2014 INSIGHTS
INSIGHTS 2014
BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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 2014 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 2014.
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National days are very important. Humans are tribal — there is no escaping this. The concept of nation provides us with a home, and a shared identity as well as a sense of pride. Over time, nations develop a set of characteristics, both realistic and the stuff of legend. If I was to give a traditional Australia Day address I would probably mention beaches, BBQs, babes, bikinis and now even budgie smugglers! Mention would also be made of mateship, larrikinism, the Australian ‘payout’ as well as our dry ironic humour. Our athletes too would feature prominently — as they should. All of these things are very important to our ‘Australianness’ but there is so much more to celebrate.

Recently I have returned from a wonderful trip to Turkey and ANZAC Cove. It would have been easy to focus on ANZAC — perhaps I could do this on ANZAC Day. The losses and what occurred almost 100 years ago is the stuff of legend. However, today I am going to take a different tack. It is timely at the start of a new academic year to focus on ideas. Australia does not do enough to celebrate our unique concept of nationhood. Traditionally our nationalism has been shrouded under our much-loved stereotypes — those I mentioned earlier. Australia did not become a nation through war and bloody conflict. Australia became a nation after a series of meetings. We debated ourselves into nationhood! This in itself is remarkable. Since 1901 we have been a federation of states under the rule of law. This has provided us with over one hundred years of peace and stability. How many other nations across the globe can lay claim to this? Our Australian democracy should be the envy of the world — perhaps it is.

The major stain on our society was and always will be the treatment of our Aboriginal people. Some terrible things happened! Countless lives were lost. Without making excuses, such behavior was a disturbing product of its time. Yes it was wrong — very wrong! Yes we should feel guilt, but we should not make the mistake of judging this tragedy through a contemporary lens — this would be historical folly. The reasons for this were complex just as the solutions to the contemporary problems faced by our Indigenous Australians will be complex. We must be creative thinkers, tolerant thinkers, empathetic thinkers and wise thinkers if we are to right past wrongs. This is the type of thinking we want you to develop during your time at this School.
To our Aboriginal people, the 26th of January is an anniversary of innocence lost. It has only been in recent years that we have begun to understand the sophistication of pre-colonial Aboriginal society. They were wonderful custodians of this land; environmentalists before their time who understood how to manage this harsh environment. They had a deeply developed concept of the spiritual, something that was not readily apparent to European eyes. A good friend of mine, an academic theologian, commented to me recently that they, our Indigenous people, got ‘metaphor’ — how to articulate a concept of the mystical through myth or story. Their traditional stories are just wonderful. Some might argue that this type of advanced thinking is something western society is only re-discovering.

Creative thinking is the stuff of our Australianness. Such thinking has created a society that is tolerant, hopefully fair, and in some respects, a model for other democracies. So what are some of these ideas? A few that spring to mind are immigration, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and HECS. Let’s briefly explore two of these.

Immigration has been very important to our nation building. We are a country of immigrants. Without immigration our economic and social development would not have progressed as quickly. Some might even go as far as to suggest immigration forms the core of our national DNA. People immigrate here; they bring their skills, culture and thankfully, their cuisine. Imagine Australia without Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, Greek or Italian takeaways and restaurants. Many of the staff here will remember the ‘old’ days — the land of meat and soggy three veg. All of this has enriched our culture and diversified and developed our concept of nation. Given this, we must be mindful that our contemporary asylum seeker debates are thoughtful, flexible, tolerant and humane. After all, we have been a destination and a home for others since the eighteenth century. We have a continent for a nation — we have obligations not only to ourselves but also to the rest of the world.

Another idea worth celebrating is the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. This sounds boring, dull and dry but it is something that has underscored our concept of fairness. All Australians have access to reasonably priced medication. In many other countries only the rich have access to what may well be life-saving treatment. The recently legislated Disability Insurance Scheme is another example of this. It was remarkable that this reform had bi-partisan support across such a fractious political divide. It is an example of the way in which we cater for the vulnerable. Such policies highlight our intellectual creativity as well as our concept of decency. They are not cost free and in fact cost a lot of money. As a nation we have often invested huge sums of money — especially when the social benefit outweighs the cost.

We have much to celebrate. We are a people of bold, creative and often trail-blazing ideas.

Happy Australia Day! Yes we are all Crocodile Dundees, bronzed ANZACS, budding Cathy Freemans, bushmen, lifesavers, mates and the rest of it. This is all very important. But as you start the new academic year, celebrate ideas, read and engage with concepts that challenge, and above all, always acknowledge that this is the best country in the world.
Precious metal
PAULINE HARVEY-SHORT, ASSOCIATE DEAN | 7 FEBRUARY 2014

…the badge represents a symbol of invariance, an emblem of educational values that stand out against the passage of time; it serves to join one generation of learners to another; it constitutes an ideological and axiological constant in the fluxion of time, resisting the more transient values of the educationally fashionable or chic … (Synott & Symes, 1995).

In their article The Genealogy of the School: An Iconography of Badges and Mottoes, Synott and Symes assert that badges and mottoes are the ephemera which convey what Bourdieu and Passeron refer to as a school’s ‘charismatic ideology’: iconic items which perpetuate its character, traditions and values.

At Girls Grammar, the first two weeks of each academic year are highlighted by ceremonies pertinent to both the Year 12s and the School as a whole. Firstly, the Year 12 students receive their XII badge from the President of the Parents and Friends Association. This XII badge preserves the tradition and continuity of the first sixth form (VI) badge. In the days of forms, Roman numerals were used to designate cohorts and this concept has been carried through to this day with this badge.

The second occasion is the induction of the Student Council, where each member receives two badges and a blazer pocket. The ceremony involves the reciting of a pledge to the School followed by a response from the student body. The first badge and blazer pocket indicate the student’s position on the Student Council. This is a bar badge proclaiming each student’s specific role – Arts, Service and Sports Captains or House Captain. In 2014, adding gravitas and distinction to these bar badges is the addition of a miniature School badge. This replica is reminiscent of the delicate ‘dress badge’ worn by the students in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and is suspended from the bottom of the bar. It will be a physical and constant reminder of the traditions the students protect, the values they exemplify and the demands of their offices: leadership, service and responsibility.

The second badge is the Student Council School badge. This has a banner at the top stating School Council and is embellished with laurel leaves on either side of the crest. The laurel leaves were a feature added to the badge in 1940 to designate the Prefect body. The selection of the laurel wreath is a traditional and historically apt one. The laurel has its origins in Greek mythology and was reserved for display on the heads of heroes, victorious commanders, scholars and poets: those held in highest esteem and who were exemplars to others.

Each Head Girl receives a gold and blue enamel Student Council badge and a special Head Girl blazer pocket. These identify their special and eclectic roles within the community where they act as ambassadors, people of influence, shepherds in leadership, carers, facilitators and convenors.
The wearing of these emblems publicly affirms the role to which each member has already committed. On 20 January 2014, the Council members approached the year with a clear understanding of the part they would play in maintaining the traditions and values of the School. They attended the fifth Student Council Conference held on the campus in the week before school commenced. There, they discussed ideas, were presented with insightful and wise counsel from Ms Ann Harrap, 1984 Head Girl and former High Commissioner to South Africa, and were challenged with problem-solving exercises by the Marrapatta staff.

The benefits gained from this conference are best summed up in the girls’ responses used to create the ‘knowledge trees’. These trees, now on display in the School Library, were created when each Council member responded on individual cards to four leading sentences: I have learnt that … ; Leaders are … ; Grammar shines because … ; and My strength is … .

The Council members believe that leaders are listeners, shepherds, dedicated, resilient, confident, approachable, encouraging, and ‘weavers of magic’. They learnt that leaders can lead from behind, leaders are inclusive, and leadership is vital at Brisbane Girls Grammar School. They also learnt that the Student Council has a large role to play; that compromise is a powerful tool, and that we are all part of a team that needs to work together in order to go ‘above and beyond’. They believe that what makes Girls Grammar shine is spirit, teamwork, commitment to service, initiative, creativity and excellence. Finally, the Council’s collective strengths were identified as kindness, humour, fairness, honesty and fun.

When asked how they wished to be remembered by the School as a leadership group in one word, their thoughts spilled over and provided an insight into their humour, honesty and fun. The words were: united, integral, enthusiastic, influential, involved, loving, inclusive, ideal, passionate, exciting, inspirational and fun.

After assimilating this information and experience, the Council members worked collaboratively to establish goals and the motto for the year. Lively discussion distilled the thinking into the key concepts of motivation, integration and promotion: motivation to respect the School, be involved, strive for excellence and be the best you can be; integration of year levels, service and sport, prefects and intrahouse; and promotion of individual talent, events, recycling, and BYOD (Bring Your Own Device).

Like the School motto, the yearly motto has the capacity to ‘… act like an epigraph, a linguistic beacon, signalling the school’s intentions and providing an explanatory mechanism for its success’ (Synott & Symes, 1995, 145). The motto was announced by the Head Girls Claudia Gulbransen-Diaz (12L) and Sarvashree Singh (12G) in the Induction Assembly on Thursday:

– Above and beyond with the Grammar bond –

The motto encapsulates the aspirations of this group of School leaders and will provide a beacon that guides the Council and the student body in 2014.

REFERENCES


It’s the economy...

STEPHEN WOODS, DIRECTOR OF ENGLISH | 14 FEBRUARY 2014

One of the hilarious observations to which English (and other) teachers are often treated is the old one about marking: ‘Don’t you just stand at the top of the stairs and throw all the papers in the air?’ The observer usually goes on to suggest that the higher grades are allocated to the weightier submissions — the ones that fall the furthest. The problem here is not the obvious one of comedic unoriginality, but of physics. If the stair-toss method was, in fact, employed (oh, how my weekends would improve!), the tomes that thud solidly onto the bottom stairs might actually attract far lower grades than those that wafted to a feathery rest on the top step or landing. Why? Because writers who can use fewer words and pages to do the same job, are better writers. The ‘secret’ of good communication is summed up bluntly but accurately in the oft-quoted words of Bill Clinton’s campaign strategist: ‘The economy, stupid’.

There is nothing new in this assertion, but there is a happy timeliness. Commentators have observed that the immanence of texting and tweeting has had two profoundly positive — if quite unexpected — effects: a return to the written word as the predominant mode of communication and an impulse towards brevity. When faced with a non-negotiable, 140-character limit, tweeters are compelled to keep their messages brief. Granted, there is no inanity limit, but the enforced succinctness of the SMS and Twitter-spheres could well provide our girls with an impetus to use words economically.

Being able to express purposes concisely, whether for a Physics EEI, an Art assignment, or an English oral presentation, is a key determinant of school success. The difference, for example, between an A and a B in one of the three Maths B and C criteria, as mandated by the QSA, is that the former is ‘concise’ and the latter isn’t. The ability to communicate economically will stand our girls in good stead in their tertiary and professional lives. The good news, and the focus of the next few hundred words, is that it can be learned.

The first step towards being an economical communicator is attitudinal. Many of our girls are yet to arrive at the realisation that quantity — of hours worked, points covered, words written or minutes spoken — does not equal quality. I made this point at a parent-teacher night last year, much to the delight of one father, who turned to his daughter and said something like, ‘Haven’t I been telling you for years to get rid of all those excess words?’

Quantity gets in the way of quality. In the most pragmatic of senses, the more we write, the greater scope we give ourselves for errors. In terms of cognitive hygiene, abiding by word and time limits forces us to discern which of our ideas are apposite, and which are superfluous. Editing is not merely stylistic: it is an intellectual process. This ability to discern the textual wheat from the chaff is in part a function of the developing brain, but is also a skill to be practised.

The second adjustment that needs to be made is an emotional one. In a macabre piece of editing advice, Arthur Quiller-Couch (as cited in Nordquist, n.d.) exhorted writers to look most closely at those passages with which they are most smitten, and then ‘murder your darlings’. His use of ‘darlings’ is apt: many girls protest — shoulders slumped — that they really like the very bits they are being advised to edit out. In How to Write Short, Clark (2013) suggests a
more diplomatic way of dealing with our beloved words, sentences and passages. Rather than homicide, he suggests that we have a conversation with each of them, beginning with the question, ‘Do I really need you?’ (p. 123). I would argue that Clark’s question can be sharpened, and made less like a scene from a daytime soap, if it is refocused: ‘Does my reader really need you?’

To ensure our final drafts respond to this question with an emphatic ‘yes’, we need time. Benjamin Franklin, John Locke, Cicero, Blaise Pascal, Martin Luther and Woodrow Wilson can’t all be wrong. Each of them made witty observations about writing a long piece because they lacked the time to produce a short one. I like the humour of Wilson’s, ‘If I am to speak ten minutes, I need a week for preparation; if fifteen minutes, three days; if half an hour, two days; if an hour, I am ready now’ (as cited in O’Toole, 2012).

The paradox that brevity is only achieved at length has obvious implications for our students. The passage of time allows us to see our own work dispassionately, and then to prune, lop or fell judiciously. A schedule (or lack thereof) that leaves little time between first draft and submission limits the objective distance even an experienced writer can bring to bear on their prose. The message for students and those in their editing support group is clear: get writing early. Once the early start is made, each subsequent drafting should take place when enough time has passed to allow for disinterest. Drafting at too close an interval produces the near-identical iterations that many of our girls submit as evidence of ‘drafting’.

Once the need, disposition and opportunity for prudent economising are in place, effective strategies abound. One of the best is mimicry. Clark (2013) in How to Write Short, and Fish (2011) in How to Write a Sentence agree that good examples of concision should be collected and emulated. This is not to say that we want to hear persuasive speeches that begin a la Dickens: ‘Cloning; it is the best of technologies, it is the worst of technologies’, but ‘Cloning; is it the best or worst of technologies?’ is a pretty crisp opening. Clark suggests keeping a scrapbook of any short writing that catches our eye, whether posters, advertisements or graffiti. Keeping such a collection is hardly onerous in the era of the smartphone camera.

A university professor of mine wrote a kind reference for me decades ago, and I have trundled out its beautifully taut opening sentence countless times since then for my own students. This is why we show the girls exemplars from the wider world of writing, from the faculty, and from the girls who have gone before them. Gleaning just one precise phrase, or one word that would replace three of our own, makes that exemplar worthwhile.

Clark (2013) identifies several ‘usual suspects’ (p. 124) that most sentences could do without, and of which many of our girls are unduly fond. Redundancies like ‘personally, I believe’, ‘shouted loudly’, or ‘so as to’, lose no meaning when trimmed to ‘I believe’, ‘shouted’, or ‘to’. Intensifiers like ‘really’, ‘very’, ‘actually’, and the sadly abused ‘incredibly’ are more often clutter than nuance. In imaginative writing, many young writers struggle to be direct; their characters live in arrested worlds where they ‘almost’ cry, and feel ‘somewhat’ lonely. These same characters also struggle to ever complete an action, as they ‘begin’ to walk across the room, or ‘start’ to drive away. Obviously, all of these qualifications could go. Often, in laudable attempts to be descriptive, our students resort to heavily adjectival and adverbial constructions of this ilk: ‘As I began to walk hesitantly and somewhat unsteadily along the incredibly uneven and treacherous patchwork footpath’ where ‘I stumbled along the rough path’ would do as well. Adverbs and adjectives are useful, but the more often we use them, the less impact they have.

Being economical with words takes practice, and it takes two. The best and best-known writers and speakers all have editors, and our students should too. The teacher’s role here is a given, but friends, parents and other supporters can also lend a constructively critical eye, because we are all readers and listeners, and, as such, the best judges of whether the message is delivered economically. In the long run, economy of expression is not about school, university or Twitter word limits; it is about being able to deliver a message that will cut through the ever-increasing information clutter. This is something that will help our girls long after their last school assignment has flown from a teacher’s hands and wafted to a feathery rest on the top step.
REFERENCES


Every girl needs a fairy godmother

CAROL MCINTOSH, OUTDOOR EDUCATION TEACHER | 20 FEBRUARY 2014

Inspired by classic literature and animated screen fantasies, many little girls dream of having a fairy godmother, and in their mind’s eye, it may well be the Disney Cinderella-style fairy godmother they wish for: the caring, motherly figure who appears to weave her magic precisely at a time of need, offer practical support, see things from a different perspective, and find a way through difficult times. This concept is fantastic (in the true sense of the word), and obviously unattainable, belonging appropriately in its Disney guise to a magical realm. If this concept is too far-fetched, perhaps we need to redefine our concept of magic and look to see if we can take the best of the fairy godmother and bring these characteristics to life for our girls. Surrounding girls with women of wisdom is important at all stages of their lives; however, it is particularly pertinent throughout their teenage years. This phase can be a time of push and pull, of periods of connection and separation, as young people seek to find their place, establish their own identities and learn to be more independent.

Parents can mistake their daughter’s transition into adolescence and her quest for freedom and individuality as a sign to be more distant in relation to their parenting (or in some cases, to ‘under-parent’ or, indeed, to be absent altogether). In actuality, Mellor and Mellor (2013) point out that this is a time when parenting is just as important as when the girls were babies and toddlers. Significantly, they need parental guidance and support in navigating the new dimensions and fluctuation points they are entering and experiencing.

This is quite a task for parents to tackle alone. The proverb, ‘It takes a village to raise a child’, highlights the concept that a community has a role in nurturing young people. Steve Biddulph (2013) in his book Raising Girls suggests that finding the right adult mentors to support your daughter is important for developing her character. He suggests an army of aunts (here appear our fairy godmothers): those aunties by relation, as well as those aunties by choice. These are the role models who are involved with our girls and who listen deeply, talk sense, are not afraid to provide feedback and are in for the long haul. In particular, this is a group of women who offer female adult time and are women with whom your daughter can form a special relationship. While this support network can be wide and include people like teachers, coaches and neighbours, it is the one-on-one relationships that are particularly valuable.

Parents offer their daughters values, beliefs and ideas the aunties can support and nourish. They can broaden perspectives and, because they may have different skills and interests, they can enrich the experience base for the girls from which to draw strength and understanding. Aunties can fill some of the gaps that mothers cannot. Mothers are not always their daughters’ only confidantes.
Parents can move in and out of favour through the teen years. It is during this time that fairy godmothers earn their wands and can truly spread their magic with our maturing Cinderellas.

A report produced by the Dove® Self Esteem Fund in 2008, entitled *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on Self Esteem*, highlighted that the transition to teenage years is the key time during which girls can lose their trust in adults. The report found that:

- sixty-seven per cent of girls aged thirteen to seventeen turn to their mothers as a resource when feeling badly about themselves compared to ninety-one per cent of girls ages eight to twelve.
- only twenty-seven per cent of girls aged thirteen to seventeen will turn to their father for help when feeling badly about themselves compared to fifty-four per cent of girls ages eight to twelve. (At sixteen, girls become more likely to seek support from male peers than from their own fathers.)
- sixty-five per cent of girls aged thirteen to seventeen refrain from telling their parents certain things about themselves to prevent their parents from thinking badly about them, compared to forty-nine per cent of girls ages eight to twelve.

Similarly, Hamilton (2008) in her book *What’s Happening to our Girls* reiterates that adolescent life has always been a process of disengaging from parents. However, the peer pressure and popular culture, combined with the constant access to friends on social media and mobile devices is pervasive but often occurs without the safety net that good parenting provides.

This all suggests the need for a broad network of adults with whom our daughters can communicate and by whom they can be influenced. It is the broader network that helps them realise they matter, that reflects back to our children that they are important, and provides reassurance of their self-worth (Ungar, 2009).

What Kids Need to Succeed: Proven practical ways to raise good kids (2012), the resulting book from extensive surveys of American youth, identifies forty developmental assets. These assets are the building blocks of human development and were identified from those who lead healthy, productive lives, irrespective of genetics, socio-economic situations or trauma. After family support and positive family communication, the third most significant ‘support asset’ is other adult relationships: frequent, in-depth conversations with adults other than their parents. Ideally, this would involve three or more caring, principled adults who support, encourage and guide (Benson, Galbraith & Espeland, 2012).

It is important for teenage girls to spend time and talk with the wand-armed aunties who display genuine interest in them and provide positive messages. Aunties can sometimes possess that magic ability to deliver messages and have them heard, even if the messages are exactly the same as those their parents have already provided. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that ‘Aunty’ is the term used with Indigenous people to acknowledge the special place of female elders and the presiding role they play in their communities.

In their book *How Girls Thrive*, Deak and Adams (2010) support the notion of sustained relationships stating that, while ‘brief contact with a model/mentor can have some
impact, the best results come when the connection is sustained over time’ (2010, p. 25). It takes patience for allegiance and respect to solidify. However, the relationship does not have to be ‘forever after’, although some of the memories and learnings may make lasting impressions.

There is one warning, however. It is preferable that the aunts you choose do not fall into the new marketing category of the PANK (Professional Aunt No Kids). Yes, this is an identified group defined as women with large disposable incomes to spend on gifts and experiences. While Cinderella did go to the ball in a glamorous dress and glass slippers, we suggest that this is not the point of aunthood. Expensive products are not substitutes for rewarding, personal experiences within these feminine alliances.

As we all strive to create that magical world for our daughters, we can take solace in knowing that there are modern day fairy godmothers available to our girls. These aunts, and the genuine relationships they share with our girls, are more powerful than any Disney fantasy. Experiences shared, the authentic exchanges, and occasional surprises that form part of this union, give our daughters another source of guidance on their journey. The essence of the magic they weave may come just at the right time; perhaps when you have exhausted your own bag of tricks (or perhaps when you are just exhausted). If Disney’s version of the fairy godmother no longer works for your daughter, look for a real one nearby. The magic inherent in that relationship promises to be more powerful than anything the celluloid world has to offer.

