parents we can challenge the notion that appearance is a woman’s most important asset by modelling respect for others and refraining from gossiping or criticising other women on their appearance.

When exploring their environment, how many times have we witnessed adolescents whipping their camera phones out, striking the perfect pose, immediately uploading, and then evaluating what they look like on Facebook, instead of savouring such moments? Asking girls what they feel or think about during such experiences, rather than what they looked like while doing it, can be a place to start. The involvement of parents in their daughters’ media usage, together with cooperative and critical discussions, are considered protective factors against disordered eating (University of Haifa, 2011).

Educate your daughters about the superficiality of ‘likes’ and photos on Facebook, and monitor the time spent on such sites. Discuss how they feel when they are using social media. Question and be curious about the posting of photos and the impact of ‘likes’ on their feelings of self-worth. However, resist banning social networking sites altogether, as they have many benefits for this age group. In reality, it is impossible to avoid media and the internet, and, despite our efforts, we are not going to be able to shelter our children entirely from such things. The most important thing is to keep the lines of communication open, be a good role model and offer a different perspective.

Brisbane Girls Grammar School embraces the opportunity to educate young women about their contributions to the world, offering a myriad of alternative ways to define
themselves, or make a mark, without focusing on appearance. Girls are celebrated and respected for their achievements, behaviour and opinions. This year part of the Year 9 Ethics programme will be devoted to discussing students’ strengths, character and values. To complement what is embedded within the curriculum, the Ethics programme will also be providing additional media literacy education to equip students with the skills to critically analyse the messages they receive from the media.

Ensuring our girls have the space to think, alternatives to ponder and role models to challenge the harmful messages that media and social networking sites offer is a joint venture between home and school. While none of us can escape the dominant media culture that surrounds us, we do not need to succumb to it. By working together with our girls, we can ensure that we provide our current generation of adolescent girls with the skills and experience required to resist developing self-objectification and instead move towards self-acceptance.

REFERENCES


ANNA STEVENS / 10H (DETAIL)
There is an amusing YouTube clip floating around on the internet at the moment. In this, a number of young people (in their late teens and early twenties) are made fun of as they express their angst over the so-called ‘first world problems’ (FWPs) that beset them. These include enduring air conditioning that is set too low, having to make two trips to the car to get the groceries out, and Apple making too many new iPhones. The punchline of this particular piece occurs when a giant mobile phone (the imaginary iPhone 6) falls on one of the protagonists. The unambiguous point here is that young people lack perspective on the real issues facing most of the world’s population; that they are unable to see beyond their own increasingly insulated world, and that, as a consequence, don’t know how good their lives really are. A damming assessment indeed; but what does it mean for us as parents and educators?

Sadly, the assertion that young people are becoming less interested in the world around them does have some validity. A recent study conducted in the United States of almost 14,000 university students between 1979 and 2009 found that empathy levels among this group had dramatically declined over the last thirty years (Zakrzewski, 2012, p. 1). This indifference to other peoples’ problems is exemplified by the often-heard saying ‘Build a bridge and get over it’.

Narcissism, which can be seen as a negative corollary of empathy, is also on the rise among university-aged students, which is perhaps unsurprising since narcissists are self-absorbed and tend to see other people in terms of their usefulness rather than true friendship. While these studies related to older students, the findings suggest that something was missing in their earlier development; that they weren’t cultivating the skills needed to connect with others (Zakrzewski, 2012, p. 1).

While ostensibly, young people may seem less interested in the broader world issues that surround them, it is important to challenge the notion that they are intrinsically less caring. If empathy really is declining, perhaps it is because of the way notions of care and compassion are represented in society. Furthermore, can we entirely blame young people for being self-absorbed when their access to the wider world is increasingly mediated by forms technology which, while supposedly connecting them to the world at large, increasingly steer them down a path of introspection?

While self-interest may be on the rise, it is obviously not a new phenomenon but normalised by some very deeply held assumptions embedded within our culture. Historically cast as dichotomous to self-interest and competition, empathy has been seen as a kind of ‘add on’ that we are civilised into — an admirable quality but not core to our base human natures, which are essentially driven by the fight for survival. Seen in these quasi-Darwinian terms, selfishness seems like a natural state of being. In some instances, it has been seen as downright folly.

The champion of Enlightenment thinking, Emanuel Kant, viewed compassion as a weak and misguided emotion, asserting ‘such benevolence is called soft-heartedness and should not occur at all among human beings’ (cited in Marsh, Keltner, & Smith, 2012, p. 39). Kant was making a clear distinction between empathy as belonging to the realm of feelings, as opposed to self-interest which was concerned with the thinking or ‘enlightened’ individual. If we dig deeper, our ideas concerning care for others have their
foundation in ideas about the self, ideas which have become polarised in modern times (Vanden Eynde, 2004, p. 46).

On the one hand, the self is seen as autonomous, independent and primarily interested in pursuing its own interest. On the other, it is contingent, contextual, feeling and thinking, shaping its identity by action and interaction with others (Vanden Eynde, 2004, p. 46). Modern Western thinking has tended to emphasise a version of the self that is autonomous, and in doing so has marginalised or ‘split off’ other versions. American ethicist Martha Nussbaum and others have called for a reintegration of emotions into moral thinking (2001, p. 1). Since empathy can be seen as crucial to the development of ethical awareness and the ability to make moral judgements, Nussbaum suggests that we need to reconceptualise empathy as not just an emotion but also as a cognitive position with an understanding that these two positions are co-dependent. According to Nussbaum our emotions are ‘suffused with intelligence and discernment, and thus (are) a source of deep awareness and understanding’ (2001, p. 1).

Nussbaum’s conception of empathy parallels recent research in the scientific field which suggests that compassion is not the opposite of reason, but rather is entirely rational, functional and adaptive. New studies show that compassion and benevolence are an evolved part of human nature, rooted in our brain and biology. One such study conducted by Emory University neuroscientists James Rilling and Gregory Berns (cited in Marsh, Keltner, & Smith, 2010) gave participants a chance to help someone else while their brain activity was recorded. Helping others triggered activity in the parts of the brain that turn on when people receive rewards or experience pleasure. It seems that helping others brings the same pleasure we get from the gratification of personal desire; that we are wired for helping others. Perhaps it is time to reintegrate the concept of self-interest with empathy, so that our students come to see that by helping each other they are ultimately helping themselves.

Curious about the FWP clip, I searched a little further on the Internet and found dozens of similar spoofs making fun of young people. Interestingly, these seemed to be made by people from the very same demographic; there is even a rap song dealing with the theme. Could it be that running alongside this apparent self-absorption is a genuine yearning for connection with the wider world in all of its complexity? As a teacher at this School, I know that when students are truly engaged in the learning process their minds open up to the creative possibilities that surround them and the world in which they live, firing the imagination to take them further into the world of knowledge. At its most fundamental level, the process of education is itself awe-inspiring — and a very powerful way to grow more compassionate individuals. ■
REFERENCES


In schools today, everything is ‘on the table’

SHANE SKILLEN, CO-DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY STUDIES | 14 MARCH 2013

What computing ‘model’ do you use at home? If you can’t answer that question without thinking, you are not alone; most of us just use what works for our situation. Increasingly, our homes have an abundance of technology: desktop computers, laptops, tablets, phones, phablets, smart TVs, media players and home automation from countless manufacturers, most of which nobody had heard of two decades ago. Technology in the home has been normalised; it is just there. A broad sweep of the arm across the kitchen table in many family homes would result in a pile of such devices.

This tech–saturated environment leads many parents to believe that their children are techno–whizz–kids who traverse this digital world with systematic curiosity, wielding their prodigious skills with subconscious ease. A key consideration, however, is that schools are not like homes, and the transition from home to school has always had its differences. Your child usually does not perceive their technology wizardry, and rarely aligns their ability to apply those skills to a life–wide learning attribute.

However, the kitchen table and the classroom may be closer aligned than you may think.

Recent advancements in consumer technology — all those devices on your kitchen table — have highlighted a key issue regarding technology provision in schools. The struggle to keep pace with rapid change means that, as soon as a system is chosen, installed, training completed and curriculum adapted, it is obsolete. The pressure to be responsive to technological change means that a technology model never has an opportunity to mature, is susceptible to faults and is, inevitably, unsustainable. For some time, in the context of technology, the conditions have been conducive for evolutionary change.

Professor Roger McHaney, an expert on business use of technology, discusses in his book The New Digital Shoreline that education is at a ‘tipping point’ (McHaney, 2011). This viewpoint was also espoused by Microsoft founder Bill Gates earlier this month in his keynote address for the South by Southwest conference in Austin, Texas (cited in Ngak, 2013). Using a technology adoption metaphor, McHaney cites Gladwell’s book of the same name stating that, for a technology to gain traction in education, it needs three critical roles to be fulfilled: mavens, connectors and advocates.

Long before the term ‘BYOD’ (Bring Your Own Device) was being touted in educational circles, a shift was beginning to occur in our student body. The advent of mobile Internet, affordable software and increasing portability of laptops saw students deciding to bring their own technology to School. Some enterprising teachers welcomed these devices into their classrooms and facilitated their use into classwork.

These were our unwitting mavens. They were the ones attuned to change and other ways of working and, with the
hindsight and privilege of Web 2.0 and cloud technologies, they have no allegiance to or perceived reliance on an institutional computing network. Notwithstanding the exceptional resourcing of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, it is this generation’s desire for the personalisation of technology, the familiarity of devices they are using at home and the control of that environment that necessitated the introduction of BYOD to optimise their learning at School.

Students today have a unique attachment to their mobile technology; for many, it is an extension of themselves and an important communication tool that provides them with a certain level of comfort. They know what to expect when they turn the device on, they know what programs they have installed and they know how to use them. Using the same device at home and at school fosters an important link between formal and informal learning. As lifelong adult learners, we can acknowledge that the information age has permitted significant autonomy when it comes to knowledge acquisition. As a School, we can embrace the normalisation of technology by embedding the presence of these devices into our classrooms along with the structure and rigour of our curriculum.

As curricula, networks, teachers and students all begin to embrace new ways of working in the classroom, we see the burgeoning of Gladwell’s second agents of change: connectors. From a technology viewpoint, these are the people who recognise which apps would be good for a task and can transform learning opportunities with their fundamental understanding of technology usage. Teachers do this through facilitation, innovative practice and embedding technology into daily routines; networks do this by being adaptive and open; students do this through sharing of ideas, role-modelling and dispersing their knowledge and expertise with applications.

When walking around the campus, it is impossible not to see students engaged in the use of technology, from the library to the lunch table. Increasingly, the vast majority of devices being brought to School have the ability to be turned on instantly and a battery life which lasts longer than the traditional school day. Whether a slate-type device like the Windows Surface (ThinkPad, iPad, et cetera.) or a laptop/tablet-like device with solid state hard drives (SSD), they provide an immediate, active environment for learning, irrespective of where they are.

What makes portable devices so powerful are applications. No matter whether they are made or supported by Google, Microsoft, Apple or any other developer, apps offer a plethora of free or inexpensive learning tools that promote judicious engagement and assist students to map, reference, graph, record, film, edit, compare, read, take and organise notes, and — perhaps most importantly to them — collaborate. Apps essentially transform these devices into universal and ubiquitous information, education, and entertainment portals (Anderson, 2009). They develop our girls’ ability to integrate technology in a meaningful way, improve digital literacy and foster positive digital citizenship.

While schools will always cater for specialist learning areas, the strength of BYOD is the normalisation of a technological workflow in all learning environments. In core learning areas, BYOD will positively impact learning and assessment items. A class doing a video task will no longer be restricted to a particular piece of prescribed or provided software. Mandating software for a task raises an equity issue, which
forces class time to become solely allocated to project work as many students do not have access to the same software at home. However, in a BYOD environment, the focus is on the product. This allows students to appositely choose the software they have at their disposal to complete the task, freeing up classroom time to focus on content and knowledge development. It also builds autonomy by allowing students the flexibility to practice creativity and develop their own learning strategies.

Our School has long resisted the idea of a ‘model’ computing environment which is device specific. The Australian Government’s Digital Education Revolution saw the advent of many schools adopting 1:1 laptop programmes; a model which is already being relegated to the history books as antiquated and restrictive. Our goal to be ‘device agnostic’ — using the right device for the right task — is evolving somewhat organically with the natural evolution of technology. Our communities are the advocates of change needed to complete Gladwell’s three predictors of a tipping point. Parents, friends, teachers and students all have a crucial role in how learning must evolve (McHaney, 2011).

The environment is ready for students to bring their devices into classrooms and make school a richer learning environment. And when they take them back home and use them at the kitchen table, they will be a step closer to becoming life-wide learners.

REFERENCES


 Barely three months ago, there was much discussion of New Year’s resolutions. The media was full of celebrity suggestions and statistics about the length of time our resolutions would endure. Students, parents and teachers all approached a new year aware of its potential and challenges. Some had created detailed plans that they hoped would guide them towards anticipated goals. Others dreamed of a future fulfilled, but with few ideas about how they were actually going to make those dreams reality. Others struggled to see past the complexity and challenges of the year ahead and were caught up in a fog of concern and anxiety. Regardless of how one approaches life, inevitably, checkpoints are reached — situations that demand reflection and re-evaluation so that future directions can be shaped more effectively.

As the School community moves rapidly towards the end of Term I, each of us is faced with such an opportunity. This week students in Years 11 and 12 have completed their first week of stand down for 2013. By the end of next week, not only will students have completed exams and assignments, they will also have been given results and feedback. Although there is much focus on the ‘grade’ signified by that all important letter or number, in reality it is the individual’s response to that grade and the actions that follow that will prove most significant in shaping future success and happiness (Wiliam, 2012). A grade provides an opportunity to compare individual achievement with the cohort and ‘external standards’ but, more importantly, it signals an opportunity to engage with not only the result but also the feedback that accompanies it. At an individual and very personal level, students are challenged to think about themselves, their motivations, their priorities and their responses to success and failure. It is a time to review those resolutions made earlier in the year, judge their effectiveness based on hard data and perhaps to make some new ones for Term II.

To encourage this, teachers ask their students to listen more carefully, to think more deeply, to do more homework, to spend less time on Facebook; students resolve to accomplish these with varying degrees of success. Personal trainer Michelle Bridges (2013) from the Biggest Loser television programme laments the inability of her clients to take action based on their stated principles:

Yet when it comes to crunch time, often they are not [willing]. They can’t stick to the eating plan I gave them, even though they said they would. They don’t do their training homework, even though they promised to. It is a totally different ball game when it comes to walk the walk, not just talk the talk (as it is for many of us). (p. 12)

So why is it so hard to follow through with resolutions? As teachers and parents encouraging our young people to evaluate the past term in order to ensure effective plans for the future, what can we do to help them develop realistic
action plans? Bridges suggests (2013) that three very personal but crucial questions need to be answered: What do I want; what am I willing to do to get there; and what excuses have I used to stop myself achieving my goals in the past? Time for a reality check! She then suggests that all excuses are written down, the ridiculous ones deleted, and action plans developed to overcome the remainder.

This is good advice, but resolutions to do better in company with action plans are not made in isolation. They need to acknowledge the wider picture. Within a community such as a school, individual response is inextricably linked to the expectations of other community members. Parents, teachers and friends create the environment in which the individual makes decisions, learns, and matures; but sometimes they are also the instigators of conflicting demands on student time and energy. It is not unusual to hear one student comment to another, ‘Mum said that I should make study a priority at this time of year but I also have to …’. As a teacher, I experience a brief, but uncomfortable, sense of guilt as I rush on, aware of the many demands I have been making on my students during the past frantic weeks leading to the end of term; but this is soon forgotten as the School community embraces the next exciting event.

While the School provides an incredibly rich learning environment with multiple opportunities for success in diverse areas, for some students it may also provide a world full of conflicting and confusing demands. How confusing it must be for some students when those caring for their welfare challenge them to set appropriate priorities and to manage their time more effectively while placing conflicting demands on not only student time, but also on their precious energy reserves.

Parents and teachers acknowledge the importance of student decision making as they assume increased responsibility for their own learning, but they must also be conscious of the environment in which those decisions are being made and the impact that mentors and role models can have on those processes. Enabling students to make best use of school ‘checkpoints’ must truly be a partnership that acknowledges the impact of all involved. Effective reflection involves gaining clarity in the current situation, and often parents and teachers will need to help students to do this. It is only then that the most constructive resolutions can be made and action plans formulated.

To facilitate this in the classroom, teachers must provide student feedback in a form that will allow them to act on it. Wiggins (2012) reminds teachers that ‘performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate and trustworthy’. Research conducted by Chadwell (2007) highlighted the importance of the following two factors in engaging girls in their learning:

1. Take time to explain processes, answer their questions, consider their suggestions, and probe their hypotheses.

2. Monitor them as they work, prod their learning, and support their hesitation.

Teachers spend much personal time discussing feedback and how this can be provided most effectively but students must take responsibility for processing this feedback. They must take the time to ‘hear’ what is being said about past performance and search for the pointers to actions that will improve future outcomes. Depending on the subject, this may involve reviewing video or audio recordings, rethinking solutions to problems while considering where thinking was faulty, or carefully analysing teacher comments. It may also require students to initiate further discussions with their teachers so that feedback can be clarified and built upon.

Research that highlights that, for effective learning to occur for many girls, the intricate balance between intellectual stimulation and emotional comfort needs to not only be acknowledged but facilitated (James, 2009). Nagel (2008) points out that ‘intelligence is often measured against...
various tests yet we know that intelligence in itself is but one characteristic of the mind’. He suggests that, to provide effective learning environments for young women, ‘the social and emotional worlds of girls are provided with the same level of importance as raising scores on some form of standardised tests’ (Nagel, 2008).

Assessment for Term I is almost complete. Feedback is inevitable whether it is wanted or not, and there is much to be gained through thoughtful reflection and adoption of some carefully crafted and achievable New Term’s resolutions accompanied by realistic action plans. This is not, however, a task that students should face alone. It is complex and requires support from teachers and parents who may be struggling with their own resolutions about allowing students to assume responsibility for individual actions while providing them with the rules and structure necessary to enable young people to develop their personal guiding principles. Swartz and Sharpe in their book *Practical Wisdom* (2010) suggest that:

A wise person knows how to take on the perspective of another — to see the situation as the other person does and thus to understand how the other person feels. This perspective-taking is what enables a wise person to feel empathy for others and to make decisions that serve the client’s [student’s, patient’s, friend’s] needs. (p. 25)

Perhaps this is a timely caution for all involved as we counsel our wonderfully talented but unique learners about their future resolutions and plans. While encouraging and challenging, we must be careful not to ignore anxieties and concerns which can be ‘immobilizing, counterproductive and even destructive’ (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010); but rather to urge our students to gain a balanced perspective by acknowledging their progress over time and celebrating the success they have achieved during the term.

REFERENCES


Building a career is a personal and quite individual process that rarely begins with the collective end in mind. While identifying the path is the first step, the wholeness of the concept called ‘career’ is only fully appreciated upon reflection. Finding one’s way can be loosely described as an exercise in recognising seemingly random life experiences; seizing new opportunities; navigating unforeseen circumstances; and embracing emergent technologies. An ever evolving reflective compass directs the trekker’s path.

As I began the first draft of this article, the world celebrated International Women’s Day — an appropriate time, I thought, to reflect upon the emerging careers of four of our recent graduates. While at School, they were proactive and involved learners. As well as embracing the fast-paced, demanding academic and co-curricular offerings of the School, these young women actively engaged in planning for their life beyond Girls Grammar.

Embedded in their stories are the beginnings of their careers which now become lessons for girls still in the planning. While each story is as different as the young woman who navigated the path, the lesson for future trekkers is the same: plan a direction that reflects a personal preference; seek and grasp opportunities as you discover them; navigate unforeseen circumstances with positivity and resilience; embrace the technologies of the twenty-first century as they emerge; and take time to allow reflection to direct you.

**SALLY’S WAY**

While sharing a tree stump at Marrapatta, Sally (alumna 2003) confided that she thought she might like to study the law. Her reasoning was: ‘It’s the place where I think I can make the most difference.’ Upon graduation, Sally was not offered a place in law as she planned. Undeterred, she studied successfully in the arts, adding law in the following year. Sally’s time at university was characterised by four things: academic success, working and saving, volunteering, and backpacking with newfound friends in the developing world. Although profoundly affected by her volunteer experience in a Ghana AIDS orphanage, Sally describes these characteristics as ‘each as important as the other in framing my career’.

At School, amongst other activities, Sally was a member of the United Nations Club. At university she joined The University of Queensland Human Trafficking Research Group. In her private life she volunteered as coordinator of Eddie’s Van for five years, providing food and friendship to Brisbane’s homeless. Now, with two years’ experience in commercial litigation under her belt, Sally felt it was time to apply her legal skills as well as her travel and volunteer experience to the planning of the next stage of her career.

Late in 2012 Sally applied for a position as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development in Bangkok. From her hotel room in Tokyo, she interviewed with an Australian Government official in Adelaide. Sally later described that, during the process, she came to a profound understanding.
‘Suddenly, I understood how the seemingly unrelated experiences I had created in my youth had, without my realising it, laid the groundwork for my career.’ And so it is with all of us that, with the benefit of reflection, the choices we make along the way eventually reveal themselves as the foundations of our future.

An ever evolving reflective compass guides the trekker’s way.

This month Sally begins her work as a Human Trafficking Legal Research Officer for AusAID, working within the FREELAND Foundation, an organisation that dedicates itself to fighting wildlife trafficking and human slavery — another opportunity for Sally, born of unforeseen circumstance and a global perspective, facilitated by technology and nurtured by reflection.

MEG’S WAY

Contemplating a career in veterinary science and wanting to arrange a rural work experience, Meg {alumna 2012} first appeared at my door in Year 10. Her return later in the year to arrange another, this time in a rural medical practice, prompted some questioning on my part.

Raised in a country setting in her primary school years, Meg would accompany her father when he visited rural and remote medical facilities as part of his work. In Year 10 she began exploring her interests through work experience. In Year 12 she travelled again with her father to a hospital in Papua New Guinea where she witnessed clinics and arranged interviews with doctors and nurses. They modelled a commitment to their profession that caught Meg’s attention and influenced her decision to seek further experience in developing countries. Later that year, Meg became the first Brisbane Girls Grammar School student to undertake an international medical work experience {in Tanzania} with a private organisation called GapMed. So profound was her experience that she returned to finish School with a newfound enthusiasm and commitment to a career in rural medicine. Meg was a young woman with a mission and the drive that creates opportunities.

Meg applied herself to the application process to James Cook University Medicine with singular purpose and dedication. Though its extensive and labour-intensive demands were sometimes challenging to negotiate, Meg persevered with relentless focus.

Meg recognised opportunities early on and took them when she could. Again, with the benefit of reflection, she confirmed in her interview that these small, youthful and seemingly unrelated decisions, along with some carefully orchestrated secondary school experiences, helped to build the foundations of what is now her early career.

In January this year she was rewarded for her efforts with a place in medicine at James Cook University and, as I write, she puts her first footprints on that path.

LUCY’S WAY

Finishing at Girls Grammar with an OP that would have gained her access to any university in Australia, Lucy {alumna 2009} chose the ‘University of Experience’ and enrolled ‘without a plan B’. Fully committed to her craft, Lucy is an actor with the passion and drive that makes a person step aside and let her pass. While her interest has been life-long, her journey into the profession was scaffolded by a number of contributors, one of whom was Francesca {alumna 1995}. Lucy attended the 2009 Careers Mentoring Breakfast where she met Francesca, who had returned to Brisbane Girls Grammar School to mentor aspiring actors. She recognised Lucy’s passion and offered to help her, should she ever come to Sydney.

Lucy seized the opportunity, accepted the offer and moved there shortly after finishing Year 12. She soon learned that, as an actor, she had to be ‘ridiculously flexible and ready to go wherever it takes you’. ‘Sometimes a mermaid, an alien or a vampire, other times a waitress or a teacher and, a lot of the time an unemployed hippie’, Lucy is gathering those seemingly random life experiences that will form the foundations of her emerging career. After a ‘billion gazillion auditions (with a billion gazillion rejections, learning from each one)’, Lucy is already well-placed to recognise and share the value of positivity and resilience. Her talent, tempered with focus and resilience, won her roles in two television series: the Queensland–made children’s drama H2O: Just Add Water in 2010 and Lightning Point in 2012.
This week, Lucy returned to the 2013 Careers Mentoring Breakfast — as the mentor. It was a time of reflection and sharing as she prepares to return to Los Angeles to begin filming her first feature-length film, *Vampire Academy: Blood Sisters*.

**AISHLIN’S WAY**

Having arisen at 3.00 am to attempt a summit of Mt Meru in Tanzania, our trekking group reached Rhino Point (3950 metres) at dawn, exhausted and very cold. Watching the sun rise over Mt Kilimanjaro was, quite literally, breathtaking and the group began to consider whether or not we would continue. From the back, a quiet voice protested, ‘We have to, at least, try!’ Aishlin’s (alumna 2008) plea sparked the creation of a smaller summit group who went on to do just that.

Her interjection that day turned out to be a mere precursor to a greater challenge that would present itself later in the year when Aishlin was encouraged to apply for a traineeship in financial assurance. To win it would mean that, instead of heading off to university as planned, she would commence full-time work and study part-time for the first two years of her degree. Uncertain, she decided to use the application process to gain experience and insight into the corporate world — a seemingly harmless decision to ‘give it a try’ that would change her life quite markedly as uni casuals were soon replaced by corporate suits.

The hours were long but the work was rewarding, especially when she could see the benefits of genuine corporate experience applied to academic theory, and Aishlin thrived. Two years of full-time work characterised by expectation and responsibility morphed into two years of full-time study, inclusive of an exchange semester at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. Though she did not plan it so and was, in fact, a reluctant starter, Aishlin created the university experience she planned, as well as the corporate experience she did not — an unforeseen circumstance, a new opportunity transformed into a life experience.

Undaunted by timelines and distance, Aishlin completed her degree a semester early and passed her first exams for the Graduate Diploma of Chartered Accounting in December 2012 ... in Singapore ... on her way to a holiday in Europe ... because it was the only venue that suited her timeline. Now a senior accountant, she is as proactive in her professional life as she was in her academic and co-curricular life here at School: setting goals, planning to succeed and managing when she does not, seizing opportunity, creating life experiences, and guiding her path with intelligent reflection.

During its lifetime, a career unfolds as a series of (hopefully) well-considered decisions influenced by opportunity, circumstance, technology and personal preference. Its wholeness is only visible with the reflective powers of hindsight.

As they did at School, these young professionals continue to engage in open-minded, well-informed planning and, as a result, have recognised new opportunities, managed unforeseen circumstances and, each as their career has demanded, embraced the technologies of the twenty-first century. For each, technology provided global opportunity. For each, seemingly unconnected youthful opportunities delivered life experiences that signposted a career.

Their paths are pointed in different directions, each leading to an unknown destination that will reflect the young woman who set herself upon it. One wonders what decisions lie ahead; what circumstances will influence them; what technologies will demand of them. If the immediate past is any indication of their future, I am convinced that they, and hundreds more like them, will build careers that will leave an indelible mark on their professions.
Brisbane Girls Grammar School has a long tradition of outstanding scholarship and innovation in educating young women. Extensive preparation, discipline and perseverance by dedicated educators enable our girls to access wide-ranging experiences and resources. All students, regardless of abilities or individual interest, can successfully reach their ultimate potential. For our girls to perform at their best and achieve exceptional scholarship, it is important to equip them with the tools to maintain good health and wellbeing.

It is not uncommon for girls to present to the Health Centre feeling ‘unwell’. This, on deeper inspection, can mean:

‘I haven’t had any breakfast.’
‘I haven’t had any water.’
‘I didn’t get much sleep last night.’
‘I have just done (some type of) sports training.’

Opportunities to educate and learn arise through all aspects of school life. Further discussion and thinking will lead girls to the realisation that sub-optimal preparation and care can result in detrimental changes to health and wellbeing; their surprise in realising why they feel ‘unwell’ is quite remarkable.

NUTRITION
Adequate nutrition is required to support strong bones and muscles, to stabilise fluctuating hormones, and to provide fuel for busy and demanding schedules. Because growth and change is very rapid in the adolescent stage of development, additional intake of the following are required for adequate nutrition:

- Calories – an increase is required to provide fuel for rapid growth and development.
- Protein – important for growth and muscle maintenance, as well as satiety.
- Calcium – responsible for the strength of bones. Insufficient calcium can lead to weak bones and osteoporosis later in life.
- Iron – insufficiency can lead to anaemia, fatigue and weakness.

It is important that diets include a wide variety of unprocessed foods as well as minimal sugar and salt intake. Good diets include adequate fruits, vegetables, dairy, proteins, complex carbohydrates and healthy fats.