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As a teacher and a parent of school-aged children, I follow the debates in the media about the direction of Australia’s educational policies with great interest. Falling rankings in international tests and arguments surrounding funding models have led many commentators to compare Australia’s educational system with those of other countries.

With my mother’s family hailing from Finland and having lived and gone to school there for a year, I am always intrigued to read the numerous references to Finland in newspapers and television reports. Following outstanding results in international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), in which Finnish students outperform their counterparts in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, nations such as Australia and the United States have sought to understand the Finnish approach. This is particularly because it is in contrast to the regimented style employed by other academic powerhouses such as South Korea and Singapore.

In Finland, there is no public/private school divide since all schools are public. For this reason comparisons between Brisbane Girls Grammar School and the Finnish model are difficult to make, but tempting nevertheless. Having some schools with beautiful buildings, fantastic resources and high quality teachers while others are average or struggle, is completely against the Finnish philosophy of equality. In Finland there are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ schools, with the variance between schools on the PISA scales being about five per cent, whereas in Australia it is about thirty-three per cent (Sahlberg, 2009, p. 6). You can go to any suburb, district, or town in Finland and you will see virtually no difference in the standard of the schools.

The main aim for the educational policies in Finland is not excellence but equality and the idea that every child should have exactly the same opportunity to learn regardless of family background, income or geographic location is paramount. Excellence has merely been the by-product of their egalitarian system. Everything relating to education, from tuition, books and materials, transport and importantly, a two-course hot meal every day, is provided free by the state. While it is true that Finland is a more homogeneous country than Australia, it is interesting to note that in the last decade, the number of immigrants has doubled and even in those areas where there is a high concentration of foreign-born students, there is no variation in their PISA scores (Virkkunen as cited in Snider, 2011, p. 2).

So what does the Finnish school system look like? Finns start school when they are seven as they believe in extending childhood as long as possible before formal education and typically have nine years of compulsory education — six years of primary and three years of lower secondary. After that they can choose to continue at either a vocational or general secondary school for another three years. I actually spent six months at a home economics high school, Kauhajoen Kotitalousopisto, and six months at a general high school, Kauhajoen Lukio, so I feel that I have a fairly good understanding of the two settings. In 2009, fifty-five per cent of students attended a general high
school and thirty-seven per cent chose to go to a vocational high school. There was the further option of a tenth grade of basic education after which the majority of those students continued back into mainstream high schools.

When I attended the general high school in the mid-1980s, a system of streaming according to ability groups in maths and foreign languages was in place, but in 1985 that was completely changed to a modular curriculum structure without streaming, age-cohort based groupings or semesters. The curriculum framework now gives the students a lot of freedom to plan both the content and the time sequencing of their studies. Interestingly, this big overhaul in the education system did not involve a rise in government expenditure, and in fact the total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP declined in the 1990s (from 7.9 per cent in 1992 to 6.3 per cent in 1995). Even today Finland’s education expenditure is only average for OECD countries compared with a country such as the United States, which spends the most, yet has some of the lowest results.

The Finns believe efficiency is more important than the level of expenditure (Sahlberg, 2009, p. 2). From my experience, I would like to point out that Finnish schools concentrate purely on the academic and leave co-curricular activities to community organisations. They don’t run sporting competitions, orchestras, drama productions or the different kinds of clubs that are on offer at a school such as Girls Grammar. While schools are well designed, they do not feature the magnificent grounds and buildings that are found in some of our independent schools. In fact, many years ago, a relative of mine who was a Principal at a specialist music high school in Helsinki, visited our School and was overwhelmed by the standard of both our music programme and the facilities on offer.

One of the biggest differences between their system and ours is that there are no standardised, high-stakes testing until the National Matriculation Examinations. The focus is solely on learning rather than passing exams and achievement is defined in relation to a student’s own development and growth, rather than in relation to universal standards. Entrance into university is not just determined by the equivalent of our OP score but rather students have to sit separate exams to be accepted into the university course of their choice. A by-product of this lack of emphasis on testing seems to be a drop in levels of anxiety and stress amongst both teachers and students. A feature of Finnish schools that is often commented on by visiting foreign journalists is the calm and creative environment and one contributing aspect to this may be the lack of assessment anxiety.

The Finns believe the cornerstone of their education system is the excellence of their primary schools and the philosophy that ‘no child should slip through the cracks’ is taken very seriously. Most schools are small (a third of schools are less than fifty students) and they often have the same teacher for more than one year of their primary schooling. Also the remedial help offered to struggling students is impressive with about twenty-five per cent receiving extra support (Virkkunen as cited in Snider, 2011, p. 3) with assistant teachers being available in most classrooms. Literacy levels for primary school aged students in Finland have always been high (Sahlberg, 2009, p. 3) even before the education reforms in the 1990s and I have my own theory about why this could be the case. Although Finnish is an incredibly difficult language for foreigners to learn because it is not an Indo–European language (completely different to Germanic or Romance language families), it is actually phonetic. Surely this would make reading easier and they would not have the same spelling problems that we have with English. Secondly, all American and English television shows and movies are subtitled rather than dubbed and I believe that this not only gives children plenty of reading practice but also assists in learning English as a foreign language.

When Finnish educationalists are asked why their system has been so successful, their answer is always that the main reason lies in the quality of their teachers. Teachers have always been highly respected members of society; it is also an extremely prestigious profession. It attracts the very top students and it is said to be harder to get into a teaching degree at university than a medical degree (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 24). Only eight universities are permitted to train teachers and there is great competition to gain entry into
these elite courses. Only about ten per cent of applicants actually succeed in gaining a place to study teaching and some applicants try for a number of years after working as teacher aids and doing further study to better their chances. They must not only pass the entrance exam but are also subjected to rigorous interviews to ascertain that their temperament and personal qualities are suited to teaching. One point that is often raised about teacher quality in Finland is the fact that every teacher must obtain a Master’s degree, their course consisting of three years of specialist subject study followed by two years of specific teacher training. While Masters’ degrees vary from country to country, the fact that this is a requirement points to the high value that is placed on the teaching profession, the serious weight given to instructing youth.

Why are the very top students in Finland seeking to be teachers? They are not paid any more than teachers in Australia but in Finland perhaps there is not such a gap between other lucrative professions such as law and medicine. Another theory is that the Finns are not as materialistic and that the prestige and autonomy that is afforded teachers and other excellent working conditions are enough to attract them and keep them in the education field. The drop-out rate of teachers is also extremely low (Virkkunen as cited in Snider, 2011, p. 3).

With so much debate about the future of education in Australia at present, it has been very interesting to read about a country which went through a similar process in the 1990s and has apparently achieved a lot of success through its reforms. It is unrealistic to think that we could transfer the Finnish model into an Australian setting, however, certain areas such as teacher training could well provide some food for thought.

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SALLY FINCH / 8H (DETAIL)
For anyone who has ever ‘crammed’ for an exam or experienced an ‘all-nighter’ prior to a due date, Ms Maggi Gunn, Director of Mathematics explores the concept of academic procrastination.

Each term, students return to my classes with renewed enthusiasm and the intention to improve on previous results. They plan to study daily, review past topics frequently and commence assignments when distributed. They carefully enter dates from assessment schedules into their diaries. However, while the intent to implement a conscientious approach to their study does not wane, the evidence of consistently appropriate academic behaviours is not always apparent.

While Migram, Batin and Mower (1993) acknowledge that a common form of academic procrastination is to delay until the last minute the submission of assignments or commencement of study for an exam, Kotler (2009, p. 99) recognises that procrastination can account for the ‘gap between intention and action’. Unsurprisingly, procrastination is not a new behaviour. The origin of the term procrastination derives from the Latin procrastinat meaning deferred until tomorrow — derived from pro meaning forward, and crastinus, belonging to tomorrow (Apple, 2005).

Of concern is the prevalence of academic procrastination. Research indicates that while ninety-five per cent of students are found to procrastinate occasionally (Ellis & Knaus, 1977), at least fifty per cent procrastinate with some regularity (Soloman & Rothblum, 1984). As an educator, I frequently observe the impacts of academic procrastination. Student stress escalates as deadlines approach. Attendance at Maths Help sessions increases as the term progresses and peaks just prior to exams. Students panic on mornings when assignments are due and printers fail. Students request permission to study in class when an exam is scheduled in the following period. It would seem intuitive that, in the majority of cases, procrastination acts contrary to the best interests of those involved.

In a 2009 study involving 200 students (Zarick & Stonebraker, 2009), only one student claimed to have never been negatively affected by procrastination, and one-third of the students reported that the quality of their submissions always or usually suffered. While students believe that procrastination predominantly affects the quality of assignments, academic staff believe the effects are also evident in exam results (Rothblum, Soloman & Murakami, 1986). Certainly, at the end of each term there are always a couple of students in my classes who seem to wish they had spent less time procrastinating and more time completing problems.

Of course, academic procrastination does not necessarily equate to doing nothing. The diversity of activities available at Brisbane Girls Grammar School provide ample opportunities for students to be productively engaged. Students who may delay commencing assignments or defer preparing for exams are often extremely busy in service endeavours or active in co-curricular spheres. Research has indicated that when faced with tasks that are difficult,
challenging or stressful, procrastinators engage in activities that are less daunting and more pleasant, enjoyable or rewarding in the short term (Soloman & Rothblum, 1984; Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau & Blunt, 2000).

In general, intrinsic reasons are negatively correlated with procrastination and extrinsic reasons are positively correlated with procrastination. Thus even students who consider classes and subject matter important for life goals will still procrastinate if they are not intrinsically interested in the learning material (Senecal, Koestner & Vallerand, 1995). With this in mind, identifying which subject’s homework is done first (and last) is an interesting exercise.

Unfortunately, identifying those who procrastinate is not simple. Tucker-Ladd (2006) identifies two types of procrastinators — those who are relaxed but may have negative feelings toward the task, and those who are anxious about pressure, ability or failure. While Soloman and Rothblum (1984) similarly identified ‘aversiveness of task’ and ‘fear of failure’ as the two predominant types of procrastinators, procrastination has also been linked to personality traits (Steel, 2007) and biological influences (Burka & Yuen, 2008). According to Wolters (2003), students who view tasks as difficult or time-consuming or who are unsure of their abilities to complete them with success, tend to procrastinate more. Further, DeWitte and Schouwenberg (2002, p. 471) believe that ‘procrastinators may have trouble appreciating the consequences that present choices have for the viability of remote goals. That is, they may underestimate the relevance of the present efforts for their final success’. Essentially, the further away the deadline, the more likelihood and opportunity there is for procrastination.

While the negative connotations of procrastination may be commonly accepted, Chu and Choi (2005) classify procrastinators as ‘passive procrastinators’ (as in the traditional sense described above) or ‘active procrastinators’ referring to those who are strategic in their time management and deferment of tasks. They suggest that procrastination can occur as a deliberate action with intended and desired outcomes. Although I encourage students to begin assignments immediately upon distribution and to initiate a comprehensive revision program early each term, for the most part I observe students delay these tasks and manage a variety of activities and achievements. For the majority of these students, reports and assignments are completed, deadlines are met and exams are passed, supporting research that suggests that some students are able to use procrastination as a tool to help them juggle multiple responsibilities (Sokolowska & Zusho, 2006).

Ferrari, O’Callaghan and Newbegin (2005) also subscribe to a deliberate approach to procrastination in referring to ‘arousal procrastinators’ who procrastinate for the thrill experience. Interestingly though, in a study using pagers to check on student behaviour, it was found that while students who procrastinate may defend this behaviour as a result of lack of creativity or the requirement of pressure to work, they do not later profess to be pleased about the decision to defer when working under deadline pressure (Pychyl et al., 2000). Certainly, the thrill component of ‘cramming’ is somewhat difficult to comprehend.

I would suggest that students who believe they strategically employ delaying tactics (procrastination) in strategic and beneficial ways for their academic pursuits should objectively analyse their procrastination habits and the effects of these habits on completion and results. In electing to maintain an ‘active procrastination’ approach they should continue to be observant of effects and outcomes. While there may be occasion whereby procrastination does not result in negative influence, and in fact aids completion and quality, it would be expected that for the majority of students and situations, procrastination is not beneficial and mitigation of the possible negative impacts are desirable.

As secondary school is the precursor to university and work-life, assisting students to limit or prevent procrastination is a measure of helping them to develop the skills required for career success (Ferrari & Scher, 2000). Unsurprisingly, self-regulation has been found to have a strong negative correlation to procrastination (Steel, 2007) and thus ‘self-regulated learning strategies such as planning and organising academic activities, using
cognitive strategies to understand and remember materials taught, resisting distractions, participating in class, and structuring their environment so as to make it conducive to study’ preclude procrastination and are conducive to strong academic results (Tan, Ang, Klassen, Yeo, Wong & Huan, 2008). Further, Tuckman (2003) found that predisposition to avoidance strategies can be modified through learning and motivational strategies and knowledge of study skills. With the knowledge that internal deadlines are less effective than external deadlines (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002), it becomes important for students to abide by due dates and manage the pressures of a fast paced and full school life.

Unfortunately, as a self-confessed and serial ‘active procrastinator’ myself, I fully understand both the allure and effects of procrastination — the appeal of deferring tasks dependent on the proximity of deadlines, the satisfaction of juggling and achieving more and, at times, the frustration of wishing I’d started earlier.

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I often find myself involved in conversations from various perspectives, about young people and the nature of deep thinking. Increasingly my research on this topic leads me to a paper, or an article lands in my inbox about neuroplasticity, the differences between deep and surface learning or perhaps the changing adolescent mind. More often, however, I find tirades against the use of technology and the role it plays in the acquisition and development of knowledge. So I am frequently struck by our deep ambivalence and dichotomous disposition towards technology: it is our great saviour and at the same time, our nemesis. Despite the antipathy, I will argue that the information age continues to unveil disruptive technologies with the potential to radically change and shape the way we live, and even the process of decision making. Technology has ushered in the era of Design Thinking!

In the scope of human history, the information age is but a speck on the lens. I read somewhere once that the wage for a Roman legionnaire remained the same for 300 years. The industrial revolution had its roots in the fifteenth century and developed for almost four hundred years before culminating in the onset of mass production in the early twentieth century. The information age is but fifty years in the making and really only took off with the rapid expansion of the World Wide Web in the 1990s. Fast forward twenty short years and we are now witnessing the emergence of 3D printing as a consumer level process which is threatening to turn the concept of manufactory on its head. These technological innovations and their associated complexities have rapidly become essential to our way of life. So why are there so many detractors simultaneously prophesying the end of human thought?

Technology is often imagined in popular culture as the cause of our demise. Science and speculative fiction ask of technology, ‘What if?’ The answer often looks like HAL9000 from 2001 A Space Odyssey, SkyNet from Terminator, or Ultron from the Marvel Universe. Technology is often the arbiter of evil in such scenarios. On 22 October 1895, the famous derailment of Gare Montparnasse garnered worldwide media coverage. Even today the famous image of a steam train ending up on the Parisian sidewalk of Place de Rennes is still today emblazoned on retro art posters as a reminder of the malevolence of technological advancement. Hindenburg, the Y2K/Millennium bug and most recently the bot net conspiracy all reiterate this fear.

Technophobia runs deep in our common imaginations, but my observations are that it features far less in those of the young. Their answer to the technological ‘What if’ is a very different one. While some of us have grown up and old with the worry that computers will eventually outsmart us, the young seem safe in the knowledge that technology has and will continue to improve us. In this age of mobile apps, Photoshop and high definition visual effects, young people are sceptical about our fears, resistant to our warnings of computer derived dystopias, and questioning of our perceptions. After all, thanks to Your Baby Can Read DVDs, Reading Eggs, Mathletics and most recently apps, they have experienced the acquisition of knowledge through technology for the entirety of their short, busy lives. The thought processes of our young digital natives is not diminishing or becoming shallower; they are merely developing differently.

Is it hard to imagine a world in which people are inspired to push boundaries and think deeply about a concept in a
YouTube video or the fictional freedom of a novel or film? It shouldn’t be; in fact it is most certainly happening. A study in the UK found that one third of university students were drawn to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) not through the laudable examples of Brunel or Curie, but through film and other media. A quick iTunes search reveals a plethora of zombie and vampire movies. Rather than decrying this trend, can we not see in it the likelihood that it may inspire a generation of potential immunologists, virologists, anthropologists, all unknowingly theorising and discussing the best approaches for pandemic disease control. Films like *Iron Man* and *Star Wars*, and computer games such as *Mine Craft* are potentially inspiring a generation of architects as well as electrical, mechanical, and biological engineers.

Anton Chekhov once wrote: ‘Man can be better when you can show him what he can be like’. Technology can show this just as readily as it has shown us doomsday at the hands of tech-gone-wrong—so perhaps we can better recognise how our young are establishing thought processes if we look to their surroundings. The possibilities of a limitless future, the bombardment of information and the uncertainties of their own career pathways are forcing them to filter copious amounts of information, retrieve what’s relevant or of interest and store it for later — a process quite comparable to what a computer uses to replicate thought.

In ancient history, religious piety and fervour structured thought. The advent of Guttenberg’s Press and the printed page propagated free thinking and the expansion of machines and science fostered our desire and established a process by which to understand, catalogue, process and control our natural world. This boom in science conceived the information age and the advent of the knowledge worker where people can network, trade, crowd-fund or crowd-source ideas, and micro-finance for social good and socialise in virtual environments. This expanse of seemingly limitless possibilities is a boon for creative thought and endeavour. Adaptation is everything, and remaining static and single-minded is a sure way to find yourself on a Parisian sidewalk in the *Gare Montparnasse* sense.

So how can we approach or define the process of deep thinking with any relevance to the present? How does a productive young person begin to solve complex problems? I think part of the answer lies in what has become known as Design Thinking. Spending time with the question, ‘What if?’ This is the foundation of creative endeavour! It isn’t the realm of daydreamers, time wasters and procrastinators. The first stage of Design Thinking is to empathise or understand all of the possibilities before fine-tuning or selecting an area of emphasis: ‘What if we could … ?’. The next phase, Ideation, returns to the question: ‘What if it looked like ... ?’ Prototyping, testing and evaluating follows on and the consensus is once again on repetition, interaction, linking ideas to knowledge and critical analysis, all undoubtedly qualities of deep thinking and all skills that can be further developed in an engaging manner through technology. Arguably there is one emergent skillset causing a significant and disruptive impact on our way of life — the ability and willingness to augment the use of technology. These experimental interactions with technology combined with a collective of agile minds leads us to discoveries which nobody knew we needed to discover, and inadvertently evolves us.

Deep thinking hasn’t left our young; it hasn’t departed the tracks, plummeted as a flaming fireball or diluted itself over the World Wide Web. The majority of our young people are asking, ‘What if?’ They are spreading their networks, storing knowledge and crowd sourcing to foster their understanding, discovering what’s important, and determining what relevance this knowledge has in their lives. It is hard for our young to philosophise on the world and the way in which it works. Their fear perhaps is in dwelling with a thought for too long in case all other things change.

If I can offer them any advice to span their productive lives it would be in the sage reflective words of HAL9000, to put yourselves ‘ ... to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do’. ■
The inaugural meeting of the Brisbane Girls Grammar School Indigenous Service Club was held at our Spring Hill campus on 18 February 2014. A name chosen by its members, The Uralla Club meets each Friday lunch break and membership is open to staff, and students from Years 8 to 12.

Uralla, from the dialect of the Anaiwan people, means ‘ceremonial meeting place on a hill’, and under the leadership of Anna McArthur-Dowty and Josefine Ganko (both of 11R) the group hopes to make a difference and effect change in relation to the complex issues surrounding Australia’s Indigenous people. In her Perspectives article written for the BGGS News, Anna draws attention to the significant difference in statistics relating to Indigenous life expectancy, health and education. She states that, ‘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.’ (McArthur-Dowty, 2013). Anna and Josefine do not wish to be referred to as a youth crusaders, but they are well on their way to making a difference.

The celebration of Indigenous culture and acknowledgement of the significant issues and challenges faced by these communities is very topical in Australian society today. Adam Goodes, Sydney Swans footballer and anti-racism campaigner is our current Australian of the Year and our Prime Minister the Honourable Tony Abbott MP last month delivered the sixth Closing the Gap report to Parliament.

Whilst acknowledging the significant contributions of the Girls Grammar community in the past, it is now time for us to fly the flags of our Indigenous peoples — not just literally, but for our students to recognise the barriers faced by Indigenous people, to create awareness of Indigenous issues, and to educate about and celebrate their culture, so the focus can be on positive movement forward.

Indigenous communities will be the beneficiaries of School Charity fundraising in 2014.

The nomination of an annual School Charity enables these goals to be shared within the student body. Under the leadership of the Head Girls, Service Captains and the Student Council, and in conjunction with appropriate experiences and support, a sense of belonging is cultivated amongst the students, of ownership of learning, and ability to make good choices (Dedmon & Kestler, 2010). Consistent with our School’s own Strategic Design, we aim to instil in our students a judicious and ethical engagement with the world and life-wide learning. The challenge is to establish this link through understanding and scholarly connection, not just fundraising.

‘The School is mindful of the need for students to feel connected to the service model and develop a sense of ownership to successfully drive the campaign throughout the year’ (Tuftball, 2012, p.16). Careful consideration must be given to the recipients of Student Council fundraising. Following the generous contribution to the Cerebral Palsy Alliance and their Research Foundation in 2013, the importance of establishing long-term relationships with the Indigenous communities we support cannot be overlooked.
The Uralla Club and Student Council have been discussing the Indigenous issues that will be the focus of their attention in 2014. A survey of members has guided the decision to focus on Indigenous education and health areas for fundraising and awareness-raising activities.

Whilst establishing real and worthwhile links across the school curriculum and co-curriculum is underway, the 2014 Student Council motto is ever present: Above and beyond with the Grammar bond. The Great Debate, Valentine’s Day and Term I Blue Day celebrations have already raised significant funds for our cause. Future events such as National Close the Gap Day, Diversity Day (International Studies), NAIDOC Week, and National Literacy and Numeracy Day (Libellum Society) will all contribute to our students’ connection to the School Charity, whilst also enhancing the magnificent School spirit that we enjoy at Girls Grammar through the celebration of our own culture and traditions.

However, we must appreciate what contribution can truly be made through Service beyond the recipient charity. We hope to contribute to the platform of ideas that will enable Indigenous people to facilitate change in their own right. Aboriginal people need to be central to the process of change. As reported by Neda Vanovac (2013), ‘Aboriginal organisations are asking to lead the way with respect to funding their own futures’. She has cited Wendy Morton, Executive Director of the NT Council of Social Services who recognises that, ‘We need to invest in building capacity of people, whether that be in schools, health or child protection.’ The principles are about driving long-term change.

Following on from our short-term aspirations of assistance and usefulness, further thought must be given to our long-term goals as we reflect on what we can achieve in the future. Such a challenge has been posed by our Thought Leader in Residence, Mr Adam Blake through the exploration of the principles of Design Thinking. During his presentation to academic staff at the January Staff Conference Day, he described Design Thinking as a disciplined process that uses stages to force one to think outside the boundaries (Blake, 2014). In its most simple form, Design Thinking is about making decisions with empathy, or with the needs of those affected in mind (Devaney, 2014).

Mr Blake challenged staff to list and explain what (and how) Girls Grammar has to offer to create positive change for Indigenous Australians and communities, without the contribution of fundraising. The suggested opportunities for engagement were numerous, but participants recognised that we must in turn ask the communities what it is that they need. We would like to develop a two-way relationship through engagement with local elders and Indigenous community groups. We aim to not only educate our students about Indigenous communities but also about the values they will develop including empathy, basic knowledge of our identity and history, and social development.

Mr Blake will return to the School next week to guide us through this sequential process of Design Thinking. To discover, interpret, ideate, experiment and implement with particular reference to a yet to be seen Indigenous awareness service project. We look forward to this task and in the meantime we continue with Design Thinking Step 1: to Discover the challenges we face in this project; our existing empathy, awareness and understanding, the benefits to the recipient of our Service, the benefits to our students, and to the Brisbane Girls Grammar School community.

Yesterday we recognised National Close The Gap Day at the School and acknowledged the gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous health statistics. Whilst opportunities abound and ideas about how we can contribute to effect change and enable reconciliation are many, it is not difficult to appreciate that this is beyond a one-year project. Anna and Josie and their band of ‘youth crusaders’ are well on the way to effecting change, but just don’t call them this — instead, join them at the Uralla Club.
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That all important sense of gratitude

DR ANN FARLEY, DIRECTOR OF DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING | 28 MARCH 2014

My daughter has a passion for refugee health care that is, in part, inspired by her secondary school History studies at Girls Grammar, where she learned about conflicts in Timor Leste, Rwanda, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Now she works with amazing refugee women who have inspired her with their humanity, respect, resilience and optimism. From my perspective, the emotion that seems to permeate all their stories is a profound sense of gratitude.

Drawn from a collection of stories of refugee strength and resilience, Elizabeth’s story is all too similar to that of many refugees.

Her life was torn apart by the conflict in Sudan, her husband and many of her family killed, others disappeared. As Elizabeth fled the horrors of life in Sudan with her children, one of her young sons was shot and killed. It was too dangerous for her to stop and grieve for him. After a horrendous journey, Elizabeth arrived with her family at Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya where they hoped for a safe refuge. However, as a woman alone with her children in a camp of 95,000 people, their lives were constantly at risk. Elizabeth’s children were kidnapped and she was forced to hide in a small section of the camp known as the ‘Protection Area’. The family was later reunited and finally, after years of living in fear for their lives, Elizabeth and her family were resettled to Australia under the Women at Risk program.

Elizabeth is a strong woman, a leader who has shown incredible determination to succeed in Australia. She has worked hard over the years to support and protect her family and is making enormous contributions to Australia. Elizabeth is an inspiration to other women who are still fighting for survival (adapted from Eckert, 2008).

In a country full of conflicting reports relating to refugees and asylum seekers, women like Elizabeth are role models not only of perseverance and resilience, but also of gratitude. Considering their past experiences, how can these women remain so positive and optimistic? For what are they grateful?

There is so much to learn from their approach to life. Marilyn Lacey has worked in refugee camps and with resettlement agencies for many years and makes the following observation:

Refugees know that everything is a gift. They have lost so much. Just being alive is a gift. Having a friend is a gift. Having a loaf of bread is a gift. Tenneh (a refugee who was being resettled) brims with gratitude, and despite all her losses, she is happy (Lacey, 2011).
We are undoubtedly a lucky School community, but should we have a greater sense of gratitude? In an article in *The Courier-Mail* late last year Kathleen Noonan asked a group of deputy principals from all over Queensland about their biggest problem in their classrooms. The answer was overwhelmingly, students with an overblown sense of entitlement. Noonan went on to question where this originates and I then have to ask if we can do anything to prevent our students from falling into the temptation of expecting everything ‘on a platter’.

Unsurprisingly, research has shown that a sense of gratitude cultivated and experienced by all members of a community has benefits on multiple levels. McKibben (2013) suggests that gratitude can lead to higher grades and life satisfaction amongst students. It can foster an increased sense of hope and trust in others and fuel a desire to give back to the community … all essential elements of an effective classroom community. She refers to studies conducted by Bono at California State University. After analysing survey responses from 700 students aged ten to fourteen, he reported to the American Psychological Association that grateful teens are more likely than their less grateful peers to be happy, less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, and less likely to have behaviour problems at school. He proposes that gratitude may be strongly linked with life skills such as cooperation, purpose, creativity and persistence and, as such, gratitude is a vital resource that parents, teachers, and those who work with young people should foster.

This is not to say that achieving a sense of gratitude is always easy. When life is happy and we are feeling content, gratitude comes easily. Emmons (2013) highlights the importance of recognising the difference between ‘feeling grateful’ and ‘being grateful’.

Being grateful is a choice, a prevailing attitude that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives. When disaster strikes, gratitude provides a perspective from which we can view life in its entirety and not be overwhelmed by temporary circumstances.

It is important to be realistic, not to ignore pain, suffering and unpleasant experiences but to recognise that the development of a grateful mindset can provide us with the capacity to shape the way these experiences are going to impact our lives. Howells (2013) argues that a sense of gratitude is most valuable to both the individual and the community when it prompts us to ‘give back out of acknowledgement for what we receive’. Elizabeth’s story is but one example of how overcoming challenges with gratitude can provide the strength and insight to support others in the community.

Why do some people cultivate gratitude, resilience and support rather than frustration, despondency and resentment? Howell suggests that resentment and gratitude cannot co-exist and notes:

Our expressions of gratitude unite us with others and encourage us to recognise, celebrate differences, and acknowledge the efforts of others. Resentment on the other hand leads us to reject, divide, ignore, lament, blame, backbite and criticise (2013).

If there is so much to be gained by developing a sense of gratitude, what can we do to encourage its development? In an address delivered to a group of students at St Joseph’s College (2011), Marilyn Lacey warned of the limitations of ‘being on top of everything but not really immersed in anything’. Lacey suggested that to live life to the full the students need to do three things: the first two were to ‘get engaged in your passions’ and ‘get lost in the different’ but the third was to ‘get gratitude’. She explained the benefits of expressing appreciation for everything that comes their way.
— everything: the heartaches as well as the triumphs, the setbacks as well as the successes.

Ryan (2009) describes gratitude as a flashlight that lights up what is already there. ‘You don’t necessarily have anything more or different, but suddenly you can actually see what it is. And because you can see, you no longer take it for granted.’ As teachers and parents we are privileged to share in the experiences of our students and children. It is inspirational to see them engage with the wider world, develop passions and take risks, but it is even more wonderful to see them become adults who appreciate others, never take what they have for granted, and are grateful for whatever they may face. I see this in the attitudes and career of my own daughter.

There is something slightly intangible that I have always loved about travelling. I love experiencing different cultures and meeting new people, but it is more than that. I’m not sure exactly what that something is, but I think part of it is recognising our common humanity despite our differences. This now makes up part of most of my days and I find great joy in it. I think it is part of what drew me to general practice more generally and what particularly draws me to refugee health. I love working with my patients to overcome the challenges refugee health care poses. It is so important that we are all able to effectively access quality health care. Finally, I love the warmth and resilience of the patients I work with. They are endlessly inspiring (R. Farley, personal communication, 2 March 2013).

There is a lesson for a teacher and a mother here. Encourage your students and children to be grateful for those experiences life affords, not as an entitlement but as an opportunity.

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Finding ways to find their way

JIM SEAHA, DIRECTOR OF POST-SECONDARY PLANNING | 4 APRIL 2014

Building a career is a personal and individual process that rarely begins with the collective end in mind. While identifying a path is the first step, the wholeness of the concept called ‘career’ is often only fully appreciated upon reflection. Finding one’s way (building a career) can be loosely described as an exercise in stringing together seemingly random life experiences, seizing new opportunities as they present themselves, navigating unforeseen circumstances, and embracing emergent technologies. Looking to the past and evaluating the present are equal partners in guiding the way to the future. Therefore, an ever-evolving reflective compass must also direct the traveller’s route.

The stories in this article are written with a singular purpose in mind: to reflect upon the emerging careers of recent Brisbane Girls Grammar School graduates in the hope of teaching, guiding and inspiring those who will follow. While at school, Sarah, Kate and Beth were proactive and involved students. These young women learned the value of engagement by embracing the academic and co-curricular offerings of the School. They were enthusiastic participants in a variety of those ‘seemingly random activities’ that would one day influence their paths. They learned to recognise an opportunity when it presented itself, and sometimes when it didn’t. They are young women who plan, act on opportunity, spend time in reflection, and embrace new ideas.

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 girls who follow 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 make time to allow reflection to guide your decision making.

SARAH’S WAY

I reconnected with Sarah (2002) this past December in a CBD restaurant called Spring. It came as no surprise to me to find that she was Managing Director. Eleven years after leaving Girls Grammar she was still the same powerhouse of positivity, enthusiasm and resilience, albeit with a lot more experience. She had learned a great deal about herself and the world and was keen to share it with the School she said ‘prepared her so well for life’. She did not say Brisbane Girls Grammar School had prepared her well for university, and she did not say the School had prepared her well for work. She said we prepared her well for ‘life’.

Finishing Girls Grammar with an OP that would have gained her entry to any programme in any university in Australia, Sarah began a double degree in Commerce and Law at The University of Queensland. Two and a half weeks later she recalled embarking on a ‘period of discovery that lasted until I was twenty five — and that’s not where the discovery ended — it’s where it began’.
Unbeknown to Sarah, her ‘period of discovery’ would last for eight years and take her around the world many times. She continued her Commerce degree part-time and, in 2005, commenced her career quest by completing a semester at a Liberal Arts College in Switzerland. The following year Sarah continued her commerce and economics studies at The University of Oxford as part of the visiting students programme. It was there that she began to recognise the many personal growth opportunities that existed for secondary students; it was there that the Brisbane Girls Grammar School Oxbridge Program was discovered.

The Harvard Summer Program in Business Management followed in 2007, and in 2008 Sarah completed her Commerce degree at The University of Queensland, following it with a Cambridge Masters in Land Economy in 2009. In need of a self-described ‘adult gap year’ and while she was ‘in the neighbourhood’, Sarah turned her attention to courses at Le Cordon Bleu in London and Paris, where her interests turned to the food industry. A summer internship at the Ritz Hotel in Paris followed, and in 2011 Sarah returned to Brisbane.

Clearly, Sarah’s journey of discovery has been global, long and varied. She freely admits that she ‘didn’t have a clue’ when she started, but adds that the habits and attitudes, the discipline and routines that were embedded in her youthful psyche, set the firm foundation for her journey of discovery. ‘They gave me the freedom to explore.’

Sarah stepped out; she took risks and sought to study many things. She disciplined herself to keep searching. She further developed those early habits of positivity and resilience and, in the end (or is it the beginning?) founded Spring.

KATE’S WAY

Bus duty can be a fruitful, educational experience for staff as well as students. While Kate (2007) waited for her bus and I fulfilled the School’s duty of care, we chatted. Sometimes we chatted about university courses and careers, but mostly we talked about life and how to get along in it.

Now, at the age of twenty-three, Kate is ‘getting along’ in a big way. After an exemplary employment record in the first years of the Origin Energy Graduate Engineer Program, Kate was deemed ‘a risk’. Her immediate supervisor reported that he believed that, ‘to mitigate the risk posed to the business if she were to accept an offer elsewhere’, a promotion was necessary. Yes, Kate was promoted to Pipeline Engineer after completing only half of the three-year Graduate Program because her supervisor believed that she had ‘outgrown it’ and her success had become a risk to the business.

Kate left Girls Grammar as she arrived: full of hope, in search of opportunity and committed to a remarkably busy life. When I asked her where she acquired her unbreakable spirit and thirst for experience, she credited the culture of her family and the influence of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, which gave her a sense that ‘women can be anything’.

‘Don’t wait for it to happen; go out and make it happen’ became the mantra of her young years as she powered her way through her engineering degree seeking and taking every work experience opportunity she could find. Part-time work came from a cold call to a software engineering firm she passed on her way to university. A thirteen-week work experience stint in an open cut coal mine resulted from a casual conversation. Fourth-year research gave rise
to a stint with an energy company where she worked in exchange for assistance in gathering data for her thesis. These experiences did not come about by chance; Kate recognised opportunities and acted on them:

Everyone is willing to help someone who is willing to learn. I sought good mentors in business and engineering and my reliance on their help instilled in me a strong sense of empowerment. When I thrived, they thrived. This was an unexpected gift from colleagues who cared enough to mentor. I hope to pass along this empowerment by doing the same.

Brisbane Girls Grammar School provided Kate with her first community service opportunity. What began with Year 10 Service in childcare, continued throughout her education and into her profession. Now, as well as volunteering as a mentor in the Young Pipeliners Forum, Kate has become a recent SES recruit where she hopes to put her engineering skills and experience to good use.

Tirelessly applying herself on many levels, Kate achieves academically and enhances her success with experience and service. She maintains a strong commitment to her work and a positive attitude to life. What does this young woman hope to gain from it all? Kate says, ‘I want to know. The more I know, the closer I am to a solution, so I search’.

In her recent experience, the knowing was about her work; the solution lies in the green shoots of her career and the searching is imbedded in her character. I think Kate’s supervisor is a wise man.

**BETHANY’S WAY**

The extreme challenge of hard core trekking at altitude forms bonds that last well beyond the experience. Bethany (2009) and I shared that bond when we attempted to summit Mt Meru in Tanzania as part of the 2008 Antipodeans Abroad Expedition. While Bethany succeeded, I made the more age-appropriate decision to rest at 3,950 m and watch the sunrise over Kilimanjaro. Not long after graduating from Brisbane Girls Grammar School, we stood on the walkway outside my office reminiscing and planning when Bethany declared:

Mr Seaha, I have worked very hard at school and achieved the OP and UMAT scores I needed to gain provisional entry to medicine at The University of Queensland. But I am also passionate about history and political science and I want to learn about international relations. I’m going to follow those interests for a while and study my degree in Arts first.

With that decision, Bethany set her foot on a path that would see her pursue learning for learning’s sake. She majored in International Relations and minored in Economics — all with a view to following a passion. Highly successful in her academic endeavours, Bethany sought practical application of her studies. She joined The University of Queensland Human Trafficking Working Group and became so enamoured with her passion that she considered abandoning her goal to study medicine in favour of a diplomatic career.

Now a second year med student, Bethany describes her transition to the study of medicine as ‘just another of those random decisions fuelled mostly by curiosity’. This writer however, sees another dimension of her decision — one rooted in a sharp and enquiring intellect coupled with a passionate search for real life.

Last year, in yet another quest to enhance her study with practical experience, Bethany joined ‘Towards International Medical Equality’ (TIME), a student organisation that
champions engagement in medical volunteering and education, as well as raising funds to purchase medical supplies for developing countries. This year she serves as its President.

Again in 2013, Bethany pursued her quest for the practical, winning a Medical Insurance Group Australia (MIGA) grant to complete her first year medical elective placement in rural Peru. ‘Just like the Antipodeans expedition in Tanzania opened my eyes to the developing world, a first year medical elective in Peru has cemented my passion for it.’

Inspired by youthful volunteering experiences, the writings of American Doctor Paul Farmer (co-founder of Partners in Health) and an Arts major in international relations, Bethany has successfully navigated her way through those ‘seemingly unrelated life experiences’ to discover the foundations of her career. ‘Ultimately I see myself working as a physician and human rights advocate in the field of public health and development policy.’

I do not know the shelf life of bonds forged in extreme travel, but I hope it will be long enough for me to see Bethany’s life work emerge. Perhaps I will even visit her in some far off developing country to lend a hand … just not at altitude!

FINDING THEIR WAY

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 with their worlds with open-minded, well-informed planning. As a result, they recognise new opportunities, manage unforeseen circumstances and embrace the technologies of the twenty-first century to fulfil a destiny they will determine.

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 be reflective of the young woman who set herself upon it. One wonders what decisions lie ahead, what circumstances will influence them, and what technologies will demand of them. If the immediate past is any indication of their future, I am confident that they and hundreds more like them, will build careers that will leave an indelible mark on their professions.
Most education occurs inside walls… Education, when it succeeds, breaks down those walls, opens doors and puts primacy on the connections between the activity inside the classroom and the broader world and society outside it’ (Fischer & Mazurkiewicz, 2011).

As a school devoted to the education of young women, Brisbane Girls Grammar School is constantly striving for new ways for our students to benefit and achieve a deeper level of personal growth through life-wide learning. Life-wide learning opportunities are designed to nurture the girls to help them develop their potential in all aspects of their life: physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually and cognitively. They complement the formal learning inside the classroom by promoting grit, tenacity and perseverance, and can ultimately assist in developing a growth mindset.

Knowledge is not static. It is ever-changing as new interpretations and discoveries push us to reconsider what we know about a topic or a global issue. In schools today, it is a rare moment to find a class sitting in silence behind desks completing skill and drill exercises from a workbook. O’Brien (cited in Favrin et al, 2011, p. 52) states ‘Schools are now looking to provide students with something educationally unique and life changing’. In other words, schools are now working to ensure they provide authentic learning experiences for their students to robustly prepare them for the wider range of life skills required to achieve success in the twenty-first century.

There is no denying the current spotlight on NAPLAN results, PISA testing and academic league tables. The test score accountability movement and conventional educational approaches tend to focus on intellectual aspects of success, such as content knowledge. However, educationalists have realised that this alone is not sufficient. If students are to achieve their potential, they must have opportunities to engage and develop a much richer set of skills. ‘When students have opportunities to work towards goals that are meaningfully connected to their future success, cultural values, lives outside of school, and topics that are personally interesting and relevant, they are more likely to persevere when faced with challenges’ (Shechtman et al, 2013, p. 20).

In a world where research tells us that sixty-five per cent of the jobs primary-age students will undertake are yet to be imagined (Heffernan, 2011), a focus on building twenty-first century skills is well justified. ATC21S is an international research effort based at Melbourne University aimed at empowering students with the right skills to succeed in the twenty-first century workplace. The organisation advocates that while formal disciplines such as reading, writing, mathematics and science are often considered the cornerstones of education, curricula must go further to include skills such as collaborative problem-solving and digital literacy to prepare students for twenty-first century employment. In particular, the development of creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, citizenship, and personal and social responsibility have been highlighted as practical skills necessary for future-proofing our students. These skills can be developed through engagement in life-wide learning activities: the extensive suite of experiences that encompass learning opportunities outside the formal classroom. Activities commonly associated with, but not limited to, this include co-curricular sport, music, drama and service. In realising
our aspiration to be a leader in exceptional scholarship, it is important to promote the scholarship gained through participation in these above-mentioned activities.

Authentic education works to continually gather new knowledge from a variety of disciplines and fields. It has been identified by Fischer and Mazurkiewicz (2011) as placing the focus on designing learning experiences that broadly connect educational practice to the real world, and they recognise the six key aspects to the conceptualisation of authenticity in education as being: rigour, real world skills, knowledge, communication, interaction and purposeful products. These aspects align strongly with the rich academic culture in our School and provide a natural springboard for the development of life skills in our students.