A substantial breakfast is by far the most important way to start the day. This will set the body up for a steady energy supply, which can be followed by nutritious snacks to maintain energy levels. Regular fluid intake, predominately of water, to maintain hydration and cellular function is also essential. Without proper nutrition and hydration, young girls are susceptible to poor physical performance, emotional variations, vitamin and mineral deficiency, and an inability to focus on their studies and cope with the rigors of daily school life.

SLEEP
Achieving adequate rest is essential in supporting our cardiovascular system, immune system, hormone fluctuations, emotions, and our ability to concentrate and think clearly. When school schedules are demanding, the temptation to cut back on sleep can be high. But even minimal sleep loss can directly affect our mood, energy and ability to handle stress.
Duration and quality of sleep directly affect the quality of our life, mental sharpness, productivity, emotional balance, creativity, physical vitality, endurance, and even our weight.

Although our body and brain do not shut off during sleep, they require this rest time to restore and provide biological maintenance to enable our bodies and minds to run in optimal condition for the day ahead. If not enough restorative hours of sleep are gained, we are not able to work, learn, create and achieve at a level close to our potential. Regular deprivation of this rest and restore time can lead to mental and physical breakdown.

How much sleep do we need? Most healthy adults require on average between seven and a half to nine hours per night. Adolescents have an increased average requirement of eight and a half to ten hours per night, largely due to rapid growth and development during this life stage. But it is important to consider the difference between the amount of sleep you can get by on and the amount you need to function at your best. If you are gaining enough rest, you should be energetic and alert all day from rising in the morning to your regular bedtime at night. By making sleep a priority and scheduling carefully to fit in adequate rest, we are better prepared to perform and achieve success.

Sleep deprivation and poor nutrition can amount to a wide range of negative effects including:
- energy imbalance resulting in fatigue and lethargy
- inability to motivate and unwillingness to ‘have a go’
- moodiness and irritability
- inability to cope with stress and change
- issues with concentration, focus and memory
- impaired motor skills and increased likelihood of accident or injury
- difficulty with decision making, critical thinking and problem solving
- reduced creativity
- immune deficiency leading to a decreased ability to fight off illness and infection
- compromised cardiovascular health
- increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and other health problems.

EXERCISE
Participating in recreational or structured exercise is beneficial to physical health, sleep quality and stress release.

HYGIENE
Establishing good hygiene practices to prevent illness or infection, as well as maintain personal image standards, are especially important for adolescent girls. Routine, regular hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent transmission of bacteria and viruses.

ORGANISATION
Being immersed in a very busy school life can lead to being disorganised and lack of preparation can lead to missed opportunities and unfulfilled potential, as well unnecessary stress.

Establishment of a clear routine suited to individual goals, commitments and needs is imperative. Importantly, scheduling ‘must do’ items first allows time for fulfilling pursuits, as well as rest and reflection time.

RELATIONSHIPS
The connections adolescents have with their peers, family and friendship group play a vital role in their social development and can easily influence their direction and success.

As teachers and parents, we can guide and support our girls in the following ways:
- encouraging them to make well-considered choices in daily life
- role-modelling appropriate behaviours
- providing support with time, resources and emotions
- encouraging them to recognise their own progress and achievements
- assisting them to plan for their future hopes and goals.

Preparation, dedication to good habits, and maintaining health and wellbeing will ensure our girls are best able to achieve their potential.
Bob Dylan, one of the most influential and prodigious singer-songwriters of the past five decades, has reflected on change in numerous songs throughout his career. Dylan’s own life was dominated by change, notably his change of name from Robert Allen Zimmerman. More broadly, shifting from his definitive folk style to rock altered the parameters of popular music in the 60s. He created great controversy at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival when, to the displeasure of the folk music establishment, he completed an electric set and, amid booing, left the stage after only three songs — a move which could have led to the premature end of his career. Not to be discouraged, and convinced that this electric sound was the right direction to move in, Dylan pushed forward and later that same month recorded and released ‘Like A Rolling Stone’, his hit song which has been named number one in the ‘500 Greatest Songs of All Time’ by Rolling Stone magazine (n.d.). Clearly, the ability to embrace change has proven to be instrumental in the longevity and success of Bob Dylan’s career.

Change is the only constant in life. The year 2013 has already been one of great change, both at Girls Grammar and on the national and international stage. How people adapt to change can mean the difference between them failing to achieve their goals and ambitions or growing and moving forward to learn from the change.

The world’s 1.2 billion Catholics have a new leader in Pope Francis. Not only is Pope Francis the first Jesuit pope, he is also the first pope elected from the Americas. His papacy, while still in its infancy, has already been marked by change, such as holding the traditional Holy Thursday Mass in a juvenile penitentiary instead of in the traditional elaborate basilica, and including, for the very first time, two women and two Muslims in the customary feet-washing ceremony. Professor Francis X. Clooney, Director of the Centre for the Study of World Religions at the Harvard Divinity School, has warned that those expecting radical change with this papacy will likely be disappointed, and suggested that people will have to be satisfied with incremental changes (Walsh, 2013). Indeed, change is often a gradual process involving planning, implementing, monitoring and reinforcing the change.

The world has recently witnessed the funeral of Baroness Margaret Thatcher, the long-serving first female Prime Minister of Britain, dubbed the ‘Iron Lady’. Margaret Thatcher led her country through an extraordinary period of reform and change, and her leadership will be remembered as perhaps one of the most divisive in Britain’s history. Closer to home, the polls are strongly indicating a likely change of federal government come the election in September.

Foremost for Girls Grammar, Australian Government reforms — such as the Gonski funding model and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum — along with the state government moving Year 7 into secondary schools will have the biggest impact. Change is not easy to generate, and nor will everyone happily join in for the ride. Respected educational change expert Michael Fullan, when discussing resistance to change, states that ‘differences, diversity and
conflict are not only inevitable, but they contain the seeds of breakthrough’ (1996, p. 175). Margaret Thatcher also alluded to the notion of conflict in change when she famously commented, ‘If you just set out to be liked, you would be prepared to compromise on anything at any time, and you would achieve nothing’ (‘Margaret Thatcher Quotes’, n.d.).

Sometimes change is planned for and at other times it is thrust upon us suddenly, or comes about as the result of a significant and unexpected event. President Obama is currently trying to make radical changes to gun legislation in the United States, motivated by the recent tragedy at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. This response is not dissimilar to the path taken by the Australian Government in the wake of our own Port Arthur tragedy in 1996. In both cases, an unexpectedly changed environment compelled a rapid change response. Personal resilience is important in a period of rapid change, and resilient people are characterised as being positive, focused, flexible, organised and pro-active (Richer & Stopper cited in Gamage, 2006, p. 184). Clearly, these traits are indispensable for effective leaders to bring about change.

Modern society requires educational leaders to not just react to changing situations as they unfold, but rather to be proactive in directing the forces of change to suit predetermined goals and values based on a well-organised vision. The adoption of new ideas and practices in an educational organisation is not only a challenge but also an obligation for the leadership team (Gamage & Pang, 2003, p. 224).

At Girls Grammar, we have been planning for the exciting times ahead. Well before the Queensland Government mooted the idea of moving Year 7 to secondary school we began readying our School for this transition. Last year we moved to the third, and new, iteration of our strategic design with guiding principles to underpin our aspiration to be a leader in exceptional scholarship. Following the departure of Dr Amanda Bell, our visionary principal of eleven years, we have welcomed Ms Jacinda Euler as the sixteenth principal of our School. With her knowledge, experience and expertise, Ms Euler is extremely well placed to guide Girls Grammar through the transition period as we look forward to welcoming our first Year 7 cohort in 2015. The School has a Year 7 and Research Centre to construct, a superb thirteen-hectare facility to develop at our new Sports Campus at Fig Tree Pocket, the next phase of the Australian Curriculum to implement, and our ‘Bring Your Own Device’ technology initiative to further develop. We are also finalising new organisational structures in readiness for the double cohort student intake of Year 7 and Year 8 in 2015. Consequently, we are well prepared for the inevitable and significant change that awaits our community over the next few years.

Returning to the 1960s and to another harbinger of great social change, as US President John F. Kennedy said, ‘Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future’ (‘Quotes on Change’, n.d.). Fortunately, our resilient, forward-thinking School community thrives on challenge and positively looks towards the future. ■
REFERENCES


The changing face of parenting

KAREN BELBIN, SCHOOL COUNSELLOR | 2 MAY 2013

There is something disturbing happening regarding parenting. Parents are turning on parents in an all-out battle over parenting style supremacy. Parenting ‘experts’ are churning out books to meet the supposed unquenchable thirst for guidance and direction that parents have regarding how to be the best parent and produce the ‘best’ child. Not everyone is a parent, but everyone has been parented which means everyone can, if they desire, make a claim regarding the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to parent. And everyone, it seems, has a parenting book in them. A quick search on Amazon for ‘parenting’ books gave 140,223 results last week; this week that number increased to 140,729.

The saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ recognises that everyone involved in a child’s life has a part to play and responsibility towards the child’s physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual development. The twenty-first century parenting ‘industry’, however, has a vested interest in placing this responsibility on parents alone (parents buy books; villages do not). The contrasting, indeed competing beliefs and expectations about what parents ‘should’ or ‘should not’ do can lead parents to feel overwhelmed and anxious about their child-rearing performance. Children watch their parents closely and pick up on parental anxieties, so it is helpful to reflect on the stresses involved in parenting today, particularly the pressure to get it ‘right’. If we can understand and defuse these, we may remove one stress from parents’ lives and, in doing so, remove one from the lives of our girls.

Controversy now surrounds every facet of parenting. Whether and when to become parents; whether to breastfeed, control cry, vaccinate, circumcise, return to work or stay at home; how to discipline, socialise, feed and teach your child; which school, sport, music you choose; their results, accomplishments, friends, choices, jobs and age of leaving home — everything is open to scrutiny and everyone has an opinion. Talking about parenting in polite society has become as fraught, and dangerous, as talking about religion, money or politics.

Discussions around parenting have shifted from the nature/nurture debate to a preoccupation with parenting style. There is much at stake when choosing a parenting style, because your choice says a lot (everything) about you — or at least that is the belief. Frank Ferudi (2007), Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent and author of Paranoid Parenting, explains:

Powerful cultural forces encourage parents, particularly mothers, to live their lives through their children. One important way in which the parenting industry has promoted its dogma is to incite mothers to gain identity through their childrearing style. Parenting has turned into a lifestyle in which women — and, increasingly, men — make statements about themselves via the tactics and techniques they use to bring up their infants. This issue is not about a childrearing technique but a moral statement about a way of life. That is why arguments about parenting have acquired such a vitriolic dimension.
Choice is no longer a personal matter; it is also political. Ferudi suggests two ways that parents can counter the trend to politicise childrearing: ‘Ignore the experts, and don’t turn childrearing into a statement about yourself’ (2007).

The polarisation of the debate may reflect an unprecedented level of parental insecurity and anxiety. Parenting is not an activity where you can muddle along in an unselfconscious kind of way anymore. Parents reach for expert advice and help; but parenting books, which are expected to reassure, can undermine parents’ confidence, especially when they make categorical but contradictory claims about the best way to raise children. For parents who cannot tolerate differences over parenting, and are anxious to get it ‘right’, the question of who is right and who is wrong becomes an important issue. Parents who are wedded to a particular style interpret claims made by proponents of competing styles as an attack on them — their identity, values, commitment and, therefore, worth as parents. Inevitably, the belief becomes: if you are not for me, you must be against me.

With so much emotional investment, parents can become preoccupied with how their performance is being judged in private and in public. According to novelist Milan Kundera (1986), it is part of the human condition to judge: ‘Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands.’ Parenting, with its uncertain dynamics and continually unfolding processes, and ‘cast’ of different personalities, is a supremely difficult process to understand. There is a lot in parenting that is ‘not known’, leading to feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. However, so much is expected of parents by society that having to bear ‘not knowing’ can make the job feel too hard. Understandably then, parents turn to the ‘experts’, seeking comfort and reassurance — the promise of a clear and successful way forward.

What is sometimes forgotten in this process of prescriptive parenting is that all children are different — no one theory fits all. The seventeenth-century nobleman and poet John Wilmot said: ‘Before I got married I had six theories about bringing up children. Now I have six children and no theories’ (qtd. in Prochnow, 1958). Simplified recommendations cannot accommodate children’s individual requirements. Most people recognise that parenting requires a repertoire of approaches, depending on the disposition and needs of the child, the age and stage of the child, the family values and beliefs, the circumstances and the culture in which the family lives and the events that occur within the family and society. Requiring parents to pin down their parenting to one method, or philosophy, denies the influence of the rich and varied experience of family life, with its rhythm, its unique pattern of development, its needs, its fears and exhilarations, and its muddles and triumphs. More worryingly, selecting one philosophy over another encourages a culture of competition and rivalry between parents, at the very time when parental support and understanding of each other is most needed.

A society that cultivates competition about social issues such as parenting, rather than collaboration, can lead its members to feel despair and isolation. In those circumstances, even if you are winning, you do not feel looked after, appreciated, or connected to those around you. An ethos of competitive parenting eats away at parental confidence. According to reports commissioned by The Australian Childhood Foundation in 2004 and 2005 (Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard), parental confidence is dropping. The 2004 report found that fifty-six per cent of parents were concerned about their level of confidence as parents; the following year this number had increased to sixty-three per cent. The 2005 report showed that seventy per cent of parents feel community pressure to ‘get parenting right’. And in 2012, Galaxy Research conducted an online survey of 1006 mothers who had children aged 16 years or younger (Procter & Gamble, 2012). Eighty-seven per cent of mothers reported experiencing feelings of isolation, with thirty-six per cent feeling isolated on most days.
Being a parent is hard work. Parenting is an unfolding and continually developing process, requiring understanding and encouragement from inside as well as outside the family. Withstanding criticism, feeling judged and isolated, or being under pressure to ‘get parenting right’ do not help. In Exploring Parenthood (1994), child psychotherapist Ruth Schmidt Neven describes parenting as one of the ‘great dynamic journeys of life [where] both parent and children undergo a transformation through a relationship which is hopefully a positive and reciprocal one’ (p. xxi). As Jane Shilling writes in New Statesman (2013): ‘Raising a child involves a circuitous journey of many branching routes that may lead, if parents and children are lucky, loving and tolerant, to a destination that everyone involved finds bearable.’

Perhaps, instead of criticism or advice, parents need an environment that supports and fosters them as they undertake their life’s work. A place that understands the pressures, facilitates their development, and builds their capacity to think carefully about what is best for their family as they travel their particular and unique path. A place where parenting is honoured, valued and respected as both a life’s task, spanning successive generations, as well as a community task. A place where parents can take solace in the reality that the parenting responsibility is shared with many other trusted adults, each of whom is as devoted to the child’s wellbeing as the parents are. A place where the stress and pressure of parenting is diluted to a ‘bearable’ degree. They need, of course, a village — of supporters.

At Brisbane Girls Grammar School, the village that surrounds and supports each family is made up of parents and students, teachers and other staff members, coaches and volunteers, alumnae and friends, neighbours and all members of our larger connected School community. Parents are the chiefs of their family in our village; the other villagers assist each parent to withstand the invasion of the ‘experts’, so that parents can get on with their important work and make their own decisions about what is best for their families.

REFERENCES

Language learning in the global arena

SUSAN GARSON, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES | 9 MAY 2013

It is now a truism that the rise of English — through business, the spread of American culture, and the ubiquity of the Internet — will continue unabated, which could ultimately render all other languages obsolete. In Australia, with our already historically low rate of second-language proficiency, there are concerning signs of linguistic complacency in the form of platitudes such as ‘millions of mainland Chinese are learning English, so there’s no real need for me to learn Mandarin’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is not the view taken by Brisbane Girls Grammar School or the language teachers, and for good reason.

The benefits of learning a second language for both the individual and for Australian society as a whole are far-reaching. Finnish researcher Irina Buchberger asserts that language competence is ‘a key element in the personal and professional development of individuals’ (cited in Mueller, 2012, p. 29). Language learners develop communication skills, enhance their cognitive capacity for problem-solving and divergent thinking, appreciate other cultures, and enable greater post-school options. On the broader stage, Australia’s trade, cultural and tourist links with other countries make it more important than ever before for students to understand and value the ‘economic benefits of learning languages in addition to English’ as well as the ‘humanistic and cognitive’ ones (Reese, 2009, p. 41). Together, these benefits open doors to critical and creative engagement in the global arena.

Amidst all the noise currently surrounding education in our national discourse, it may have gone unnoticed that language learning has received some welcome attention. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the body responsible for producing the new Australian Curriculum, acknowledges the importance of additional language learning and seeks to move language education forward in Australia (Cutshall, 2008). It seeks to raise the profile of languages education as an important contributor to literacy, which can be ‘transferable across learning areas’ (ACARA, n.d.). It is difficult to disagree with Reese’s (2009) conclusions that, ‘foreign language education is imperative more so now because technology has made us more interconnected than ever. We need to know how to operate in different languages and cultural environments’ (p. 41). As so much of the current debate has centred on test league tables and international comparisons, it bears remembering that many European and Asian nations with successful education systems have had a long-standing commitment to compulsory second-language learning (Mueller, 2012).

So what can girls, parents and the School do to realise this learning? In the words of Noel Pearson (2011): ‘Determination alone is no guarantee of success, but you won’t get very far without it .... Part of the quality of seriousness is determination. Another part is discipline’ (p. 12). Foreign language proficiency requires a serious approach to school-based curriculum development and
quality teaching and learning. Foreign language teachers strive for a ‘balance of accuracy and fluency–focused activities’ (Rifkin, 2003, p. 170). As opposed to the rote learning of previous eras, the ‘Communicative Method’, on which contemporary language teaching is based, values teaching, interaction and communicative competence. Listening and reading comprehension, speaking and writing ability, as well as the understanding of culture and perspectives, all allow learners to immerse themselves in authentic texts and be involved in communicative activities in groups. Students of modern languages are judged on their proficiency in listening, reading, writing and speaking. Language courses have further goals, such as learning about the history and literary traditions of the people who speak that language (Rifkin, 2003). Language teaching has also come a long way from the ‘Audiolingual Method’ taught in the mid–twentieth century, in which students memorised and recited numerous dialogues, but never really understood the meanings. Thus, language learning in the past was a behavioural exercise, rather than being concerned with interaction in authentic contexts (Rifkin, 2003).

Putting language skills to work in the ‘real world’ makes the language a living, and not simply an academic, entity. This is why our involvement with international Affiliate Schools is so important. The linguistic exchanges made possible by interacting with similar–age native speakers in France, Germany and Japan afford students entry to the melting pot of language and cultural immersion in a realistic context, extending language learning beyond the borders of the School. Girls learn to communicate in new and sophisticated ways through such exposure. Compared to previous generations, there is a shift to meaningful exchanges that are about more than seeing the world and participating in a homestay; these interactions also actively engage students in schooling and academic courses in the target country.

Overseas students come to us, too, and seek to align their linguistic and cultural knowledge of Australian English. These experiences bear fruit only if they are approached with determination and discipline. Immersing oneself in the world of another language is a profoundly challenging experience, but one which benefits the determined learner incalculably.

Many adults in our School community may have embarked on language–learning journeys without ultimately arriving at fluency. This is testament not only to the difficulty of the task of acquiring another language, but to the need for support for language learners. Encouragement from home is crucial in sustaining life–wide student engagement in language education. Pearson’s (2011) twin exhortations to determination and discipline are also invitations for us to support the girls in their linguistic endeavours. To succeed, girls need to engage seriously in their learning, and this can be difficult. Few girls are interested in writing out characters, vocabulary or model sentences for hours each week, but exercises like this are precisely the kind of comprehensive, disciplined study that leads to proficiency. Adults in the educational mix — who may have faced similar challenges in language learning, and who have developed the wisdom and long–term view that our girls do not yet have — can remind, cajole, and encourage girls in regular, systematic efforts that are integral to the achievement of the greater goal. In short, proficiency in a language is a long–term commitment, and a team effort.

Language proficiency and communication are essential to our girls’ education and to their effective participation in the global arena. Competency in additional languages is also important for the future of Australia. Right now, there is a happy coincidence of the personal and the national: language learning has long been understood as personally enriching, and there is now a broader acknowledgement of the ways in which it may well be nationally so. By committing to learning a language, the girls are learning not just the languages they will need to be economically ‘globile’, but qualities of discipline and determination that will enrich them far more profoundly as people.
REFERENCES


Resilience can mean different things across various disciplines.

‘In physics, resilience describes the process by which other objects revert to their original shape after being bent or stretched. In medicine, it refers to the ability of patients to recover from injury or illness’ (Clarke & Nicholson, 2010).

Howard and Johnson (1999) define resilience as ‘the inherent and nurtured capacity of individuals to deal with life’s stresses in ways that enable them to lead healthy and fulfilled lives.’

Psychologist Andrew Fuller is an expert in child, adolescent and family psychology and consults to communities and schools about the promotion of resilience. He provides a more accessible definition for youth, describing resilience as ‘the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life’ (2012). Whenever ‘tough stuff’ happens, resilience is the ability to rise above and rebound from adversity (Fuller, 2012).

Whatever the discipline, the recurring theme linked to resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’. Research has identified that some people appear to be more resilient than others, less deterred by setbacks and clearly demonstrating a greater ability to bounce back, regardless of life experiences that threaten to disturb and overwhelm them. How we develop and promote resilience is an area of intense research and debate.

Research into resilience often focuses on risk and protective factors. Risk factors are particular characteristics or circumstances that, if present, increase the likelihood that an individual, when exposed to stress, will develop an emotional or behavioural problem (Keogh & Weisner, 1993).

Longitudinal studies in this area have revealed that, as the number of risk factors in a person’s life increases, the chance of a positive emotional outcome decreases (Gilligan, 2000). Cumulative risk leads to poorer outcomes with respect to emotional resilience. Reducing the number of risk factors, even by one, has been found to have a significant impact on the individual’s level of functioning (Gilligan, 2000).

In the shift towards a strength-based approach, research has broadened to consider protective factors, which have a profound impact on resilience and can serve to ameliorate the adverse effects of risk factors. Indeed, psychological outcomes are now understood to be determined by the interplay of risk factors and protective factors. Protective factors are described as attributes of the individual and their environment that temper the effect of the individual’s susceptibility to stress (Carbonell, Reinherz, & Giaconia, 1998). Research has identified a range of protective factors that impact on outcomes for at-risk youth, making it clear that there is no single pathway to resilience (Fuller, 2012).

Characteristics of the individual found to promote resilience include high levels of persistence, approachability and well-developed social skills. Environmental factors that have been shown to lead to a positive outcome include family stability and support, sound peer relationships, community involvement, and a sense of connectedness to family and friends.

Problems arise when risk factors outweigh protective factors; however, while an increased number of risk factors can be associated with low resilience, the right combination of protective factors could prevail over the negative effect of risk. It is this process of interaction between risk and protective factors, at both the individual
and environmental level, that is said to determine resilience (Kalland, 2002). There is evidence that it may, in fact, be the individual level factors that have the greatest contribution to resilience and, therefore, exert the most influence (Kalland, 2002).

In 1993, Werner (cited in Keogh & Weisner) identified that young people with inadequate coping skills were still able to develop resilience through the use of education and intervention programmes that focused on the promotion of social skills and problem solving. In the last two decades, a range of intervention programmes for youth have been developed world-wide. These programmes aim to reduce the number of risk factors while simultaneously promoting protective factors and individual strengths. Working from a strength base to develop a positive outcome is ultimately more respectful of the young person. A sound example of one such model is the evidenced-based ‘Friends’ programme, written by Dr Paula Barrett, Founding Director of Pathways Health and Research Centre, and currently used in the Year 8 Ethics programme.

An important component of the School’s strategy for resilience education is engaging authoritative guest speakers to address students, staff and parents. This year we have benefitted from presentations by Mr Paul Dillon and Mr Brett Lee, experts in drug education and cybersafety respectively. Both these respected presenters have identified that the key to protecting our youth rests in education.

Paul Dillon has been working in the area of drug education for the past twenty-five years. Through his own business, Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia (DARTA), he works with many agencies and organisations across the country to give regular updates on problem drug trends within the community. Paul’s work with many school communities ensures that they have access to good quality information and best practice drug education. His best-selling book for parents, Teenagers, Alcohol and Drugs, was released in 2009.

Paul Dillon’s presentations to the students are quite unique and always exceptionally well-received. A previous teacher with a tremendous wealth of knowledge in his area and a talent for connecting with teenagers, Paul is able to engage with the girls in a very special way and build meaningful relationships with them that continue to develop across three years. Each year, members of staff comment on his ability to connect with his student audience. Paul’s key focus is on developing a trusting relationship with the girls, which ensures that the information he offers is accepted.

As emotional ties of connectedness between youth and adult occur, information provided during the teachable moment is more likely to be accepted and become deeply learned, not because of the information per se, but because of its context, the caring process. (Brown, 2004)

Presentations such as those given by Mr Dillon and Mr Lee have their foundations in resilience education. Resilience education acknowledges that some people have certain protective factors built in. These factors in a person’s life promote wellbeing, and can be qualities inherent in either the individual or their environment. Resilience education aims to strengthen the existing qualities of the young person and improve the environmental factors they are exposed to in order to assist them to make positive decisions across important areas such as alcohol, drugs and using online technology.
Unfortunately, some drug and cyber education programmes are delivered in an attempt to scare young people through techniques that involve fear arousal. Research has shown that this strategy has not been successful for many young people and, in fact, can have the reverse effect, discouraging a young person’s quest for knowledge and limiting their opportunities for critical decision-making (Dillon, 2013).

Resilience education centres on fostering a balanced environment that is supportive of youth with a direct focus on the specific protective factors and appropriate information that will allow for lifelong flourishing. There is little evidence to suggest that resilience-based prevention programmes will reduce the rate of experimentation with alcohol and other drugs; however, the research does indicate that the more resilient young people are, they will be less likely to fall into serious trouble with high-risk behaviours including frequent or heavy alcohol or other drug use (Dillon, 2013).

By nurturing and strengthening the individual protective factors of our students and ensuring that we continue to provide a range of positive environmental factors for them, we increase their resilience and give them a greater chance of bouncing back when they are faced with future challenges.

REFERENCES

Why is it that some students seem to breeze through their study and turn up well prepared for tests, whereas others struggle to implement the sort of study strategies that are the most effective for improving their educational outcomes? The results of an investigation of study habits by Hartwig and Dunlosky (2012) show the most reported study strategies are underlining or highlighting while reading (seventy–two per cent); testing oneself with questions or practice problems (seventy–one per cent); rereading chapters, articles, notes (sixty–six per cent); and using flashcards (sixty–two per cent), while a review of the effectiveness of commonly used learning techniques found all but self–testing to be of surprisingly low utility (Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, & Willingham, 2013). Relatively few students chose to create diagrams, charts or pictures (fifteen per cent) which have been shown to lead to a deeper understanding of science concepts (Cheng, 2002) and to improve test performance (Davidowitz, Chittleborough, & Murray, 2010; Gobert & Clement, 1999). Why is this so?

Science educators desire more than knowledge acquisition for their students. Science is about understanding; so, in our minds, worthwhile learning is achieved when students understand the underlying principles of scientific concepts and theories in order to be able to explain and solve problems related to real–life phenomena. Given that most of the phenomena studied in science are very complex and unable to be directly observed — either too big, too small, too fast, too slow, too far away, or too inaccessible — scientists use models as a means of simplification or to assist with the visualisation of what is actually happening.

Visualisation can be defined in two ways, both of which are important in the construction of scientific models. External visualisation is the process of making something visible to the eye. Displaying information in a graph or drawing a diagram are forms of external visualisation. Internal visualisation, on the other hand, is the process of making a mental image of a concept. An example of this is trying to imagine the reaction mechanism of a chemical reaction. Students need to develop their visualisation skills and their metavisual capability in order to be able to regulate the multiple modes used to represent and communicate scientific concepts (Gilbert, 2007).

According to Gilbert (2007), models of scientific phenomena can be expressed or represented at three different levels: the macroscopic level, the sub–microscopic level, and the symbolic level. The differences between each type of representation can be illustrated with a precipitation reaction, which is a typical example of a scientific phenomenon that can be observed at the macroscopic level but can only be fully explained using elements that are too small to be observed with the naked eye. When students describe their observations of the reaction taking place in a test tube, they are modelling the reaction at the macroscopic level. Drawing a diagram or writing an appropriate chemical equation represents the reaction at the symbolic level. When students try to make
A deep understanding of a scientific phenomenon involves the ability to construct, and move fluently between, the three levels of representation (Gilbert, 2007). For students who have a deep understanding of precipitation reactions, the balanced chemical equation elegantly represents the behaviour of the reaction species on all three levels.

Yet research has shown that chemistry students who receive extensive tuition and practice in each level of representation may still struggle to achieve expertise in one or more of them, and fail to move between them with the necessary fluency (Wu & Shah, 2004). Young chemistry students flounder at the symbolic level, and struggle to make sense of chemical formulae and equations, while many older students perform well at the macroscopic and symbolic levels, but have a poor understanding of the phenomenon at the sub-microscopic level where real understanding and productive explanation is situated (Hinton & Nakhleh, 1999). This inability to access levels of representation and the lack of fluency moving between them is indicative of poor internal visualisation skills and underdeveloped metavisual capacity and is, clearly, an impediment to learning (Gilbert, 2007).

These weaknesses can make science hard to learn. Cognitive research into the mechanism by which we acquire and apply knowledge, how information is encoded in memory and retrieved from it, and the types of mental representations that result from everyday experiences provides some recommendations for improving a student’s internal visualisation and mental model construction.

Mental models act as internal representations of information gathered by observation from the real world. They are the mechanism by which students gain access to the sub-microscopic level of representation. Rapp (2007) defines mental models as ‘memory structures that can be used to extrapolate beyond a surface understanding of presented information, to build deeper comprehension of a conceptual domain’ (p. 43). While faulty or inaccurate mental models can impede learning, valid and reliable models can facilitate it (Rapp, 2007). Mental models are personal constructs, so students must take responsibility for their own model development. Robust and fruitful mental models are intertwined with a deep understanding.

The pursuit of a deep understanding is both effortful and time consuming, so students must be motivated to be actively engaged in the learning process.

Science is neither done, learned nor communicated through verbal language alone because verbal discourse has not evolved sufficiently well to cope with the cognitive demands of the discipline (Lemke, 1998). The everyday experiences of students are not conducive to the formation of useful mental models, so teachers provide visual enhancements to assist in the visualisation process. As a result, communication in science classrooms, as it is in science, is achieved through the integration of verbal text, mathematical expressions, realia, and numerous discipline-specific external visualisations, such as graphs, tables, drawings, abstract diagrams, microscope images, maps, and photographs. The dynamism lost in these types of graphics has been recovered in other more kinetic visualisations such as video and animations, over which the user has some control. Many visualisations are primarily Illustrative and have little or no explanatory power. Illustrative diagrams can facilitate recall and comprehension but diagrams that are more explanatory in nature are needed for higher order conceptual understanding. Modern multimodal technology facilitates the creation of complex visual presentations, so when students are in class learning about a particular domain or at home revising it, they will have a variety of visualisation tools at their fingertips.

Unfortunately, research has shown that students cannot always access the intended learning when presented with diagrams and other visual tools (Canham & Hegarty, 2010). It appears that in many cases they are unable to extricate the most pertinent features of the representation. Human
cognition is such that individuals vary in their working memory capacity and therefore attention is capacity–limited. Because objects in a visual display compete for attention, students can suffer cognitive overload, wasting precious working memory processing capacity on irrelevant details. Cognitive overload might also contribute to the failure to make the necessary links between the external visualisation and the macroscopic and sub–microscopic levels of representation (Leutner, Leopold, & Sumfleth, 2009).

Rather than merely presenting students with diagrams, teaching them to generate their own has been shown to improve conceptual understanding and assessment outcomes. Gobert and Clement (1999) investigated the performance of three groups of students studying the domain of plate tectonics. One group just read the text, the second group made a summary, and the third group generated their own diagrams. The researchers hypothesised that the task of generating diagrams while reading would promote richer mental model construction rather than simply reading text or creating summaries, two study strategies very popular with students (Hartwig & Dunlosky, 2012). The posttest (test administered after instruction) assessed knowledge of spatial/static aspects of the domain, for example, ‘Where is the thinnest part of the earth’s crust?’ and causal/dynamic aspects of the domain, for example, ‘Rock from the floor of the Atlantic Ocean tests to be younger than rock from the middle of the North American continent because …’. While the summaries contained more domain–related surface detail, the diagram group outperformed the other two groups in questions related to both static and dynamic aspects of the domain. The authors claim that, as plate tectonics is a domain that is not able to be directly observed by students, they must engage in causal model construction to generate internal representations of complex processes in order to be able to depict these relationships externally in the form of diagrams (Gobert & Clement, 1999).

What is of interest to students studying for upcoming tests is the method used by the researchers (Gobert & Clement, 1999) to scaffold the process of drawing diagrams. Firstly, they asked students to depict a static representation of the domain, in this case the interior layers of the earth. Then they encouraged them to add a depiction of the dynamic processes gleaned from their reading. Finally, students were asked to depict the outcomes of these processes, such as mountain formation and volcanic eruption. This strategy aims to progressively refine students’ understanding of the domain as they progressively construct more complex models of it. It also reflects the evolution from description to explanation commonly employed in science texts.

All processes pertaining to assessment are complex. We assess students’ surface understanding by asking questions that are relatively familiar to them. They succeed on these types of questions by being able to recall what they have heard or read or by being able to apply their knowledge in relatively straightforward situations. We also need to give students with deep understanding the chance to reveal what they know and show what they can do with the expertise they have acquired. For this purpose, we create questions that ask students to reason logically about scientific concepts and theories and to apply them in novel situations, often in unseen domains. Rapp (2007) claims that, as internal representations of a student’s understanding, mental models can act like a mental simulation which can be ‘run’ for the purpose of solving problems. He believes that students can use their mental model of a concept to reason beyond course materials. It gives them the capacity to generate hypotheses, apply their knowledge to an extended range of contexts, and transfer it to new domains. Ultimately, generative mental models contribute to the deep understanding of scientific concepts that science educators desire for their students.

Learning science presents unique challenges when it comes to studying for tests. It is a multimodal discipline and students require multiliteracies to succeed. Clearly, assisting students with the development of their visualisation skills and metavisual capacity to achieve mental model capture should be an imperative of science education. ®
REFERENCES

Canham, M., & Hegarty, M. (2010). Effects of knowledge and display design on comprehension of complex graphics. Learning and Instruction, 20, 155–166.


Technology has reprogrammed
the way we use our eyes to take
in the world around us. It has
redefined the boundaries of
usability and inherent traits.

Technology exploits the corruptions
and angles of our nature: gossip, sensitivity,
and snarky curiosity. Almost as if technology itself
took over, creating a smoother and more flattened
style, making technology impossible to resist.
Disciplines make the academic world go around. Faculties teach them, grades and degrees are conferred in them, teaching positions are advertised in them. The whole high-school world runs on timetables divided up by disciplines. The Lilliputians thought Gulliver’s watch was his god; and, as his fob was to him, our timetables — the temporal distillation of many centuries of disciplinary thinking — are to us.

Our students look at their timetables almost as often as they consult their phones, because their lives are run by them. But disciplines do not just shape the girls’ routines, they also shape their thought processes. The lines that delineate the lessons on their timetables also demarcate separate territories in their developing intellects. The girls learn an English way of doing things, a History way, a Physics way and a German way. The overlaps and complementarities between these ways understandably go unnoticed, because to the girls the differences between the disciplines are manifest: different rooms, different textbooks, different teachers, different ways of doing things, and most likely, different grades.

Don’t get me wrong; I come to praise disciplines, not to bury them. After all, thinking in terms of disciplines has enabled the specialisation, expertise and analytical rigour on which our intellectual, technological and artistic modernity are founded. By working within discipline confines, specialist physicists, linguists and historians have added to the sum of our knowledge and skills incalculably. Our girls do great work because we inculcate in them the cultures and repertoires that our specialties bring.

A strengthening current in the academic world, however, suggests that the sharp focus enabled by working exclusively within disciplines also fosters a kind of myopia, obscuring the connections and interrelatedness between fields which have been constructed over centuries as discrete and even competing republics. The main contention of this article, therefore, is that schools and parents need to help students to look not just within but also beyond and between the long-standing but nonetheless arbitrary boundaries between academic disciplines to what has been termed — rather unappealingly — transdisciplinarity.

Transdisciplinarity differs from its prefix-siblings multi and inter in that it starts not with disciplines that we might contrive to combine, but with problems we seek to solve. A transdisciplinary approach draws on whatever solutions and skills any or all of the traditional disciplines might offer us, but also draws on the kinds of thought that might lie outside conventional disciplines.

Transdisciplinary writers and thinkers often use metaphors which cast practitioners as ‘the conductor of an orchestra’ (Morin, 2008, p. 27), marshalling diverse areas of expertise into a systematic whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. Less eruditely, transdisciplinary approaches can be envisaged as like that stage of a heist movie in which the brains of the operation gathers a team of experts in a range of nefarious fields, each essential to the whole of the caper, but none capable of pulling it off alone. With his customary clarity, Daniel Pink argues that ‘what’s in greatest demand today isn’t analysis but synthesis — seeing the big picture and, crossing...
boundaries, being able to combine disparate pieces into an arresting new whole’ (2005, p. 66). Reminiscent of the aforementioned conductor analogy, he calls this faculty ‘symphony’ (2005, p. 66) and includes it in his list of the six senses required in a world where specialised tasks will either be outsourced or turned into an app.

Pink’s apprehension about an imminent specialist-created but specialist-unfriendly future is shared by proponents of transdisciplinarity, notably the Romanian theoretical physicist, and champion of the transdisciplinary movement, Basarab Nicolescu.

Nicolescu responds to the now-truism that we will all have to change jobs and careers several times in our working lives with the caution that doing so ‘is practically impossible in the context of an accelerated super-specialization’ (2012, p. 11). He argues for a complement to traditional discipline-based study in schools, stating bluntly that ‘excessive, precocious specialization should be outlawed in a world which is in rapid change’ (2012, p. 14). This does not mean that schools should become specialists in generality, churning out jacks-of-all-trades. Rather, proponents see their approach as an adjunct, ‘an indispensable complement to the disciplinary approach’ (Nicolescu, 2012, p. 11), as ‘one cannot do open heart surgery if one has not learned surgery; one cannot solve a third-degree equation if one has not learned mathematics; one cannot be a producer without knowing theatrical techniques’(Nicolescu, 2012, pp. 13–14). It does mean, however, that space — actual and intellectual — should be found for students to pursue enquiries through, across, between, and beyond the realms of the conventional subject divides.

My experience in schools, however, is that disciplinariness rules. It runs so deep that girls derive their identities from them, as in ‘I’m a Humanities student’, or ‘I’m a Science nerd’. From inside these silo mindsets, it is unsurprising that teachers are sometimes heard bemoaning the girls’ inability to make connections between what they do in different subjects. Last week I spoke to a teacher of Science who revealed that girls abandoned the basics of English grammar when writing reports for her subject, seemingly under the impression that they no longer applied in the non-English realm of Science. Many girls show great skill in the logical setting out of Mathematics problems, but do not see that the same patterns of logic underpin the construction of analytical paragraphs in English and the Humanities. I had a chat to my Year 10 class this week, urging them to use nominalisation — a tool for conciseness in their writing — in their other subjects, fully aware that they were about to file it under ‘English’ alone. I would argue that it is hard for the girls to pare back the disciplinary differences to reveal the fundamental commonalities beneath the demarcated surface, but it is important, not just for their academic success, but on a much grander scale, that we help them to do so.

As is often the case, it is the exception that proves the rule. I have been gratified to note recently the girls in my classes making connections between what we are doing and what they are doing in other disciplines. The Latin scholars in my Year 10 class have enjoyed pulling Macbeth words apart using their classical grounding. A Year 12 student last year brought her Music Extension expertise to class one day, demonstrating, better than I could, how altering the soundtrack could be used to sway film viewers to a particular response. One of my Year 12 girls this year applied her musicality to the rhythm of a love poem we were studying to make a valid and imaginative point that my narrow expertise prevented me from seeing. The girls can do it, and enjoy the experience, but it remains novel. Essentially, the girls are shifting modes from the traditional tendency to extrapolate from one disciplinary perspective to one in which they interpolate to a fertile new area that lies in the interstices between two or more disciplinary perspectives. Transdisciplinary experts call this kind of interpolative approach the logic of the excluded middle.

Philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin (2008) argues that the astounding complexity of our modern world has given rise to problems of equivalent complexity: ‘polycrises’. Such polycrises are intractable when viewed from the single perspectives of economics, psychology, quantum physics, or biology, but solutions may be found that draw selectively from these and other fields and synthesise them into a novel approach. My homespun heist metaphor seems apt here: there is a need for someone to be the ‘brains’ of the operation
— for the kind of thinkers who can see that the solutions to
polycrises like disease, conflict, debt, planetary degradation,
access, and inequality may well lie in the overlaps between
the disciplines. The safecracker, the geek, and the getaway driver
are all well and good, but they are useless without the one
who has a moment of serendipitous insight that pulls the
whole job together. Pink handily sums up this
transdisciplinary skill as a ‘meta-ability [that] goes by many
names — systems thinking, gestalt thinking, holistic thinking
[or] simply as seeing the big picture’ (2005, p. 137).

The strength of our disciplines at Girls Grammar is at the
core of our drive to be a leader in exceptional scholarship.
Increasingly, though, the School is finding spaces and ways to
augment this strength through the transdisciplinary. Having
paired House Group teachers from different disciplines
shows the Year 8 and Year 10 girls how these different areas of
expertise can complement each other. The Philosophy of
Learning program in Year 8 exposes and develops the kinds of
thinking skills and dispositions that run through and beyond
all of the subjects the girls study in their time here. Every
Faculty now has a team member from both Differentiated
Studies and Technology Studies, adding a different set of
disciplinary perspectives and methods to their repertoire.

When they arrive in 2015, Year 7 girls will undertake a
specifically transdisciplinary subject in their first year at the
School. Currently being designed by a multidisciplinary team
of teachers, this — as yet unnamed — subject will follow the
transdisciplinary approach by starting with problems and
drawing on solutions irrespective of discipline.

In the bigger picture of the girls’ post-disciplinary lives, a
transdisciplinary mindset will allow them to live the
principles of the Brisbane Girls Grammar School Strategic
Design. It will clearly allow them to put the ‘judicious’ in
‘judicious and ethical engagement with the world’, but it will
also enable them to press on with concept of ‘life-wide
learning’ articulated in the Design. I have to admit to an
initial struggle with the semantic shift from the traditional
notion of things being life-long to one in which they are
life-wide. But my excursion into the ideas of
transdisciplinarity has given me a clearer notion of why wide
works. In Nicolescu’s (2012, p. 11) words:

It will mean the emergence of continually connected
beings, who are able to adapt themselves to the changing
exigencies of professional life, and who are endowed
with a permanent flexibility which is always oriented
towards the actualization of their interior potentialities.

REFERENCES


Training tomorrow’s technologist

BRENDON THOMAS, CO-DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY STUDIES | 6 JUNE 2013

The need for today’s students to be innovative, self-managing and change-ready to contend with the complexities and challenges of the future continues to gain attention from researchers, education authorities and industry leaders (MCEETYA, 2008; Seely Brown, 2011). While technology teaching in schools varies depending on the learning context, resourcing, and leadership, the ultimate goal should be to train our students for a world that we cannot even envisage. Fostering scholarship for tomorrow’s innovative and creative technologist requires a threefold quest: staying responsive to emerging technologies, understanding how to apply technology in educational contexts, and tailoring learning to suit our students’ personal expectations.

The Technology Studies Faculty at Brisbane Girls Grammar School oversees the design and layering of information and communication technology (ICT) for cross-disciplinary learning endeavours, staff eLearning training, the learning management system, and elective curriculum studies. The technology curriculum includes elements of computer science, building client solutions, computer programming, information technology, and design technology.

Change is a constant for all sectors, not only education, with learning environments encompassing a much broader scope of technology resourcing and connectivity. The information available on the Internet constantly challenges us to rethink education while refining our notion of literacy. In addition, issues such as accessibility, privacy and reliability of information mean that the world has ‘one big data problem’ (Elbaz qtd. in Hardy, 2012). The data is at our fingertips, and can be tailored to our varying knowledge levels and appetites. The ambitious thinkers of tomorrow will need to digest and manage ‘big data’ in inventive, migratable and sustainable ways.

As educators, we need to ask how our assessment and learning culture encourages our students in digital technology innovation and enterprise. In some ways, the structured rhythm of the school day (McWilliam, 2012) can impede deep integration and considered cross-disciplinary inquiry.

In 2001 Dr Judith Ramaley coined the acronym STEM with reference to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Chute cited in Daugherty, 2013). She defined STEM as an educational inquiry placing learning in a real-world context, thereby creating opportunities in the pursuit of innovation (Daugherty, 2013).

Recently, several academic papers have emerged on the integration of the arts into the STEM paradigm — to create STEAM — for educators attempting to reinvigorate the role of creativity and innovation in STEM (Daugherty, 2013). Rhode Island School of Design presents STEAM as the contemporary way to foster new approaches to innovation by ‘combining the mind of a scientist or technologist with that of an artist or designer’ (RISD, n.d.).

Lewis (cited in Daugherty, 2013) notes that technology education, like arts education, ‘has always had to
contend with the question of its legitimacy as valid school knowledge; historically, both subjects entered the curriculum based on utilitarian rather than academic rationales.

Increasingly, educators and researchers are asserting the need for a greater infusion of creativity into traditional analytical curricula, such as those encompassed by the STEM disciplines (White cited in Mishra, Henriksen, & the Deep–Play Research Group, 2012). Brown (2009) concurs, suggesting educational focus on analytical and convergent thinking is so dominant in schools that most students leave school with ‘the belief that creativity is either unimportant or that it is the privilege of a few oddballs’.

This year, the Technology Studies Faculty had the opportunity to apply a STEAM–style philosophy and engage in valuable cross–disciplinary analysis and practice. In liaison with the School Psychologist, Director of Humanities and Dean of Students, we established a theme for the annual Digital Design Showcase. ‘Women Warriors of Folklore’ was selected as a stimulus for the girls to reflect and investigate the misrepresentation of women in pop–culture. The Year 10 Multimedia and Interactive Technologies (MIT) project commenced with a stimulating presentation from Ms A Dare, Director of Humanities, regarding the historical origins of women warriors. The responsibility of contributing to the current representations of women through the creation of individual digital design was discussed with the Year 10 students. This year’s assessment piece was enriched beyond just the development of digital skills. It also incorporated societal and historical dimensions as our Year 10 girls were given the chance to create a technology project that presented women through a desexualised lens of visual representation.

The Digital Design Showcase presented design and illustration of vector and bitmap imagery for print, video and textile design. Year 9 and Year 10 MIT students now move onto developing and applying problem solving in algorithmic logic and abstraction associated with programming digital games and robotics. The MIT subject encompasses engaged learning strategies to actively involve students in meaningful interactions with technology. Girls gain understanding and acquire skills in MIT as they respond to a broad range of complex technological challenges.

Teaching strategies in MIT include challenges in inquiry and problem–based computational thinking. Project–based learning stimulates critical thinking, collaboration, and decision–making processes and focuses on student–centred learning with authentic tasks. Cyber safety, cyber bullying, and social and ethical issues, as well as concepts of computer systems, are integrated throughout the two–year course.

Other recent cross–disciplinary ICT endeavours have included English cyber poetry, Science animations to represent the life of atoms and molecules, Drama multimedia backdrops and 3D digital stage design, Humanities pop culture and geographic websites, and video productions involving various subject areas.

If we are to train and nurture the bright and fertile minds for tomorrow’s ‘conceptual age’ (Pink, 2005), we will need to reflect in greater detail new ways of seeing rather than simply looking (Root–Bernstein & Root–Bernstein cited in Mishra, Henriksen, & the Deep–Play Research Group, 2012) at unconnected educational elements. Focusing on genuine and shared curricular prototyping engages our students as seekers of knowledge rather than receivers of information (Brown, 2009). To do this, we need a framework of skills and thinking that can be built into lessons and learning experiences that are rich in creativity and technology (Mishra, Henriksen, & the Deep–Play Research Group, 2012).
REFERENCES


For if you suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you first make thieves and then punish them. (More, 1516/2010)

In the fourteenth century William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England, proclaimed ‘Manners maketh man’. Manners — politeness, etiquette and charity — are the basis of our society; they are what give us our humanity. Understanding and following the rules of social behaviour and demonstrating respect and consideration towards others enhances our relationships and helps our society ‘work’, but these values are under pressure.

We are much more time-poor, sleep-deprived, stressed and anxious than previous generations. This is both caused and exacerbated by the fact that communication and technology have transformed life in recent decades. We now have no time to be bothered by nuisance telemarketers, everything is abbreviated, and it is quicker to send a text than to have a face-to-face conversation. Has there been a collapse in civility? Is being rude becoming more acceptable? Now, at the end of semester — when teachers are scrambling to meet reporting deadlines and tired students are finishing their last pieces of assessment while longing for the upcoming break — is perhaps a good time to reflect on the importance of good manners, treating each other well, and teaching our children and students these social competencies from their infancy.

Manners and etiquette, of course, are not set in concrete. They evolve and adapt as society does. Men no longer kiss a woman’s hand when introduced or offer to lay their jacket over a puddle so that she might avoid dirtying her shoes. The basic principles of good manners, however, have never changed: respect, consideration and honesty. Emily Post, American authority on etiquette early in the last century, once said, ‘Etiquette is the science of living. It embraces everything. It is the code of sportsmanship and of honour. It is ethics’ (qtd. in ‘Obituary: Emily Post’, 1960).

Research conducted this year by Australian social analysts McCrindle Research indicated that certain traditional manners are no longer as strictly observed as they used to be. Examples included offering a seat on public transport for the elderly, not swearing in public and saying ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and ‘hello’ (cited in Starke, 2013).

Professor Pier M. Forni of Johns Hopkins University and co-founder of the university’s Civility Initiative suggests that ‘we are both ruder and more civil than in times gone by … we are more accepting of people who look different and the disabled, and we have a higher ecological awareness’ (qtd. in Tugend, 2010). On the other hand, our notion of good manners is in decline and this ranges from an absence of deference to authority and age, to a failure to observe everyday courtesies such as greeting a colleague or allowing a fellow driver to merge into traffic (Tugend, 2010).

If our capacity for rudeness is increasing, what effect might this have on our society? Research conducted in the United States over the last decade has shown that many employees leave their workplaces each year because of continued incivility (Tugend, 2010). The study also found that employees were fifty per cent more likely to decrease their effort after experiencing ongoing rude behaviour (Tugend, 2010).
People have always had the capacity to be rude, but the impulsive and impersonal nature of digital communication has increased the potential for miscommunication, and has made it easier to be rude, to friends and strangers alike, with seeming impunity. Long-term friendships are lost due to controversial comments posted online, individuals are embarrassed because of unsanctioned videos and photographs that go viral, and bullies now have the tools to effortlessly and relentlessly harass their victims. 

Psychologist and professor Sherry Turkle of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology explains that ‘we are less inhibited online because we don’t have to see the reaction of the person we’re addressing… it’s harder to see and focus on what we have in common [so] we tend to dehumanize each other’ (qtd. in Bernstein, 2012). There is a feeling that we can say hurtful things about others anonymously online and one consequence of this is the disturbing statistic that half of all young people aged between 14 and 24 have experienced digitally abusive behaviour (Steyer, 2012, pp. 29–30).

Psychologists refer to face-to-face communication as ‘warm’ communication as opposed to ‘cold’ communication such as email and texts (Conyers, 2012). Seemingly, our connections with others are not as deep as they once might have been. People walking around wearing earphones listening to music, children watching videos or playing games on their parents’ iPhones while out at a restaurant for a family meal, teenagers standing around in a group at a party checking their Facebook pages or texting friends who couldn’t come — these are not images of humans connecting.

Children learn the difficult task of interpreting emotions by watching the faces of other people and listening to them closely. It’s hard work and unlikely to happen if everyone is peering at the screens of their smartphones. When we media multitask, we’re not really paying attention to the people around us and we get into the habit of not paying attention and therefore miss other important aspects of communication. (Stober, 2012)

Social media will continue to be the favoured communication form among young people, but this shift may begin to affect their ability to properly communicate in person with their peers (Fowlkes, 2012). To be considerate and respectful of each other, we need to spend time in face-to-face conversations. Indeed, Stanford research conducted with girls aged between 8 and 12 years has shown that girls with higher levels of face-to-face communication showed much better social and emotional development, and were more likely to experience social success and feelings of normalcy (Stober, 2012).

This is not a ‘young people nowadays’ rant; it has probably always been the case that the younger generation has questioned the values of their elders. Dr Helen Wright, headmistress and a leading commentator on education, urges parents to discuss and explore their values with their children (2013). She acknowledges the challenges of having complex, meaningful discussions about values in a world where digital communication seems to promote superficiality and the media usually paints pictures that are black and white, right or wrong. Human lives are complex and our children need their parents’ guidance more than ever before in the superficial world in which they are growing up (Wright, 2013).

There was once a notion of respecting and learning from one’s elders. Now there seems to be a growing perception among youth that their elders have little to offer, simply because they may not know what Snapchat, Instagram or a
‘selfie’ is. Marketing and the mass media foster and reinforce these perceptions, regrettably widening the generation gap (Cupit, 2013). Parents may not have their children’s technological savvy, but they do have a wealth of wisdom to impart that can only come from life’s experiences. The good news is that recent research undertaken by the University of Canberra’s educational institute has revealed that teenagers, perhaps despite all appearances, still love spending time with and talking to their parents (Macdonald, 2013). So it would seem that the opportunity is there to be taken!

In his recently released book, The Good Life (2013), social researcher and author Hugh Mackay laments the way the meaning of the proverb ‘charity begins at home’ has come to be misinterpreted in today’s society. In its most common usage, it is taken to mean that we should first look after our own (family, immediate circle) before worrying about the needs of others — an interpretation Mackay describes as convenient and self-serving. Its original intention was to remind us that children must first learn the lessons of charity — kindness, respect for others, compassion, generosity — in the home. Mackay implores us all to teach our children, right from the beginning, to take the rights, needs and wellbeing of others into account. He warns that, if this doesn’t happen at home, that it may never happen at all (Mackay, 2013, pp. 137–138). Forni asserts that:

When a mother corrects her son for chewing with his mouth open, and tells him people don’t like looking at half-chewed food, she has given him a rule of table manners, but also a fundamental notion of all ethical principles — actions have consequences for others. Good manners are the training wheels of altruism. (qtd. in Tugend, 2010)

One of the key areas of focus in the Year 9 Ethics programme this term has been to encourage the girls to build their capacity for empathy, to put themselves into someone else’s shoes. During the empathy training sessions students have been urged to take the time to tune into others, to interpret how they might be feeling, and to respond in appropriate, helpful ways. These skills, we hope, will empower them to foster positive, respectful relationships and consider the plights of others.

The Brisbane Girls Grammar School community places a great deal of importance on role-modelling and teaching good manners. There is an expectation that the girls will stand aside in hallways to let others pass, that they will be friendly and welcoming when visitors come to the School, and that they will thank their teachers at the end of each class. In the same way, we expect Grammar girls to conduct themselves in a respectful manner in the wider community by offering up seats on public transport, remembering their pleases and thank-yous, and generally acting as good ambassadors for the School. This notion of ‘the wider community’ also extends to their online lives. In their Ethics programmes at each Year level, the girls are taught to consider how they are portraying themselves online and the importance of leaving a digital footprint they can be proud of.

Our world may have changed through technological innovation and its accompanying propensity for informality, but consideration for others will never lose its relevance. Teachers and parents must adapt to these changes and work together to develop our young people’s social skills through positive role-modelling and meaningful conversations so that they may confidently navigate their way through life, building solid, respectful relationships with others.
REFERENCES


overheard a teacher recently discussing a writing task submitted and the student’s lack of appropriate punctuation. She described her sense, while reading, of having ’no room to breathe’, as the sentences flowed one after another in one continuous paragraph.

I was reminded of something that students of Japanese struggle with when they first encounter Japanese writing — the lack of space between words. Imagine reading this paragraph if there were no spaces between words. Where does one word end and the next one begin? Reading something when one cannot find the space to draw breath is difficult. As I thought a little further, I realised that the space between the lines of text is also important. Too little space allowed and the lines are all crammed together and the meaning is difficult to decipher. Too much space and the connections between characters and words are lost, rendering the passage ultimately meaningless, simply a collection of isolated words and characters.

When introducing students to Japanese texts, we teach them to recognise the particles in the sentence — the small one syllable characters after which a breath can be drawn and meaning can be made of the sentence. I am reminded that my Japanese students need to be shown or taught where to find the space, where to create the gap, so they can breathe and the meaning can become clear.

Finding the space, the gaps in which to breathe, in order to find meaning is important in all learning.

In her poem ‘Fire’, Judy Brown (cited in Brady, 2003) speaks of the importance of space:

What makes a fire burn
is the space between the logs,
a breathing space.