Tangible authentic education can take many forms. It might involve expeditionary learning via participation in an international study tour or the Marrapatta Outdoor Education programmes, or it might involve life skills developed through participation in leadership and service activities. These are skills that simply cannot be gained sitting behind a desk or from Facebook (Miller cited in Favrin et al, 2011, p. 52). According to Fischer and Mazurkiewicz (2011, p. 7), ‘Expeditionary learning seeks to develop a deeper understanding of knowledge through the development of skills of inquiry’. It not only teaches subject matter, but it also provides a vehicle to explore moral and personal development and allows students to explore judicious and ethical decision-making. There is no better place to explore this authenticity in education than through the life-wide learning programmes offered by this School. Students who have opportunities to work towards goals that are meaningfully connected to their future success, cultural values, or lives outside of school are more likely to persevere when faced with challenges (Shechtman et al, 2013). This perseverance is linked to the development of academic resilience and tenacity.

Dweck et al (2011) advocate that students who are academically tenacious seek challenging tasks and are not derailed by intellectual or social difficulty. Rather, they see setbacks as opportunities to learn. They believe they belong in school academically and socially, view effort positively, and have great capacity to remain engaged over the long haul. In a recent life-wide learning strategy meeting involving Marrapatta staff and the School Co-curricular Committee, representing sport, instrumental music, drama, debating, service, study tours and all interest activities, committee members reflected on what academically tenacious students looked like. The following traits resonated with the group owing to the capacity for students to authentically engage and develop these behaviours through participation in life-wide learning activities.

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<th>Teamwork</th>
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<td>Accuracy</td>
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To explain this further, when students become aware that their sound is heard above the others and they begin to blend their sound, they learn teamwork; when they follow a conductor’s baton through a series of metre changes, they learn accuracy; when they support their debating team by researching material but they are not selected as a speaker and have to wait for another opportunity, they learn patience; when they are on time for drama rehearsals or for sports training sessions they learn responsibility; when they refrain from talking during training clinics and rehearsals they learn respect; when they choose to commit to a sporting fixture or performance or debate over a personal event, they learn commitment; and so forth.

While nobody would question the relevance and necessity of the formal component of education, students who have an active engagement with the co-curriculum and experiential learning opportunities are generally happy, contented, goal-oriented scholars. These students are engaged in their learning, are socially connected to their school, and value the opportunity to broaden their life skills. They are embracing the life-wide learning opportunities provided by the School and are building great capability to succeed in their education.

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People who need people …

Karen Belbin, School Counsellor | 2 May 2014

With every device and virtual dimension available at their impetuous adolescent fingertips, why do teenagers still prefer to talk face-to-face? Is there something essential that is only experienced in the presence of another person; when we relate to them, gaze at them, and feel their gaze upon us? With so much media attention devoted to teenagers’ use of technology, it is reassuring for parents and educators to know that face-to-face is still the dominant, and preferred, relationship for teens.

At a recent (12 March 2014) ‘Provocations’ session, when the School invited experts in different fields to speak with staff and provoke deep thinking on a variety of topics, Ms Roberta Thompson, PhD Candidate at Griffith University, presented ‘Capturing the hidden and unofficial work of young teen girls’ online participation’. Roberta explained that today’s teenagers experience no online/offline divide in their lives. Technology is embedded in their minds so deeply that it has become natural for them to use whatever medium is available (face-to-face, the Internet, mobile) simultaneously and continually. They live in a ‘multiple world-networked participatory culture’: a new and unfathomable space to most adults.

What is surprising — and what this article takes as its focus — is that Roberta’s research shows face-to-face contact is still teenagers’ preferred mode of relating. Other studies (Rideout, 2012) confirm that face-to-face communication beats face-to-screen as the preferred type of interaction in teenagers aged thirteen to seventeen years. We see this at school after every holiday and weekend, when girls run excitedly towards each other, to look and talk with each other — even when they have been in constant virtual contact. There is clearly something important occurring when they are with each other, face-to-face.

Developmental theorists (such as Bowlby, Winnicott, Ainsworth and Fonaghy) have long known that relating by looking and being physically held, is essential for infants’ healthy physical and emotional development. They note that personality development is influenced by our earliest relationships with others. These relationships help us make sense of our experiences, and through them, we learn about ourselves, about other people, and the wider world.

When babies come into the world, they stir up feelings in the adults who are there to care for them. Infants communicate emotionally through their relationship with their parents. The way the adult contains and manages these stirred-up feelings helps the infant make sense of their own feelings. Feelings, even frightening ones, begin to feel comprehensible and manageable to the infant. Even in infancy, there seems to be some inherent sense that the communication that occurring within a relationship with an immanent other, will help to alleviate distress.

As development progresses, infants become toddlers, and wider social experiences become possible. Playing is vital for young children to continue to learn about themselves and others. Relationships with others provide a link for the child between the parent and the outside world. Through play, toddlers begin to negotiate their needs in a world where other children also have a claim on the adults around them, and therefore a claim on the wider world. Tantrums and upsets express deep passions. How they are responded to and managed helps toddlers gain more information about themselves and others; in this way, social
development continues through all stages of growth and development.

Early experiences of feeling separate from parents can stir up powerful emotions in toddlers not unlike the emotions sometimes present during the teenage years, an emotionally ‘vibrant’ time when feelings run high. The adolescent state of mind requires others to be very emotionally involved — the adolescent process is relational. Experts in adolescent emotional development such as Waddle, Fraiberg and Anderson note that the healthy development of the teenager’s internal world also requires the nurturing and care that occurs within a relationship with another person. Like the babies they once were, adolescents project powerful feelings into the adults around them, giving parents and teachers little opportunity not to be involved.

Projecting their uncomfortable or unmanageable feelings into others allows the adolescent to feel a little distance from the feeling. Of equal importance for the developing adolescent mind, this gives the adolescent the chance to observe, from a safe distance, how the other person manages feelings that felt unbearable and unmanageable to her. In this way, projection of feelings is a precious and valuable learning experience for the adolescent. Parents and teachers who pay close attention to adolescent projections also learn valuable and helpful information about them: information that assists adults to understand the adolescent’s emotional struggles and needs.

Teens also manage their conflicting feelings by seeing the adults in their lives — usually their parents and/or teachers — as either wonderful or awful rather than the painfully ordinary mix of both. Ambivalence towards parents assists the teenager to feel that she will one day have the inner resources to leave her parents and take her place in the world. As group relationships become more important to teenagers, reasonable parents could conceivably believe that their child doesn’t want to talk with them. This is not true. Yearly reports from Mission Australia (2013, p. 16) show overwhelmingly that teenagers value their families highly and like talking with their parents. However, group life does dominate their attention. Experiences with peers can help a teen to find a way to be herself with others who are not family. Group life becomes a way to invest in passionate, connected relationships that don’t take her too far away from the family and allow for feelings of both separateness and belonging. Peer groups support and hold the adolescent while she is immersed in the important tasks of development, with moving away at their core.

During adolescence, the search for a feeling of being understood is dynamic and insistent. Their exuberance; their passion; their physical presence; their capacity to test, to challenge, to seduce and be seduced; and their necessary and natural interest in sex and aggression enable adolescents to experience, and share with us, the whole emotional palette. The human need for relationships that have honesty, truth and trust at their core is more important now than at any other time. They need to be ‘seen’ by others who will engage with them and share responsibility for initiating contact, communicating and caring about the relationship.

Physically being with each other achieves what virtual relationships, despite their many and undeniable benefits, cannot: the deep and personal contact adolescents need at this time. Face-to-face contact is a vehicle through which
eyes and faces can convey essential parts of our humanity, and illuminate our own personhood, so we know we are truly being seen. Face-to-face contact is essential, but it may not always appear as positive as this. Adolescents need to have face-offs too. Older adolescents’ need for independence can sometimes lead to confrontation with parents who may feel kept out of their lives, while the adolescent marks out her uniqueness and her differences to them. Parents of adolescents have to find the confidence and patience to keep being there, thinking about their children and talking with them during this time when the noise and rejections of adolescence can feel painful and exhausting.

The family structure changes as children grow older, as do relationships as the family makes room for the emerging adult. The task of the family — to promote development and change — becomes one of managing the transitions, and losses, that come as the adolescent incorporates new possibilities. However desirable and welcome the new things may be, learning to take them on means leaving other things behind. This process of growing emotionally by taking on, and eventually taking in these more mature aspects of the personality, can only occur in the real world, through real relationships with real people.

It is through such relationships that we learn about ourselves and others. Communication that occurs within relationships allows qualities such as goodness, courage, honour, beauty, truth and generosity to be felt and expressed first hand. The reflection back of the other person that occurs in face-to-face relationships is necessary at every stage of development — in infancy, during the teenage years and in adulthood — as an essential part of our continuing humanity. Importantly, it is through our relationships with others that we learn about love, and to love.

Perhaps the last word on relationships should go to the School’s Visiting Philosopher for 2012, Associate Professor John Armstrong, author of *Conditions of Love* and *Love, Life, Goethe — How to be Happy in an Imperfect World*. In a Radio National interview Armstrong (2006) said:

> What I’ve been trying to bring out in a number of different books is the centrality of the quality of our relationships to ideas, to people, to things, to works of art, to our own memories, to ourselves. And that quality of relationship really aspires to the condition of love. Love is our name for the highest quality of relationship that we can sustain or we can have.

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From the outside, schools may seem to promote sameness and structure for students. The wearing of uniforms, the regimentation of the timetable, structured curricula and the promulgation of particular world views all contribute to a homogeneous culture. Despite the comfortable uniformities of school life, our School challenges the homogeneous, reproduction model of education and instead provides girls with a myriad of opportunities to come into contact with, study, value, take positions on and take actions relating to issues of cultural importance. Schools should be driven by an active diversity agenda.

A secondary education helps develop individuals and enables them to take their place in and contribute to wider society during and after their school lives. Not only does it prepare them for the working world, but it also creates opportunities for them to actively participate in a social and historical one. Girls at this school learn many languages and experience not only the mechanics of learning the language and communicating effectively in it, but also have an underpinning expectation that languages are taught from positions of empathy, acceptance and understanding of the ‘other’. Good language learners are willing and accurate guessers who constantly look for patterns and analyse their own speech and the speech and behaviour of native speakers. Learning a language goes beyond vocabulary, grammar and small role-plays; it prepares young people for positive social engagement with diverse social groups. In education and action, ‘gnosis’ and ‘praxis’, to borrow from Greek, can become one and the same.

Language study assists girls to form an appreciation for other cultures and traditions, and on the flipside gives them the ability to contrast this with their own cultures and traditions, building a deeper understanding of their background. It broadens their outlook and gives them the skills to be global citizens, contributing to a multicultural view of the world that values the participation of Indigenous and minority groups.

The inherent diversity of our languages programme is enhanced when we welcome overseas students into our school community. Girls Grammar families have recently hosted twenty-one students from the Werner-Heisenberg Gymnasium in Neuwied, Germany. It is a distinct advantage to be engaged with a different language and worldview when its owner is sitting next to you in class or being billeted in your home. Hosting a student is a tremendous opportunity for us to share our language, culture, traditions and Australian way of life with someone from a different background. The diversity exchange runs two ways and when the girls take part in study tours, they are immersed in it. The complexity of peoples’ lived realities, their stories in their countries, in their schools and in their homes on the other side of the world, can ‘inspire reflection and action’ (Suzuki & Mayorga, 2014, p. 19). The academic pursuit of learning a language becomes a cyclical process of ‘learnings and social interventions’ that can benefit them as individuals and then influence their community (p. 16).

What are the benefits of having a diverse society where people hold different beliefs and ideas? There are many: open-mindedness, dynamism, an interesting and challenging environment in which to live, and the development of a well-rounded, ‘educated’ individual. But some are reluctant to assert opinions and, as a result, approach debates about diversity in a generalist fashion,
tolerating and agreeing with all positions for the sake of maintaining ‘political correctness’. This well-meaning reticence can actually be a barrier to exploring issues in greater depth. As Hillary Clinton asserted in a memorable commencement address at the University of Pennsylvania, ‘What we have to do ... is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our communities’ (cited in The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 1993). In this way, diversity is not an impotent stasis in which no single viewpoint or position prevails, rather it is a fertile ground in which diverse views compete. Some prevail, others don’t.

It may seem paradoxical, but diversity, like charity, begins at home. This week, the School held its inaugural Diversity Day. This day represents a start to uncovering different viewpoints at home and in our local community. It seeks to raise awareness in our school community about the broader societal challenges facing Australians of Indigenous and multicultural backgrounds. On Diversity Day, Wednesday 7 May 2014, a forum was held in the School’s Gehrmann Theatre featuring a Q&A style panel discussion about issues from Indigenous perspectives. Uncle Albert Holt, an Indigenous elder in our community, was the senior member of the panel. He was joined by an Indigenous mother and her Girls Grammar daughter, another student with Indigenous heritage, and two non-Indigenous students who have an interest in community issues. The panel members discussed racism, equal opportunity, the teaching of Indigenous languages and cultural practices in schools, reconciliation, and differing historical perspectives of invasion versus settlement before an audience of students and teachers. On the same day, two parents from multicultural backgrounds also spoke to a smaller group about their personal stories of migration, education, identity and tradition.

Another School Service initiative is the Uralla Club, established this year by two passionate students seeking to raise awareness and interest in Indigenous issues in the community. This club exemplifies girls being actively involved in the broader community and they have already celebrated Closing the Gap Day by painting a large mural covered with handprints. Many girls were surprised by the disparity in literacy and numeracy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, which was a key message featured on posters around the School. The Uralla Club was instrumental in the organisation of Diversity Day through the creation of awareness-raising posters and the brainstorming of important key questions for the forum. Uralla Club members are discovering that they can set ‘goals to move students from awareness to action for social justice’ (Burrell Storms, 2014, p. 44).

According to Burrell Storms (2014, p. 45), vignettes or personal stories in video or photographic form ‘can be an effective teaching strategy to incorporate students’ lived experiences with social oppression and increase their personal awareness, empathy, confidence, and knowledge about tools for social action needed to recognize and respond to [it]’. In Semester 2 this year, the participants in the Uralla Club will employ such methods to solidify and communicate their personal positions on diverse issues such as multiculturalism, justice, reconciliation and identity in Australian society.

Girls’ involvement in initiatives like these can be a transformative force in marrying individual scholarship with collective thinking and debate of a range of societal issues. A passion for diversity implies a disregard for complacency, and the friction between different views and positions is what powers subsequent action to move society forward. In the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1939, p. 420), ‘he who is different from me does not impoverish me — he enriches me. Our unity is constituted in something higher than ourselves — in Man ... for no man seeks to hear his own echo, or find his reflection in the glass’.
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Which is more difficult: picking a flower or solving a complex mathematical problem?

Sweller, Ayers and Kalyuga (2011) draw on the work of noted cognitive developmental and evolutionary psychologist David C Geary to make a distinction between the two types of knowledge required to complete each task. According to Geary (2008), biologically primary knowledge is the instinctive knowledge that humans have evolved to assimilate. It is learnable but not teachable. On the other hand, biologically secondary knowledge results from social and cultural constructs, like money and time, which are invented by humans to improve the competencies needed for successful living in contemporary society. Biologically secondary knowledge is learned through social interaction (Keating, 2013). Because we have not had to acquire this type of knowledge during our evolutionary history, it needs to be explicitly taught if we are to learn it. We have evolved to pick flowers and can do it without being taught. Moreover, the act of picking flowers causes us no discernible cognitive load, even though it requires vast amounts of information to coordinate all of the tasks involved in the whole process. Mathematics, however, is a human construct, and solving a maths problem, even a simple one, requires some knowledge that has to be acquired in a different way to biologically primary knowledge; it requires some specific biologically secondary knowledge (Sweller et al., 2011).

Another example of the distinction between these two types of knowledge is the act of speaking versus reading or writing. We have evolved to speak and can acquire our first language merely by being immersed in a culture that speaks it. On the other hand, we will not learn to read or write unless we undergo instruction (Sweller et al., 2011). Humans have been able to speak for thousands of years but up until 150 or so years ago, not more than one per cent of the population could read or write (Gary, 1993). Literacy rates only started to improve when the idea of compulsory, public education for all children gained some momentum. Of course, we can be coached to improve pronunciation and enunciation à la Eliza Doolittle, but essentially, biologically primary skills that require a substantial alteration in their expression are no longer biologically primary (Sweller et al., 2011).

It follows that (at least according to cognitive scientists) the mechanism of learning depends on what one is trying to learn. Biologically primary knowledge is easily learned and rapidly and automatically stored, whereas the acquisition and storage of culturally invented, biologically secondary knowledge is effortful and conscious. While we have not evolved to acquire biologically secondary knowledge with
the ease by which we acquire biologically primary knowledge, we have evolved the cognitive wherewithal that permits the attainment of an infinite range of biologically secondary skills (Sweller et al., 2011).

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) educators seek to understand, to eradicate the impediments to students’ problem-solving success. Clearly, the acquisition of germane biologically secondary knowledge is crucial to a student’s ability to solve problems. However, according to Sweller et al., (2011), problem solving, planning and decision making are most likely biologically primary, evolved skills which, as stated previously, are able to be learnt but not taught. Therefore, to solve a maths problem, students must have the relevant domain-specific, biologically secondary knowledge (for example, algebra, trigonometry, geometry), plus the necessary problem-solving proficiency, which is a biologically primary skill. Similarly, to solve a science problem, they must be able to select the problem-solving strategies that will work best with the pertinent scientific concepts. Teachers frequently see students struggle with problem solving — not because of a lack of conceptual understanding but because of underdeveloped biologically primary skills. How then do students acquire the biologically primary skills necessary for problem solving? The process is not straightforward but is best explained by looking at what we know about human memory.

Human cognitive architecture can be illustrated by the Atkinson and Shiffrin modal model of memory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). This model is oversimplified but frequently cited because of its explanatory capacity.

Human cognition requires a large store of information to interact with the external environment. We receive information from the environment through our senses. If we ignore these stimuli they disappear almost instantaneously. However, if we perceive them, they enter our sensory memory and the process of encoding that information begins. The sensory memory acts as a buffer for sensory inputs and allows the brain to retain impressions of sensory inputs after the stimulus has ceased (Mastin, 2010). It makes sense that each of the five senses would warrant its own buffer but only two — visual and auditory — have been extensively studied (Sweller at al., 2011). Visual information, such as text and images, is temporarily stored within the iconic memory, while auditory information is stored in the echoic memory. Written text is perceived visually but encoded in the echoic memory. In effect, we hear what we are reading (Ricker, 2014). Sensory memory is a very short-term memory and decays very quickly. Visual information is lost in less than one second and auditory information within three-to-four seconds, unless it is passed from the sensory memory into working memory via the process of attention. This is the cognitive process of selectively concentrating on one aspect of the environment while ignoring others (Mastin, 2010).

Working memory is very important in mental tasks involving the biologically primary skill of problem solving and has two characteristics that impact on problem-solving success. First, it has a limited capacity to store information, a capacity that is determined by the novelty of the information, its complexity, and the quantity and quality of distractions that occur during the storage process. Miller’s Law suggests that the number of random objects an average human can hold in working memory is 7 ± 2.
(See how many of the following numbers you can remember after a short period of examination: 23 42 16 87 91 56 78 21 38 63). Miller worked with simple items only. When more complex items are used, Miller's magic number falls to three or even two (Mastin, 2010). Second, working memory is also limited in duration: novel information is only held for a few seconds before being lost unless something is done to refresh it. The primary function of the working memory is not to store information but to process it. Since cognitive tasks can only be completed if we have sufficient ability to hold relevant information while it is being processed, working memory capacity and duration can predict intellectual ability. Variations in students' problem-solving success can be attributed to differences in their working memory capacities if they are working in a domain that is novel to them.

According to Sweller et al. (2011), we are intuitively aware of our personal working memory limitations. They become obvious when we are engaged in tasks such as copying a sentence from the board by the number of words that we can transcribe before we have to look up again. Mental arithmetic also exposes our personal working memory limitations. Can you do the following sums without pen and paper?

\[
24 + 38 =
\]

\[
24538974 + 38296749 =
\]

Most adults would have no trouble with the first sum, and the second is no more taxing mathematically than the first — if you are allowed to write your answers down as you go. Jotting the results of your computations as you go effectively clears working memory space. If pen and paper are not allowed, most would struggle to provide an answer for the second sum because the task exceeds working memory capacity. Significantly, when information is retrieved from long-term memory to working memory, the latter is neither limited in capacity nor duration as it is when novel information is acquired from sensory input.

Long-term memory has unlimited capacity and duration. Given that the greater part of our everyday activity is familiar to us, much of our long-term memory consists of biologically primary knowledge. This is essential for our survival. But all of the higher-level cognitive processing that characterises our lives is reliant also on the biologically secondary knowledge that is also stored in our long-term memories. This knowledge is organised into schemas that allow us to treat multiple elements as a single entity, thus providing the templates for problem solving.

Problem-solving success in one domain does not automatically lead to success in another. Chase and Simon (1973) stopped a chess game mid-play and asked master chess players and novices to reconstruct the placement of the chess pieces. They then counted the number of times each player needed to refer to the original board to reconstruct it from memory. As predicted, the masters needed fewer referrals. Then they repeated the experiment with randomly placed chess pieces on a board. The performance of the experts was worse than the novices because the masters' schemas were useless in a random environment.

The difference between an expert and a novice is found in the quality and quantity of their schemas. Experts in a particular domain have a large, complex knowledge network constructed via the large variety of situations in that domain with which they have experience and to which they have learned how to respond. Most problems emanating from this domain would be routine for them and automatic. On the other hand, a novice in a domain has relatively few relevant schemas and few domain-specific situations within their experience. The domain remains novel and each problem requires attention to be given to many different elements in the pursuit of a solution.