But the problem with space, rather perhaps the problem with us, is that too often we equate space with emptiness and our response is to fill it. Fill it with words, fill it with objects, fill it with people, fill it with activities. Whether it be checking Facebook updates for the latest celebrity news, or watching the latest reality TV show, or renovating ‘the block’, or being a master chef ruling the kitchen, we live lives filled to overflowing.

We’re so overloaded with voices, messages and blogs telling us stuff and more stuff, sometimes it seems we need background noise or constant distraction to function. (Schlegel, 2013)

Then there is our emphasis on productivity. As Dawson (2003) warns, we now have the ‘generation of a frantic culture of overwork that is now taken for granted, or grudgingly tolerated as the natural mode of working life’.

The danger in all this frantic, endless activity is superficiality when it comes to learning (Hart, 2004). Superficiality allows us to miss the opportunities for deeper understanding and more meaningful application.

Too often teachers lament that many students seem interested, concerned or pre-occupied as to whether what they are going to study in the next unit will be on the test, signifying that the subject matter is seen as a means to an end, something that is to be assessed and then forgotten as we move to the next unit. And too often teachers lament the lack of connection students make between their various subjects across their learning. Woods (2013) speaks of ‘silo mindsets’ where students derive their identity from the discipline divisions that exist in schools. Learning is then is reduced to a check-list of finite chunks of information to be learnt for the next test or assignment and then forgotten.
Can part of the problem be that during the school day, and in our classes, the space required for students to make these connections between their subjects and their learning is lacking? That there is no space for the space required?

Connections between learning and deeper understanding require both space and time. We know that depth in learning implies higher-order understanding and application, creativity, problem-solving, and self-reflection. ‘Deep encounters with knowledge and with one another have the potential to transform the learner and the process of learning’ (Hart, 2004).

So building fires requires attention to the spaces in between, as much as to the wood. (Brown cited in Brady, 2003)

How can this space be created? What would it look like if we invited students to ponder the questions that they want answers to? Can we encourage students to sit in the grey, the ‘unknowing’? The ‘unknowing’ is an uncomfortable space to sit in, but is actually the space from where deep understanding can come.

Too often, as students, we want the easy answer, the quick answer, so we can move onto the next thing. As teachers, too, giving the answer is easy, as it allows us to go on and continue with the curriculum that students must know before their test. However, this emphasis on one right answer often works against depth of exploration. The result is that neither teachers nor students are willing to undertake risks for understanding; instead, they content themselves with correct answer compromises (Hart, 2004).

Can we open the space in our classrooms where holding paradoxical or contradictory perspectives long enough may frustrate and transform normal thinking (Hart, 2004)?

Studies of creative individuals, from Mozart to Einstein, give us clues that, although analytic practices are important and often necessary, they are insufficient to explain the depths of creativity and insight. Similarly, disciplines ranging from literary analysis to cognitive psychology identify the important function of gaps in the learning and inventive process. It is these cognitive gaps or spaces that allow for the possibility of conceptual flexibility and multiplicity (Hart, 2004). Creativity takes quiet time and a sense of space to encounter it with our full attention (Dawson, 2003).

What we know of effective learning is that the predominant factor is not merely time on task; it is the quality of attention brought to that task. Studies show that performance, behaviour and depth are tied to attention (Hart, 2004). As teachers, we quickly recognise that a student’s ability to direct and sustain her attention towards a task has a direct impact on her success. If our attention is somewhere else, scattered or racing perhaps, we may have little capacity to be present (Hart, 2004).

I know that the success of my lesson is influenced by not only how I come to it, by what my attention is focused on, but also by how my students turn up to it. Do they come fresh and ready to learn Japanese; or do they come pre-occupied with a range of concerns about the coming weeks and tasks that need to be addressed, particularly at this time of term? How many assignments they have, when the next one is due, how difficult their last one was. While they are present physically in my classroom, are they present to the task at hand?

Our job as teachers, parents and students is to find that all important balance between fuel and space, between facts and learning, to find the gaps to breathe and find meaning, so that the fire of deep understanding can ignite and burn passionately.

A fire grows simply because the space is there with openings in which the flame that knows just how it wants to burn can find its way. (Brown cited in Brady, 2005)
REFERENCES


ANNALIESE THOMAS / 11L (DETAIL)
Anyone who saw Brisbane Girls Grammar School’s 2011 Senior Drama Production would never forget the strange world of Bustown. A dystopian vision of the future, Bustown was compelling with its quirky characters, playful use of pop culture and inventive language choices. Written by acclaimed Australian playwright Lachlan Philpott and directed by Head of Drama Ms Joanne Martin, the production was a great success and therefore it is not surprising that the School has looked to Philpott again in 2013 to stage the Senior Drama Production.

Last year was an especially busy one for Lachlan Philpott. Not only did he obtain an Australia Council literature residency to work in San Francisco for five months but he had several of his plays performed on stages around the world, from Australia to the UK and Argentina. Amongst the myriad of projects underway in 2012, Philpott took the time to write a specially commissioned work for Brisbane Girls Grammar School — The Chosen.

With an imposing physical stature, a deep baritone voice and a broad smile, Philpott’s easy rapport with students reflects his years working in Youth Theatre and also as a teacher at NIDA, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, and in various schools across New South Wales.

Philpott’s notion of being a playwright is not necessarily someone who is locked away in an attic tapping on a keyboard but rather one who sees the creative process as collaborative, by working with actors, directors and designers. Ms Martin describes Philpott’s engagement in the project as bringing ‘a joy and light-heartedness to what is a serious and complex process.’

The process of writing The Chosen began in 2012 with Philpott spending many Friday afternoons with a group of Year 11 Drama students, workshopping ideas, characters and plot lines. Although Philpott came to the process with a central theme, the students’ ideas and voices formed an integral framework for the play. It was very important for Philpott to hear their opinions and capture the essence of teenage girls: the way they speak and behave, and their motivations and ambitions. Philpott also knows that audiences enjoy seeing aspects of themselves reflected in art. He says, ‘It’s very much like when we see a film that was filmed in our hometown, a place that we know well. There’s a connection to it when it’s acknowledged. When we see the place we spend our time in, we live in, and struggle in, it is quite nice to see that represented on stage.’

The Chosen is not set in Brisbane Girls Grammar School as such, but the audience of Grammar girls, their teachers, families and friends will find amusement in recognising aspects of both life at school and Brisbane in general.

The Chosen certainly carries the hallmarks of a typical Philpott play in that it is highly original, grounded in the truth but at the same time quite stylised and theatrical. Choosing to use a choir — almost like a Greek chorus commenting on the action and driving the narrative — adds another fun dimension to the production. The Director, Ms Martin, says that ‘the songs are partly recognition of this generation’s enjoyment of a soundtrack for all experiences and a choice that enhances the “Glee-esque” style of the play. They also deepen the sense of community created throughout the narrative.’

Ms Martin has thoroughly enjoyed the building of this production: ‘Its fast-paced, zippy, punchy dialogue,
punctuated by poetic musings on a universe filled with life force, makes for energised rehearsals and an upbeat tempo. Exciting as the performances will be for audience and actor alike, it is the rehearsal period that matters most from an educator’s point of view. To be privy to the very beginning of a creative process, learning about the machinations of script writing — the craft of development, editing and refinement — and then being involved in the struggle to bring the page to the stage is an invaluable learning experience for the senior Drama students. The process can be challenging, exhausting and time-consuming but, on the flip side, the sense of shared energy and perseverance culminating in the final product is tremendously rewarding.

Ms Martin’s fine talents as a director have shone on the stage of the Gehrmann Theatre in previous productions (The Miracle 2010, Bustown 2011). These talents, honed after twenty years of teaching Drama at prestigious schools in Sydney, enable the cast of The Chosen to feel a level of trust in her ability to bring out the very best in their performances. However, even this veteran of many school productions feels the pressure to do justice to Lachlan Philpott’s play. This is the first time that a secondary school in Queensland has commissioned work from such an acclaimed playwright and completed the artistic cycle in publishing the work. The fact that Playlab will be publishing the play, including photos from the Girls Grammar premiere, adds a great deal of gravitas to the project. Sharing the pressure with Ms Martin is the equally talented Mrs Katrina Riveros, who is developing a piece of physical theatre which will act as a prequel to the main play. This was a way to include all the students who had been involved in the initial developmental stage of the process, and it has the full blessing of the playwright.

Another cast member who is feeling a little apprehensive yet thrilled to be a part of The Chosen is the lead actor, Year 11 student Sophia Bergman. Despite winning the Prize for Year 10 Drama last year, Sophia has never been involved in any previous production and she is amazed at the effort needed to stage a play. Sophia plays the main character, ‘Freya Star’, and much of the story line revolves around her and her struggle to find her place within the complex dynamics of school life and the grander scheme of things.

It will be incredibly exciting to see the lights come up on the opening night of The Chosen. The end product of two years of dreaming, workshopping, scripting and shaping — this will be a School event not to be missed.
Perspectives 2013
In a contemporary world awash with visual images, writing still matters. Thinking deeply and reflecting is more important than ever, and articulating our views in prose remains a vital skill.

At Girls Grammar it is our students who best express the quality of the education we provide, and it is important that we offer the girls a platform for their voices to be heard within the School and in our wider community.

One of the benefits of having students write and express their ideas is that it is a healthy exploration of identity, which is a natural part of adolescence. Arguably, spending some time framing their views, and considering the views of others, through a written piece contributes more to this process than endlessly trawling Instagram or Facebook.

While developing visual literacy in our girls is an essential element of their education, there is the risk that the pendulum is swinging too far. Most of us are becoming more impatient in our desire to access information instantly, succinctly and visually. Yet, there remains a place for the well-reasoned, carefully constructed and reflective piece that, naturally, can transmit more sophisticated ideas in greater depth and with more nuance than via a post or a tweet.

Writing, good writing, is powerful. It can lead to profound change when an idea or fresh perspective causes us to rethink our own views, spur us to action or simply give us pause for thought. At Girls Grammar, we have a long tradition of presenting ‘Insights’ from our staff; I now introduce some ‘Perspectives’ from our students.
Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation. — Oscar Wilde

Everything begins with a thought. One thought develops into an accumulation of thoughts. These thoughts build up, and we make links between them to form opinions. The development of our opinions leads to action, which inspires more thought!

We express our opinions every day through lunchtime conversations, classroom discussions and over dinner at home. We have a view on everything from our favourite TV show, to who is the best leader for our country, to which of mum’s home-cooked meals is the most delicious.

It is Oscar Wilde’s opinion that most people take on others’ views rather than perhaps being brave enough to form their own. The quotation above is a call for us all to be strong enough to accept our individuality and thus avoiding becoming a clone of someone else.

So why is it important for teenagers, in particular, to have their own opinions?

Firstly, it is our right, as global citizens, to have a view on the happenings of the world we live in. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) supports this, with Article 12 stating that children (defined as people below the age of eighteen years) have the right to freely express their opinions and to be heard, and Article 13 declaring that they should be allowed ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.’

Additionally, research shows that expressing your opinions brings long-lasting benefits in numerous ways, which I will explore in this article.

Expressing an opinion requires higher-order thinking skills

Critically evaluating an issue and forming an opinion is not easy to do. It involves remembering information, seeking out new data and understanding this data, applying knowledge to different situations, analysing and evaluating these situations, and creating meaning. In fact, it involves all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, a classification of intellectual behaviour levels developed in 1956 by a group of educators led by psychologist Benjamin Bloom (Clark, 2013).

In classes at School we are encouraged to use our higher-order thinking skills in all aspects of learning — to consider the author’s intentions in English, to apply our knowledge of calculus to new and difficult problems in Maths, to compose music in our own style in Classroom Music. This means we are not simply regurgitating information, which involves only the lower-order thinking skills of remembering and understanding, and is neither constructive nor challenging.

As teenagers, it is very important for us to develop these crucial higher-order skills so that when we enter the ‘real world’ we are able to more easily decipher large amounts of information and come to decisions.

Teenagers’ different perspectives can lead to positive change

Teenagers can often present different perspectives on topical issues, and some countries are already asking young people for ideas on issues relevant to them.

In 2007 Ireland’s Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched a national consultation involving conversing with more than 200 teenagers from across Ireland about their opinions of solutions to alcohol misuse. The teenagers
suggested offering alcohol–free venues — such as youth cafes offering facilities including karaoke, DVDs, Internet access and music events — as a reasonable alternative to going to ‘the pub’ (McEvoy, 2008). Participants also proposed the establishment of a group of teenagers to evaluate existing youth cafes and suggest improvements (McEvoy, 2008).

These insightful recommendations by ‘engaged’ and ‘keen’ young people demonstrate the benefits of giving teenagers a voice. In fact, as a result of this national consultation, Ireland’s Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) has recently announced their Youth Cafe Capital Funding Programme which will provide funding of up to one million euros (approximately AUD $1.4 million) for the refurbishment or establishment of new youth cafes.

EXPRESSING AN OPINION DEVELOPS COMMUNICATION SKILLS

In January this year I attended the National Youth Science Forum in Canberra. The Forum had a particular focus on the importance of good communication, specifically that effective communication between science and society is essential. We were able to express our opinions on topical issues in three debates, which covered topics such as the link between the consumption of sugary foods and obesity, whether the International Criminal Court should be able to prosecute for crimes against the environment, and whether the government should be funding scientific research when there are arguably more pressing issues at hand.

One thing that was highlighted at the Forum was the importance of communication skills, not only in a professional sense, but in every aspect of our lives. With social media providing even more methods of communication than ever before, it is imperative that we are able to express our thoughts and opinions in an appropriate manner. This can only come with practice. If, as teenagers, we start to think deeply about current topics and work on clearly articulating our opinions, we will be well set–up for the future.

Our opinions matter. They may not be the same as others and they may not be supported by the majority; however, in allowing ourselves to speak them freely, we might just open another thought in another mind, which could lead to a better future for us all. It is the forming of opinions and the way we express these opinions that will develop our individual personae and how we can contribute to the ever–changing world in which we live.

REFERENCES


Indigenous issues, while not always making headline news, are among the most significant to face us as a nation in the twenty-first century.

Life expectancy is nineteen years less for Indigenous men than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and less than one third of Indigenous students complete Year 12 compared to over three-quarters of non-Indigenous students. While these are startling statistics their true meaning is often not heard or felt. The reality of these facts and figures are the shortened life expectancy of the mothers, fathers, uncles and aunties of our First People who have lived diminished lives and died before their time. As Michael Dodson, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Commissioner, has said, 'We die silently under these statistics.'

While it is easy to become deaf to statistics, raising awareness of the human face behind these figures is important. Without awareness there can be no understanding and without understanding there can be no call to action; some things will never change.

My awareness of Indigenous history can be traced back to primary school when I first learned about Captain Cook and his arrival in Australia. I don’t remember the details of what I was taught but I have always felt guilty about the difficulties Indigenous Australians have faced since early colonial times. (I now realise that I have no cause to feel guilt as I cannot take responsibility for past decisions or actions.)

During the Christmas holidays my family visited the Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park in central Australia. This trip revealed the rich and long cultural history of the Anangu people through their stories, song, dance and ceremonies. The cultural heritage of the park is recognised by its World Heritage listing, which honours the traditional belief system of the Anangu as one of the oldest human societies on earth.

Not long after our trip to Uluru my dad and I watched a documentary, The Tropic of Capricorn with Simon Reeves, which focused on Mutitjulu, the closest Aboriginal community to the rock. To my surprise, it was reports of child sexual abuse in Mutitjulu that led to the launch of the federal government’s intervention in the Northern Territory in 2007. While the issues are complex, and there are claims and counter-claims on both sides, the images of unpaved roads, the lack of basic services and a strong sense that an injustice had been done have not only stayed with me but prompted me to action.

Without sounding like some kind of youth-crusader, I want to make a difference and I want to effect change. Gandhi said, ‘Be the change you want to see in the world.’ In my lifetime I want to see the closing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and I want to see real reconciliation between the two groups. I can’t wait around for someone else to do it and I can’t wait until I grow up. So, I’ve resolved to act now. I’m beginning in small ways by raising awareness to help promote understanding. My address to the School at Assembly, along with fellow Year 10 student Josefine Ganko, and this article are my first steps in taking action. I have plans, big plans, but raising awareness is my first port of call.
On Thursday 16 August the Senior Drama Company premiered Lachlan Philpott’s new play *The Chosen*. Tensions were high as twenty-eight girls and a team of creative minds led by the magnificent Ms Martin prepared to take to the stage.

For me it all began in Term I. I had heard whispers that the School had commissioned a play but it was all a huge secret. Slowly I started to hear snatches of words... space... aliens... and a name: Freya Star. I think I knew then that this was going to be special. I was so excited when I found out I had made the cast. For our first read through we sat in a huge circle, everyone filled with anticipation as we were handed a script with a picture of an alien on the front cover. It was amazing to finally discover what *The Chosen* was all about.

I admit that at the beginning I was dubious about the role I had been given — Tiddy, Freya’s younger brother, a boy who acts like a dog. I wasn’t sure that I was the right choice, or if I had it in me to embrace a character that was out of my comfort zone. The main challenge was to learn how to be a dog. When I first tried to bark, I just said the word ‘bark’ really loudly hoping it would sound convincing — and people laughed at me. At that point I was really scared, then I started rehearsing the Star family scenes. It was then that I realised just how weird and wonderful this family was and how fun my character could be. So I threw myself into the role; I practiced barking with my sister, watched videos of kelpies, and even asked my brother for tips on how to be a ‘real boy’. At this stage all the cast were workshopping and we were starting to create some magical moments.

As opening night drew closer, things started to get hectic. Not only were we trying to perfect the play but also integrate the pre–show installation and teach a bunch of actors how to sing like a choir. It was tough and tensions were high as we started rehearsing into the night. I think we all felt the strain as we tried to maintain balance in our lives. But I think we all knew it was going to be worth it. As always, it wasn’t until the day before opening night that we felt that we were ready. Then on Thursday all the months of hard work became a reality. Our opening night was a huge success and then we had to put all our remaining energy into doing two more performances.

Overall, it was a surreal experience, especially to be the first actors to tell this wonderful story. I know I feel so proud to have been a part of this production. I’m also so glad that I got to work with, and become friends with, all the people involved. I like to think that that because of this production whenever we hear about a UFO sighting, or hear someone humming ‘Ground–Control to Major Tom’, we’ll think of *The Chosen*. 

---

**TALES FROM THE CHOSEN**

**FREYA McGRATH, YEAR 11 | 23 AUGUST 2013**
Most of us hear a lot about Australians’ sporting achievements, whether it is through the nightly news report, the newspaper or social media. Male and female athletes from all over Australia have had great success in their sports, so why is it that eighty per cent of the reports we see are devoted to men’s sport? This could be due to the sexism of those running media outlets, women’s sport being less popular or the lack of financial gain for the media in promoting it.

Whatever the reason is, something urgently needs to be done for the sake of women’s sport in Australia. Although highly successful in their sport, many of these women have to fit in another job around their sporting schedule just so they can earn enough money. These athletes frequently have events in other states or countries and it is very hard for them to find a job with a boss who is willing to work around their sporting commitments. The astounding lack of media coverage makes it hard for these women to get sponsors and supporters.

I follow all types of women’s sport and there is one thing that stands out to me. Along with being exceptionally good at their sports, these women always play with the utmost respect for their own team, the opposition and their supporters. They don’t start fights with the opposing team or disrespect their fans like countless male athletes do. These women are setting a great example for people all over the country but, due to the lack of media coverage, most people — particularly young girls — do not get to see this.

A great way to help these women continue their success is to increase the awareness of women’s sport. We all know of a few female athletes such as Sally Pearson, Stephanie Rice, Stephanie Gilmore and Samantha Stosur. But did you know there is an Australian women’s rugby union team and a women’s State of Origin? What about the W–league, the top women’s soccer competition in Australia? If you pick up the newspaper, will you see any reports about the Matildas being ranked the eighth best women’s soccer team in the world, or the Australian Women’s Cricket Team having more success than the men? No, you will likely see a report about how well the Broncos’ last training session went, or how the Wallabies lost to New Zealand… again.

This year, the Girls Grammar Football Squad has been lucky enough to have Brisbane Roar and Matildas player Elise Kellond–Knight coming to run skill sessions. In 2011 Elise made the World Cup Football (Soccer) All–Stars team. This is a tremendous achievement, yet barely any Australians even know who she is. Another unnoticed athlete is Jessica Fox. She won a silver medal for slalom canoeing at the 2012 London Olympics. So many women who play at the highest standard of their sport go largely unnoticed.

Women have made a significant contribution to Australian sport at all levels. Their commitment is admirable and they represent our country with loyalty and integrity. I believe that we owe it to these women to support them and help raise awareness of their achievements. They work hard and deserve much more credit than the media gives them.

Everyone is able to help raise awareness of these fantastic athletes. Look–up these women on the Internet or Facebook, and show them your support. No matter what sport you play, there will be Australian women playing it at a professional level. Go and watch some of their matches and tell your friends about them. Every single bit of support will help these women get recognised by the media, sponsors and spectators. It is what they deserve.
As the Year 12s embark on their final term of school, a profusion of events and a multitude of emotions are imminent. Our Girls Grammar lives are rapidly coming to an end and we must take a moment to reflect and ask ourselves the fundamental questions: What now? Are we prepared for life after high school?

Popular culture is dominated by depictions of high school; *Glee*, *Gossip Girl* and *High School Musical* come readily to mind. The common fixation with these five years of our lives stems from the idea that these are our formative years, where we grow and develop both physically and mentally. Maybe, paradoxically, by supposedly keeping us apart from it, high school prepares us for the ‘real world’. The isolation, the shame, and the aggression from these years — all of it readies us to cope. The time you had an argument with your best friend, the time you received a horrible score on that History multiple choice test, the times where you thought your life was over because of these minor setbacks — these are the events that have assisted with our development into young adulthood and the ability to deal with these ‘failures’ is something that we have learnt in our time at high school.

But what does the future hold for us? How will our high school experiences affect our adult lives? Will the identities and relationships we formed in high school carry over into the real world, or will they simply disintegrate? While some of us will be pleasantly surprised and pleased with our OP score and others will be disappointed, this should not discourage us and should not define who we are as people. This score is not the crucible in which our adult identities are forged and we need to keep these things in perspective.

We will all take different paths. We all have different life aspirations and goals and we should not mark our personal success on whether or not we receive direct entry into a specific university course. While it may take a few more years, we will all get there in the end. It is important to remember that there have been and always will be people along the way in whom we can confide about our concerns and issues. Our family, friends, teachers and school counsellors have all nurtured us throughout high school and foregrounded the importance of doing our best and fulfilling our potential. Nevertheless, it is the interpersonal skills of resilience, perseverance and determination, which we have learnt throughout our years at Girls Grammar, that will really prove to be our greatest assets when we are forced to take on the potentially cold and unforgiving world around us.

In the words of Antoine de Saint–Exupéry, ‘As for the future, your task is not to foresee it but to enable it’. The uncertainty of the future and the fear of the unknown should not faze us. We must embrace the fact that change will occur in our lives and that these changes will take place constantly, with and without our participation. We must accept that things will not work out, relationships will end and we may not receive an offer for that job. Nonetheless, while it is important to plan ahead and deal with the hazards that give rise to this fear of the future, we must allow room for the unexpected and unprecedented.

I truly believe that my schooling life at Girls Grammar has not only nurtured my desire to learn and discover new things, but has also equipped me with the strength to overcome adversity and cope with the future challenges of life.

LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

TÉA ANGELOS, YEAR 12 | 11 OCTOBER 2013
I still remember my first Brisbane Girls Grammar School Open day. I was in Year 3 in 2007 and the first thing that struck me was the balloons along the Gregory Terrace fence. As we drove up to Girls Grammar, I was just tall enough to see the line of balloons through the car window, floating in the wind. However, as I got a little older and have come to know Girls Grammar a little more, I have realised that the blue and white balloons aren’t just for decoration; instead, they’re the opening at the front of the School into a Grammar culture, a Grammar way of life. It was the invitation for every new student to become a Grammar girl.

After that Open Day, my twin–sister and I spoke with excitement at the prospect of one day becoming Grammar girls. Dad, who had been on the selection committee for Rhodes Scholars for some time, told me that the Grammar girls who applied for the scholarship were impressive in that, in his view, they possessed confidence without arrogance, poise without pretension, maturity with enthusiasm, wore their achievements with humility and appreciated that respect was a two–way street. In my time at Girls Grammar, I have come to appreciate what he meant by those descriptions.

I am always proud to wear my Girls Grammar uniform. When I am wearing my blazer, I feel every part of the School history sewn into the crest. To me the uniform is not just a garment: it is a representation of the School’s culture. The vibrancy, the commitment, the determination, the enthusiasm and the persistence of each Grammar girl is reflected through our uniform.

Speech Day this year was a reminder of the values and beliefs of Girls Grammar and the staff’s engagement in and commitment to our education. As I sat with my Year 9 peers surrounding me, I listened to the words of the Chair of the Board of Trustees Ms Jameson, our Principal Ms Euler and the guest speaker Ms Harrap. The values they addressed were what I have been brought up with, which is why my parents chose a Girls Grammar education for my twin–sister and me. Girls Grammar provides endless opportunities to widen our perspectives on the world and makes us appreciate there is nothing we cannot achieve if we work hard enough: Nil sine labore.

As Ms Harrap spoke of her adventures since her Girls Grammar days, I listened in awe of her strength and courage that opened the way for a life of leadership with service to her country on the world stage. Equally, I was humbled as our Principal, Ms Euler, spoke of her and our nurturing teachers’ belief in every girl as we enter the Gregory Terrace gates each day. Ms Euler reminded the departing Year 12s and those of us still walking this amazing journey that the gates to Girls Grammar will always be open and welcoming to us all, long after she rings the bell and bids us farewell on our final day.
NICOLA PANIZZA / 8W (DETAIL)
Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know. — Lao Tzu

This famous Chinese quotation refers to 德 ‘de’ — a Taoist concept often translated as ‘inherent character or inner power’. It reflects the cultural importance placed on quiet composure, inner contemplation and humility. Chinese and other Asian cultures respect quiet — and quiet people.

Silence is a way of communicating; it is better to talk too little than too much. Cultural mores influencing this mindset include the desire for group harmony and the belief that withholding one’s true opinion signifies politeness. In many Asian countries, characteristics such as reserved quietness, listening to others, and introversion are highly respected (Cain, 2011), qualities which are not so well regarded in western culture.

Reflecting upon my time teaching in Japan, I remember how I felt discouraged when students did not seem to participate or engage in class. High school students in particular did not ask questions and, if I asked them questions, they would often just stare back at me in silence. It took me some time to understand that, in Japanese society, actions are valued more than words, and it is the quiet, persistent student who receives the praise.

Recently, all students received their Semester 1 reports and Year 10 and Year 8 Parent–Teacher interviews have taken place, leading to discussions about student progress and levels of engagement. The ‘Engagement in Learning’ comments on student report cards have given pause for thought; and I have considered how I ascertained ‘engagement’ of the quiet, possibly introverted, students in my care. While cultural differences can have an impact on where students sit on the introversion–extroversion spectrum, the fact that our Australian education system encourages students to vocalise their opinions in a collaborative learning environment and to be positively, actively engaged in an extrovert-centred world also needs to be considered. There is a need to foster different types of engagement and participation to individually cater for every girl. What constitutes ‘engagement’ differs for everyone, particularly for students who are introverted.

At least one third, but possibly closer to one half, of the population are introverted (Cain, 2012). Introverts thrive in environments that are not over-stimulating, and tend to enjoy quiet concentration. If your daughter is an introvert she may recharge at the end of the day by being alone with her thoughts and undertaking inner contemplation (Petrelli, 2012). Conversely, your extroverted daughter would be energised by social situations and tend to be an assertive multi-tasker who thinks out loud and on her feet (Goudreau, 2012).

In every class I teach, in every House in the School, there are students who are very good listeners, who are cognisant of what is happening in class, who know the correct answer, and yet don’t feel comfortable to answer questions or to engage in class discussion. While it is vital for these students to develop the skills they need in order to survive in what can be deemed as an extroverted society, it is also necessary to recognise their needs and nurture their sensitivity. How can we, at Brisbane Girls Grammar School, engage students who are introverted, as well as support exceptional scholarship so that each girl acquires the confidence to contribute to her world with imagination, wisdom and integrity?
Ms Natalie Smith, our Dean of Studies and Planning, speaks of the need ‘to find that all important balance between fuel and space, between facts and learning, to find the gaps to breathe and find meaning, so that the fire of deep understanding can ignite and burn passionately’ (2013). The importance of creating the mental space to ponder is equally important as creating the physical space to develop deeper understanding and enhance academic performance. According to research psychologist, Anders Ericsson, ‘solitude’ is the key ingredient required to enhance exceptional achievement (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). While introverts prefer to work individually and crave solitude, if we consider this notion in the actual classroom, it is actually the extroverts who unfortunately often fail to realise their true talents. The quietness and the time needed to practice music or study mathematics requires a solitude that they try to avoid (Cain, 2012, p. 83).