So, back to the original question.

The reason that picking a flower and talking is so easy for
us, even though they are among the most difficult tasks that humans ever master, is that we have evolved to perform these tasks. Hence the associated schemas are so comprehensive and held so strongly in long-term memory that such activities present little burden on working memory (Cooper, 1998). Similarly, reading and writing present little cognitive load for most adults because of the expansive set of task-related schemas we have acquired. But think about how young children struggle to encode the required schemas to enable them to read and write. Still, as familiarity with the processes of reading and writing increases, the cognitive demands decrease so working memory can handle them more efficiently, and they progress from ‘clumsy, error-prone, slow and difficult to smooth and effortless’ (Cooper, 1998). With practice, they become more automatic readers and writers.

It is the same for problem solving. The reason it presents such cognitive challenges for students is that they have not yet acquired the necessary schemas to reduce cognitive load. Learning to solve problems requires students to augment the schematic structures of long-term memory for each of the domains they are studying until they are able to perform tasks with low levels of mental effort. With practice, they will become more automatic problem solvers.

Problem solving serves a critical role in STEM curricula and improving it must remain a key goal of STEM education. Students often fail to apply their acquired knowledge to novel situations because of their underdeveloped repertoire of problem-solving skills. It is clear that problem-solving ability in any domain is contingent upon familiarity with its concepts. As students work to improve the quality and quantity of schemas and how readily they can be retrieved, they gain expertise, reduce the cognitive demands on working memory and move closer towards problem-solving success.

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In the dimmed room, pairs of khaki-clad pilots man their jet simulators. Headsets are adjusted. Safety harnesses clicked into place. Control panels are checked, and re-checked as communication systems are activated. The ‘thumbs up’ signals readiness as the countdown commences. The action begins; the chance to prove who is the best in the head-to-head simulated fighter pilot scenario — the ultimate Top Gun competition.

The venue was NASA’s Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama, USA. Space Camp was launched in 1982 to inspire and motivate young people from around the country to join the ranks of space pioneers who persevere to push the boundaries of human exploration. Today, with attendees from all fifty US States, territories and more than sixty countries, this immersive programme continues to challenge young people to dream of a future in space.

Brisbane Girls Grammar School has enjoyed a long association with NASA’s Space Camp. The inaugural tour to Alabama took place in 1992, and since then, the School has returned eleven times. As a teacher observer in 2011, I marvelled at our girls in action during their Mach III Aviation Challenge programme. Working alongside students from around the globe, our girls were challenged in the fields of aerodynamics and aeronautics as they experienced Space Camp’s most advanced aviation course.

Using simulated combat scenarios and hands-on activities, Aviation Challenge provided our girls both with an understanding of flight technique and piloting skills, as well as rich opportunities for the reinforcement of leadership, teamwork and creative problem-solving.

I was in awe of the skills the girls were demonstrating and how they were flourishing in their new environment. They were incredibly proficient, quick thinking, and spatially aware. They were deft at communicating to solve problems, sometimes within very short time frames. They showed an intensity of focus and a commitment to the task at hand. Faced with obstacles and challenges, they presented a grit and determination to succeed — a ‘dig deep’ mindset. It was not surprising that on several of the US Space Tours, Girls Grammar students have been awarded the prestigious Right Stuff and coveted Top Gun awards.

Those old enough to remember the 1986 hit movie Top Gun will recall the male-dominated field of United States Naval Aviators. Aviators were men and those in aeronautical pursuits were considered to be the best of the best. The job was physically and intellectually demanding and risk taking was revered. Not a woman to be seen, except for the stereotypical glamorous blonde providing the perfect predictable storyline of Hollywood movie fare. Many years later, while marvelling at our girls outperforming their male counterparts in what can still be described as a male-dominated arena, I pondered the perceived differences of male and female minds, and if indeed, any difference exists.

Over the past two decades, brain researchers have sought to identify structural differences in brain anatomy that provide reasons for the perceived differences between the sexes. The female brain is often described as dominant in language, social connection, nurturing and empathy, while in contrast, the male brain is often viewed as one designed for mathematics, spatial orientation, systematisation and analysis. New findings about male-female differences command worldwide attention and scientists use gendered brain maps to demonstrate structural differences between...
male and female brains in the hope of extrapolating structural differences into functional variance (Eliot, 2013). Great care needs to be taken in this area. While it might be intuitive to assume that differences in brain structure will result in differences in function, the most recent work in this area suggests that this is not necessarily the case (Fine, 2013). Cutting-edge studies in neuroscience have identified that while in the past, some neural differences between the sexes have been highlighted as important differences and thus attributable to a more male or female brain, they have since been deemed inconsequential and found to be offset by other compensatory differences. Neural differences can, in fact, provide alternative pathways to the same behavioural end.

One indisputable physiological difference between males and females is brain size. The larger brain of the average male presents a different sort of engineering problem, much like a larger city requires a more comprehensive highway system to allow traffic to move smoothly from the centre to the suburbs. To minimise energy demands, wiring costs and communication times, different neurological arrangements are evident in differently sized brains. In males, the wiring pattern generally appears to be from front to back with few connections bridging the two cerebral hemispheres. In females, the pathways criss-cross between the left and right hemispheres. This structural difference has paved the way for some sloppy scientific extrapolation in terms of how men and women think.

One popular school of thought is that with their richly interconnecting neural circuitry, females are programmed to multitask, connect, nurture and communicate. Male brains, on the other hand, have a far more straightforward patterning and are built to streamline, hardwired for action and analysis (Deak as cited in Owens, 2003).

Today, good science disputes this and now supports the fact that men and women are able to meet similar intellectual challenges using different sized neural machinery and slightly different neural patterning. Ultimately, the brain is able to meet the same outcome in more than one way and it would appear gender is not the key factor at play in this debate (Eliot, 2014).

Leading neuroscientist, Professor Gina Rippon of Aston University, Birmingham, claims the idea that male and female brains are wired differently is a myth with no basis in science. She contends that nurture has far more to do with gender-perceived brain difference than nature:

There is increasing concern within the neuroscience community about the misinterpretation and abuse of our findings on the links between brain structure and behavior. This ‘neurohype’ is designed to support stereotypes and to suggest that there is a major biological and structural difference in the brains of men and women that explains their social roles and status. This is nonsense. There may be some very small differences between the genders but the similarities are far, far greater (Rippon, 2010).

Professor Rippon’s irritation with such ideas is shared by Associate Professor Cordelia Fine, of Macquarie University in Sydney. In her 2013 presentation to the ACER Institute Research Conference, Fine focused on debunking the pseudoscience behind boy brains and girl brains. Drawing on the very latest research in neuroscience and psychology, Fine revealed a surprising number of gaps, assumptions, inconsistencies and poor methodologies in scientific studies based on brain difference. Through her careful, deep and thoughtful analysis of the most recent research, Fine presented a compelling case that who we are is much more closely attuned to the culture that surrounds us, than to the biology of our brains:

As long as there has been brain science there have been misguided neurological explanations and justifications of sex inequality. Again and again, these hypotheses eventually find themselves on the scientific scrap heap. But not before they become part of cultural lore, and reinforce social attitudes about men and women that hinder progress towards greater sex equality (Fine, 2010).

Fine’s view is of plastic, mutable minds that are continuously influenced by cultural assumptions about gender. The truth is that the mass of the billions of nerve cells that comprise our brains is flexible and changes based on experience. Two decades ago, the brain was thought to be rigid in many
respects. The notion of fixed neurological structures was the accepted norm. Since then, neuroplasticity has been somewhat of a revolution. We now know that our brains are malleable and much like a muscle, they can be trained, retrained, developed and repaired given the correct stimulus, at any time throughout our lives (Merzenich, 2013).

Simply put, experiences change our brains. To explain differences between male and female brains, some neuroscientists today are challenging the status quo, suggesting that the science now points to an interesting interplay between cultural stimuli and neuroplasticity, rather than basic anatomy. A woman’s brain may become more ‘wired’ for social connection, nurturing and multitasking simply because of stereotypical attitudes and unconscious bias through the course of her life. Society’s expectations of her have resulted in her using that part of her brain more often. Over time, as a result of developing and strengthening those particular neural pathways, the brain adapts to be more expert and adept in this area (Rippon, 2010).

Ultimately, what is important about gender differences is not whether they arise from social constructs or from brain design but that they can be changed. Females can be experts at mathematics and analysis. Men can empathise and multitask. Our educational opportunities at Brisbane Girls Grammar School are rich and challenging. They provide the cross training that is essential for our girls’ age and stage, enabling them to flourish in a wide variety of academic endeavours that see them challenging gender boundaries. It is our duty to continue to present to our students the importance of a growth mindset, the significance of neuroplasticity, the role of cognitive challenge and an understanding of the rich rewards that failure can bring. Through the breadth and depth of our academic offerings at Brisbane Girls Grammar School and our vast array of co-curricular activities, guided by an outstanding team of staff, our students are provided with the ideal environment for them to reach exceptional standards in education and learning. Their preparation for the future is not gender biased nor gender dependent, allowing them the flexibility and freedom to prepare themselves for their valuable contribution to our future society.

In an increasingly complex and competitive world, we need our boys to be emotionally intelligent and our girls to be technologically savvy. By appreciating how sex differences emerge — rather than assuming them to be fixed biological facts — we can help all children reach their fullest potential, closing the troubling gaps between boys and girls and ultimately end the gender wars that currently divide us (Eliot, 2014).

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Can less be more?
The gift of silence and stillness

DR BRUCE ADDISON, DEAN OF CURRICULUM AND SCHOLARSHIP
| 29 MAY 2014

A few years ago I was very fortunate to visit Kakadu National Park and Arnhem Land — both were remarkable places. Arnhem Land proved to be a particularly moving experience — its colours, silence and stillness were so very special. It is little wonder our Indigenous people have such an affinity with their land. This experience left an indelible mark on me. What had I felt that day? For many years I had been involved in musical performance, most of it during a very long association with St John’s Cathedral. I had been in that very special space for happy events, sad events, State events and many ‘ordinary’ events. I thought I knew a concept of stillness, but it was nothing in comparison to Arnhem Land that day.

Since my encounter with this landscape I have read much historical, anthropological and theological literature about ‘silence’ and its accompanying presence, ‘stillness’. A particularly important book was Robert Sardello’s (2006) gem, entitled quite simply, ‘Silence’. Sardello carefully constructs the meaning of silence to our humanity — something that challenges our contemporary badge of honour — busyness.

I started to think about a few issues. Today we are more ‘connected’ yet we appear to be more anxious. Consumerism tells us that consumption equates to happiness yet we do not seem to be particularly happy or satisfied. We have so much information yet we yearn for wisdom. Words such as wonder, ponder, quiet, stillness and silence are almost countercultural to our twenty-first century notion of civility. Perhaps we have much to learn from our Indigenous people and their link with an expansive silence.

My hope for our students is that somehow we can help them find the presence that comes from states such as wonder, quiet, stillness and silence. In an environment driven by high expectations, this is no mean feat, however, it just might be an invaluable gift for their equilibrium in an ever-changing, demanding and contradictory world.

Recently I wrote a number of reflections based on Sardello’s book, including the one below. I hope it does his work justice.
CALM: WISDOM’S SIMPLICITY

The world says more –
more affirmation
more success
just more!

‘Moreness’ challenges
peace –
it jars the soul
opposing the calm of
our deep and sustaining
interior.

Confronting ‘more’
with ‘less’
is housekeeping
for the
soul.

To seek ‘less’ is
wisdom’s ultimate
silence –
wisdom saying ‘dig deep’ –
growing in
the essence of life sustaining
simplicity.

Cleansing and letting go
our ultimate treasures –
treasures
beyond this world
deep interiors of calm –
embedded wisdom beyond
all understanding.

Wisdom and calm
difficulties dissolve –
embraced knowingly in
an eternal presence –
a presence cradling
our heart’s¹
desire.

A challenge for our students and indeed everyone lucky
enough to belong to this community, is that we not only
understand the importance and toil associated with our motto
Nil Sine Labore, but that we also ‘get’ the restorative and
calming presence of stillness and reflection. Something tells
me that the latter is the much harder skillset to master.

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Carolina.

¹ For a very interesting discussion on the concept of ‘heart’ see: Palmer, P. (2011).
Healing the heart of democracy. San Francisco: Josey Banks.
There is little doubt that adolescence is a distinct time of change for young people. The demands of teenage life including personal relationships with family and friends, anxiety related to study and schooling, individualisation and the development of personal identity results in a number of emotional development challenges. These include the regulation of stress and the possible onset of affective disorders. Current neuroscientific research into adolescent brain development centres on the idea that the brain structure in the early teen years undergoes a large amount of change, including the development and formation of new connections between neural pathways and the specialisation of specific structural systems. During this time the brain also undergoes a maturation process whereby there is a change from a limbic structure system, based on often primitive emotional responses and immediate impulses, to a more connected and specialised prefrontal cortex used in decision making, long-term planning and impulse control (Johnson, Blum & Giedd, 2009).

The development and balance between the two systems often results in vulnerability in terms of mental health disorders. Early intervention programmes with a focus on increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors can lead to minimising the incidence of mental health issues for the teenager. Programmes found to use scaffolding, modelling and role play help build and develop resilient brains that are able to make these refined connections in a safe and supportive environment, and can also learn to problem solve in a school setting (Mathison, 2012).

The Brisbane Girls Grammar School intent states that we are committed to establishing the foundation to build confidence and resilience in young women. The School recognises there is a need to deliver a contemporary, well-researched programme early in adolescent development to help teenagers with self-regulation and self-esteem and to provide resources to counter the onset of possible affective disorders. The Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP), developed at the School of Psychology and Counselling at Queensland University of Technology, is designed to build resilience in young people in their early teenage years. It has a focus on the identification and development of individual strengths, growth of positive coping strategies and construction of social support networks to navigate a time of emotional and physical change. RAP aims to address several key areas including the recognition of personal strengths, identification and challenge of negative thinking, self-regulation in stressful situations, problem-solving strategies to evaluate possible solutions, the development of strong support networks, and an understanding of empathy (Shochet & Hoge, 2009).

As the young person begins to develop their own sense of identity, separate from that of their parents, RAP provides students with the tools to navigate emotional development and gives them a set of skills to deal with complex circumstances as they arise in a productive and practical way.

Research into the development of RAP was conducted by Ian Shochet and Rebecca Hoge at the Queensland University of Technology. The research team used a universal intervention method of programme delivery aimed at reducing the incidence of anxiety and depression across a group of students, irrespective of whether they displayed signs of mental health issues. This model was
also selected to provide early intervention to those at risk without drawing attention to specific individuals. This was developed with the understanding that all young people will benefit from a preventative and protective programme that draws upon the strengths of each student (Shochet, Dadds, Ham & Montague, 2006) and equips them with skills to navigate adolescence from twelve to twenty-five years as the prefrontal cortex continues to develop.

The Resourceful Adolescent Program draws upon research developed by Cognitive Behavioural Therapists (CBT) such as Aaron Beck and David Burns and a number of Interpersonal Therapy programmes. The CBT components of RAP apply cognitive restructuring (the identification and challenge of negative thoughts and behaviours to develop positive self-talk) by using self-regulation and self-calming strategies and equipping the teenager with problem solving. The Interpersonal Therapy components include activities and material that encourages young people to identify and draw upon a series of social support networks to gain an understanding of the perspectives of others and to develop skills to manage and resolve conflict. Shochet and Hoge (2009) make the statement that for intervention to be successful, it is important for the adolescent to have a deeper understanding of how they interact with one another and those around them. This will lead to a better understanding of self and helps to develop self-esteem.

The effectiveness of RAP has been evaluated through a series of studies designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to increase resilience by minimising risk factors and building protective factors in adolescent development. In a 1997 trial by Shochet, Dadds, Holland, Whitefield, Harnett and Osgarby (2001), 260 Brisbane students aged between thirteen to fifteen years were split into two main groups, with one receiving RAP aimed at teenagers, and another group receiving no intervention. The RAP in this instance was delivered by qualified psychologists and results were gathered based on three measures including before, immediately following and ten months after the programme was delivered. Results showed that there were statistically significant reductions in reported depressive symptoms, when compared to the non-intervention group (Shochet et al, 2001) resulting in an increase in self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

Merry, McDowell, Wild, Bir and Cunliffe (2004) conducted research on a New Zealand trial of RAP whereby 392 participants aged thirteen to fifteen years across two schools were placed in an intervention group (those to whom RAP was delivered) and a non-intervention group (where a programme excluding the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy components of RAP were omitted). In this trial, the programme was tailored for New Zealand students and delivered by teachers who had been trained in the RAP (as opposed to psychologists). The results from this study showed the programme was statistically significant in reducing depressive symptoms. Researchers continued to monitor students over the course of eighteen months and found a large number of students in the intervention group had shown improvement in their level of mood and anxiety. It also showed there was a net deterioration in depressive symptoms in the non-intervention group (Merry et al, 2004). Further in this study, the results demonstrated that it was equally effective to have trained teachers deliver the programme, as opposed to trained psychologists, allowing for school-based intervention across a large population.
SIENNA STACEY / 8H (DETAIL)
A study in 2004 by Montague and Shochet furthered previous research looking at the effectiveness and efficacy of RAP when delivered primarily by teachers with direct support and presence from the wider school community including psychologists, counsellors and nurses. It found that having a number of people for the student to connect with across a school community strengthened the protective factors for the adolescent. In this study students reported increased feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, and were able to reflect upon the thoughts and feelings of those around them. Other students showed signs of higher abilities to problem solve in stressful personal situations.

An ongoing trial conducted by Shochet and Hoge in 2009 across twelve schools with 2500 Year 8 student participants and trained teachers as facilitators, has shown those students who are classified as ‘at risk’ indicated improvements in depressive symptoms both in the short and long term due to the RAP. Initial results also show RAP is effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression in students identified to be ‘at risk’ and also with those who showed no signs of mood disorders.

With current research into adolescent brain development and results of studies related to RAP in mind, a large group of staff members including Year 8 House Group teachers, Heads of House, Marrapatta staff and School Psychologists and Counsellors were trained during Term I by QUT to deliver the programme to all Year 8 students commencing in Term II. The programme will be primarily delivered by the House Group teachers as a part of the Ethics lesson students have once every two weeks. The House Group teachers were specifically chosen as these are the teachers who see the students each morning and have begun to develop strong, supportive relationships with each girl in the group. The programme has eleven sessions and will run through the course of Terms II and III this year. This programme will be supported by Heads of House and School Psychologists and Counsellors, in partnership with staff at Marrapatta, to further strengthen the programme and to reinforce ideas from a range of people within the students’ support network.

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Calligraphy: A beautiful art form and an exercise in mindfulness

VIOLET ROSS, HEAD OF WOOLCOCK HOUSE AND CALLIGRAPHY CLUB COORDINATOR | 12 JUNE 2014

In my calligraphy, there is ink, tea, breathing, mindfulness, and concentration. Writing calligraphy is a practice of meditation ... I think the word ‘wonderful’ means full of wonders. If you are truly there in the moment, you can recognize so many wonders ... So breathe in, bring your mind back to your body and you can touch many wonders (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2013).

In our keyboard-driven society, calligraphy may seem a quaint anachronism. I would argue that this art, and others like it, bears scrutiny. It offers us, in miniature, a model for the kind of thoughtful activity we would like our girls to be doing. After all, Steve Jobs credited a calligraphy course he did at university with unlocking the creativity he later called upon when designing the first Macintosh computer (Schwebach, 2013).

Producing exceptional calligraphy requires skill and imagination, coupled with years of dedicated practise and commitment to the art. It aims to bring words to life and give them a character of their own. In alphabetic writing systems, we take a functional view of written characters, but the Japanese consider writing a reflection of a person’s inner nature (Tara, 2010). Styles, therefore, differ greatly from person to person and are highly individualistic. Good calligraphy will feature elements such as strong and clear straight lines, a natural balance in both the individual characters and the composition as a whole, a variance in the thickness and thinness of the strokes, a consistency in the amount of ink on the brush, and curved lines that are delicate and mobile (Hawker, 2012).

Japanese calligraphy, known as Shodō or ‘the way of writing’, was introduced to Japan during the seventh century but its Chinese roots are thought to date back to the thirteenth century BC (Tara, 2010). Japanese calligraphy is not just about the neat handwriting and uniformity that we associate calligraphy with in the English language, it is the foremost art form in many Asian countries. It is greatly admired, and the works of esteemed calligraphers are
displayed in galleries and museums, just like the works of Monet, Picasso and da Vinci.

Brisbane Girls Grammar School’s Calligraphy Club was established in 2000 by Ms Yachiyo Takizawa and will celebrate its fifteenth anniversary next year. Perhaps one of the more unusual co-curricular activities offered at the School, it is made up of a relatively small group of dedicated members. During workshops, students meticulously hone their skills, thoughtfully practising, taking great care with each stroke, and striving to perfectly form each character.

It is at this point, when one is so fully absorbed in creating a beautiful piece of art, that a state of flow can be achieved. ‘Flow’, a phenomenon first identified by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi when he was researching creativity, occurs when we become completely immersed in a task — so immersed that we are not distracted by external factors like noise, discomfort, the passing of time, thoughts or emotions. ‘Flow’ states are not just associated with feeling good, but also with increased capability, creativity and performance (Manocha, 2013).