The need for quiet spaces for students, both introverted and extroverted, to spend time in solitude — for creativity, for contemplation and reflection, for solo-thought and for dedicating pure attention toward time on task — is being incorporated in the plans for future campus development at Girls Grammar. And while solitude can provide the quality of attention required to effectively learn tasks (Smith, 2013), it must also be noted that collaborative work in open spaces has a rightful place in the contemporary learning environment. For introverted students, however, collaborative learning should be in small groups and well managed.

Interestingly, research into the productivity of group performance indicates that as the size of the group increases, the group performance decreases. Groups of four generate better and more creative ideas than groups of six, who do better than groups of nine (Cain, 2012). For introverts, the best approach for group work in the classroom is to have small groups of two or three, and clear roles for each student. In class discussions, teachers should encourage the quiet, introverted student to contribute ideas earlier, rather than wait until everyone has voiced their opinions and the tension has built up internally.

Online discussions are wonderful platforms for introverts to voice their opinion. The way we communicate and interact via social media and the Internet is positive for introverts, as it gives them the time and the space they require to think (Sparks, 2012). Moodle, the School’s internal learning management system, is an excellent resource for introverted students to be actively engaged in subject material. In 2014 the School’s Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy will be implemented, thus giving students greater opportunity to receive a broader range of classroom materials online through their preferred technological devices. Students can choose to individually process and reflect upon concepts in a more accessible environment, potentially allowing for a richer discussion in class, as the time and space for thinking and analysing has been provided. Using Moodle and engaging via small groups will not only empower students who are introverted, but it will help develop their confidence to contribute to the wider world around them.

Principal Ms Jacinda Euler states that, ‘A Girls Grammar education recognises the particular strengths and needs of the individual, seeking to draw out the very best in every girl’ (2013). While our education system values collaborative learning, interactive participation and asserting one’s opinion, in order to support exceptional scholarship, we believe that it is imperative to also recognise individual needs and nurture students’ sensitivities for each and every girl to reach her full potential.

We know from myths and fairytales, there are many different powers in this world. One child is given a lightsaber, and another a wizard’s education. The trick is to not amass all the different kinds of available power, but to use well the kind you’ve been granted. To possess such a key is to tumble like Alice down her rabbit hole. She didn’t choose to go to Wonderland — but she made an adventure that was fresh and fantastic and very much her own. (Cain, 2012, p. 266) ■
REFERENCES


How do we grow a good person?

This question was posed at the Young Minds conference at Sydney Town Hall, held in June this year. A wide variety of leading thinkers and inspirational speakers challenged an audience of over 1700 people — including educators, psychologists, parents, students and youth workers — to explore the possibility of empowering our youth to reach their full potential in character and intellect, and ultimately to lead a happy, fulfilling life. We examined the nature of the current world our teenagers are growing up in, and focused on the goal of ensuring that our youth have a ‘Warm heart, cool head, bright future’.

For me, the most inspirational speaker was His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, who engaged, and frequently entertained, the diverse audience in addressing the question, ‘How do we grow a good person?’ His dialogue with a panel of world-renowned childhood advocates and educators emphasised the important point that, as educators, we are teachers of human beings, not just a subject area, and as such we are responsible for enhancing the development of ‘good people’ above all else.

So, what exactly is a ‘good person’? The Dalai Lama defined a good person as one who is warm-hearted and has peace of mind and contentment — ‘a beautiful mind feeling inner peace’ — and observed that this state of mind not only serves the individual well, but also serves those around them. Furthermore, he espoused the notion that in order to have peace of mind, human beings, especially children and teenagers, need true affection which cannot be shown through materialistic objects. Whether individuals are able to live a happy life depends on the nature of the society in which they live. We are social animals and a good person can only be ‘grown’ in a family or community of people who demonstrate genuine affection.

Panel member Professor Carla Rinaldi from Italy, an internationally renowned advocate for children and childhood, conversed with the Dalai Lama in response to the question, ‘Does a baby have the peace of mind belonging to a good person or does it have to be achieved over the course of a lifetime?’ Professor Rinaldi believes that all children have the capacity to become good people, but that this depends on those around them who are caring for them. Interestingly, she contends that the child can become a good educator to the parents as they then become a community of learners who grow together. If children do not have a ‘good’ mother and a ‘good’ father, then one ‘good’ parent may be enough, or they might have a network of ‘good’ people around them to support them and assist their development. She emphasised the importance of the educator’s role as part of the network.

The Dalai Lama’s comments on this question of parenting resonated strongly with the audience. He explained that he was physically separated from his mother at five years of age, but mentally she remained very much with him. The people he was surrounded by when he was growing up...
were constant, supportive and affectionate, and they also taught him how to play. He emphasised the impact that consistent and emotional relationships have on children’s development, and specifically stressed the importance of trust and affection.

Another panel member was Yassmin Abdel-Magied, Young Queenslander of the year 2010. Born in Sudan and educated in Queensland, she is now a mechanical engineer and founder and President of Youth Without Borders. She discussed with the Dalai Lama the question, ‘Does technology intrude negatively upon relationships?’ Ms Abdel-Magied does not believe that technology detracts from human connection, but acknowledges that family values dictate how children view this situation. For example, technology would never replace a hug from her mother because of the importance placed on emotional relationships within her family.

In regard to technology and human connection sitting side by side, the Dalai Lama asserted that modern technology within contemporary society seems very useful, but the amount of time spent immersed in technology takes away from time spent with the child’s parents and family, which is when the family’s values are modelled and imparted to offspring. As a result of this predicament, he supports the idea of schools including Values Education in the curriculum as values are vital in children’s lives, especially today.

Values are the key to a healthy mind, a healthy body and a happy life; these values can be taught to all children, regardless of their background. The Dalai Lama made the important point that religion is not universal, but the values that underpin religion — such as tolerance, acceptance, love, forgiveness, compassion, integrity, and honesty — are essential for developing a warm-hearted person with ‘a beautiful mind feeling inner peace.’

Growing a good person relies upon the stability of relationships for a child. It also depends on the availability of a supportive framework for all children to look forward to a bright future through learning in schools that are open to young people from all faiths or even no faith.

The Dalai Lama concluded his discussion by answering a variety of questions asked by a range of young people aged from 5 to 25 who assembled on stage. A sample of three provides a glimpse of the interactions, the first of which was greeted by much laughter from the audience.

**How do you control your temper?**

Well, what is the value? Your peace of mind will be destroyed and you will create more trouble. Anger clouds our view, so even if you decide you are going to hit someone, you will do it more effectively if you find a weak spot first, if you have a calm mind!

**How can we become good leaders?**

Being intelligent, truthful and honest is the most important thing, as you will become a good leader if people trust you.

**How can you maintain the determination to reach your goals in the future, while sustaining peace of mind about what you have achieved in the past?**

By achieving our goals, we gain warm-heartedness, which brings self-confidence, self-respect and determination.

As simple as it may sound, the Dalai Lama’s own words exemplify the message that emerged from the discussions and interactions at the Young Minds conference:

> If there is love, there is hope that one may have real families, real brotherhood, real equanimity, real peace. If the love within your mind is lost and you see other beings as enemies, then no matter how much knowledge or education or material comfort you have, only suffering and confusion will ensue. (1999, p. 132) ■
REFERENCES


A s spectators or audience members, we thrill to the exploits of ‘freakishly’ talented athletes and ‘prodigiously’ talented musicians. As teachers, we are sometimes impressed by the ‘naturally’ talented students in our care. When confronted with the freakish, the prodigious, and the natural we are amazed and immediately identify — or are in awe of — the innate or ‘god–given’ talents on display.

The idea of talent has become a pervasive one. It was kick-started by Francis Galton (a cousin to and admirer of Charles Darwin) in 1869 when he co–opted many of Darwin’s ideas for his own book *Hereditary Genius* (Coyle, 2009). Galton wrote:

> That a man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world … I have no patience with the hypothesis … that babies are born pretty much alike and the sole agencies in creating differences … are steady application and moral effort. (cited in Coyle, 2009)

In the world of sport this idea is often put forth by exercise physiologists who espouse the view that DNA and genetic make–up are the ultimate arbiters of success. There is, however, a growing school of thought that seeks to challenge, in the words of Malcolm Gladwell (2009), ‘The Talent Myth’ and it is through the broad psychological idea of ‘skill acquisition’ that this is happening.

Physical Education teachers have been intimately acquainted with the principles of skill acquisition, as they relate to physical performance, for years. In 1967, two researchers from the Department of Psychology at the University of Oregon, Paul Fitts and Michael Posner laid the foundation for the systematic analysis of skill development with their three–stage model (Magill, 2007). The Fitts and Posner Model proposes three stages of learning a motor skill:

1. The cognitive stage (understanding)
2. The associative stage (practice)
3. The autonomous stage (automatic reference).

Teachers of Physical Education have been consciously and unconsciously applying this model to their teaching ever since. Skill acquisition allows us to look at physical performance as a whole plan, or motor programme, and to break down the plan into its component parts, or sub–routines. In effect, the learner is encouraged to break large, complex tasks into smaller, more manageable ones. In the language of education, these students are ‘chunking’. In doing so, they are engaging in deep practice. The teaching is progressive and deliberate. The student looks at the
whole motor programme and often the approach mirrors that of legendary UCLA Basketball coach, John Wooden.

A 1974 analysis of Wooden’s teaching identified that one of his most frequent forms was a three-part instruction where he modelled the correct way to do something, showed the incorrect way, and then re-modelled the correct way (Coye, 2009). His reviewers, educational psychologists Ron Gallimore and Roland Tarp, wrote that Wooden’s ‘demonstrations … are of such clarity that they leave an image in memory much like a textbook sketch’ (Coye, 2009). It is at this point that the motor programme is broken down into its sub-routines, looking at the first and then the second, combining them, before looking at the third, combining one and two with three, and so-on.

With the advent of modern camera and video technology, teachers and coaches are able to enhance demonstration and analysis with video images of elite and student performers in all of their slow-motion and freeze-framed glory. The sub-routines have never been more obvious or important.

A seismic shift in our understanding of skill acquisition could have occurred in 1993 when Dr K Anders Ericsson, of the University of Colorado, wrote a paper published by the American Psychological Association’s Psychological Review, called ‘The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance’. Unfortunately, no-one beyond tertiary intuitions paid much attention to his ground-breaking, convention-shattering work until May 2006 when Freakonomics authors Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner wrote a piece about his work in The New York Times, titled ‘A Star is Made’. People were outraged but fascinated. A raft of non-fiction best sellers, all drawing on Ericsson’s work, followed the publication of the article.

At the most basic level, Ericsson argues that there is probably no such thing as innate talent or, if there is, it is overrated. Of the books and articles that sprung from Ericsson’s work, all share a basic tenet: when it comes to success, expertise is significantly more important than ‘talent’, and the way to become expert is through deliberate or purposeful practice. The importance of expertise cannot be overstated, but experience is not enough. Ericsson and others proclaim the ‘10,000-hour-rule’ — that is, 10,000 hours of practice, or the equivalent of ten years, as the minimum amount of time required to become expert.

Almost without exception, anyone who has risen to the top of his or her field can be identified as having spent this prerequisite amount of time engaged in the activity before they began producing their best work. This is true of Mozart, Tiger Woods, Bill Gates and the members of the Beatles (Gladwell, 2008). But, 10,000 hours alone is not enough to create elite performance. Colvin (2008) also dismisses the idea that expertise is related to specific inborn ability, further stating that expertise is not related to intelligence and memory.

Ericsson’s 1993 paper says it best: ‘The differences between expert performers and normal adults reflect a life-long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain.’ In an explicit rejection of the ‘you’ve-got-it-or-you-don’t’ view, Ericsson effectively claims that ‘deliberate practice’ is the crucial component in relation to the development of expertise. Other authors use different terminology, such as ‘purposeful practice’ or ‘deep practice’, which are all variations of the same concept. Even so, the concept itself can be clearly defined.

Colvin (2008) writes:

Deliberate practice is characterised by several elements … It is activity designed specifically to improve performance, often with a teacher’s help (because of his or her ability to see you in ways that you cannot see yourself); it can be repeated a lot; feedback on results is continuously available; it’s highly demanding mentally, whether the activity is purely intellectual, such as chess or business-related activities, or heavily physical, such as sports (although four to five hours a day seems to be the upper limit of deliberate practice); and it isn’t much fun (because it requires us to insistently seek out what we’re not good at).

It is further defined by Matthew Syed (2010) when he writes:

Ericsson calls it ‘deliberate practice’ to distinguish it from what most of the rest of us do. I am going to call
it purposeful practice. Why? Because the practice sessions of aspiring champions have a specific and never-changing purpose: progress. Every second of every minute of every hour, the goal is to extend one’s mind and body, to push oneself beyond the outer limits of one’s capacities, to engage so deeply in the task that one leaves the training session, literally, a changed person.

It is in the deliberate consciousness of skill acquisition, and the deliberate extension of performance, that accelerated learning takes place, because this is also where failure is most evident.

Figure skating might be an unlikely activity to illustrate the point; however, in the 1990s researchers conducted what has been identified as a revelatory study into the difference between elite figure skaters and their less elite counterparts (Syed, 2010). It was discovered that the difference between the two groups was not to be found in genetics or other such things, but rather in the type of practice they engaged in:

Elite figure skaters regularly attempt jumps beyond their current capabilities (even when measured relative to their superior abilities); less elite skaters do not. The conclusion is as counterintuitive as it is revealing: top skaters fall over more often during their training sessions. (Syed, 2010)

Colvin (2008) further expands:

A study of elite figure skaters found that sub–elite skaters spent lots of time working on the jumps they could already do, while skaters at the highest levels spent more time on the jumps they couldn’t do, the kind that ultimately win Olympic medals and that involve lots of falling down before they’re mastered. Landing on your butt twenty thousand times is where great performance comes from.

Of course, the problem with this scenario is in getting people to want to ‘fall over more often during their training sessions’. For this to happen, two things are required.

Daniel Coyle (2009) identifies the first of these as ‘ignition’: an image, an interaction, a transformational moment, a motivational jolt — what psychologist Michael A Rousell (2007) calls a ‘spontaneous influence event’. This is the moment when motivation changes from the extrinsic to the intrinsic. Physical Education teachers know, through the study and teaching of sport psychology, that the most successful athletes (and in their place could be musicians, actors, doctors, and so on) are those whose motivation is internalised. Coyle (2009) explains the importance of this spark: ‘Ignition supplies the energy, while deep practice translates that energy over time into forward progress.’

The second important element in getting people to ‘fall over more’ is in using language that encourages them to do so. This is the language of Carol Dweck (2006) and her ‘growth mindset’. It is language that praises effort rather than talent. Syed (2010) states it clearly when he writes about Dweck’s successful experiments:

We should emphasise how abilities can be transformed through application; ... we should teach others and ourselves to see challenges as learning opportunities rather than threats; ... we should interpret failure not as an indictment but as an opportunity.

Our goal then, as educators, and indeed for Brisbane Girls Grammar School as a place of teaching and learning, is to further develop an environment wherein deep, or deliberate, or purposeful practice happens routinely. This is the ‘exceptional scholarship’ of our Aspiration. It is not necessarily the job of the School to become a ‘hotbed’ of a very narrow and specific type of performer given that, by design, we establish an ‘educational foundation’ for young women by encouraging in them an appreciation for a broad-based, liberal education.

In Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) retells the story of a 12-year-old girl from the Bronx who was given the opportunity to attend an experimental public school that takes a random sample of children from extremely poor neighbourhoods. The school emphasises effort and looks
to encourage deep practice. Prior to her attending the school, she lacked direction, but was now extraordinarily motivated. Gladwell (2008) says, ‘She’s just a human being responding in a rational way to the requirements and incentives of her surroundings. This thing we call initiative and hard work and persistence is a social construction. It can be reproduced.’ One of the striking things about Brisbane Girls Grammar, particularly for newcomers (staff and students alike), is in how hard the staff and students work. The School’s motto — *Nil sine labore* — can be both a ‘war cry’, as it is in the School song, and an unspoken ‘feeling’. In the very many ways that it presents itself, it is never forced or contrived.

Over 138 years, the School has developed into a place where people can immerse themselves in learning. Rather than rest on the laurels of our reputation — and that is certainly not the culture of the School — our challenge is to create an environment where there is ever-increasing opportunity to engage students and staff in deep learning. If we increase our understanding of purposeful practice, with the first step being awareness, and apply some of the principles that relate to it, we can achieve this.

---

**REFERENCES**


Growth through adversity

LAUREN PHILLIPS, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST | 22 AUGUST 2013

Challenge and trauma can be used as catalysts for releasing a person’s best potential, ultimately leading to a happier and more fulfilled life. When we look at the world around us, at present and through history, it becomes clear that many people who have achieved the most have experienced hindrances, injuries or the hardest of times. A number of examples follow:

- German composer Ludwig van Beethoven was called ‘hopeless’ as a composer by his music teacher. Later in life, he became progressively deaf (being completely deaf by age 46). Nevertheless, he went on to write his greatest music, including five symphonies (Canfield & Hansen, 1993).

- Corrie ten Boom was imprisoned for helping many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. Following her prison and concentration camp stays, Corrie ten Boom was taken finally to Ravensbrück death camp in Germany, but was later released due to clerical error. She went on to set up a rehabilitation centre in the Netherlands for concentration camp survivors, and received a number of honours in her name (ten Boom, Sherrill, & Sherrill, 1971).

- When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, he had carried out more than 2000 experiments to reach the point where it worked. When asked how it felt to fail so many times, he replied, ‘I never failed once. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2000-step process.’ It is worth mentioning that Thomas Edison was home-schooled after his teachers complained he was ‘too slow’ and ‘too stupid to learn anything’. He went on to create more than 1300 inventions, and was probably the greatest inventor in American history (Canfield & Hansen, 1993).

- Wilma Rudolph was the twentieth child of twenty-two, and was born prematurely. By the age of 4, she had contracted double pneumonia and scarlet fever, which left her paralysed in her left leg, forcing her to wear a leg brace. Having been told she would never walk again, Wilma Rudolph took off her leg brace at the age of 9 years; by 13, she had developed a rhythmic walk which the doctors proclaimed a miracle. That same year, Wilma decided she wanted to be a runner, and came last in every race she entered; but she persevered and started to win her races, going on to win three Olympic gold medals. ‘My mother taught me very early to believe I could achieve any accomplishment I wanted to. The first was to walk without braces’ (Wilma Rudolph qtd. in Canfield & Hansen, 1993).

- In 1962, four young musicians played their first record audition for the executives of Decca Recording Company. This British rock group, who called themselves The Beatles, were turned down, with one executive stating, ‘We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out.’ The Beatles went on to have twenty-seven number one hits (Canfield & Hansen, 1993).

- Helen Keller was born in 1880, and in 1882 she fell sick and was struck blind, deaf and mute. She later worked with an extremely dedicated teacher named Anne Sullivan, who supported her in making tremendous progress in her ability to communicate. Helen Keller sought to learn more about the world and how she could help improve the lives of others. During her lifetime, she
received many honours in recognition of her accomplishments, including the Theodore Roosevelt Distinguished Service Medal in 1936, the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964, election to the Women’s Hall of Fame in 1965, and countless honorary doctoral degrees (A+E Television Networks, 2013). Throughout her remarkable life, Helen Keller stood as a powerful example of how determination, hard work, and imagination can allow an individual to triumph over adversity. By overcoming difficult conditions with a great deal of persistence, she grew into a respected and world-renowned activist who laboured for the betterment of others.

POST–TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Growth through trauma, specifically, is well documented in psychological research. Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, psychologists at the University of North Carolina, interviewed survivors of acute injuries (1996). They then went on to survey elderly people who had lost their spouses. Person after person told them the same thing: they wished deeply that they had not lost a spouse or been paralysed, but nonetheless, the experience changed them for the better.

Patterns began to emerge in a further study with trauma survivors. People reported positive change in five areas: they had a renewed appreciation for life; they found new possibilities for themselves; they felt more personal strength; their relationships improved; and they felt spiritually more satisfied. Tedeschi and Calhoun named this ‘post–traumatic growth’ (1996).

Evidence of post–traumatic growth has been found across cultures: in Palestinians who were held in Israeli prisons; in Turkish earthquake survivors; in Germans who survived the Dresden bombing; and in Israelis who survived terrorist attacks (Rendon, 2012). Stacey Holmes (2004) and others have reported similar findings in people’s reactions to the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York City.

EVIDENCE IN NATURE

Growth through adversity is evident in many facets of life. An example in nature exists with grape vines: water stress, whereby vine roots must grow deeply into the earth to reach their water supply, actually improves the fruit quality. Making vines struggle will generally result in the production of better quality grapes. If you take a grapevine and make its physical requirements for water and nutrients easily accessible, then, somewhat counter-intuitively, it will give you poor grapes.

California’s first documented imported European vines were planted in Los Angeles in 1833 by Jean-Louis Vignes (Wikipedia, 2013). Conditions were ‘perfect’, with nutrient-rich soil and a good water supply; but wine produced from these grapes did not taste as good as wine produced in Europe. In the 1850s and 1860s, Agoston Haraszthy promoted vine planting over much of Northern California. He dug large caves for cellaring, promoted hillside planting with little soil, and fostered the idea of non-irrigated vineyards. Essentially, he made the vines struggle to grow and, in turn, was rewarded with grapes of high quality.

When relating this example to growth through adversity, it is because the vine has a choice; in a favourable environment, it will choose to take the easy option, focusing its energies on making leaves and shoots, with less concern for producing grapes. When circumstances are made more difficult for the vine — such as having a restricted water supply, having limited nutrients available, being pruned harshly, or made to grow in close proximity to other vines — then the vine will focus its energy on reproducing itself, which, for a vine, means producing good fruit.

EMBRACING CHALLENGES

American Fleet Admiral William Frederick Halsey Jr. once said, ‘There are no great people in this world, only great challenges which ordinary people rise to meet’ (cited in Power Performance, 2003).

It is easy to be disheartened when things don’t seem to be going well, but challenges can build emotional resilience. However, that doesn’t mean difficulties always have to be faced alone. By taking advantage of support from others, the obstacles we encounter may become easier to overcome; through sharing experiences and seeking guidance from professionals, emotional growth is attainable.

Here at Brisbane Girls Grammar School, girls learn that it is acceptable and wise to seek support. The Student Care
team can help girls with many issues, supporting them to manage problems and work through difficult situations. It is important to provide a nurturing environment, but an equally important aspect of student care is to ‘push’ students on their way, encouraging them to set their own challenges and goals, to go one step further, to aim higher, and to continue to grow from within. There is a delicate balance which we strive to preserve: the provision of care when students face external challenges, and encouragement of students to grow inwardly stronger, to exceed their self-perceived boundaries and to ultimately achieve their individual potential.

Camps at Marrapatta provide opportunities for students to challenge themselves, both mentally and physically. Camp leaders are available to assist students to reach beyond their own (sometimes falsely perceived) limits to achieve goals that they initially would have thought unobtainable.

The marvellous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. — Helen Keller (qtd. in Annin, 2013)

Research overwhelmingly suggests growth occurs through adversity — be that in nature, or when, as people, we face emotional or physical challenges. We bend; we break; we repair; we rebuild; and often we grow, changing for the better in ways we never would have, had we not suffered along the way.

The ‘Irish Blessing’ (Island Ireland, 2013) says:

- May the road rise up to meet you;
- May the wind be always at your back;
- May the sun shine warm upon your face.

Perhaps it should say:

- May you rise up to meet the road before you, at times tortuous, volatile and gruelling;
- May you embrace the tempestuous elements that bear down upon you,
- Until the sun shines warm upon your face.

REFERENCES


In almost any given school yard one can observe the frenetic pace with which teens’ fingers swipe touch screens. Hunched over, surrounding them are eager eyes ready to view the latest YouTube video, newest photo upload on Instagram, or the incoming updates from Facebook. This is the norm of twenty-first century Australian teenagers.

The debate and research which is frequently published in the nation’s papers cautions adults about the constant use of mobile devices as a means of connection, with claims that ‘today’s under 30s live their lives “a mile wide and an inch deep”’ (Munro, 2013). Consequently, adults must reconsider the confiscation of mobile devices as a solution. Instead, adults must become informed and savvy in the developmental impacts this new norm has and, with this in mind, learn how to effectively engage with it.

Android phones, iPhones, iPads, tablets and similar devices have flooded the consumer marketplace meeting with popular demand. For adolescents, the most essential of the electronic devices is the mobile phone. Their popularity is explained by the various functions they embody. More than just a communication device, mobile phones can take photos, be used to listen to music and play games, and for social networking. Senior researcher, Amanda Lenhart, from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, asserts that ‘these technologies meet teens’ developmental needs’ in that ‘mobile phones and social networking sites make the things teens have always done — defining their own identity, establishing themselves as independent of their parents, looking cool, impressing members of the opposite sex — a whole lot easier’ (cited in Henley, 2010).

This information is hardly revelatory; any teacher observes this happening throughout the course of the school day. However, with the average age of first time mobile phone users being charted at 13 to 14 years of age and even younger (Griffin, 2011), are adolescents equipped to use the technological advantages of electronic devices to their benefit? American psychologist and sociologist Sherry Turkle (2011) cautions that the prevalence of electronic devices in teens lives has social and developmental implications.

Turkle notes an increasing trend where current adolescents are ‘growing up tethered’ (2011). In her book Alone Together, she states that ‘these young people live in a constant state of waiting for connection’ (2011, p. 171). While waiting, teenagers become habituated to constant connection. Turkle opines that, ‘in our time, if we can be continually in touch, needing to be continually in touch does not seem a problem … but an accommodation to what technology affords. It becomes the norm’ (2011, p. 177). Further to this, a 2013 national survey of 2000 16 to 30 year olds, commissioned by digital publisher Sound Alliance, found that participants suffered from FOMO ‘the fear of missing out’ and FONK ‘the fear of not knowing’, which consequentially drove them ‘to constantly check their phones for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter feeds and new emails and texts’ (Munro, 2013). Should this constant checking of electronic devices become the norm? What is the cost and what will be sacrificed?
FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

The very nature of friendship and its key aspects has been redefined by this reliance on the mobile. Social media and electronic devices allow an unprecedented level of control to be exercised by teens in how they engage with others. Turkle uses an analogy of the children’s story *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* to describe the nature of relationships in the digital age. Like Goldilocks who tried bowls of porridge and beds until she found the one that was ‘just right’, Turkle asserts that friendships are customised to be ‘not too close, not too far, but just right’ (2012). This is problematic in terms of adolescents learning how to communicate and navigate the ups and downs of relationships. Through the use of technology, teens can avoid the demands, the emotions and the unpleasant, messy moments inherent in human relationships. Yet, what is sacrificed is that adolescents may not have as wide a range of experiences to add to their social skills from this developmental stage of their lives.

Teens increasingly favour text messaging as the preferred means of communication with their peers. Communicating in bite-size grabs, some adolescents may boast that their communication skills are far superior to those of their parents, as they can multi-task by reaching several people with one text. Moreover, teens view texting as ‘a very useful way of undertaking one’s social obligations to stay in touch without spending time or energy on the encounter’ (Campbell, 2005, p. 5). While it certainly seems on the surface that teens have taken communication to a new level, they are actually distancing themselves from having a true connection with their friends by avoiding face-to-face communication. Turkle has found that teenagers ‘talk about their dread of conversation as they explain why “texting is always better than talking”’ (2011, p. 65). Data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that:

The volume of texting among teens has risen from a median fifty texts a day in 2009 to sixty texts for the typical teen text user. Older girls remain the most enthusiastic texters, with a median of 100 texts a day in 2011, compared with fifty for boys the same age. (Brenner, 2012)

Texting certainly has its advantages in terms of planning and organising; however, for adolescents it is limiting key conversation skills that are the foundation to understanding relationships.

Professor Patti Valkenburg, from the University of Amsterdam’s Centre for Research on Children, Adolescents and the Media, highlights that modern communication tools assist adolescents to have control over their need for self-preservation, as well as to communicate their identity to others (cited in Henley, 2010). Teens have control over the information they can post about themselves and who, when and how they engage with others. For example, Facebook allows for groups where friends can communicate; however, a pitfall of this ability is that ‘it is common for friends to expect that their friends will stay available — a technology-enabled social contract demands continual peer presence’ (Turkle, 2011, p. 174). A general unspoken rule amongst teens is that the acceptable time lapse for responding to messages is 15 minutes. With this in mind, it can be concluded that the control that adolescents have within the confines of social media is true to a certain extent.

Another perceived benefit for adolescents is the control they have, via social media, over their individual online profiles. However, based on her research and discussions with American teens, Turkle (2011) comments on the anxiety and, indeed, panic that some teens feel towards their online profile and life. They worry about what photo to upload, what comment to post and who to be friends with. The online world is a very public place where anyone can view another’s profile. As a result, teens are spending increasingly more time creating the ‘perfect’ online profile that will meet the approval of the desired digital groups, which can in turn lead to greater social anxiety as to who they really are.

This social anxiety is concerning as ‘establishing a coherent identity is the fundamental psycho-social task of adolescence. Adolescents must establish a clear sense of who they are, what they are, what they believe in and where they are headed’ (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008, p. 139). Facebook and other social media networks
have added another layer to self-discovery and identity that teens are compelled to work through. Therefore, it is important that adolescents are supported and guided by adults to balance the influence of online pressures.

As more research and studies are conducted to investigate the influence of electronic devices in adolescents’ lives, adults need to be mindful of the subtle changes impacting upon their development. Clear and firm rules regarding use of electronic devices at home is important, along with modelling of how these devices should be used. Of course, this is always easier said than done, however, teens require those firm boundaries to ensure they are safe online.

At Brisbane Girls Grammar School, we continue to inform students about appropriate use of electronic devices and maintain clear and transparent rules and expectations of their use while at School. Teaching our girls about the pitfalls of technology will equip them with necessary online cautions. This, together with more traditional aspects of schooling such as face-to-face communication, will assist students to build confidence and resilience ‘offline’. Educating young people about the importance of balanced interactions in various ‘worlds’ is essential in preparing them to be able to contribute and engage meaningfully beyond school.

REFERENCES


From a place of being so often marginalised and undervalued as an academic discipline, from a position of deference and even fearfulness, the arts are increasingly being acknowledged in research as central to a considered set of ‘twenty-first century skills’ that students will need to live and work in the world. Advances in neuroscience and imaging technology are uncovering and mapping some of the brain’s complexities in action and are demonstrating the power of the arts to our thinking, feeling and decision-making. Business, industry, and government are all turning their eyes to the importance of the reasoning styles and processes that an arts education richly provides for our students, for both their educational experiences and for their future interactions in the world of work and relationships.

In April of this year, the Creative Arts Faculty of Brisbane Girls Grammar School hosted an inaugural public symposium for arts educators and students entitled Creative Futures. The forum explored how students of the arts might create future career pathways out of their arts education, using their skills as professional artists but also as participants in business and industry. Our keynote speaker, Adam Blake, National Manager, Design Integration Program, stressed to the audience that the critical skills formed and cultivated in arts-based learning will be the ‘must have’ assets for graduates entering the world of work (2013). Blake reported that the number of graduates in creative and design industries across the nation is now almost 300,000. The arts programmes at Brisbane Girls Grammar School are committed to a momentum that ensures our students connect and communicate with the world and become part of the new future.

Gradually across the education spectrum, the essential elements that are arts skills are showing up in academic theory and in practices that go beyond schooling. What are some of the highlights of arts education theory and practice that are taking hold in these first decades of this century?

Some years ago the Harvard Graduate School of Education developed Artful Thinking as one of their Project Zero initiatives (n.d.). Artful Thinking is a programme used in schools, and now in some industries, to encourage different ways of perceiving, understanding and communicating. The artful thinking approach is not so much about ‘making’ in the arts. Rather, it is about experiencing the arts as a means of viewing questions and integrating content using the analytical skills and thinking strategies of the arts to work across all curriculum areas. The artful thinking approach uses what is termed a ‘thinking palette’ — six thinking dispositions to emphasise intellectual behaviours. These intellectual behaviours include making careful observations, exploring multiple viewpoints and reasoning with evidence. While they obviously have a skill focus, they also evoke a more affective and motivational element crucial to effective learning and good thinking: personal and purposeful engagement with learning.
STEM — science, technology, engineering and maths — has been another important focus for organising learning programmes in education. However, ultimately it was considered not comprehensive enough to translate into skilling students to lead with the necessary edge in an advancing economic society, especially where the economy is in difficulty. STEM has now become STEAM, adding the ‘A’ to integrate the thinking skills privileged in the arts. Even Sesame Street, the long-running, international, iconic educational television series, which had introduced STEM into their scripts and scenarios, transformed this to STEAM in their most recent season (Maeda, 2012).

Both the STEAM and artful thinking approaches are mining the common ground of what were considered diametrically opposed fields of learning and practice — with the arts seen as a luxury, the icing on the cake, and ‘real’ subjects like mathematics and science considered the heart of learning and the passport to industry. In a recent meeting of Creative Arts staff, Head of Chemistry Mr Keith Treschman presented a snapshot of Senior Chemistry in this School. It was clear from his presentation that contextual and conceptual thinking are shared high-profile skills formed in students in both the sciences and the arts. Even more important is the clear priority in both learning areas on focusing on posing questions — the nature of these questions and the drive for students to seek a resolution that is a resolved truth, but not necessarily any single, uniform pre-destined truth.

Another example is the list of words developed by Stephen Beal, President of the California College of the Arts, that he believes resonates for both sides of the stereotypical science-maths versus arts curriculum divide: ‘research, observation, experimentation, discovery, collaboration, and innovation’ (2013). He points out that both ‘the studio and the laboratory are learn-by-doing educational experiences’ (2013).

Companies and organisations that have traditionally looked to large research universities for talent are now looking for artists and designers — creative people who will bring to the workplace unique problem-solving skills, entrepreneurial spirit, and a deep understanding of the user experience. (Beal, 2013)

Neuroscience and the arts is another active field of research that is affirming the dynamic nature of arts thinking. Neuroscience informs us about the affective workings of the brain and mind, revealing the centrality of motivation, value and pleasure in innovative thinking. The arts promote the why of learning, not only how and what. It is this affective bias that provides a different and vital edge to thinking and innovation, underpinned by values and culture.

Ellen Dissanayake, Affiliate Professor at the University of Washington’s School of Music, has written and spoken about the ways in which creative group activities contribute to the release of the powerful hormone oxytocin which not only suppresses stress but raises positive feelings (2013). James Zull, Professor of Biology and Director of the University Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Education at Case Western Reserve University, researches the connections between arts and neuroscience (2005). He also discusses the role of reward chemicals such as dopamine, which is released in the region of the brain that we use to create ideas, make decisions and plan our actions (Zull, 2005). Creating new ideas brings feelings of reward. Emotions may not necessarily problem-solve, but it seems that they are critical to reasoning and analysis and to the motivational elements that are indispensable to effective learning, problem-resolving and decision-making.

Creativity is part of the twenty-first century lexicon; and while we understand that this attribute is by no means the sole property of the arts, creativity in arts education is also importantly about innovation and conceptual thinking. Knowledge and information have very little power without a transformational platform. There is a growing realisation and recognition that the thinking, collaboration and productivity actively practised and honed in arts classrooms are intrinsic, both economically and socially, to the wellbeing of the workplace. These practices that are central to the creative industry domain and to design teams are now more and more part of government and business. These are natural destinations for not only the artists in our midst, but for those students who enter these spheres with a solid, long-term learning base in the arts.
The twenty-first century is a time and place of constant challenge, where new is better and new ways of doing are expected. Our students will work in environments where they will need to be adept and adaptable, fast-moving yet mindful. The arts thrive on questions, on exploring pathways known and unknown, on reflecting, editing, reshaping — all in response to resolving the questions, without necessarily forming a definitive answer. The truth in arts is not a single truth. Looking at the world through different prisms, as happens in the arts, opens the possibility to innovative, conceptual and emotional thinking — a skill set that is historically embedded in concrete practices and not merely as generic theory.

It is exciting to see these thinking dispositions in our own arts programmes — in the composition work in Curriculum Music, in the diverse representations of the Visual Art students, and in the deep layers of theatre explored and practised in the Drama department, to name but a few. When Shari Tishman talks about the dispositions she envisages for good thinking, she not only uses words such as ‘strategic’ and ‘evaluate’ but also ‘wonder’ and ‘adventurous’ (n.d.). In venturing into the shifting sands of the future, our students will need as prerequisites a capacity for wonder and adventure in a framework of wisdom, integrity and imagination. The arts are here to help.

REFERENCES


From the earliest days, competition in sport has been woven into the historical fabric of Brisbane Girls Grammar School. Tennis matches were played on the court at the front of the Main Building, a sports uniform was designed for girls to compete in the Queensland Girls Secondary Schools Sports Association (QGSSSA) and sporting awards were highly sought-after in recognition of sporting excellence (Harvey-Short, 2011).

The founding principles of sport at the School were based on the informed desire of the early ‘Lady Principals’ to include physical activity and competition into the girls’ daily routine. The advanced thinking of these women was remarkable, as this was occurring at a time when women were not even afforded the right to vote in Australia. Then as now, Brisbane Girls Grammar School represents a different picture to statistics for girls’ participation in sport.

Sophia Beanland, Principal from 1878–1888, persevered with the Board of Trustees to have a gymnasium built and established tennis as a competitive sporting activity, awarding a silver bracelet to the winner. Charlotte Pells, 1888–1895, believed education should be threefold: mental, moral and physical. She could not understand ‘how a careless, slouching walk, narrow chest and weak muscles can be considered things of no importance’ (cited in Harvey-Short, 2011). Kathleen Lilley, 1925–1952, believed that ‘physical activity and sport had the capacity to develop initiative and self-reliance in the individual and acted as a balance to academic stresses’ (cited in Harvey-Short, 2011). As outlined by Pauline Harvey-Short in her book To Become Fine Sportswomen: The History of Health, Physical Education and Sport at Brisbane Girls Grammar School 1875–2010 (2011), by the start of the twentieth century the extensive Physical Education and Health programme at the School was ‘incorporating the most modern components of the subject used worldwide’.

With such a solid foundation, it is no surprise that physical activity and sport are so integral to the life of a Girls Grammar student. And now, when media outlets are drastically under-reporting the recognition of our successful female athletes, Grammar girls are defying the national and international trends by continuing to participate, pursue and actively engage in the challenge of...
competitive sport. Harvey-Short (2011) summarised the tangible reasons as to why this continues at the School:

- The strength of the Interhouse programme and the inter-school competition. Brisbane Girls Grammar School was a founding member of QGSSSA (originally the Sports' Association of Secondary Girls' Schools), which developed into the first secondary school sports association in Queensland.
- Access to top quality venues, including the recent purchase of the thirteen-hectare sports campus at Fig Tree Pocket.
- Prizes for achievement in physical education and sport: an awards system designed to recognise the many sporting achievements of the girls.
- Dedicated, qualified staff to deliver the teaching, coaching and development of sporting programmes.

As a result, over 700 girls participate in eighteen competitive sports for Girls Grammar each year. In research conducted into participation rates over the past decade, 70% of the student population has represented Girls Grammar in competitive sport. In the winter months, more than 600 girls are involved in Rowing, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Athletics, Hockey, Netball, Tennis and Volleyball. Most notably, in stark contrast to the national and international trends, there has been no decline in the rate of participation for Brisbane Girls Grammar School students in the past decade.

National trends have reflected a decline in sports participation rates for girls aged 12–14 years from 2003 to 2012. The only improvement is the narrowing of the gap between girls and boys participation rates. In 2008, 56% of girls aged 12–14 years participated in organised sport, while over 71% of boys did so (ABS, 2008). In 2012, the gap and the rates have decreased: 66% boys and 53% girls (ABS, 2012). When compared to girls aged 15 and over, there is no ABS data associated specifically with competitive sport, which is often where a decline in participation in organised sport occurs for girls. In the United Kingdom, participation rates are even lower for girls, 40% for those aged 12–17, and the decline in girls’ participation in organised sport from Year 10 to Year 13 is drastic: 39% in Year 10 to 15% in Year 13 (Quick, Simon, & Thornton, 2010). Sadly, the same gap in gender participation exists in the United States of America, where girls make up just 42% of those involved in sport, compared to the 58% who are boys (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2013).

The levels of participation in organised sport at Brisbane Girls Grammar, in terms of our School population, are impressive in comparison to the national and international data. Surely participation rates across the country and the world would soar if more leaders embraced the same sentiments as the leaders at this fine educational institution.

Looking beyond participation rates, it appears that there is an absence of women in decision-making positions in sport. Women who could contribute to the strategic planning, allocation of funds and guiding philosophies of sporting organisations are particularly under-represented in coaching at the elite level, as well as in administrative positions. In Australia, only 24.4% of board directorships of national sport organisations (NSOs) are held by women. Five out of the fifty-five NSOs recognised and funded by the Australian Sports Commission did not appoint one woman to their board in 2013 (Women on Boards, 2013). In the United States, 80% of the universities who compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association employed a male as the athletic director (Irick, 2011). In the United Kingdom, thirty-one out of fifty-seven boards surveyed do not meet the 25% minimum female representative expectation, and six sports boards do not have any female representation at all (Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2013).

It appears that, over the past fifteen years, very little progress has been made for women to be represented equally at the decision-making level in sport. At a time when the future of our girls’ involvement in sport could be quite seriously affected, it behoves this Director of Sport to try to address this issue within the microcosm of society that is Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

The School is committed to offering girls not only the opportunity to be involved in sport during their school years.
days, but to further their engagement after they have graduated. Over the last decade, alumnae coaches have increased to over 80% of our total coaching staff and assistance is given to coaches who wish to pursue formal coaching qualifications. Connections with alumnae are a natural progression in sport, and opportunities to network and mentor coaches exist in many unofficial avenues. In numerous ways, Grammar girls are better equipped to become leaders in sport based on the structure that they experience while playing sport at the School.

In order to change what has become the status quo for women in leadership positions in sport, there needs to be a greater focus on preparing girls for opportunities to develop leadership skills in sport while they are still in school. Principal Milisent Wilkinson, in 1908, stated:

> It is sometimes said that women in their ventures into life do not display the qualities which men possess, self-restraint, good fellowship when pursuing a common aim, ability to take defeat in good part, esprit de corps, qualities which men first gain as boys, from their games. If this be so, there is all the more reason why girls should be given, equally to boys, the chance to receive such beneficial effects and be no longer debarred from the education of the playground. (cited in Harvey–Short, 2011)

The playground of the twentieth century has become the boardroom of the twenty-first century. In order to best prepare our girls, Brisbane Girls Grammar will use sport to capture their boardroom skills while they are beginning to imagine their future careers. Employed coaches will continue to be encouraged to gain qualifications while engaging with a network of qualified and accomplished alumnae. This helps to develop greater bonds and creates more opportunities for women to support each other in the process of pursuing a position of leadership. Experienced coaches will mentor younger coaches, not just in the skills of coaching, but in decision-making and professional behavior as well. Built-in leadership from tiered and transparent coaching structures — including formal reviews, coaching workshops and feedback opportunities — will be a refinement that will be introduced. Events such as the Sportswomen of Excellence Celebration in October this year will showcase all sports teams and their achievements, highlight our excellent coaches and recognise our alumnae who have benefitted from participating in sport well beyond their time at this School.

These strategies will educate and encourage girls, coaches and teachers to be prepared to challenge for national leadership positions in coaching, administration and beyond. They will also continue to educate our staff and girls on the importance of ‘taking a seat at the table’ (as advocated by Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook CFO) in order to be heard. Without delay, the representation of the decision-makers in sport must be the participants — all participants. It will come as no surprise that our girls will be very well represented. ■
REFERENCES


The culture of Brisbane Girls Grammar celebrates achievements in learning. Each year our extraordinary girls set academic goals and work to the best of their ability to achieve them. Many of these goals are focused on attaining a certain mark or, from the perspective of our Year 12 students, they may emphasise a certain OP score. The dedication and determination with which the girls apply themselves to their studies and co-curricular pursuits are often astonishing and certainly worthy of recognition. While not all of our students can achieve the top marks or the highest OP score, the fact remains that their efforts and achievements are just as worthy of celebration. In my efforts to understand how to remind all Grammar girls to celebrate their successes without comparing themselves to others, I turned to Wendy Mogel’s book *The Blessing of a B Minus* (2011). This article summarises some of Mogel’s salient points and their context to the School community.

It is hard work being a parent of a teenager. The dangers of the world are real; suddenly they are learning how to drive, going to parties, developing (often without fully understanding) virtual profiles that will follow them into adulthood, and their future studies and careers are not as far off in the distance as they were when they were in primary school. Now there is more at stake and the protective urge in parents is easily triggered. At an age when it is important to take a step back and give your teen space to learn about life, it is easy for parents to perceive this as a dereliction of their duties; however, ‘respectfully detaching’ (2011, p. 104) is crucial to your teen’s development and is a key point that Mogel makes in her book.

Girls Grammar’s aspiration ‘to be a leader in exceptional scholarship’ is an inspiration to both students and teachers; yet it can, perhaps, be narrowly misinterpreted to mean that ‘exceptional scholars’ are only those who achieve As or get OP 1s. This interpretation is incorrect and can cause problems for students and their families. Just as not all sprinters can run as fast as Usain Bolt, not every student can achieve top marks. Besides which, this is not the point of our aspiration. Rather we ‘look for the exceptional in who [our students] are and what [they] do — and build upon it — making the most of [their] talents, interests and assets’ (Bell, n.d.). This is what makes us an exceptional school.

Nonetheless, in a competitive world it is understandable why the idea of stepping back and not pushing for perfection can feel like the shirking of parental responsibilities, which is why Mogel’s book is so relevant. As a clinical psychologist, she explores how the passage of adolescence is necessarily painful due to the fact that teens need to separate from their parents, but she invites readers to recognise that this detachment is crucial and can be viewed in a positive light. She points out that there is, in fact, a real danger in being overprotective and putting too much pressure on adolescents. According to Mogel, it is possible for parents to change their perspectives on a long list of common complaints about adolescence and to see them as blessings in disguise — including your daughter getting a B minus.

Each chapter of the book looks at different issues such as rudeness, materialism and carelessness.

The importance of a low academic score can be exaggerated and parents need to see it as an opportunity for their teen to learn some life lessons rather than as a
sign of failure. The blessing of a B minus — if this is, in fact, perceived as a unsatisfactory mark — is that it can prompt your daughter to reflect on what went wrong: Did she work hard enough or was she lazy? Did she give herself enough time to work on the task or did she procrastinate? Did she access help if it was required or did she blindly persevere? Self-reflection such as this, especially when supported by parental advice, can encourage teens to ‘enlist the help of an adult’ (2011, p. 100) and, as Mogel correctly points out, teachers love it when their students take an interest and ask them for help.

The rhetoric at Girls Grammar often refers to raising independent young women in terms of self-advocacy, autonomy and accountability. We encourage and celebrate the progress we see from the early stages, where parents contact the School regarding their daughters’ concerns, to the point where the girls seek help from their Head of House and teachers on their own volition. To achieve this, the girls must start the process of separation from their parents and their parents must also accept the role they need to play in this process by detaching.

Mogel goes to some length to explain that, ‘detachment practiced properly is neither cold nor unloving. It doesn’t mean that you walk away from your parenting duties. Quite the opposite. Detachment is a balancing act that requires both compassion and contraction’ (2011, p. 7). When a parent contacts a teacher themselves rather than their daughter doing it, hires a tutor or even helps too much with an assignment (2011, p. 100), they can end up ‘robbing their teen of an opportunity to learn from natural consequences’ (2011, pp. 103–104). Of course, students and their particular learning needs are varied and complex and, therefore, require different approaches and levels of support, but it is important for parents to remember to ‘step back, think calmly and then respond’ (2011, p. 98) rather than trying to rush in and take action.

Another blessing of a B minus is that it provides teenagers with an opportunity to develop resilience. I must at this stage point out that, to many students, a B minus is an excellent mark — even a measure of success — after all, any mark above an official pass means that the student has met the assessment requirements. However, to others it can be perceived as a ‘failure’ or it can ring alarm bells for students and their parents aiming for an OP1. This is what leads Mogel to two key points explored in depth in her book: firstly, that disappointment is necessary in adolescence in order for teenagers to build resilience; and secondly, that there are much more accurate predictors of success in adulthood than grades in high school.

Parents should not try to shield their teens from experiencing the disappointment of a low result because this is actually ‘good suffering’ (2011, p.103) and helps prepare an adolescent to successfully face future challenges as an adult. Indeed, overprotecting teens from disappointments can cause negative results, which is discussed by Mogel in chapter 6: ‘The Blessing of Problems to Solve’. ‘College Deans use the code name ‘teacups’ for incoming students who are overprotected and fragile. When presented with a challenge, teacups don’t rise to it. They crack’ (2011, p. 95). Furthermore, when parents respond to a B minus as if it is a crisis, they are also conveying unintended messages such as: ‘the work is unbearable (no, it’s just unfamiliar); it’s too much for [her] (no, [she] is sufficiently capable); it’s so terribly important for [her] to do well on every single [assessment] that we can’t take any chances (no, it’s just one [assessment] out of many’ (2011, p. 55).

These messages can undermine a teen’s potential to build self-confidence in their ability to overcome future challenges. For example, if as an adult they have a demanding boss, or need to work with problematic colleagues, or navigate an important yet complex relationship, they may not be able to find the inner strength to persevere and succeed if they never had a chance to discover this ability as a teenager (2011, p. 97). Concomitantly, if a parent can take a deep breath, step back and give their teenager the room to have a go at working things out, then the message this conveys is that they trust their child’s ability to problem solve (2011, p. 102).

The prevalence of our culture’s narrow definition of success, such as top marks or the highest OP, can result in more accurate predictors of adult success actually being overlooked. In chapter 2: ‘The Blessing of a Strange Fruit’,
Mogel states that qualities of emotional intelligence contribute far more to happiness and success as an adult than high school results or even university degrees. These include: ‘empathy, optimism, flexibility, a good sense of humour, the capacity to function as a team member and a positive reaction to setbacks’ (2011, p. 24). Indeed, when teenagers feel that they are being constantly measured by society — their grades, their looks, their popularity — this can have serious effects on their wellbeing. Even students who constantly achieve high results can perceive this as a negative as they fear that they are only on top of things while they are academically successful; they can feel as though they are constantly walking on a tightrope where one false step will make them fall. You only need to turn on the television to hear this message reinforced — think MasterChef: ‘You’re only as good as the last thing you cooked’.

Living in a constant state of anxiety due to the pressures of striving to be perfect is obviously not healthy and can be avoided by reminding ourselves to celebrate the real successes of our teenagers. We need to recognise that when our students display personal development by setting realistic personal goals or PBs and achieving them, demonstrating maturity and resilience, behaving more compassionately towards those around them, and taking up the offers of further help from their teachers, these are the signs that they are successfully growing into young adults. At Girls Grammar, our focus remains on establishing our students’ love of life–wide learning; therefore, the measure of an OP in one sense becomes arbitrary — yet it is far too easy to lose sight of this.

Mogel clearly acknowledges that ‘accepting [our] children as they are — not tiny champions who are exceptional at everything, but gloriously ordinary’ (2011, p. 10) takes courage. And while intellectually we can understand and appreciate that adolescence is all about our children slowly separating themselves from us, their parents and guardians, it does not necessarily diminish our surprise at how much it hurts (2011, p. 16). I only hope that when my daughter reaches adolescence and starts slamming doors, rejecting my advice simply because I’m her mother, and experiences the disappointment of a low academic mark, I will remember to reach for Mogel’s The Blessing of a B Minus and understand that my ‘formerly cuddly, adoring toddler has begun the difficult work of separation’ (2011, p. 16) and is on her way to becoming an adult.

REFERENCES


The new information paradigm

KRISTINE COOKE, DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES | 11 OCTOBER 2013

In a world abuzz with electronic information, Brisbane Girls Grammar School has embarked on a major new building project, the Research & Innovative Learning Centre. This new five-level building that will house research, library and classroom zones is designed to make a significant and positive impact on the learning experiences of the students and the academic environment of the School. Metaphorically, it is a ‘tree of learning’ reflecting and embracing the Moreton Bay fig — the centenarian that stands so proudly at our Gregory Terrace front fence. The new building will have a glass façade that will allow students to feel as if they are ‘sitting in the branches’ and will also permit the public to see the engagement with scholarship that this School has embraced for almost 140 years.

Some may agree with Geoff Hanmer (2013), who asserted in The Australian Financial Review that, because ‘anyone can find out virtually anything using Google or Wikipedia on their smartphone, the relevance of the traditional university library has been sharply reduced’. There are those who believe this is also true of school libraries: indeed one large Queensland Government high school of almost 1,000 students announced the closure of its library at the end of last term after forty-five years of service to the school community.

Our new research centre is not being constructed to ‘allow the library to keep books that [we] should have the courage to throw out’ (Hanmer, 2013); it will allow the professional staff of the library the opportunity to develop an integrated and strategic approach to research and information gathering: an approach that blends books, digitised information, the traditional Dewey system, and modern apps. Indeed, the Beanland Memorial Library was an early adopter of technology, introducing a computerised catalogue in 1983, and pioneering our intranet in 1995. In 2013 it subscribes to twenty-four external databases.

Librarians are not technophobes; rather we have embraced the online environment and do not run ‘towards the edge of the digital cliff crying “Google and Wikipedia will save us”’ (McKerracher, 2013). Professionals in high school libraries understand that many adolescents often take the easy research option. Their first, and sometime only, information decision is Google and in a results page using this search engine, the first hit is generally Wikipedia followed by YouTube. Optify, a digital marketing organisation, has shown that only 2 per cent of searchers work down to click on the last item on the first page. If they navigate to page two, the hit rate is down to 1.2 per cent by the fifth item (Optify, n.d.).

Many students are more than adept at the ‘cut and paste’ method of task completion, relying on the first page of Google hits to rank, sort, and evaluate for them. All too often this proves unsatisfactory as the information can lack sophistication and specificity. This behaviour is validated by a survey of almost 2,500 teachers by the Pew Research Center (Purcell, et al., 2012). The heart of any
genuine research is astute inquiry where students create their own questions, make discoveries, think critically, manipulate information, draw reasoned conclusions, and become knowledge creators. This does not happen without a clear supporting research philosophy. The Guided Inquiry instructional design model developed by Carol Kuhlthau, and one endorsed by this School, provides a process for targeted teacher intervention to furnish students with the procedural skills necessary to become confident manipulators of information and producers of knowledge.

Library staff and teachers collaborate to offer more effective strategies than Google. The aim is to enable students to understand and validate their background knowledge, explore by developing their own questions, work through conflicting information, and engage with a diversity of ideas. These skills will allow students to become critical thinkers and evaluators of information. Thus, the library supports a judicious blend of books, database searches, journal articles, and internet exploration.

In the later stages of last term, a Year 11 biology student was looking for reliable and balanced information on her allocated ‘disease’. A library staff member was able to direct her to comprehensive books on pathology written by experts in the field and an authoritative and comprehensive medical dictionary. She returned two days later pleased with what she had learned, saying ‘now I can check for online information because I understand more and will be able to judge the validity of what I find with greater confidence’. Sometimes it is not a matter of either books or digital, rather it is the judicious blending of both.

Even before the first clod of earth was turned for the new building, it was easy to be consumed with the number of power points, floor finishes and furniture, but it is the underlying philosophy that must never be lost: the Aspiration of the School must always be the touchstone for the design process.

Visitors to Oxford University are immediately aware that, even if tourists, they are immersed in a whole community that has, for centuries, been involved in learning and scholarship. Touring the Bodleian Library is a concentrated, distilled experience. When walking through rooms with a history and a culture of scholarship, it is as if your being is infused with something intangible in each breath you take — just by being there.

Dutch architect Francine Houben designed Europe’s largest public library in Birmingham, England, a beautiful building that has just opened. Houben has described her concept of the library in the twenty-first century, asserting that libraries are ‘the most important public buildings, like cathedrals were many years ago’ (2013). She explained how the Birmingham building was designed as a ‘people’s palace … We wanted it to be very inviting and welcoming, not just about books. It’s not just for the rich or the intellectuals, it’s for everybody’ (2013).

This inclusivity is foundational to the way in which the new Brisbane Girls Grammar School research centre is being developed. While perhaps not in the same league as the Bodleian or the Birmingham library, the Beanland Memorial Library also aspires to enthuse its students with an atmosphere and resources that inspire scholarship — because excellence should not be an unattainable goal but an everyday habit.
REFERENCES


When visiting an American university in January this year, I became interested in Professor Susan McHale’s new body of work on the role of siblings in family dynamics. Upon my return to Brisbane, an article on first-borns, ‘Made for life: First out, best dressed’ (Symons, 2013), caught my eye. Birth order theories had been dismissed by many as pop psychology in the 1990s, but in 2013 rigorous debate still continues about this controversial theory. Is there really something to this birth order theory and could this new research about siblings help me gain a better understanding of my students — their personalities and academic performance — and about the role of sisters?