To write calligraphy with mastery, a state of flow and full awareness — mindfulness — must be achieved. There is a Zen-like concentration as the mind and body are unified and the characters are let flow onto the paper. This essentially meditative nature of calligraphy transcends aesthetics, making the practice of writing a spiritual exercise. This may seem a strange or hyperbolic statement, but the kind of focus and precision that calligraphy requires in applying, but at the same time transcending technique, takes the practitioner out of the every day. This transcendent aspect is worth considering, as ‘a line that manifests clarity cannot be drawn if the heart is clouded by worldly concerns’ (Tara, 2010, p. 6).

Dominated as they so often are by such ‘worldly concerns’, our busy, modern-day lives may be having a detrimental effect on our emotional wellbeing. Current Australian statistics indicate that mental illness is now very common. During any given year, one in five Australians between the ages of sixteen and eighty-five will experience a mental illness — the most common being depression, anxiety and substance use disorder. The onset of mental illness typically occurs during mid-to-late adolescence and Australian eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds have the highest prevalence of mental illness compared with any other age group (Black Dog Institute, 2012). Given these concerning statistics, addressing and promoting good mental health must be a priority for schools and families alike.

Mindfulness can be a powerful weapon in both preventing and combatting these types of maladies, and it is increasingly recognised that mindful activities like calligraphy, are an effective way to reduce stress, increase self-awareness, enhance emotional intelligence and help effectively deal with difficult thoughts and feelings (Harris, 2008). This link is not speculative; the lived experiences of girls at our School, expressed in their own words, bear it out:

I’ve really enjoyed calligraphy because it gives me a temporary escape from other aspects of my busy life, enabling me to solely focus on one thing to the best of my ability. Practising calligraphy is repetitive. You write the same strokes over and over, you notice their inaccuracies and you notice your subtle improvements each time you put your brush to the paper.

After I finish a calligraphy session I feel quite calm and focused. The placid, relaxed pace of the sessions helps me to become less stressed.

Our Calligraphy Club is very fortunate to be under the expert instruction and guidance of Mr Eimatsu Kojima and his wife Fumiko — both Calligraphy Masters with a life-long dedication to their art. While 8th Dan is the highest rank for a Calligraphy Master, in 2005 Kojima-Sensei became one of the select 1.5 per cent of 8th Dan Calligraphy Masters to be promoted to the rank of 9th Dan Calligraphy Judge. It should also be mentioned that Fumiko-Sensei recently achieved her 8th Dan Calligraphy Master ranking.

Both instructors, and Kojima-Sensei in particular, have won numerous awards and their work is displayed each year in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Gallery. Despite Kojima-Sensei’s lofty rank in the calligraphy world,
he continues to strive to reach higher heights, with his sights now set on the venerated Prime Minister’s Award in Japan. His persistence sets a wonderful example for our aspiring calligraphers — to keep striving for excellence — and demonstrates the rewards of life-long learning and achieving the exceptional.

Mr and Mrs Kojima love passing on their craft to novices and experienced calligraphers alike. We have a very open door policy and new members are welcome to join at any time. Five calligraphy workshops are held each term on a Thursday afternoon in the Cherrell Hirst Creative Learning Centre. These workshops are open to all year levels and students from both Brisbane Girls Grammar School and Brisbane Grammar School are invited to attend.

Like all co-curricular activities on offer at Brisbane Girls Grammar School, calligraphy provides a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and learn new skills. What we also offer is an opportunity for quiet contemplation, time to reconnect with one’s thoughts and emotions and achieve a calm, focussed mind amid the bustle of our daily lives. Again, in the words of some of our own budding calligraphers:

Calligraphy Club is a relaxing way to simply sit down and create beautiful works of art. Each word has its own significant meaning and the manner in which each character is formed is unique and beautiful.

Calligraphy Club has been quite exciting this year. I’ve progressed with my brush skills, and have more control over my hand now to make firmer, more precise strokes. The teachers have always helped me whenever I needed them, and I was proud of myself when I completed something that actually looked good. And of course, the community is great as well.

REFERENCES


LILY ALLEN / 10H (DETAIL)
Things happen in threes — at least that is what my mother always told me. In fact, I have noticed that when the universe is trying to tell me something, it takes three goes to ensure I am paying attention. So when serendipitously, the same two themes recently cropped up on three unrelated occasions, I knew I needed to pay attention.

The first occasion was when I was contemplating my presentation for the Year 10 Parent Information night earlier in the term. I was drawn back to notes from a presentation by Professor Andrew Martin, which were covered in my highlighting and underlining. His research into girls as learners, particularly in relation to building confidence and academic resilience, had certainly caught my attention.

The second occasion was at the recent Alliance of Girls’ Schools Conference, Creative Girls, Creative Women. Highly successful women from all walks of life spoke on the role of creativity and challenged the conference delegates to consider what we were doing in our schools to foster confidence and academic resilience, had certainly caught my attention.

The third occasion was when I was sent a link to a recent article in The Atlantic, ‘The Confidence Gap’. Its authors found that in general, women display lower levels of confidence and resilience in particular circumstances that directly impact their success.

Each of these examples reinforced in my mind that developing resilience and confidence are such important themes for us as educators of young women.

Professor Andrew Martin, noted above, is an Educational Psychologist and Professorial Research Fellow at the University of Sydney. In his presentation ‘Girls, Engagement, Motivation and Personal Potential’ (2010) he identified the following general observations about girls as learners:

- They are generally high achieving
- They are better behaved in classrooms
- They are highly motivated
- They have a high emotional response to failure and setback — therefore less academically resilient
- They require good relationships with teachers.
Based on my own experiences in the classroom, the point that really resonated with me was that girls are generally less academically resilient than boys. So what is ‘academic resilience’ and how can we build an increased capacity for it within our students?

The Oxford Dictionary (2014) defines the term ‘resilience’ as: 1) the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape — elasticity, and 2) the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties — toughness.

Academic resilience can therefore be defined as the ability to deal with setbacks at school, academic challenge and schoolwork pressures (Martin 2010).

There are many factors that influence the academic learning that occurs in our classrooms. As teachers and parents we understand that the underlying motivation of our students and daughters plays an enormous part in how they approach and engage with every challenge put before them.

Martin defines motivation and engagement as, ‘the students’ energy and drive to learn, work effectively, and achieve — and the thoughts and behaviours that reflect this’. We also know from the work of Dr Carol Dweck of Stanford University (2008) how important mindset is in influencing the behaviour of students.

Martin (2003) describes the factors that influence students’ motivation and engagement as having three types of effects. The term ‘boosters’ refers to the thoughts and corresponding behaviours that reflect enhanced motivation and engagement. These include self-belief, learning focus, valuing school, planning, study management and persistence. Factors that impact negatively on student motivation and engagement are called ‘mufflers’ and ‘guzzlers’. Mufflers reflect impeded or constrained motivation and engagement and also include anxiety, failure avoidance and low control, while guzzlers reflect a reduced motivation and engagement and are exhibited as self-sabotage and disengagement.

The Motivation and Engagement Wheel diagram outlines these factors (Martin 2010).

Motivation and engagement boosters are indicated by the top two quadrants of the Motivation and Engagement Wheel and can be summarised as follows:

1. **Self-belief** — students’ belief and confidence in their ability to understand or do well in their schoolwork, to meet challenges and to perform to the best of their ability (e.g., ‘If I try hard, I believe I can do my schoolwork well.’).

2. **Learning focus** — being focused on learning, solving problems, focusing efforts on developing skills rather than on competition, recognising abilities and avoiding comparisons with others (e.g., ‘I am pleased with myself when I really understand what I am taught at school.’).

3. **Valuing school** — how much students believe that what they learn at school is useful, important and relevant to them or the world in general (e.g., ‘Learning at school is important to me.’).

4. **Planning** — how much students plan their schoolwork, assignments and study and how much they keep track of their progress as they are doing it (e.g., ‘Before I start an assignment, I plan out how I am going to do it.’).
5. **Study management** — how students use their study time, organise their study timetable and choose and arrange where they study (e.g., ‘When I study, I usually study in places where I can concentrate.’).

6. **Persistence** — how much students keep trying to work out an answer or to understand a problem that is difficult or challenging (e.g., ‘If I can’t understand my schoolwork at first, I keep going over it until I understand it.’).

Motivation and engagement mufflers and guzzlers are indicated by the bottom two quadrants of the Motivation and Engagement Wheel.

7. **Anxiety** — students feeling nervous and worrying — nervous being the uneasy or sick feeling students may have thinking about assignments or schoolwork, and worrying being their fear of not doing well in assignments or schoolwork (e.g., ‘When assignments and exams are coming up, I worry a lot.’).

8. **Low control** — students being unsure about how to do well or how to avoid doing poorly (e.g., ‘I am often unsure about how I can avoid doing poorly at school.’).

9. **Failure avoidance** — students have an avoidance focus when the main reason for doing their schoolwork is to avoid doing poorly or being seen to do poorly (e.g., ‘Often the main reason I work at school is because I don’t want to disappoint my parents.’).

10. **Self-sabotage** — students do things that reduce their chances of success at school (e.g., ‘I sometimes don’t study very hard before exams so I have an excuse if I don’t do as well as I hoped.’). Martin (2003).

The motivation factors identified in the wheel are significantly linked to students’ academic engagement, interest in school, enjoyment of schoolwork, effort, self-regulation, class participation, academic resilience, attendance, and study patterns. It is via these connections that motivation leads to knowledge acquisition, skill development and competence (Martin 2013).

So how can we increase students’ experience of the top half of the Motivation and Engagement Wheel and therefore decrease their experience of the lower half? What needs to be done to boost the boosters and muffle the mufflers?

Martin posits that there are five factors impacting academic resilience: the 5 Cs. These need to be the focus of our attention if we are to build academic resilience in our students.

- **Confidence** (self-efficacy) — we need to focus attention on increasing students’ self-belief through experiencing success. Challenging students’ concepts of themselves as learners, establishing a ‘growth mindset’ as opposed to a ‘fixed mindset’, and focusing attention on personal improvement and progress rather than competition and comparison.

- **Control** — we need to focus attention on increasing students’ sense of control. By giving clear and timely feedback about how to improve their work, by showing them that hard work and effective study strategies can impact their achievement.

- **Coordination** (Planning) and **Commitment** (Persistence) — we need to focus attention on encouraging students to set effective goals and show them that effort and strategy are important factors for improvement. They must work towards these goals, even when they are finding things challenging, and focus on mastery.

- **Composure** (low anxiety) — a fear of failure often underpins students’ anxiety (Covington cited in Martin 2006). We need to focus on building a classroom environment where mistakes are experienced as a natural and essential part of learning and do not actually reflect on a student’s worth as a person. We must provide specific ways to reduce students’ test anxiety such as practice tests, developing test-taking skills and strategies.
Now at the end of the semester, with assessment being handed back, reports being finalised and students heading into the holiday period, it is timely to raise the issue of academic resilience. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning over the past semester — what worked, what did not, what needs to change and what needs to be re-adjusted. Students need to realise that any apparent failure is feedback that something needs to change; that a failure does not define their worth as people but rather provides an opportunity to refine what they do. They are encouraged to focus on the 5Cs of confidence, control, coordination, commitment and composure as they approach the challenge, schoolwork and pressures of the next semester and beyond. ■

REFERENCES

IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVES

JACINDA EULER, PRINCIPAL

For last year’s words belong to last year’s language
And next year’s words await another voice
(T.S. Eliot, 1942).

There has been a seismic shift in the way we educate our children. Static classroom environments once defined the spaces where learning occurred. Now students enjoy a world of learning experiences both in and outside the classroom and beyond to a virtual world. Knowledge was once acquired primarily through a process of rote learning. Now students are encouraged to learn through enquiry and debate, and through discovery and creation. And the once quiet classrooms where a single voice dominated are now vibrant, interactive and inclusive spaces.

At Girls Grammar, we educate and prepare our girls to springboard into the world beyond this School from a strong intellectual platform. We prepare them to be active participants in discussion and critical debate and to share their ideas with peers and colleagues, with confidence.

To do that, while they are at school we must provide opportunities that allow them to find their voice. We must give them the space and time to determine what matters to them, to shape their opinions and to learn how to articulate them. We must guide them when they are uncertain, encourage them to stand again when they fall and celebrate their great successes.

The voices of our students matter, and as teachers and leaders it is our responsibility to ensure they are heard. We know that students learn better when they are engaged in the learning process. We also know that listening and learning is a two-way process, and that encouraging student input can improve the culture of a school.

At Girls Grammar, empowering our girls with leadership and decision-making responsibilities — as Head Girls, Captains, Prefects, Student Councillors and as Buddies — and actively engaging them and valuing their input, gives their voices multiple vehicles through which they can be heard.

Perspectives is another. I trust you will enjoy reading this year’s student Perspectives.
Recycling is mind-numbingly easy. So mind numbing, in fact, that you really can call it a no-brainer.

But therein lies the danger.

When we become dispassionate about recycling, we begin to forget why we recycle. When we forget ‘why’, we begin to shrug and ask ‘why bother?’. Large-scale individual apathy makes recycling unsustainable.

Recycling was re-introduced at Brisbane Girls Grammar School last year, but I am concerned that it may fail in the long term through this very process … it has in the past! I believe a sustainable recycling programme relies on changing attitudes from indifference to ‘positive recycling psychology’ or, to attempt a punny neologism, ‘cyclology’.

So what does this cyclology involve? Firstly, linking recycling to the global picture.

What is this global picture? Climate change, our greatest challenge today, is amplifying extreme weather events worldwide — raging bushfires, severe flooding, major storms and famine-inducing droughts. Effectively, climate change is directly responsible for human suffering. It is difficult to comprehend the scale and impact of climate change, let alone relate it to our everyday actions. What can you or I — one of a global population of seven billion — do to make a difference? So, like typical human beings, we procrastinate. We blame it on China, India and the USA, despite the fact that only the USA comes anywhere near Australia in per capita CO2 emissions (AAP, 2012). We become cynical, disenfranchised, disempowered.

But, before we start wallowing in pessimism, let’s scale down. All the way down to a simple 375 mL aluminium can. A 375 mL can of the most fashionable drink in the cafeteria, which you might buy as a guilty Friday afternoon indulgence. What can that do? Recycling a single aluminium can saves enough electricity to power your laptop for over five hours (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2013).

Say that you really can’t get enough of this über-hip drink so you buy one every lunch for a week, then recycle them at a conveniently placed cyto-purple-and-yellow bin on your merry
way to class. Here, you’re reducing the demand for aluminium mining — a toxic and destructive process occurring in some of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Basically, you’re saving sloths.

Suppose this drink contains some addictive substance, so you buy one every school-day of the year. If you’re also driven ten kilometres to School every one of these days, recycling those cans offsets about one-fifth of those emissions (Planet Ark, 2013)!

Then, what if the five hours of laptop energy saved from recycling a single aluminium can is multiplied by 1170 Grammar girls? Or consider the car emissions offset by an entire, recycling-conscious Girls Grammar community, including alumnae and families? How about the two million people of Brisbane? The twenty-five million of Australia? The seven billion worldwide? The energy savings and environmental benefits become magnified out of comprehension! But this all starts with the individual; every aluminium can, every bottle, every strip of paper recycled by each person adds up.

Once we relate the global benefits of recycling to our everyday decisions, the Girls Grammar recycling programme will become sustainable. But I believe that there’s a second part to cyclology: realising we can tackle large-scale global change from cumulative individual efforts (if you could call putting something in the correct bin an ‘effort’).

Consequently, recycling becomes a stepping stone to other environmentally conscious activities. These in turn empower and encourage us to mitigate climate change more aggressively. Try to reuse and reduce as well as recycle — turn lights and power sources off when you’re not using them, limit food wastage, install energy-efficient appliances, invest in solar power, simply buy less ‘stuff’!

Because Australians are amongst the highest per capita emitters (AAP, 2012), we must accept that we need to make a change — not just China, India or the USA. It would be crazy to think that we’re somehow exempt from taking responsibility for our own planet, just because we’re a less-populated country! It won’t be easy to transform the consumer-driven, sometimes wasteful Australian lifestyle to an entirely sustainable one. But with every small environmentally conscious step we take, the overwhelming, urgent, insidious problem of climate change shrinks little by little until it suddenly becomes manageable.

So I challenge you, classes of 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 (yes, Year 8s, that’s you!) and beyond to embrace cyclology, the School’s recycling programme, and the idea that your individual actions can and will affect the world. □

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Deciding upon a motto for Brisbane Girls Grammar School for 2014 was not as gruelling a task as we had expected. During a conference for this year’s Student Council, we, along with 24 other girls, were given the significant responsibility of determining a motto that would encapsulate our vision and goals for the year ahead. Although we were initially a little apprehensive, the passion and enthusiasm with which the Council approached this task reassured us that a collaborative process that harnessed our unique ideas would generate an apt motto. After deciding that the goals of integration, promotion and motivation were of utmost importance to us as a Year 12 cohort, we identified exactly what we wanted the motto to embody and subsequently constructed this year’s motto: Above and beyond with the Grammar bond.

The first of our major goals for this year is integration, which exemplifies our vision of a more unified BGGS. To us, it is the deep sense of community that distinguishes this school from others. However, we recognise there are barriers between grades and even houses that hinder connections, and thus we are aiming particularly to create an environment in which inter-house and inter-grade relationships can flourish.

Secondly, we believe that enhanced promotion of Girls Grammar life in all its forms is a vital objective for this year. This aim is specifically targeted at the promotion of our extraordinary school fundraising events including Blue Days and Valentine’s Day, as well as a variety of other initiatives. In addition to these elements, one distinctive intention of our promotion is to provide more opportunities for girls to showcase their individual skills and talents. At our School, girls’ strengths are not limited to academic excellence, but extend to sporting, artistic and cultural spheres, and we feel it is critical to further recognise such abilities.

Our third aim for 2014 is to intensify the motivation at Girls Grammar. Our intention is to encourage the girls to take pride in the School and stay committed to anything in which they participate. Ultimately, we want each girl to feel inspired to achieve her full potential, whether it be academically or in sport, service or the arts.

We believe these goals are fundamental to the success of Girls Grammar in 2014, as they seek to bind us together as a power unit with limitless possibilities.

Above and beyond with the Grammar bond perfectly embodies the vision we hold for the School this year. Above and beyond aims to encourage girls to approach all facets of School life with dedication and enthusiasm. The idea of ‘beyond’ particularly appealed to us, as it extends from school to the wider community and even future endeavours.

The Grammar bond holds particular significance to us, as it epitomises the strong sense of community within the School. In our time at Girls Grammar, mottos have almost always made mention of unity, whether they made reference to the ‘sisterhood’ among students or encouraged us to ‘link the blue’. This common theme demonstrates that the connectedness of Girls Grammar is what sets it apart, and makes it such a welcoming and harmonious environment.
It is hard to comprehend that on my walk home every afternoon, I encounter homeless men and women just metres away from two of Brisbane’s most prestigious educational institutions. In the same suburb, a handful of homeless shelters are nestled amongst residential housing and businesses. A garage on Rosa Street makes sandwiches to be distributed to the homeless every morning. There is a church service and free Thursday night barbecue amongst the shops on St Pauls Terrace for those suffering financial hardship. You may pass these people every day, but the odds are, you probably will not realise it. Homelessness is right under our noses. There are no trumpets, no fanfare. We simply go about our daily hustle and bustle. Homelessness is, to put it simply: silent.

Tonight, around 105,000 people will be homeless across the country. These figures amount to the entire population of Cairns. How do we not know this? It is because homelessness has been shoved under a thick rug and left to collect dust. As a result, we do not fully understand the situations and stories of these people and we are often quick to place misjudged and/or prejudiced views.

If you ask some people about their thoughts on homelessness, the chances are that they think it is purely their fault, or that they have done something terrible to end up on the streets.

But here are the real facts.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, about seventeen per cent of homeless people in Australia in 2011 were aged under twelve — they are at the start of their lives, yet they find themselves sleeping in crowded shelters, or roughing it out on a chilly street. Many were born into these circumstances, through no fault of their own or their parents for that matter. In Australia, one of the major causes of homelessness is domestic violence. Often, women have no choice but to flee family breakdowns with their children, with no back-up plan. If you put yourself in the position of these desperate women and children, could you honestly say it was their fault?

These children often have to change schools frequently, leaving their prospects of a bright future bleak. As a result, they may not have the necessary financial support to break out of the homelessness cycle.

We take for granted our ability to go to school, play sport in a team or play an instrument in an orchestra. We take for granted that we have a bed to sleep in and a light to switch on. We take for granted that we can actually bring our friends to a house and call it our home. Because the reality is, we could just as easily have been born into a completely different world.

At Brisbane Girls Grammar School, we are fortunate enough to gain a deeper insight into the complex issue of homelessness. The Second Chance Committee has given girls the opportunity to help homeless women in our local area and gain a greater understanding of the real causes of homelessness. Furthermore, Year 11 and 12 students are able to volunteer for the Ecumenical Coffee Brigade, a voluntary organisation that is dedicated to providing sandwiches and hot beverages for the homeless. Two weeks ago, our school community wholeheartedly embraced the Ecumenical Food Brigade Food Donation Drive. This contribution amounted to a donation of 334 packages of food, and will greatly assist those people who need a helping hand.