Birth order is fun to debate. Everyone is an oldest, middle, youngest or only child and can recount a personal story when it comes to birth order. We are all affected by this constellation but the effects of birth order are not straightforward and clear (Klass, 2009). Birth order theorists begin with the basic premise that every child born into a family assumes a unique position which determines his or her early experiences of life. Because the family unit is a microcosm of society, lessons about conformity, frustration, persuasion, strategy and control are learned from an early age. Theorists would have us believe that an individual’s intelligence, achievement, career, creativity, empathy, delinquency and even blood pressure are all linked to birth order (Hudson, 1990).

The interest in birth order and intelligence dates back to 1874 when Sir Francis Galton observed that more first-born sons held prominent positions than could be attributed to chance (Kristensen & Bjerkedal, 2007). Early in the twentieth century, Austrian psychoanalyst Alfred Adler argued that birth order has an effect on personality and that the position in the family — whether it be first-born, second, middle, only or youngest — leaves an indelible stamp for life (Grose, 2003). The publication of Frank Sulloway’s Born to Rebel in 1996 added renewed energy to birth order research. Given his belief that place in family was the single best predictor of leadership and creativity, Sulloway (cited in Grose, 2003) assigned the following set of personal characteristics to the different birth order positions:
First-borns are more: achievement-oriented, anxious, antagonistic, assertive, conforming, fearful, jealous, extraverted, organised, intense, responsible, self-confident and traditional. They are more likely to identify with their parents and more likely to assume leadership roles than later-borns.

Later-borns are more: gregarious, co-operative, easygoing, jealous, intense, adventurous, altruistic, emphatic, open to experience, popular, rebellious, risk-taking, sociable and unconventional. They experience more stress.

In Why First-borns Rule the World and Last-borns Want to Change It, Michael Grose (2003) questioned how a group of children from the same genetic pool, being brought up by the same parents in the same neighbourhood and attending the same school, could be so different. He also argued that, ‘A child’s position in his or her family impacts on the child’s personality, behaviour, learning and ultimately his or her earning power’ (p. 1).

Not everyone, however, agrees with the conclusions of the birth order theorists. These studies have been criticised for focusing on outcomes or observed relationships and not on causation. In addition, when scientists scrutinised the data, they found the link between birth order and personality to be tenuous and not convincing (Hartshorne, 2010).

According to Alan Stewart (cited in Whitbourne, 2013), we are not fated to live our life dominated by the timing of our birth. Having distinguished between birth order (the numerical rank order into which you are born) and psychological birth order (self-perceived position in the family), he concluded that one’s perceived niche in the family plays a larger role in influencing the adult we become than the actual timing of our birth. In addition, Daniel Eckstein (cited in Whitbourne, 2013) has argued that parents may, because of their perceptions about birth order, unconsciously assign these stereotyped roles and create self-fulfilling prophesies for their children. It is important to define our children in terms of who they are and not when they were born (Whitbourne, 2013).

These birth order theories cause a great deal of soul-searching on the part of parents. In trying to pin down the definitive shaper of a child’s personality, experts finally conceded what is obvious: that the one constant in family life is the parent. This central role often causes parents to feel guilty about their child-rearing decisions, particularly when they share their time unequally between siblings. Parents would certainly agree with the proposition that the first child could be thought of as ‘the first draft’ (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). Experience helps, making parental expectations about adolescents more realistic and leading to more relaxed and harmonious relationships with later-borns (Whiteman, McHale & Crouter, 2003). It must be acknowledged, however, that parental supervision, attachment and discipline are also significant influences on each child’s development (Cundiff, 2010).

Recent studies have concluded what we have known all along: siblings are key players in forming a child’s personality. Parents raise you. Your spouse lives with you. But it is your brothers and sisters who really shape you (Kluger, 2006). It is from siblings that lessons are learned about how to form adult relationships. From birth, siblings perform quite contradictory roles; they are competitors yet objects of pride, both collaborators and co-conspirators, role models and cautionary tales, protectors and scolds, tormentors and playmates, counsellors and sources of envy. They teach one other how to resolve conflicts, how not to conduct friendships, and when to walk away from them. Sisters teach brothers about the mysteries of girls, brothers teach sisters about the puzzle of boys (Kluger, 2006). Professor Susan McHale (cited in Kluger, 2013) believes that, ‘There’s nothing like having a band of brothers and sisters to venture out with you’. Dorothy Rowe describes in My Dearest Enemy: My Dangerous Friend: Making and BreakingSibling Bonds (2007) the pain and pleasure of having a sibling and how sibling relationships are very much about being validated as a person. Siblings themselves go a long way to explaining sibling dynamics and individual personalities within families.

To gain personal insights into what being a sibling means for today’s teenaged girls, I asked several Grammar girls for their thoughts.
FIRST-BORN SIBLINGS

As the oldest child, I am used to doing things first; I remember that being the first to go to high school made me feel so grown-up. When my sister came to Girls Grammar, I became a bit competitive... I think it was a bit of sibling rivalry, although she always seemed so chilled...

As the oldest sibling coming to Girls Grammar, you get to find out everything for yourself, which is more fun! On the other hand, it means that my sister has (hopefully) been able to learn from my mistakes.

SECOND SIBLINGS

As the second sibling to come to Girls Grammar, I found it both easy and difficult. Arriving in Year 8 wasn’t daunting or overwhelming but exciting... but it was slightly more difficult to pave my own way and make my own impact on the School.

Being the second child to come to Girls Grammar I found it hard not to copy my sister all the time. I found that I have similar interests to her but I don’t want to copy her every move.

I felt as though everyone expected me to achieve the same sort of standards academically as my sister. I don’t really feel that pressure anymore, as I have found different strengths in different subjects to what she did.

I realised before I came to Girls Grammar how different we were, and I think this was a good thing, because I think I would have felt pressured to ‘match’ her in some ways. I really appreciate my sister’s advice but I am at a point now where I just want to discover things on my own.

THIRD SIBLINGS

While being the youngest also meant that there were expectations for me to reach the standards of my sisters, it was ultimately easier, as I had people who had experience and were able to pass that and their wisdom on to me.

As the third and youngest child in my family, I generally found my transition into high school easy and comfortable. From the beginning, I was already equipped with experiences from my older siblings, which granted me a certain degree of mental preparation. It was a great advantage.

The consensus amongst Girls Grammar students surveyed is that siblings are significant figures in their adolescent lives. Being the trailblazer is exciting and actually fun, and the older siblings are willing to support and encourage their sisters. As a result, younger siblings are more relaxed and comfortable with school life because they have learned from the experience of their older sisters. These second and third siblings, however, seek to differentiate themselves, staking out their own identities, strengths and co-curricular interests, ever conscious of parental pressure to achieve the same standards as older siblings.

In conclusion, a generation of researchers has tried to prove that birth order determines each child’s personality. Certainly no adolescents, especially later-borns, like to be typecast by random factors such as their order of birth. It is unwise to use our perceptions of birth order to stereotype children, because other factors, such as family dynamics and siblings, determine their character. At Brisbane Girls Grammar, teachers try not to make assumptions about birth order and siblings. Girls are seen as unique individuals in their own right. Siblings are not identical clones, despite having the same genes and family background. They are valued simply for themselves.

REFERENCES


Over the past few weeks, I think I have felt a bit like my GP might feel, sitting in his office with a full list of people awaiting his attention. It has been Senior Education and Training (SET) Plan interview time, where Year 10 students sit and discuss their plans for their subject selections across Years 11 and 12 and how those fit into their longer-term aspirations. They sit in the waiting area outside my office ahead of their appointed time and, one by one, talk with me about where they are now and what they would like their futures to hold. All my conversations start the same way, every single one of them. What are you looking forward to as you head into your Senior years at the School? What are you concerned about? What is playing on your mind going into next year? What I appreciate the most is that none of the conversations ever finish in the same place.

It is rewarding to talk with girls who have clear goals that they have thought through, and a clear path that they would like to walk over the next few years. But equally rewarding for me are the girls who offer a wry smile and a shrug when we talk about where their patterns of study across Years 11 and 12 might take them in the years beyond School. These girls are looking to prepare themselves for a future they have not yet mapped out, that they want to discover as the next years unfold, who want to understand more about themselves and explore diverse paths before deciding on which to tread.

No school in Australia should, in good conscience, be preparing their students to be successful in the world of 2014. Teaching for today does not prepare students for the world of tomorrow — or for the world in the years beyond. Labour market economists forecast that around sixty-five percent of the tasks or contexts that will be completed in the world of work by students now of school age are yet to be imagined (Heffernan, 2011). So, we do not have a responsibility to prepare this generation of students for employment, but to foster the skills for employability in the future — in other words, build the skills for the twenty-first century.

Too often the focus on the capabilities that will required for success in the years ahead is simplistically reduced to digital and technological competencies. There is no doubt that the revolution in how global society accesses, manipulates, produces and evaluates information has been driven by technology. But ultimately, the technology is the medium of delivery or the tool of access. It is the medium and the tool in the same way the multi-floor library stacks, the binders of journals, or the countless reams of hand-written pages were in my school and university life. When we ask what is needed to build capacity to be a life-wide learner for the years ahead, technological skills are only a small part of the equation.

Increasingly, research tells us that schools have a broader responsibility to equip students with the ability to interpret, manipulate and evaluate information. The most comprehensive analysis in this field, the Assessment and Teaching of 21st-Century Skills project coordinated globally through the University of Melbourne (ATC21S, 2013), defines a diverse skill set that schools need to develop: ways of thinking, ways of working, tools for working and skills for living in the world. In practice, these include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, collaboration, and information literacy (Care, 2013). In a life context, these are
the capabilities that academia and industry value now, and will be critical to success in the future.

Technological competencies and digital skills are the vehicles that enable students to develop these capabilities; they are not the end goal in and of themselves (ATC21S, 2013). In many ways this view has underpinned this School’s Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) technology initiative. As all students are using their own computers from the start of 2014 across the curriculum and personalising how they use them to deepen and broaden their learning, our use of technology becomes more focused on a product than a process. It becomes focused on the quality of the material that our students use; it becomes about the depth of thinking a presentation demonstrates; it becomes about the precision of the language in a research piece. It is not about the technical skills needed to manipulate a specific software platform or operating system — one that will be redundant in a shorter period of time than it takes to swap Prime Ministers. It is about becoming discerning and deliberate in how we access information and, more importantly, how we view it critically to make decisions based upon it. These are the real twenty-first century skills.

This is not without challenges. The Australian Curriculum, as with all curricula produced by the Queensland Studies Authority for Senior subjects, places significant emphasis on the teaching of higher-order skills. These skills sit alongside the need to develop the essential concepts and build an understanding of the broad content base within each academic discipline. While getting this balance right is the responsibility of each teacher and the school, it is also (in Queensland particularly) the focus of rigorous policy debate (Ferrari, 2013). Additionally, the balance between concepts and the critical skills of applying them influences the nature and shape of how learning is assessed, requiring schools to develop a more diverse set of assessment tasks and tools. Professor Patrick Griffin from the University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education argues that this is one of the greatest challenges for schools as curricula evolve (Griffin, 2012). A test or an examination cannot tell us the whole story of a student’s capacity to be a critical and analytical thinker. If these are skills we value and wish to foster, they are skills schools must continue to assess and develop.

As teachers are bidding farewell to a cohort of students as they leave the white picket fence behind at the end of Year 12, we often say that they are off into the ‘great unknown’. It has always been a turn of phrase that draws attention to the uncertainty of the path that lies ahead for each and every girl. As I reflect on how my own work life has changed in the past decade, and the way that society and technology has changed what it means to work in schools, that great unknown is not only the uncertainty of which path a girl might take, but what the destination will look like when she gets there. It is every school’s responsibility, as it is Girls Grammar’s, to equip them well for that journey.

REFERENCES


Why is it that some students are focused, organised, and fully engaged and others are easily distracted, disorganised and continually procrastinate? In all kinds of educational settings, the challenge of motivation is one of the essential concepts that is encountered on a daily basis, but it is sometimes the absence of it in students that teachers and parents find most noticeable and of most concern. What is motivation, how is it measured, and how can students become more motivated to learn?

The word motivation comes from the Latin motare — to move or to motor. Robert Slavin, psychologist from the Johns Hopkins University, defines motivation as ‘what gets you going, keeps you going, and determines where you are trying to go’ (cited in Brown, 2008).

Motivation is about energy and direction. It explains what we do and why we do it. It concerns psychological processes behind an individual’s behaviour and involves value components such as intentions, plans, goals, interests and purposes. It has an expectancy of success, confidence in the capacity to succeed and the belief that the results of learning are under personal control. It also contains affective components such as feelings of self-worth and achievement anxiety.

Numerous diverse theories about motivation have been developed over the past sixty years. According to Woodfolk and Margetts (2007), motivation can be grouped into four general approaches: behavioural, humanist, cognitive and socio-cultural.

For the behaviourist, student motivation begins with an analysis of the incentive or rewards available. If a reward is presented as a consequence of an action, the action is likely to be repeated and eventually form a habit. Rewards can include money, marks, stickers, affection, power, prestige, privilege and recognition. Rewards can be used to encourage and discourage behaviours.

From the humanist perspective, to motivate means to encourage a person’s inner resources — their sense of competence, self-esteem, autonomy and self-actualisation. This approach emphasises personal freedom, choice, and striving for personal growth.

Cognitive theorists believe that behaviour is determined by our thinking. Behaviour is initiated and regulated by plans, goals, attribution and expectations; rather than responding to external events or conditions, people respond to their interpretation of these events. People are seen as active and curious, searching for information to solve personally relevant problems.

The socio-cultural view emphasises participation in communities of practice where people engage in activities to maintain their identity and their interpersonal relations within the community. There is a deep relationship between the individual and participation in social communities as a student moves within the group from peripheral participation to central participation.

Motivation is often divided into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation occurs when a student does something purely to avoid punishment or attain a reward, such as good grades, money, recognition and influence. This means that the student is motivated by the pleasure of the reward and is not really interested in the activity for its own sake. It often leads to decreased interest in the task,
thereby diminishing the likelihood that the task will be continued in the future.

Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because a student is motivated from within and is driven by curiosity, interest, and enjoyment to achieve personal goals. A student who is intrinsically motivated does not need to be externally rewarded, but is excited by the challenging nature of the task. Educational researchers (Brewster & Fager, 2000) now believe that intrinsically motivated students:

- are more likely to earn higher grades
- are better personally adjusted to school
- employ strategies that demand more effort
- use more logical information gathering and decision making strategies
- are more likely to persist and complete assigned tasks
- retain information and concepts longer
- are more likely to be lifelong learners.

This simplistic view implies that extrinsic motivation is negative and intrinsic motivation is positive, but Edward Deci and Richard Ryan’s theory of self-determination (2000) suggests that motivation is a developing process. They identify four levels of extrinsic motivation, focusing on the extent to which human behaviours are self-determined. They place motivation on a continuum with amotivation at the left, four stages of extrinsic motivation in the middle and intrinsic motivation at the right.

Understanding the different types of extrinsic motivation is important for those who cannot always rely on intrinsic motivation to foster learning. Self-Determination Theory describes the concept of fostering the internalisation and integration of values and behavioural regulations by promoting a greater sense of choice, more self-initiation and greater personal responsibility. Each type of extrinsic motivation on the continuum indicates the degree to which internalisation and integration are achieved and reflects a range of extrinsic motivational behaviours from unwillingness, to passive compliance, to active personal commitment.

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), the primary factors that drive motivation are the basic psychological needs of autonomy (self-determination), competence and relatedness (sense of belonging). They assert that self-determined people experience a sense of freedom to do what is interesting, personally important and vitalising. An environment that supports these three needs facilitates the process of becoming self-determined and, eventually, intrinsically motivated.

How is student motivation measured?

Student motivation can be effectively measured by their engagement or disengagement in the learning process. Russell, Ainley, and Frydenberg (n.d.) suggest that if motivation is perceived as a driving force, then engagement can be thought of as this force in action. Engagement is the connection between the person and the activity, and they articulate three types of engagement: behavioural, emotional and cognitive.

- Behavioural engagement is about positive conduct, rule following, adhering to norms, effort, persistence, participation in class and other school activities.
- Emotional engagement refers to affective matters and involves emotional reactions to teachers, classmates, learning tasks, and the school. It can be observed by students’ interest, boredom, happiness, and anxiety.
- Cognitive engagement refers to the use of effective learning strategies, self-regulation, intrinsic motivation and mental effort.

While there is no magic formula for motivating students, Deci and Ryan et al. (1991) state that promoting greater self-determination is an important developmental goal and the avenue to attaining outcomes such as creativity, cognitive flexibility and self-esteem. They suggest that, by supporting the achievement of autonomy through offering choice, minimising controls, acknowledging feelings and providing the right information for decision making and task performance, students will retain their natural curiosity and achieve intrinsic motivation for learning.

Barbara Gross Davis (n.d.) from the University of California
states that in order for students to be self-motivated they have to believe that they can succeed, want to succeed and know how to succeed. They need to:

- have confidence in their ability so that they will approach tasks with energy and enthusiasm
- see value in the tasks and work to learn not just to achieve a good grade
- believe that success will come when they apply good learning strategies
- stay focused when things get difficult and not be worried about failure.

Gross Davis identified some of the approaches that teachers and parents employ to encourage students to become self-motivated independent learners. They include:

- helping students connect with their needs, and their sense of curiosity to find personal meaning and value in the material
- ensuring opportunities for students’ success by assigning tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult and provide active participation
- creating an atmosphere that is open and positive
- giving frequent, early, positive feedback that supports students’ beliefs that they can do well
- providing suitable role models for students with which to connect
- adopting a supportive style
- helping students feel that they are a valued member of a learning community.

Extensive research continues to be undertaken to extend and clarify motivational theories and their application. Although some students seem to be naturally enthusiastic and self-motivated about learning, others expect their teachers to inspire, stimulate and challenge them. In gaining even a general understanding of what motivation is — and how it is measured and encouraged — teachers and parents can greatly enhance the educational contexts that facilitate conceptual understanding, flexible problem-solving, personal adjustment and social responsibility.

On a final note, it was most rewarding to witness the Year 11 cohort paying tribute to their Year 12 mentors in such an organised, thoughtful, creative and generous way at the Music Farewell event this week. Independent of staff direction, they arranged groups of students and planned, organised and presented every aspect of the evening. This event and the Gala Concert last week are impressive examples of the motivational levels that young people can achieve when they are immersed in an environment that nurtures self-determination with the ultimate goal of intrinsic motivation. The overwhelming joy experienced at the Gala Concert, as well as the genuine engagement and respect shown to each other at the farewell function, are the corollaries of intrinsically motivated students.
REFERENCES


The act of remembering

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE REMEMBRANCE DAY 2013 SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

STEPHEN WOODS, DIRECTOR OF ENGLISH | 7 NOVEMBER 2013

Ninety-five years ago, on 11 November 1918, at 11 o’clock in the morning, an armistice, or truce, came into effect between the Allied and the German forces fighting on the Western Front. Ever since, many countries have set aside the 11 November as a commemoration of those who died in World War I and in all subsequent wars.

We observe Remembrance Day today, but I suggest that the important thing is not the day or date, but the act of remembering. In fact, after World War II, the Australian and British governments changed the name of this commemoration from Armistice Day to Remembrance Day. The Armistice is a very significant, but an ever-more-distant, moment of history; but remembrance is something we can, and should, do today and every day.

A few years ago, I heard an idea that resonated with me, an idea that I think helps us understand occasions like this: In some cultures, people think of death as having three stages: the first is when a person’s body ceases to function; the second is when the deceased person is buried or cremated; the third is when that person’s name is spoken for the last time, when there is no-one left who remembers them.

When we think about those who died in war, whether in conflicts a long time ago, or in much more recent ones like Iraq and Afghanistan, we are saving them from this third passing, forestalling oblivion. By reading the names of those who perished on monuments like those dotted all over Brisbane and in every town across Australia, and on the Honour Roll of Brisbane Grammar next door; by wearing a poppy; by thinking about some of the people I will mention in the next few minutes; by holding these people in our thoughts during the minute’s silence; by doing these things, we — in a very real sense — keep this third and final, and most profound, death at bay. By remembering, we keep alive the values, principles, and hopes of those who died in war — combatants and civilians, men and women.

That is what the famous lines of the English poet, Laurence Binyon, mean: ‘They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old’. By remembering those who died in war, we keep alive in us the things they stood for. In a less-quoted line from the same poem, Binyon writes that the fallen live on ‘where our desires are and our hopes profound’. So, if we think in the minute’s silence about what it means to live in a country that is free and open and compassionate and democratic, then we are sustaining the very ideas that many of those who died in war believed in.

In a famous elegy for his school friend John Learmonth, who was killed in WWII, the Australian poet J. S. Manifold begins: ‘This is not sorrow, this is work: I build a cairn of words over a silent man’. Manifold looks backward, at the dear friend he lost, at their shared childhoods, and in his poem he builds a memorial, a cairn, out of words. But in that opening line: ‘This is not sorrow, this is work’, we understand that Manifold has a second purpose: he wants to preserve in his poem the things his friend John Learmonth stood for, in particular ‘courage chemically pure, uncrossed with sacrifice or duty or career’. His friend John Learmonth was brave, not necessarily patriotic or loyal, just brave. The point of this
remembering, then, is that maybe we can take up the work of being brave ourselves.

Perhaps we can remember the names of four WWI Australian nurses, Sr Rosa O’Kane, Sr Ada Thomson, Nurse Doris Ridgway, and Nurse Hilda Williams who died here in Australia, not long after the armistice. The Boonah, a transport ship full of Australian soldiers bound for the Western Front made it to Durban in South Africa three days after the Armistice, and returned home to Australia. Tragically, the Spanish Flu, or pneumonic influenza — a disease which killed millions of people worldwide after WWI, many more even than the war itself — broke out on board and, by the time the ship approached Fremantle, hundreds of the soldiers on board had contracted the often-fatal illness.

Despite the risk of infection, twenty nurses volunteered to care for the men at the Woodman’s Point Quarantine Station, in the full knowledge that they themselves could contract the same disease. The four nurses whose names I read out before did, and they died alongside the soldiers they were caring for. Their commanding officer, Lt Col McFarlane, wrote of their courage and devotion, ‘I count it an exceptional honour to have been associated with such a gallant band of sisters, and would lay my tribute of praise at the graves of those who have fallen’. Nurses O’Kane, Williams, Ridgway, and Thomson, were buried at the quarantine station, but, if we think of them and what they did, we keep them from that third death, and perhaps carry their selfless devotion, their love of humanity, as an example for ourselves.
With their final assessment now complete, our Year 12 students have just one week in which to embrace the ease of everyday friendships, reflect upon their Girls Grammar experience and anticipate the opportunities of the future from within the confines of the white picket fence. Reminiscing will include five years of curricular, co-curricular and social events, as different experiences will resonate with each girl. Undoubtedly, these precious memories of their days as Grammar girls will be recalled at reunions in the years to come.

Our Intent, inscribed on the wall of the Cherrell Hirst Creative Learning Centre, declares that a Brisbane Girls Grammar School education ‘establishes the educational foundation for young women to contribute confidently to their world with wisdom, imagination and integrity’. While it is the sum of all educational experiences that has equipped our girls for life beyond school, it is the academic learning component that provides the core of this preparation.

Learning is not confined by classroom walls. It does not cease upon graduation from secondary school, and thus it is a responsibility of schools to equip students with the necessary skills, dispositions and motives to continue to learn in the world beyond school. Eminent scholar and educationalist Sir Richard Livingstone stated in 1941 that, ‘the test of a successful education is not the amount of knowledge that pupils take away from school, but their appetite to know and their capacity to learn’ (cited in Claxton, 2007, p. 115). As teachers, the learning, development and wellbeing of our students is our core business, thus ‘in the grand scheme of things our chief and overriding purpose is the achievement of our students and success in instilling life-long learning skills’ (Helterbran, 2005, p. 263). Learning is a life-long and life-wide journey that should be enjoyable, stimulating and motivated by interest. As Ranson, Martin, Nixon, and McKeown (1996, p. 14) declared, ‘learning is becoming’.

Throughout their secondary school years, our students are expected to engage with their academic studies and are encouraged to pursue their particular interests as avenues for discovery and learning. Lessons explore curriculum content with rigour and detail, and our students frequently deliver astonishing insights for such young minds. In Girls Grammar classrooms, students collaborate, inquire, research, discuss, question, analyse, challenge and evaluate; and teachers aim to inspire in our students a systematic curiosity in research and learning. As Chickering and Ehrmann (1996, p. 3) assert, ‘learning is not a spectator sport’. Learning is a process of discovery that involves knowing, understanding, applying, and the challenge of grappling with difficult and unfamiliar problems.

Unsurprisingly, students often express an early and avid interest in clarifying the extent and manner in which curriculum content and dimensions will be included in assessment tasks. Questions such as ‘Will this be on the test?’ and ‘Could we be asked …?’ are frequently directed to teachers. Given the impact of Senior assessment results on tertiary options, it is understandable that students possess this preoccupation with acquiring a precise
understanding of assessment requirements. Indeed, with the stakes of assessment outcomes so high for students, assessment has the potential to define and frame learning (Willis, 1993). Paradoxically, this can have a deleterious effect on student performance.

The danger of allowing impending assessment to motivate and direct student learning is that both breadth and depth of learning are diminished. Focusing on the desired outcome promotes rote learning and a fixation on process at the expense of understanding and exploration. When students pursue performance goals, they are motivated to complete tasks to obtain good results and to compare favourably with their peers (Dweck, 1986).

Conversely, when students establish academic learning goals, they are focused on understanding. Research has also indicated that students who establish goals related to learning or mastery generally display an increased level of engagement in their study, improved learning strategies and greater self-belief than those who set goals related to performance (Dweck, 1986). A focus on academic learning allows learning to be driven by curiosity and pursued with a sense of excitement. Our students need to be continually encouraged and supported to prioritise the process of learning. While ‘expanding the learning capacity’ of our students will result in higher achievement standards, authentic learning is not merely about assessment outcomes (Claxton, 2007, p. 124).

Certainly, being a successful learner means much more than doing well in exams.

Despite our efforts to frame learning as an independently worthwhile activity and not undertaken only for the purposes of assessment, learning and assessment are inextricably linked. Whether assessment is formative or summative, it informs about learning; it is a necessary gauge of the progress or learning status of each student. Assessment evidence indicates the performance or achievement level of a student at that moment in time. For teachers, assessment outcomes inform and guide future teaching and learning practice. For students, it should inform subsequent learning endeavours. Often, it would seem that students receive the feedback provided by assessment as if it were an irrevocable judgment about ability, rather than as an indication of the ‘current state of their expandable learning capacity’ (Claxton, 2007, p. 124) and, thus, a launching pad for improvement. Learning is a continual process, and progress and rates of learning vary. While learning is life-long journey, assessment provides feedback and directions while engaged in the formal educational component.

For our Year 12 cohort of 2013, the school-based learning component of life is almost complete. Whether continuing their education through tertiary study, travel or work, we hope they continue to develop their intellectual curiosity and wish them inspiration and joy in limitless learning. We hope they continue to be creative, curious and critical thinkers who explore the unknown, search for answers and contribute to the world with wisdom, imagination and integrity. And we remind them that learning was, and never is, just about the test. ■
REFERENCES


Can we imagine the nature of the professional lives our 2013 Senior cohort might lead in 2023? No doubt many of our graduates will enter medicine, law, science or business in Australia and abroad. No doubt many will distinguish themselves in as yet unimagined but infinitely rewarding careers. Yet will increasing emphases on ‘T–shaped professionals’ and ‘portfolio careers’, or ‘slashers’, diversify their professional pathways in creative ways? What ways of thinking and acting might guarantee professional success amid a future characterised by rapid technological, social and economic change?

To prepare our students for the ‘great unknown’ (Driver, 2013), our academic curriculum, co–curricular activities and service programmes have laid a firm foundation, anticipating workplace skills such as problem–solving, creativity and resilience. In a recent Perspectives article, Year 12 student Téa Angelos recognised her peers’ greatest assets as ‘the interpersonal skills of resilience, perseverance and determination’ (Angelos, 2013). For Téa, these qualities, which are legacies of the students’ Girls Grammar days, have prepared them to face the ‘uncertainty of the future and fear of the unknown’. As our Seniors — our young professionals of 2023 — prepare to create their own future selves, other perspectives on developing professional lives in challenging times provide some guidance.

First, to build on the legacy of Girls Grammar’s broad–based, liberal education, Howard Gardner’s *Five Minds for the Future* reminds us that ‘all of us — scholars, leaders, professionals — must continually hone our skills’ (2006, p. 5).