So next time you drive around Spring Hill, take in your surroundings. Seek out those places that respond to the silent cries of the homeless. Be thankful and count your lucky stars because you are truly lucky to have them.

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In 2012, I was lucky enough to receive an ASSIST scholarship to spend a year at an American school. In 2013, I left half-way through Year 11 to study at Greenhill School, a co-educational private school located in Dallas, Texas.

Each week at my new school, a speaker would come to talk to the students at Assembly. One of the speeches has stuck in my mind since I have returned to Australia. Presented by seven-times cancer survivor, Woody Roseland, the speech was about how he chooses to live his life after enduring cancer. He told us that on the back of his phone, it says, ‘don’t die wondering’ — a reminder to himself to take more chances (even if that chance was to ask a cute waitress out on a date). After hearing the speech, I decided to adopt his expression, and use it as a mantra for the year at my new school. Nothing could hold me back from trying new things; if I failed or embarrassed myself, no one would ever know! Also, the fact that my grades in America were not going to ‘count’ gave me all the more reason to try new subjects, sports and other activities that I wouldn’t get the chance to try in Australia.

With ‘don’t die wondering’ cemented in my mind, I played new sports like lacrosse and cheerleading. Even though I was by far the least coordinated cheerleader in the team, it was an awesome experience that I will never regret.

I also became a member in some of the school’s clubs. In Global Action Club, we talked about current issues facing the world, and I made the effort to voice my opinion and act as a representative for Australia.

On Martin Luther King Day, a public holiday, I went to the North Texas Food Bank and worked with other volunteers unpacking and sorting food for distribution to a network of community service agencies.

At school, I filled up my schedule with interesting classes like African American History, Fashion Drawing, Video Production and American Government.

I formed a girl band for the school talent show with a bunch of my friends. We didn’t make the finals … but we had a blast trying out.

I volunteered my Homecoming date and I to represent the 11th Graders in the annual game of ‘do you know your date’. Despite the fact that we hadn’t known each other for long, we came in at second place!

I signed up to join my Art History teacher and three other students to hear Renzo Piano, an Italian world-renowned architect speak at a conference at the Nasher Sculpture Center.

All of these unique experiences added up to make my year fulfilling and unforgettable — the best year of my life (so far).

Now that I’m back at Brisbane Girls Grammar, I can’t help but wonder why can’t every year be like that? Even though Girls Grammar and Greenhill are completely different, our School has just as many experiences to offer. The reason I was able to have such a fun time, was because I completely let go of my inhibitions and embraced every opportunity presented to me. As for my classes in America, instead of worrying about what marks I was getting, I really enjoyed myself and tried out a range of interesting courses. Despite my sudden change in learning and all the extra-curricular and social activities added to my life, I ended up doing pretty well scholastically. Now I know that you can have fun and still do well at school (as long as you try hard)!

So, I have decided that Woody Roseland’s expression, ‘don’t die wondering’ will stay with me for much longer than one year. When I graduate from Brisbane Girls Grammar School in 2015, I don’t want to leave wondering what it might have been like to support QGS swimming, or what that Term III Philosophy Café was all about, or what volunteering for the Ecumenical Coffee Brigade would have been like. If my year away has taught me anything, it would be that you should make the most of what you’re given, no matter where you are. Even if you embarrass yourself, you will gain more from trying new things than not trying them at all!
Being a student at Brisbane Girls Grammar School I have been told more than once that I am privileged; that I am so lucky to go to a school like this, have parents like mine and live the lifestyle I live. However, prior to completing my Year 10 Service I did not think of, let alone understand, the true meaning and significance of being privileged.

Every Year 10 Grammar girl must complete fifteen hours of community service with a non-profit organisation as part of the Service Unit. This is compulsory as BGGS has a strong belief in giving back to the community and provides numerous clubs and fundraisers to support participation in Service activities. Despite all of this I have never been involved in Service.

I thought it was great that people held fundraisers and raised money and awareness for non-profit organisations and volunteered their time for others; it was just something in which I was most definitely not interested. So when the time came for me to participate in our Community Service Unit and spend fifteen hours volunteering, I did not take it seriously. I ended up lazily asking my family friend to organise the forms and set up a time for me to work at the primary school where she teaches. I presumed it would be quite an easy job considering my past experience with children and was not prepared to take it seriously.

However, I soon learnt this was not the type of school I was used to, and was quick to realise that being culturally diverse, the majority of its students were bilingual. I also learned that most of the students came from underprivileged families and their lives were quite different to what I was familiar with. My family friend who had allowed me to work with her warned me that, ‘most of the kids don’t have a lot and their lives in general are very different to anyone you would have contact with’. She told me: ‘If it’s freezing and a kid isn’t wearing a jumper it’s not because he’s not cold, it’s because his family simply can’t afford one, and if a kid doesn’t turn up with lunch, same thing’. I was sympathetic but again, not completely moved.

From the outset I was told which kids did not speak English. There were two in the class I helped: an adorably cheeky Sudanese boy and a beautiful Farsi-speaking boy from Afghanistan. They were quick to become two of my favourites as despite the language barrier, they tried so hard to converse with me. They attempted to ask what colour the flowers in their drawing should be, if I could help them glue their 3D shapes, if I wanted to play soccer with them and if I was cold because of the wind. There were also only two Caucasian Australian kids in the class I was with. One of them was a boy who, while I helped make 3D shapes, explained to me that he was so tired because he is one of eight kids and shares a room with his brothers who often get home late. He told me he finds it hard to sleep because his brothers, ‘always keep me up late ‘cause they’re so noisy when I try to sleep’. He was also one of the kids not wearing a jumper, despite the freezing wind. He told me it was because he, ‘didn have none’.

During lunch break, after the gorgeous girls in the class asked me to sit with them, I observed that while the food most of the kids ate included some traditional Vietnamese rice dishes, a lot of it was packets of chips, cookies and store-bought confectionery. In that moment, I became grateful for all those years of mum’s homemade nut slices and baking as I realised that it was something not everyone was lucky enough to receive.

During my fifteen hours I was to help the kids build their 3D objects, read to them and make art with them. I became somewhat of a celebrity among the eight-year-old girls and had
a growing number of followers as the day went on. The kids were fascinated by me, my school, my family, the reason I was there, and even my braces. I often found myself laughing at some of the students’ playful teasing. But my absolute favourite part of my time there was the soccer game I played at lunch with the kids. Together, a variety of five to twelve-year-old girls and boys with all different cultural backgrounds played a crowded version of soccer. There, I witnessed the more shy kids become playfully competitive, heard the non-English speakers tell me I was losing, and saw the girls crashing what was a seemingly boyish game. Towards the end of the game however, the girls were quite upset they hadn’t kicked the ball and told me, ‘we can’t play soccer, it’s a boy sport’. To this I replied — in the spirit of Girls Grammar — ‘come on girls, don’t think like that, we can do ANYTHING boys can do, and sometimes even better!’ This seemed to make them laugh and even though we never really got another chance at kicking the ball, I’d like to think I made a difference to their beliefs regarding gender equality. All in all, the game was extremely fun and was the highlight of my Service.

Throughout my time I was exposed to beautiful kids from all over the world, each with their own stories. I was faced with new problems such as language barriers and got to witness the struggles of kids who know little English. In particular, I learnt so much from the two boys I mentioned earlier, as they were both non-English speaking, yet tried so hard to communicate with me. It was truly a beautiful thing. I also got a better understanding of other people’s home situations and came to realise how very lucky I am to have the little things such as a jumper and sufficient food, which some of these kids did not. I was also very surprised to see that people living literally fifteen minutes away from me lead such a dramatically different life. A big thing I took from my experience was the impact I can make on people and how much some people really do need that. Knowing this, I am inspired to make a difference to others’ lives, contradicting my former beliefs. No one is more surprised than myself at how these kids have possibly changed my life, equivalent to how I hoped I changed theirs. Another insight I gained through my Service was that yes, I am lucky to go to such a great school and live the life I live, but am I living it to the fullest? I have so many opportunities to do great things and I don’t take them. But from now on, that will be a different story.

So, to conclude, privileged doesn’t simply mean you are lucky … lucky to go to a school like Girls Grammar, or lucky to have a nice car, quality food, and great friends. Privileged means to have so many opportunities to do, be, think and say whatever we want, when many people can’t. We are privileged because, as Grammar girls, we have the ability and opportunity to be the best we can possibly be and therefore we should all make the most of it. □
Developing Countries Should Not Host International Sporting Events

Sara Burke, Year 12, Senior Merle Weaver Public Speaking Competition Winning Speech | 27 November 2014

Like most of us, my typical Friday night involves loud cheers of, ‘C’mon... Get the ball... Keep going... Oh he’s offside... This ref is hopeless!’ Because yes, my Dad loves soccer. But what if I were to tell you that this beautiful game left five-year-old Maria abandoned, on the streets, scared, cold, vulnerable and traumatised. Maria is just one of 250,000 who were thrown onto the streets due to the World Cup. Are you still cheering?

Ladies and gentleman, football does not feed. Today I will explain three reasons why it is unethical for developing countries to host international sporting events.

Firstly, society does not benefit from these games. Secondly, these events do not help those in need. And lastly, I ask you to consider your ethical duty to help global citizens.

But to my first point that these events do not help society. Last year, eight countries met for the Confederations Cup in Brazil. As a sweep of colours swirled across the stadium, a storm of protestors brewed outside. Acrobats, dancers, music, celebration, unity, pride. Mothers, grandmothers, Maria, thirty-nine injured, thirty arrested and thousands sprayed with tear gas. Is this the celebration of a healthy society? Neighbourhoods destroyed, cost of living skyrocketed, thousands of children in abject poverty. All for what they call the beautiful game? Ladies and gentlemen, this is one game we do not want to lose. For a country where soccer is the religion, there are thousands who have lost faith.

This leads me to my second point that we must help those who are suffering. Now I know what some of you are thinking: the money generated from this event will go towards helping others. But I ask you, will the thousands of dollars made by a tourist company go towards buying Maria’s school supplies? Will the millions of dollars made by airlines go towards Maria’s healthcare? Will the billions of dollars made by FIFA go towards getting Maria off the street? Stop tackling the ball out of innocent families like Maria’s and preventing them from scoring. They need this goal more than we need to watch a soccer player score one on TV. Now I know living here in sunny Queensland it’s easy to feel distant. You do not live in a developing country. You do not deal with the daily struggles of being homeless. But you do have compassion.

So ladies and gentlemen, lastly, I ask, is this not your responsibility to help global citizens? Let’s kick off our careless boots and put on our global citizen hats. Let’s embrace our Aussie roots and give everyone a fair go. They may not be Australian, they may not be one of us, but they are human. And in the face of adversity, is that not enough? How much suffering needs to be inflicted before you refuse to remain silent?

I know you agree that developing countries hosting these games is wrong. As mentioned, it does not advance society, nor help those in poverty, and lastly it is your duty to say no to human suffering.

Hockey does not house, swimming does not school and football does not feed.

So remember, next time you turn on the TV to watch the sport, don’t think about the clueless ref or if your team is winning, but whether five-year-old Maria has a future. □
‘On ne saurait faire d’omelette sans casser des œufs’
(my apologies to the French teachers)
‘You can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs’.

This popular English language idiom had its origins in France around the time of the French revolution, when the expression was used to excuse the massacre of the French nobility.

While searching for something profound to say to you all today I realised that, as a fourteen-year-old with very limited life experience, there is almost nothing I can tell you that you don’t already know, but that doesn’t mean I won’t try. If you are anything like me, you can barely make an omelette without breaking not only a few eggs, but also several appliances and maybe almost burning down your home. Fortunately for me, this proverb applies to more than just omelettes.

I want to move away from the aspect of this proverb that people use to excuse violence and waste, and towards a side that’s more about personal sacrifice in the achievement of your goals.

To an extent, this proverb invokes the expression ‘the end justifies the means’. So whatever metaphorical eggs you have to break along the way, they’re not the issue; what’s important is that you persist.

In about 300 BC, give or take a V or an X, Pyrrhus led his army into battle against the Romans. They fought hard, and they won, but at such a cost that nobody felt like the battle had been worth it. The Romans retreated, armed a new vengeance to gather more soldiers, and left Phyrus’ army victorious ... but devastated. It’s from here that the concept of a ‘Pyrrhic victory’ stems.

So while eggs are inevitably going to be broken, whatever you’re trying to achieve, you need to keep it in perspective and know when to step back. A Pyrrhic victory is pointless.

I don’t know an awful lot about life, but from what I have gleaned, it’s very, very hard, at least some of the time. Being a middle class, white girl attending one of the best private schools in the country, I have to admit I’ve known far less than my fair share of hardship. But still, even I know how awful it feels to fail, how you can feel like life is just battering you day after day, and how it gets harder and harder to get back up.

Teenage years can be some of the hardest of our lives, and that’s why I want to extrapolate a bit.

Just for a second, apply this proverb not just to things you want to achieve, but also to your whole world. Your life is an omelette. As a generalisation, at BGGS, we’re privileged enough to have an education that will allow us a degree of choice as to what goes into our omelette, and a great safety net of family and friends. But nothing in life — at least nothing that’s worth achieving — comes easily.

You’re going to experience sleepless nights, failure, grief, loss, and sometimes you’re going to try your absolute hardest at something and still not succeed. Eggs will be broken, and even that’s not all bad. The tough parts of your life are what form the good parts of your personality.

Even if, in the end, you never succeed to the standard you had hoped, you might one day look back and discover that your life has kind of already become an omelette, simply for the way you lived it — without fear, and without giving up — even if there are a few eggshells in it.

Break eggs girls … Get over it ... Break more. □
Making educated choices

ALISON DARE, DIRECTOR OF HUMANITIES | 25 JULY 2014

It is that time of year when Year 10 students must choose their Senior School subjects. The task of considering what a life beyond school might look like can seem very challenging — particularly in a media-saturated environment where the anxiety of missing the latest screen bites keeps many in a state of perpetual ‘presentness’ and mitigates against deep reflection. Rapid change will define their world and traversing such an environment will require a breadth of experience, as well as an openness of mind and heart; narrow specialisation will have a limited shelf life.

From an educator’s perspective, we are often told that our task is to prepare students for careers that don’t yet exist. Beyond this, there is an implicit understanding that we will provide them with the aptitudes and dispositions to help them lead fulfilling lives and make a meaningful contribution to their world. Or as the esteemed naturalist Jane Goodall asserts, ‘What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what sort of a difference you will make’.

How can an individual student be best prepared for a life beyond school? It is tempting to consider this question simply in utilitarian terms, to see subject choices as nothing more than conduits to specific tertiary courses. In such a scheme, all that would be required of students would be mastery of a set of skills and acquisition of a defined body of knowledge to enable them to pass a test. Such an approach, however, would not prepare students to negotiate an increasingly complex world, one which may be described as a post information and post-skill one. We are living in a conceptual age. Yesterday’s rubrics will not suffice to prepare our young people for the exciting challenges associated with the fluidity of change that lies before them. Futurist and Brisbane Girls Grammar School’s Scholar in Residence for 2010, Professor Erica McWilliam, provides an insight into the kind of future students will need to negotiate as they move beyond school. She asserts that:

In this century, work culture is less willing or able to reward craftsmanship — that is, to reward an individual’s talent for doing one thing extremely well. It follows that hard-earned skills have an increasingly brief shelf life, particularly in fields closely related to technology, sciences and advanced forms of manufacturing. As long-term, stable employment recedes, and fast-paced work transitions become the norm, we now find ourselves paying closer attention to managing short-term relationships while migrating from place to place, job to job and task to task, re-developing new talents as economic and skilling demands shift (2014).

Educational institutions, once the gatekeepers of knowledge, have also had to adapt to the reality of a new paradigm, one in which the acquisition of information is not in itself enough to guarantee success beyond their walls. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries schools were an offshoot of the industrial juggernaut in Britain and as such, tended to privilege competencies and ways of understanding the world which suited the needs of the modern society. An educated populace was crucial to the maintenance of a highly developed economy and education tended to organise knowledge and skills into clear classifications aligning with the specific imperatives of that industrialised workforce. Within this environment, the more ‘ephemeral’, philosophical and creative knowledge areas remained in the hands of the privileged few who had time and money to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Things have changed. Professor Arthur Costa asserts that the old ways of
classifying knowledge, a legacy of Cartesian thinking, is now an obsolete rubric. He suggests that ‘the organisation of curriculum into these static compartments, while a helpful classification system for allocating time, hiring and training teachers, managing testing, purchasing textbooks or organising university departments, has probably produced more problems than benefits’ (2010, p. 3).

Like McWilliam, the author and social commentator Daniel Pink suggests we have entered a new cultural paradigm, one which is predominantly conceptual rather than mechanistic. While the conceptual era is the product of the success of earlier times, it differs fundamentally from the Industrial Revolution and Information Age, which preceded it in its reliance on a different set of skills and cognitive dispositions. Pink suggests that a whole new mind, that of creators and empathisers, pattern recognisers and meaning makers, is required to succeed in this age (2005).

In some respects, Pink’s ideas can be seen to echo the predictions of writer and futurist Alvin Toffler in his 1990 work *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century*. In this work, Toffler envisaged the dawn of a new era, one in which knowledge would be networked, intuition would come to the fore and context would take precedence over atomised information. In a globalised economy, the very skills and aptitudes that caused our society to flourish in the Information Age can now be outsourced to less developed countries (Pink, 2005, p. 37). Conversely, the competencies that tended to be marginalised in the Industrial and post-Industrial Ages have become most prized since they cannot be programmed, packaged or outsourced (Pink, 2005). So what are these qualities? According to McWilliam, of all the attributes needed to engage in this new future workforce, ‘the most important is agility of movement, the ability to move at speed across disparate geographical, virtual, disciplinary and sociocultural landscapes is now a key capacity of the global workforce’ (2014, p. 2). This notion of agility can be seen to align with Pink’s six senses (design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning). Of particular interest is his notion of symphony: ‘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 interesting new whole’ (2005, pp. 65-66).

It is interesting to note that Pink describes these qualities as senses because in doing so he creates a middle space between the cognitive and the emotional, a split which is also a product of modern Enlightenment thinking. These senses, which place us at the heart of a broad-based liberal (and more specifically humanities) education not only provide the necessary skills to deal with the kind of changed workforce that McWilliam describes, but beyond this pave the way for a judicious engagement with the world. In educational terms, we return to the idea of what it means to be an educated person and what the goal of schooling and subject choices is or should ultimately be about. Change, in tandem with the twenty-first century’s obsession with the volume of information over quality of knowledge, only reinforces the importance of a broad-based liberal education. In such an environment, the breadth of subject choice associated with learning for learning’s sake needs rediscovery and further exploration. Creativity of thought and reflective discernment will be essential dispositions in a world dominated by exponential change. The Ancient Greeks mused much about education. We could learn much from them; after all, ‘It is the mark of an educated man to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it’ (Aristotle).

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Are our schools ‘fit for purpose’ to enable our girls to lead the world of the future?

Are schools in support of the linear line of progression or the squiggly line of exceptional?

To lead the world of the future, our girls need to be big, brave and bold. They need to be comfortable with discomfort, cultivate the difficult and embrace failure. The challenge of becoming exceptional is to traverse the squiggly line.

This is the idea Claudia Batten, New Zealand entrepreneur and keynote speaker, presented to delegates at the Creative Girls, Creative Women Alliance of Girls’ Schools Australasia Conference, earlier this year. In contrast to the squiggly line is the innocuous, and more commonly recognised linear line. The linear line helps us to learn, fit in and grow; it teaches us that if we do the work, we get the reward, and we move on. So we study hard. We sit the exam. We pass the test. Results are measured, planned and linear. However, take heed of Batten’s warning — she valiantly declares that the linear line fools us into being average (Batten, 2014).

And who wants to be average? Batten boldly argues that the linear approach is safe and comfortable and it teaches people there is a positive outcome and positive movement forward for every action (Batten, 2014). To be creative and revolutionary, to be brave and to be curious — to be exceptional — more is required than measured and planned steps forward. Being exceptional requires movement sideways and backwards with twists and turns in a very non-linear fashion. It requires courage, embracing the difficult, and the determination to take risks and learn from mistakes.
‘An exceptional life is found not on the linear line, but found on the squiggly line’ (Batten, 2013).

The squiggly line pushes beyond comfort zones, which are undeniably comfortable, safe and predictable. Risk is generally contained, performance has the capacity to plateau and it can be the breeding ground of complacency. However, the place where the most learning occurs and where the real magic happens, is in the zone of discomfort. Those who are willing to be courageous and to take risks will experience the most personal growth and reap the biggest rewards (Batten, 2014).

Undoubtedly, most of us like to operate within our abilities. Stepping beyond that puts us at risk of failure — it can be uncomfortable and difficult. At Brisbane Girls Grammar School, learning opportunities within the four walls of the classroom and beyond are designed to provide our girls with a range of difficult situations — so they are challenged, they persevere and persist, with tenacity and grit. We reassure them that sometimes they may fail and they can learn from mistakes, if overall, they have a growth mindset.

How comfortable are our girls with being uncomfortable and how well can they stand back and think how to get past problems?