**FIVE MINDS FOR THE FUTURE**

Gardner drew on his long association with Harvard University’s Project Zero and GoodWork Projects to propose that the work–in–progress of one’s lifetime of intellectual and character refinement could be enhanced by cultivating a ‘quintet of minds’ (2006, p. 153): **disciplined, synthesising, creating, respectful and ethical**. Individually and collectively, the mindsets impact professional growth, professional conduct, and interpersonal relationships. They stemmed from his theories on multiple intelligences but combined human agency to promise direct, positive benefits to communities. Gardner recommended the conscious nurturing of each as a necessary and ongoing process for professional and personal fulfilment.

The *disciplined* mind reflects the distinctive mode of thinking in a scholarly discipline, craft or profession, as well as the individual’s own self–discipline in mastering the concepts and knowledge pertinent to that profession.

The *synthesising* mind selects, filters and evaluates information across disparate sources, but pieces them together in meaningful ways. Given the escalating rate of information growth and diversity of sources, this mindset will be more crucial, especially where judicious decisions are expected. The *creating* mind forges new ground in existing or uncharted areas. These two mindsets are complementary: the synthesiser ‘seeks order, equilibrium and closure’; the creative thrives on ‘uncertainty, surprise, continual change and disequilibrium’ (Gardner, 2006, p. 98).
The *respectful* mind engenders harmonious relationships and intercultural cooperation, but its absence means disruption with wider implications in society. The *ethical* mind ponders the moral dimensions of one’s own actions and the moral imperative for society. Gardner believed that acting respectfully and ethically cuts across career specialisations as these mindsets ‘deal with how human beings — be they scientists, artists, managers, leaders, craftspeople, or professionals — think and act throughout their lives’ (2006, p. 15).

All five mindsets define crucial thinking modes for thriving in a rapidly changing world.

Forecasting our Seniors to 2023 acknowledges the usual ten-year path to master the knowledge, skills and processes of one’s chosen discipline and profession. We know that ‘the life of a professional is not equivalent to the life of a young student [and] students must pick up the distinctive habits of mind and behaviour of the professional’ (Gardner, 2006, pp. 29–30). As they transition from school girls to skilled practitioners, our young women will also learn to appreciate how reflection and lifelong professional development help ensure the currency of their capabilities across changing times.

By 2023, workplaces will no doubt present new norms and constraints. Forbes (2013) has cautioned that already, ‘the traditional, single-track career pattern of the last century (think ladder) is now more difficult to find’ (p. 1). Two trends impacting ‘twenty-something millenials’ (Nathanson, 2012) have been identified: the promotion of ‘T-shaped professionals’ (CERI, 2013; BHEF, 2013) and the rise of ‘portfolio careers’ (Forbes, 2013) or ‘slashers’ (Nathanson, 2012).

**T-SHAPED PROFESSIONALS**

Professionals prize their specialised knowledge, their raft of discipline-specific skills and problem-solving expertise in their own domain. These are the ‘T-professionals’, as distinct from the ‘T-shaped professionals’ whose deep problem-solving in their own discipline is augmented by expertise across several other disciplines and systems (CERI, 2013). The deep knowledge and broad competencies of these ‘boundary spanners’ (Gardner, 2011, p. 582) allow their exploration of problems from many different perspectives and identification of universal patterns of behaviour (Donofrio, Spohrer, & Zadeh, 2009).

The University of Cambridge Institute of Manufacturing and IBM have urged universities to enable their graduates ‘to become T-shaped professionals, who are adaptive innovators with a service mindset’ (University of Cambridge, 2008, p. 12) and equipped to make a greater contribution to a twenty-first century, service-driven, global economy. Grounded in their primary discipline, these ‘adaptive innovators’ have strong communication skills and could also realise a continuous stream of innovation in service systems across business, technology and social sciences. IBM’s smart planet university model advocates the development of T-shaped professionals who possess both deep content knowledge and the breadth of competencies spanning several disciplines (BHEF, 2013). Such qualities have been present in certain individuals across time, but according to Philip Gardner (2011), ‘every field will require T-shaped professional development’ if they are to thrive in
the years ahead. Earlier, Donofrio, Spohrer and Zadeh (2009), for example, advocated the promotion of T-shaped professionals in medicine, citing the acceleration of knowledge, technology, and the increasing diversity of health care organisations as justification.

Yet economic constraints have accelerated the casualisation of the workforce. Universities promote discipline specialisation for ‘I-’ and/or ‘T-shaped professionals’, yet their own rates of casual employment and short contracts are expanding (Bexley, Arkoudis, & James, 2013). Casual contracts precipitate searches for additional revenue streams through secondary contracts and freelancing. Professor Sharon Parker, organisational psychologist at the University of Western Australia, observed that the ‘job-for-life mentality’ was being replaced by ‘more and more portfolio workers, or people who work multiple part-time jobs with different employers’ (Parker cited in Schaefer, 2007, p. 238). From this context, the concept of ‘portfolio careers’ (Forbes.com, 2013) or ‘slashers’ (Lurie, 2011) has emerged.

PORTFOLIO CAREERS

The concept of portfolio careers has been a lifestyle choice for older workers for some time as they seek a more fulfilling work-life blend and greater flexibility. Yet time-management and mental resilience are also required if the mix is to be successful. Current trends, however, show that the concept has been gaining wider popularity with younger workers and professionals. Both Lurie (2011) and Nathanson (2012) believed that the current trend towards multiple professions, passions and interests was being spearheaded by hard-working, creative young people in their twenties and thirties whose portfolio careers were as much about ‘self-discovery’ as lifestyle. Central to the concept is the individual’s creativity in shaping her own mix.

Alboher’s (2007) investigation of the portfolio career phenomenon launched the notion of the ‘slasher’. She found that this trend had become a phenomenon because people of all ages and socioeconomic groups, from different places around the globe, were expressing pride in their ‘slashing’. ‘Slashies’ might hold down three positions at a time, with a predicted seven to ten career changes throughout their working life. Alboher identified several distinct models of slashing that often complemented the many facets to one’s personality and talents: the ‘engineer/museum curator’ was able to exercise both sides of her brain and the ‘professor/physical therapist’ extended both mind and body. Now, with the creative marketing possibilities afforded by the internet, entrepreneurship has been added to the slashing mix, as with photographer/journalist or programmer/property developer (Johnson, 2013).

CREATING PROFESSIONAL SELVES

Whether our 2013 cohort become I-professionals, T-shaped professionals or slashers, we wish our 2013 Seniors careers that are ‘excellent, ethical, and engaging’ (Gardner, 2006, p. 8). In imagining their future work selves, their conscious cultivation of Gardner’s quintet of minds should help cement those disciplined, synthesising, creating, respectful and ethical mindsets into the fabric of their daily lives and decision-making. Insights from the late Emeritus Professor John Schaar (n.d.), of the University of California, remain salutary:

The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created — created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination.

Go forward, young professionals of 2023. Create your own future selves Enjoy a ‘good life’, rich in ‘good work’.
REFERENCES


French aristocrat, writer, poet and pioneering aviator, Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s *The Little Prince* (1943), ostensibly a children’s book, makes profound observations about human relationships, which are, of course, the foundation of a healthy school culture. He captures something we all instinctively know with simple and direct words: ‘That which is essential is invisible to the human eye.’ Truth, love, trust, loyalty and understanding are essential in good relationships and they are fundamental characteristics in schools where great things happen.

This year is the twenty-fifth I have worked at Girls Grammar — most of that time in a leadership capacity. Why stay so long in one place and still be compelled and energised by the mission — to the extent of waking up in the middle of the night to jot down seemingly brilliant ideas for the School or revelations on how to sort out one of the many conundrums? Or sitting on a beach on holiday and texting the boss with the ideas that one can only imagine while staring at the sea with time to ponder? Well, it is the same for me as for other staff here. We just love this place that is Girls Grammar and what it stands for — *learning* — and we feel a sense of great privilege, still excited and terribly responsible to be part of the heritage. The thinking for the School can be constant, particularly in challenging times or when strategically designing. The weighty responsibility for the nurturing and wellbeing of 1170 girls and a large staff is ever-present; and envisioning and navigating the School into the future requires imagination, courage and stealth. But what could be finer or more engaging work than that of educating our Grammar girls to be women of the future? I also feel profoundly grateful to have met, worked with and learned from so many fascinating people on a daily basis as part of a 138-year-old tradition. This ability for the School to elicit such dedicated, whole-hearted service from so many — staff, parents, students and Old Girls alike — contributes to its greatness and this in turn enriches all those who are part of the enterprise.

Literature on good schools defines culture as the context in which everything else takes place. This School has an exceptionally strong culture and I believe, as do many, that it is a great school. One of the things I have learned about the stewardship and development of an exceptional learning culture is the importance of understanding the extent to which we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. Acknowledgement and respect for this, in the narrative that is Girls Grammar life, provides the guidance and wisdom to manage the way forward. Every great organisation is characterised by dual actions — to preserve the core and to stimulate progress.

The great paradox of change is that the organisations that best adapt to a changing world know what should not change. They have a fixed anchor of guiding principles around which they can more easily change everything else; there is an understanding of the difference between what is sacred and what is not, between ‘what we stand
for’ and ‘how we do things’. People involved in Girls Grammar share a common purpose and shared values which establish a connection that endures beyond each person’s formal activity with the organisation. It seems to me that this enduring relationship is becoming stronger and transcends active participation, whether as a student, parent or staff member.

‘Once a Grammar girl, always a Grammar girl’ or ‘You can take the girl out of Grammar, but you can’t take Grammar out of the girl’ as the sayings go. One might ponder if this is because there is such a strong fundamental need for people to share things that give their lives and work meaning; and that schools like ours represent something that people want to remain a part of. This need for connection to others — sharing with them experiences, beliefs and aspirations to form a common bond — is perhaps more important now than any time in the past as people seek to be part of something noble and larger than the individual.

This School has created and perpetuated an intentional culture shaped by the adults, grounded in the universal values of honesty and caring, and relentlessly orientated towards achievement. Dedicated educators, over decades, have contributed to shaping a culture that demands and supports ethical virtue and citizenship, while providing an instructional environment that demands and supports best academic effort through challenging work and high expectations. Performance and ethical excellence are born from a culture. When our students enter our culture, which demands and supports quality work and moral character, they tend to work to fit in so that the virtuous ethic becomes their norm. *Nil sine labore*. Nothing without hard work. Grammar girls work hard at all they do — academic achievement, relationships, responsible social behaviour, sport, and developing their own good character. This happens for our staff also; people develop wonderfully here because the culture is so authentically and powerfully about learning and teaching that everyone learns and develops. It is impossible not to, once you enter the world of Girls Grammar. And of course, it is obvious that teachers make schools great. Our School is full of passionate teachers so crazy about the subjects they teach that anyone would want to be in their classrooms. The Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics teachers have almost persuaded me as to the beauty of their subjects; and the Music teachers have finally convinced me that everyone can play music and sing — even me.

And I have learned, too, over the years that the School ‘mood’ needs to be continually watched over and managed. The girls need to be ‘horse whispered’, as we used to call it, and the staff need to be cared for as sometimes they work too hard and stress levels escalate. So, too, with the girls.

That is why good schools always make sure that the students have regular bouts of fun. They work hard and can be very earnest, but that needs to be balanced with play, physical activity, and, sometimes, just being silly. They are, after all, still very young. How the girls are wearing the School uniform, the mood of an assembly, how happily they greet you, how easily or not they can be pulled into line, the balance of their compliance and their subversion, their respectfulness or disinterest, their introversion and extroversion, the presence of individuality, tolerance of difference, acceptance and belonging in groups, the number and kind of relational tensions, the agency of peer pressure, the level of littering and property lost — all are indicators of the mood or health of the organisation and require some level of appropriate response from adults in order to keep the girls emotionally safe and cared for — and to protect what we have deemed culturally precious. This level of wisdom and constant reflection keeps a mature school enduringly steady and strong to its mission through currents of change and adolescent chaos. The careful management of rate of change and its impact together with strategic and well-timed disruption where necessary keeps the place vibrant, exciting, and moving forward — but also contained, so that people feel safe and the changes are not superficial. By doing this, trust is established as people feel cared for and respected. This in turn ensures a strong level of engagement and loyalty.

I have always thought great schools nurture eccentric personalities and I was delighted to read the chapter
entitled ‘Being Eccentric’ in Professor Erica McWilliam’s *Educating Girls* (2013). I recall a much–loved, very amusing English teacher occasionally wearing her dress back–to–front and odd shoes while absorbed in teaching existential poetry, Shakespeare or feminism in her various classrooms, and a very brilliant Mathematics teacher — who inspired so many hundreds of girls — but seemed unable to follow the numbers on a clock. Or the previous Deputy who, when it was fashionable for boys to ‘streak’ through the School, would say huffily that she knew from the quality of the girls’ squeals when they (usually they came in multiples) were on the premises. (The older girls’ derogatory comments have since frightened them off.) Miss Lilley (Headmistress 1925–1952) always had a small cushion for her small dog, Geordie, near the lectern when she spoke on assembly, but perhaps nothing compares to Headmistress Wilkinson’s (1900–12) presence in assembly in her long black taffeta dress with a coloured parrot resting on one shoulder. Perhaps if I stay here long enough, I may grow to be equally eccentric and start to run School assemblies so too adorned.

An eccentric or unorthodox approach to something opens up new ways of thinking and it is particularly ironic that, at a time when creativity, innovation, thinking outside the box and liveliness are highly praised, educational reform pushes teachers and students towards a norm of sameness. It seems these days that the drivers are proceduralists who most value conformity, uniformity and ticking boxes. A kind of smoothing down of the human persona seems to be occurring with a growing wariness about anything that cannot be safely risk managed, put in a box, or documented as a policy.

I also believe great schools listen carefully to feedback, particularly from parents. No organisation or individual is perfect. I have been taught that there is something to learn from each complaint that is made and every compliment given. By listening carefully and responding appropriately, the performance of the School can be continually strengthened and the needs of our girls and their families more deeply understood. Again, it is important for us to remain confident, and not to be defensive, if the message is negative. Also, I have come to understand the pressure some families are under and that an email sent late at night from an exhausted household after a family meltdown is not the end of the world; it just shows the humanity that we all share.

I will conclude — perhaps eccentrically — with these lines from Kathleen Noonan’s recent article (2013) inspired by the poem ‘Things I Didn’t Know I Loved’ by Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet. Noonan’s reflections ground us to the most important thing that connects us all — the wellbeing of our young people as they venture into life:

> I didn’t know I loved being woken up at midnight or one when a daughter returns home safe from a night out, down in the valley jungle. I have always hated having my sleep broken. So, who would have thought the slam of the cab door and the sound of clomping high wedges on the front steps would make taut shoulders drop and the heart heave? ■

REFERENCES


KATJA I'ANSON / 12M (DETAIL)
Navigating the complexities of responsibility

ANNE STUBBINGTON, HEAD OF HIRSCHFELD HOUSE | 28 NOVEMBER 2013

Character — the willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own life — is the source from which self-respect springs. — Joan Didion (1968)

I have had the pleasure and privilege of being a Head of House at Brisbane Girls Grammar for twenty years, and one of my responsibilities at the end of each year is writing Testimonials. This is a task that I always enjoy, as I reflect on the journey that the young women in Year 12 Hirschfeld have taken during their time at Girls Grammar. Memories of how each one has risen to inevitable challenges and crises, and managed her disappointments and achievements, all inform how each girl has mapped out her own personal pathway. Something I always notice is the level of responsibility that a student has taken so far for her own life and the level of responsibility that she has accepted within the School community. This is a measure of maturity and character. Added to which, those able to take responsibility for their own lives have usually acquired healthy reserves of humility, resilience and good humour.

Responsibility is the cornerstone of our relationships, our community and of our democratic society. We come to know that there are laws and rules, and checks and balances, to remind us of the difference between right and wrong. As we grow within the family, we absorb the lessons of transgression and gradually assume the self-discipline and sense of responsibility that leads to most of us living our lives in reasonably peaceful harmony with others. Responsibility means respecting the rights of others, being able to make decisions, keeping our commitments, honouring our promises, and not blaming others for our own mistakes.

Easier said than done, unless our elders and mentors take the time and trouble to teach us what these concepts mean or unless we have excellent role models to show us the way. Social researcher Hugh Mackay (2013) says that parents have the vital job of nurturing a sense of what he calls ‘charity’ in the very young — ‘how to be kind, generous, respectful and compassionate towards others’. In other words, responsibility rarely comes naturally. It is something which has to be taught and measured against the consequences of selfishness.

The House is the family unit within the School. This is where the student is held in a safe and secure environment, where problems are contained without spinning out of control and where the adolescent can practise becoming a responsible adult. Girls mature into young women as they learn from their mistakes, learn to use their own voice, become brave, and develop the resilience and good humour that will inform their future potential for responsibility and leadership. There are democratically elected positions of responsibility within the House available from Year 8 onwards that provide them with training wheels, right up to the position of House Captain in Year 12. One of the tasks of adolescence is the separation from parents, the need to change from being a totally dependent child both emotionally and physically, into an adult who can be
responsible for herself. Again, Hugh Mackay (2013) points out: ‘Children are likely to struggle when confronted by the demands of independence if they have been cosseted in a state of prolonged dependency and fed a rich diet of self-esteem-boosting praise.’

Another task of adolescence is to secure healthy and life-promoting relationships with peers. Sometimes in this time of transition the friendship group takes on an intensity which can transcend the value of the adult world and provide a shield of invincibility for the members until individuals feel confident to strike out on their own again. House activities and obligations, the House party to welcome the Year 8s, the breakfasts, the Interhouse competitions and House meetings all help to give students a sense of self-perspective and connectedness, and to help them develop varied and meaningful relationships. Ultimately, the maturing adolescent comes to realise that she has a responsibility to herself and to the community, a mind of her own and her own place in the world. As Brisbane Girls Grammar alumna Melinda Taylor said in her recent Valedictory Address to Year 12 students: ‘It is important to know yourself and to accept responsibility for your own actions.’

As responsible adults, we have to make sure that we offer appropriate experiences and have appropriate expectations of young people. Academic and pop-culture expert Karen Brooks (2013) expands on this and suggests that that we need to trust young people with hard choices. In a discussion about raising the legal drinking age to 21 to address the risk behaviour of binge drinking, violent and promiscuous behaviour, road accidents and trauma, she comments that, while this is concerning:

Here we are, not only seeking to postpone the onset of personal responsibility for young adults who in other areas are deemed ‘adult’ enough to make life-changing decisions, but there is a sense in which we are prolonging adolescence by endorsing young people’s inability to suffer (or enjoy) the consequences of their actions and choices…. Something appears awry when we allow young people access to the adult world in some areas and seek to deny it in others. Exposed to violent imagery and sexualised concepts on a daily basis through pop culture, and encouragement to interact in cyberspace with friends and even strangers, we are allowing young teens to enter the adult world before they are cognitively prepared.

So, on the one hand we have children being exploited by commercial interests, while on the other we are seeking to delay the access of older teens to adulthood. Difficult though it may be, as parents and teachers, we have a responsibility to get the balance right.

There are significant activities within the curriculum that are designed to strengthen healthy social and emotional development, most notably, the Service programme. Within a School-wide focus on Service, the Year 10 programme expects each student in the cohort to negotiate her own placement and contribute a minimum of fifteen hours of her own time for the benefit of others. The Year 10 students of 2013 have met this challenge well and have demonstrated a high level of responsibility. Community Service is an integral part of our curricular and co-curricular programmes. While the community benefits from our fundraising, time, energy and involvement, the students develop a deep awareness of those in need and a
positive sense of community. As a result, during this important phase of their intellectual, social and emotional development, they develop a more complete sense of self.

Service nurtures an ethos of social responsibility and self-respect, and provides a wonderful opportunity for students to learn what personal growth and responsibility is about. And this is the point: students can only take the opportunity to be responsible if they are allowed to. Reflections from Year 10 girls on their service experience that are worth sharing follow.

Madeleine Gandhi —
25th International Olympiad in Informatics (IOI) at The University of Queensland:
While volunteering at the IOI, there was a great emphasis on responsibility for yourself and your team. The gravity of the potential scenarios you could be responsible for varied from unintentionally offending someone from another culture, letting your contestants sleep in and miss a meal or even an exam, someone getting lost and being stranded without a mobile phone, or calling the wrong person in an emergency. Being responsible for six foreigners living in separate accommodation on a huge campus you barely knew your way around and who were eager to catch public transport and explore the city at night time, was certainly nerve-wracking. However, having coped with these mammoth responsibilities and watched others deal with even greater ones, I feel very proud of the way they led us from being shy and nervous at the start of the week to confident and competent by the end.

Estelle Peatey-Sah —
The McIntyre Centre providing riding programmes for people with a disability:
I feel that helping at the McIntyre Centre was really good for my confidence. As there were so few staff, the ones that were there were often busy and never had time to tell us to do every single thing required. I learned to trust myself more and act on my instinctive feelings of what should be done rather than worry about whether it is ‘right’. I have often found in School that I struggle with this and feel the need to have things checked before doing them. While this could be seen as a good thing, some have said I do need to trust myself.

Bronte Jackson —
Wesley Mission Parkview aged care residence:
Community Service not only allows us to develop a sense of responsibility in a work environment, but it also helps us understand the importance of responsibility to a person. In particular as I worked in an aged care facility, I had at least two or three people each week counting on my visits and I needed to make sure I didn’t let them down.

Meera Prasad —
Vital Connection soup kitchen for the homeless:
I see everything from new a perspective. I have become a lot more appreciative of the things I have, for example, dinner on the table every night and a good education. I think the exposure we had to the real-life problems of homelessness has made us stronger as girls and has boosted our maturity level by a long way. We have now seen the reality of the world and hope that we have been able to do something to help the situation.
Madeleine Farr — Red Hill Special School:

This incredible experience taught me a great number of things which will stay with me my whole life. One very valued skill which I developed through this experience was responsibility. Through helping to care for children who were not at the level of other children their age, it meant there was more responsibility on me to help them do everyday things, which many of us take for granted. Caring for young children with various conditions taught me to step up, and made me realise how much I could help them with their everyday lives, improving my sense of responsibility significantly.

And, finally, I received this correspondence from the 2007 School Service Captain Stephanie Carter recently:

If you remember, I did refugee tutoring at Moorooka State School and one of the girls that we met during these few weeks was Matu Bordolo, a 10-year-old girl who had come to Australia as a Liberian refugee, straight from a refugee camp. Over the past eight years, I have maintained communication and a lovely friendship with Matu and yesterday she had her 19th birthday! It has been so wonderful to watch her grow into a young lady — from meeting her at Moorooka, to watching her graduate, become a star hip hop dancer, achieve an OP 7 (wow!), and start a Bachelor of Psychology at Griffith University. I thank you for encouraging us all to participate in the Year 10 Community Service programme, as the relationships and connections that we form can help shape our future career aspirations (as it did for me). I’m sure Matu has great things ahead of her.

In these times of predators who seek to take advantage of the young, and pressure from a competitive society to perform, we have to be very careful not to be over-protective or to do too much for our children. We cannot be, nor should we try to be, perfect parents. Ground-breaking thinker, paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1953) wrote that every child needs a ‘good-enough’ parent and, even then, as long as a child has at least one good person in her life, parent or otherwise, who really cares, then they will thrive. Stephanie’s story about Matu seems to underscore that point. As parents and teachers, we need to love our children, care for them and teach them; but we need to let them take responsibility for their own lives. We cannot do it for them.

REFERENCES


With the year drawing to a close, the School community once again came together for an evening ‘under the stars’ with Christmas carols, bubbles and ‘snow’ filling the air, and fairy lights lighting the way. Christmas is always a special time of year, and here at Girls Grammar we have our own way of celebrating. The girls participate in Secret Santa events in their House groups, give gifts and cards to one another and their teachers, and look forward to the final music event of the year, the Christmas Carnival and Carols. In the festive atmosphere, we celebrated with stories told through music, stalls with tempting treats and fun activities, and the arrival of Santa. Each child and adult there was looking forward to some aspect of Christmas and had their part to play in the celebrations, whether as an organiser, a musician, a student leader, or a child filled with wonder and anticipation.

As Christmas draws near, what we need to ask ourselves is not what we celebrate, but why we celebrate and how we celebrate. These occasions offer an opportunity to focus on the big things of life, to look for meanings beyond our selves and embrace issues that are complex, disturbing or profound. Through festivals and the stories enacted around them, we come to grips with these struggles and see a model of how we can address these issues.

Christmas is a significant event that is celebrated worldwide. A Christian festival, it has at its core the birth of Jesus. This is still seen in the many nativity scenes on Christmas cards and heard in the carols sung. We often hear Yuletide commentary to the effect that Christmas has lost its meaning, or been hijacked, but it has always been thus. Some argue that the 25th of December was originally the pagan festival of Saturnalia, or a festival celebrating the birth of the Sun, and that the church took over the date in an effort to draw the masses away from paganism and into a Christian celebration (Miles, 1976). Our secular society has seen the institutionalisation of Santa Claus as the primary figure on Christmas Day. Regardless of the origins, 25 December is celebrated by millions, albeit invested by many with little or no religious sentiment. As the world shrinks and the marketing grows, people of many faiths are beginning to celebrate Christmas as a time to feast and to give gifts.

It is important for each of us to know ourselves and what we are celebrating this holiday season. Christians should endeavor to look beyond the tinsel and to reconnect with the religious meaning of Christmas. This is a time for Christians to deepen their faith and renew their relationships within their families and within the church. Agnostics, atheists and people of other faiths may choose to celebrate the season as a time of family, feasting and giving gifts, without the religious overtones. Whatever the beliefs, Christmas is usually a time for celebration and family.

It is, for many, a time to reconnect with our families on a deeper level. In his article ‘The Stories that Bind Us’, Bruce Feiler asks, ‘What is the secret sauce that that holds families together?’ (2013). His question is, of course, rhetorical, and the answer stems from research into what
makes families effective. Feiler suggests that knowing your family history is crucial in growing resilient children and creating effective families. Using the time over Christmas to talk to your children about their family history will help to foster their feelings of connectedness and their resilience. Knowing where their parents and grandparents were born, where they went to school and how they met, starts to develop a family history.

A ‘Do You Know?’ scale was developed by Dr Marshall Duke, on whom Feiler based his article. Duke advocates asking twenty questions, ranging from the aforementioned to questions of a more probing nature (cited in The Mustard Seed House, 2013). However, it is not just the answers to these questions that build a healthy family, but the time spent telling the facts and building the stories that is invaluable. It is the process as well as the content. The time spent together and the tales told then build up into detailed stories that are needed to develop a healthy family narrative.

Dr Duke has researched the types of family narratives that come out of these conversations and has categorised them into three types (cited in Feiler, 2013). The first is the ascending narrative, where the family has come from nothing and has risen to where they are now. While this is a positive, healthy narrative, it can leave some children feeling incapable of reaching these same heights themselves. In an unfortunate paradox, the intended inspiration can ultimately be demotivating. The second, the descending narrative, has children hearing stories of how great the family once was but that they have since declined. The possible deleterious effects of this kind of narrative are self-evident.

The third story trajectory may well be the healthiest: the oscillating narrative, with stories of success and of failure, of setbacks and of periods of growth. As a child learns that their forebears and family members have faced adversity as well as enjoying success, they may internalise valuable psychological insights. The realisation that their family members have struggled may help them to rebound when they go through tough times themselves. The oscillating narrative takes the pressure of perfectionism off the child and helps them to develop what Carol Dweck (2006) calls a ‘growth mindset’. Viewed in this way, the family’s history is important because of what can be learnt from it.

Children are not alone; they are part of a family and a community. Reliving these family stories allows them to connect to something bigger than themselves. They begin to develop an intergenerational self as they hear the family history told and retold by members of different generations. Duke noted that most family stories were passed down by mothers and grandmothers, and at times of vacations, family dinners and celebrations. It is this time of family members giving to each other that builds the resilience and cements the family bonds.

There is, of course, a broader family context, which is why many people spend time reaching out to others at Christmas and giving back to their communities. This can be through volunteering for a local organisation or helping people that need assistance. Reaching out to others has the added benefit of improving our own mental health while reminding us of the spiritual meaning of the holiday season. There are as many ways of reaching out as there are people in need, from those within our families to the needy in our communities.

So as we plan for this festive season, it is important to plan for family time. To put aside those differences we have with various family members and to connect on a level that is healthy and beneficial to ourselves and our children. Let’s make this Christmas a time to celebrate by giving of our time, our history and ourselves. It is not about the food, the gifts and the hype, but about finding a meaning bigger than ourselves and helping our children to look beyond the tinsel and find their own meaning too.
REFERENCES