As a representative of the School at the Lord Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council, I have participated in many community-based events. Some of these experiences have taken me out of my comfort zone, but I have learnt so much about myself and others — things that I could never have learned just in a classroom. These experiences have helped me gain perspective and recognise that life is not without challenges, and it is how we face them that determines who we become. I feel better prepared for the challenges ahead, such as the upcoming International Young Leaders Forum, where I will again face uncertainty in the form of language and culture, unknown tasks and experiences and travelling away from home.

Phoebe Gibson-Dougall, Year 10, Griffith

The Japan trip was one of the most amazing yet challenging experiences of my life! Being immersed in a foreign country, language, and culture I soon found that I needed to be flexible, to embrace my surroundings and to get involved as much as possible. In the beginning, I did not understand a lot about the culture and language, and communication was difficult. Unlike travelling with my family, this trip gave me the opportunity to fully immerse myself in the culture, and perhaps one of the most valuable things I learned was that I can step out of my comfort zone. My Japanese has improved dramatically, and I have made many new friends and unforgettable memories. It’s an opportunity for which I am truly grateful.

Madeleine Farr, Year 11, Mackay

One way to describe Year 8 so far is that it’s like a roller-coaster. Sometimes there are ups and downs, but it’s great to share those times with supportive family, teachers, and friends. This ride, however, is always thrilling because there is a lot to learn each term. At Marrapatta some of us pushed our comfort zones and learnt that it’s alright to not always feel super secure. I definitely pushed my limits, being the first time I ever went to camp, and I learnt a lot from it. We were all willing to take risks, to challenge ourselves, to make mistakes, and then do it all over again.

Maria Stavrianos, Year 8, England
Don’t let failure define us; let it refine us!

The reality of the squiggly line is that stumbling blocks will come up. The secret to success is to anticipate the brick walls and develop strategies to not let them impede the upward trajectory. In the words of clinical psychologist Andrew Fuller, it is about the concept of being resilient and having the ‘happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life — to rise above adversity and obstacles’ (2014). In the academic setting, educational psychologist Andrew Martin (2002) refers to the ability to effectively deal with setback, stress or academic pressure as having ‘academic resilience’. And Angela Duckworth speaks of demonstrated resilience and persistence in overcoming obstacles in pursuit of a larger goal as ‘grit’ (as cited in Schott, 2014). Gritty students will experience failure, yet have the necessary mindset, thought processes and habits, to enable them to persevere and continue moving forward … along the squiggly line.

In the twenty-first century workforce where lineal expectations are not the norm and grit is certainly favoured, the life-wide learning journey will be a permanent requirement for personal and professional growth. Research by Duckworth and Sedlacek (cited in Dahber, 2014) signifies that factors such as motivation, ability to handle failure and goal orientation promotes success at university, as well as later in life.

Batten concurs, ‘When interviewing, I assume you are smart. I don’t really care how well educated you are. I care about your flexibility of thinking, your attitude and your attention to detail’. She goes on to say that for ‘generation flux’ and the millennials who follow, change is the new normal (Batten, 2014). Business leaders value creativity; and whilst renowned futurist Morris Miselowski predicts that in the next thirty-five years, sixty per cent of us will be doing jobs that do not currently exist (cited in Craw, 2014), the key to survival is being able to adapt. It is not what you know today that is important — ‘it’s how you acquire, refine and apply new knowledge for tomorrow’ (D’Souza, 2013).

No one denies that knowledge development is an important cornerstone of education. For our current generation to be adaptable to the ever-changing global future, collaborative problem solving, digital literacy, intercultural understanding, and critical and creative thinking are principal, and so are the squiggly line variables of discomfort, risk, failure and grit. Students at Brisbane Girls Grammar School are willing to give up the familiarity of the known and embrace their discomfort to take risks in their learning, to stretch and grow — regardless of whether it be in the language classroom, the science lab, the drama rooms, at Fig Tree Pocket or on an international study tour.

The Creative Girls, Creative Women Alliance challenged schools to be ‘fit for purpose’ to enable girls to lead the world of the future. At Brisbane Girls Grammar School we are devoted to exceptional scholarship. Our Intent, underpinned by our Organising Principles, articulates the School’s dedication to developing women who value diversity, who are creative, who are curious and confident, and women who have the dynamic thinking skills and the ability to continuously adapt to change. We are confident that we are creating the climate for the current generation to walk the squiggly line and to be big, brave and bold as they stride into the ever-changing world of tomorrow.

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The ‘getting’ of wisdom in the twenty-first century

JAN O’SULLIVAN, HEAD OF GRIFFITH HOUSE | 7 AUGUST 2014

Wisdom is the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom: and with
All thy getting get understanding
(Proverbs, iv. 7)

This proverb is quoted in the foreword to the novel, The Getting of Wisdom, by Henry Handel Richardson, first published in 1910, with the film, directed by Bruce Beresford, released in 1977. It is a story about girls at boarding school, which focuses on a spirited and highly unconventional girl who attempts to adapt herself to the strict discipline of the narrow society of the time, especially its narrow mindedness in relation to the role of women.

WISDOM LITERATURE
The quotation above is taken from The Book of Proverbs, which originated from the later writings of the Old Testament and is classified as ‘Wisdom literature’ or ‘Wisdom texts’. It belongs to the third to first centuries BCE and may have been influenced to some degree by Greek philosophy, especially that of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The main characteristics of the Wisdom texts are that they:

- are short, pithy proverbs
- focus on broad philosophical issues (i.e. how to live a good life) rather than on narrow religious issues
- personify WISDOM as a goddess-like female figure and always refer to it as ‘she’
- focus on public virtue and moral righteousness.

VIRTUE ETHICS FOCUSES ON CHARACTER
Around the same time that the Wisdom texts were written, Aristotle espoused the value of Virtue Ethics help individuals to negotiate their way through the complexities of life. The word ‘virtue’ is derived from the Latin word ‘virtus’, meaning excellence, capacity or ability. In modern English, the word has come to refer to someone’s character or personality, including traits such as generosity, honesty, courage, good humour and friendliness. Virtue Ethics encompasses developing admirable character traits and aspiring to be an excellent human being.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER
Clearly displayed ‘in relief’ on the feature wall of our CLC Building is the Brisbane Girls Grammar School Statement of Intent:
Proud of our Grammar tradition, we are a secondary school that establishes the educational foundation for young women to contribute confidently to their world with wisdom, imagination and integrity.

Scholarship is the central essence of our Statement of Intent as it is, and has always been, the focus of our educational tradition. The ‘Getting of Wisdom’, interpreted from a Girls Grammar perspective is not solely linked to academic pursuits, but also to the life skills required to navigate the world with compassion, generosity and veracity. In reflecting upon the meaning of the entire Statement of Intent, three questions provide ‘food for thought’ for students, teachers and parents:

1. How can we ensure our girls learn what they need in order to go out into the world and the workplace with wisdom, imagination and integrity?
2. How can we ensure our girls actually understand morality so they can judiciously and ethically engage with the world, thus enabling them to be ‘women of integrity’?
3. How can we ensure our girls take with them the confidence and fearlessness required to function assertively in a world partly devoid of religion and the ethics that go hand-in-hand with religious teachings?

A real-life example of a Girls Grammar ‘old girl’ contributing to the world with wisdom, imagination and integrity

While Girls Grammar is a secular school, it is grounded in developing girls of character who contribute confidently to the world. A strong culture of Service, which encourages girls to give back, combined with international experiences that foster cultural understanding, gives girls perspective and insight.

In our Year 9 Level Assembly last Wednesday, teachers and Year 9 students were privileged to have ‘old girl’ Lara McArthur-Dowty speak to them about her fervour and conviction in relation to helping Indigenous Australians. As Lara is currently studying a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, her presentation focussed on raising awareness in the Year 9 cohort of the ways and means of enhancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. She wanted the students to gain a deeper understanding of their predicament and the action needed to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This presentation aligns with the work of the School’s 2014 charity, the Uralla Club, formed this year by the girls to promote understanding of Indigenous issues in Australia. It also complements the current Year 9 English assignment, ‘Australian novels reflect the best and worst of what defines us as Australians.’

What are the implications for us as students, teachers and a School community?

Ethics in combination with Values are embedded in our curriculum and our Student Care sessions explore Ethics in some detail. However, let’s consider the questions posed earlier about girls being able to attain wisdom, imagination and integrity. Scholarship will enable girls to achieve these goals if specific and existing strategies, such as the ones that follow below, are reinforced by teachers and parents:

- reinforce the idea of character formation through service to others: treat others as you would like to be treated
- promote empathy and kindness
- reduce the girls’ stress by promoting mindfulness
- provide guidance and consolation by letting girls know we genuinely care about them
- constantly reassure them and ‘contain’ their anxiety and fear of failure
- encourage silent sustained reading: creating stillness, peace and reflection in each student’s day.

Wisdom: Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honour, when you embrace her.

I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths

(Proverbs, iv. 9 & 11).■
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One moment please

STEPHEN FOGARTY, DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

| 14 AUGUST 2014

In her 2012 song *The Moment*, Australian singer-songwriter Mia Dyson is unambiguous when she sings, ‘You will know what to do when the moment comes’. I’m not so sure. In today’s world, with its inherent and ubiquitous level of distraction, it can be difficult to recognise the ‘moment’, let alone know what to do when it arrives. An example of why we find it increasingly difficult to engage deeply, using reading as a case in point, is provided by James Gleick in his book *Faster* (1999):

There is friction implied by choosing a book, cracking its spine, slitting its pages, adjusting the lamp, placing the bookmark; and this time-consuming frippery served an unintended purpose. Having made the investment, people found it natural to devote relatively large chunks of time to the actual reading. In contrast, the Web facilitates information consumption much as the remote control facilitated television watching. Reading on-line becomes another form of channel-flipping (p. 71).

In relation to the increased pace of correspondence, Gleick goes on to say:

Who knew that the inconvenience of old-fashioned letter-writing provided a buffer? Perhaps we simply have not had time to adjust. We may need to set aside formal time for deliberation, where once we used accidental time (Gleick, 1999, p. 89).

The pace and distraction of modern life makes it harder to ‘be in the moment’, and yet, I see my children (aged eight and eleven) do it frequently. It’s how they learn. When they are in the moment, they lean in, as young children do when they are engaged (Gladwell, 2008). They squint their eyes. When their interest is piqued, they are totally engrossed; so much so that any efforts to distract them are ineffectual. They are at one with the object of their interest. To what extent do the distractions of modern life affect their ability to maintain this high level of engagement? I can already see my eldest child, as she begins to succumb to these distractions (and they are arriving thick and fast), lose some of that innate ability to focus and remain deeply engaged. Writing in The Sydney Morning Herald about today’s adolescents — and indeed, those under thirty — Kelsey Munro outlines some of these distractions:

They have so much information coming in through aggregation, principally [social media], that they are working very hard to keep up with the constant flow. They aren’t able to attribute time and energy into specific passions; to the extent that maybe people could before social media was so pervasive … The youth of today are living their lives ‘one mile wide and one inch deep’ (Munro, 2013).

Whilst the previous line presents a neat aphorism, there is something to it. It’s how many of us feel (under thirty or otherwise). Early in January 2014, *The Courier-Mail* columnist Kathleen Noonan, writing in the reflective mood of someone crossing from one year to the next, extolled the virtues of the ‘stolen moment’ — nothing untoward — just a celebration of the wherewithal to recognise when she was ‘confronted with something wonderful’ (in this case, a painting). She offered many more examples and they all share a common thread — they are all (on a surface level)
utterly mundane, but I suppose, that is the point. There is beauty to be seen in the everyday, we just need to be mindful enough to block out endless distraction. Noonan believes that the ‘best thing about stolen moments — they are simply that, a moment. You simply have to mind the gap, or maybe even, mine the gap. Whenever you find yourself waiting … simply be present’ (Noonan, 2014). What of this ‘gap’ — this space between distractions? Readers of graphic novels and comic books will instinctively understand the concept. In a comic book, the space between panels is known, rather unceremoniously, as the gutter. Scott McCloud (1993) put it rather nicely when he stated that:

> The gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics. Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you something must be there (p. 66)!

So the gutter between panels becomes a place of utmost importance. The reader experiences something that is imperceptibly intense, yet utterly mundane. It is where we mind the gap. It is the place of the stolen moment; the place of deep concentration; the place of mindfulness. How then, is one able to develop this all-important mindfulness? The first thing is responding to and/or quietening the ‘little voice’ that sometimes leads us astray when it comes to our ability to concentrate … our ability to stay focused. Concentration comes not from trying too hard to focus on something, but from keeping your mind open and directing it at nothing. A Zen Buddhist might describe it as trying not to ‘put a head on top of a head’ or trying not to think yourself out of being able to think clearly.

Phil Jackson, one of the great basketball minds of his (or any) generation, has won eleven National Basketball Association Championships; one as a player with the New York Knicks and ten as coach of the Chicago Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers. He is renowned for his ability to get the best out of his players, and he often achieves this through unconventional means. In his book, Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior (1995), he has interesting things to say about his experiences with mindfulness.

Adapting the concepts to reflect a school context, Jackson suggests the thoughts of students sitting in class takes many forms. There is pure self-interest (‘I’m going to answer this question, because I know the answer and it’ll make me look smart in front of the class and the teacher.’) and selfless self-interest (‘I’m going to tell my best friend the answer and she can say it and that will make her like me.’). There is anger (‘She makes me so mad. If she answers another question correctly, I’m going to scream.’) and fear (‘I know the answer, but I can’t say anything. What if I’m wrong? I’ll look foolish.’) There is self-praise (‘That was cool. Do it again.’) and self-blame (‘What’s wrong with you? A ten-year-old would know the answer to that question.’) (Jackson, 1995).

The litany can be endless. However, the simple act of becoming mindful of the frenzied parade of thoughts can (paradoxically) begin to quieten the mind. If this can be achieved, we are free to give our all to the thought process or an action, and we are free to practise with purpose. We have found a way to ‘be in the moment’.

A favourite quotation of recent times comes from 85-year-old New York photographer, Bill Cunningham: ‘He who seeks beauty will find it’. I urge you to seek beauty in the obscure, the mundane, and the everyday. Try to spend your time purposefully operating at the edges of your ability and in the gutter between panels.

Will you know what to do when the moment comes? The answer is obvious — engage fully and practise with purpose. Be in the moment, because this is when deep learning occurs and deep understanding is attained. ■
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Connectedness refers to the feelings of belonging and social connection; it is one of our fundamental human needs. We are biologically, physically, cognitively, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. We are profoundly social creatures, and underlying most of our materialistic desires are the needs to belong, to be accepted, and to connect with others.

A HISTORY OF RESEARCH
Child development researchers in the early 1940s were interested in a ‘disease’ that was prevalent in orphanages, known as ‘hospitalism’ or ‘anaclitic depression’, and referred to findings that some orphan babies became ill and often died. The cause was traced to a lack of affection, and children not being sufficiently cuddled or played with (McCartney, 2014). Other researchers supported this need for contact — which contrasted with child-rearing texts of the 1920s and 1930s, suggesting that responsiveness to a crying child would lead to the child being ‘spoiled’ (Milano, 2014).

What we now know is that these early bonding experiences are only a small part of the richness of the dynamic. When a child is young, he or she needs to feel included by his or her family; this is ‘passive’ belonging. By age four to six, children have begun to expand the scope of their worlds to include larger circles of friends and more abstract entities. They begin to partake in ethnic identities, to feel patriotism, or to follow in a parent’s footsteps by supporting a particular football team. A child becomes more aware of giving, helping and being useful to others. With this awareness, a child will feel that their family belongs to them as much as they belong to their family.

‘Passive’ belonging has now progressed to ‘active’ belonging.

It is important for families and schools to promote and validate this active component of belonging, because it gives a deeper sense of connectedness. Some families and schools do not operate in a way that children can experience their usefulness. Children may not be given enough chores or responsibilities, and indeed, it is often easier to do things for children; but they may then fail to learn the enjoyment of feeling useful, that comes with the assumption of responsibility.

As humans, we need to belong to our friends and to our families, to our culture, and to our country. Belonging is both primal and vital to one’s sense of wellbeing. Our interests, our motivation, our health and our happiness are inextricably linked to the feeling that we are connected to a greater community that may share common interests, concerns or hopes. The term ‘connectedness’ then refers to a more complex, life-long need for feeling a sense of belonging.

‘STROKE’ AS A UNIT OF CONNECTEDNESS
Some researchers have addressed the interpersonal sphere of connectedness. Dr Eric Berne, a psychiatrist who developed the theory and method of Transactional Analysis in the 1960s, coined the term ‘stroke’ as being the ‘fundamental unit of social action’ (Berne, 1964). A stroke is a unit of recognition, when one person acknowledges another; either verbally or non-verbally. Berne developed earlier infant findings, and presented a theory about the need for belongingness in adults. He claimed that adults
need physical contact as much as infants do, but adults learn to replace this with other types of recognition, such as a smile, a wink or a handshake, instead of the higher levels of physical stimulation necessary for positive infant connectedness (Stewart & Joines, 1987).

Dan Goleman expressed a heightened appreciation of this pervasive dynamic in his book, Social Intelligence:

During these neural linkups [when one person shows recognition of another], our brains engage in an emotional tango, a dance of feelings ... The resulting feelings have far-reaching consequences, in turn rippling throughout our body, sending out cascades of hormones that regulate biological systems from our heart to immune cells. Perhaps most astonishing, science now tracks connections between the most stressful relationships and the very operation of specific genes that regulate the immune system. To a surprising extent, then, our relationships mould not just our experience, but also our biology (Goleman, 2006).

A brain imaging study by Ethan Kross (University of Michigan) suggested that the parts of the brain activated during social rejection are the same as those activated during physical pain (Conley, 2013). Another recent study led by Shelley Taylor (University of California) suggested that stress relating to relationship conflict, led to increased inflammation levels in the body (Loszach Report, 2012) — so both physically and psychologically, social connection is experienced positively, while isolation and a lack of belonging is experienced negatively.

‘A sense of belonging appears to be a basic human need — as basic as food and shelter. In fact, social support may be one of the critical elements distinguishing those who remain healthy from those who become ill’ (Pelletier, 1994).

AN UNCONSCIOUS DYNAMIC

Most people may have experienced loneliness, alienation, isolation, and existential ‘angst’ at times in their lives, but often feel shame and guilt in relation to these feelings. This may be attributable to the fact that much of psychology relates to the individual, implying that society as a whole is not to be challenged. There is an implicit societal assumption (for many) that healthy people can adjust and, therefore, that is what we should try to do.

However, the feminist movement is a demonstrable challenge to this; the plight of the housewife living in a suburban ‘nuclear family’ situation was a pressing issue in the 1950s and 1960s. This was an isolated existence for many housewives, most of whom had no extended family in the household (as historically, households in many societies had often consisted of groups of extended family members). Many women complained of symptoms associated with anxiety and depression; they were given tranquillisers, but the real diagnosis was that they were trying to adjust to an unhealthy living situation (Napikoski, 2014).

The point to note here is that the hunger for belongingness, for human interaction, for feeling appreciated, and for ‘stroke’ exchange was for the most part overlooked, not only by professionals, but also by the women themselves. The symptoms were not uncommon, but a good diagnosis (in the sense of assessing the state of basic connectedness) was rare.

People can learn to increase their capacity to make contacts and create a better sense of belonging, and learning these techniques and skills should be encouraged. However, equally as important is the need for society and its sub-groups (such as businesses, communities and schools) to take responsibility for welcoming and fostering connections amongst newcomers and those who do not easily fit in.

INCREASING CONNECTEDNESS AT SCHOOL

Rapid changes in Western culture over the past several decades have made life qualitatively different compared to fifty years ago. Consequent isolation means many people do not feel sufficiently connected, and this condition is an important, yet often overlooked, cause of a variety of personal and social problems.

At Brisbane Girls Grammar School, we provide many opportunities to promote connectedness. At times, girls may need to be encouraged to take advantage of some of the social opportunities available to them, but there is an
abundance of School clubs, lunchtime and after-school activities, and chances to increase the girls’ sense of belonging.

Marrapatta is a wonderful opportunity for many girls to experience connectedness with teachers and peers. When girls are able to give as well as receive — as they do when they are helping and accepting help from others whilst participating in activities at Marrapatta — connections with others are deepened.

For many students in many schools, emphasis is placed on individual academic achievement, and whilst this should not be discounted, we need to also be mindful of those students who have a marginal or gross deficit of ‘strokes’. Giving more thought to avocational guidance, as well as vocational guidance, may be beneficial for broadening friendship circles and social connections, and this can be encouraged both in and out of school.

‘Strangeness’, ‘oddness’ and ‘weirdness’ — it seems that most people are different in different ways. Celebrating this, and seeing diversity as a virtue, and a part of individuality, is crucial! We experience more connectedness when we feel our differences are enjoyed, or at least tolerated. At Brisbane Girls Grammar School, we have girls of differing religious backgrounds, cultural upbringings and sexual orientations.

As a leading school in the twenty-first century, we want to celebrate our differences and, in turn, promote connectedness in our students. We are striving to do this, and our Pastoral Care team can provide support and helpful suggestions for students who might be feeling a lack of connection at school.

At Brisbane Girls Grammar School we want to promote an overall sense of connectedness amongst students, teaching staff, parents and the community. While large-scale societal changes will likely need to take place for all to experience connectedness, we, as individuals, can remember that by saying ‘hello’ or giving a wave of acknowledgment can make all the difference to someone else.

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Let’s start by indulging in some nostalgia. Think back to the time when you were a child immersed in imaginary play; your open mind brilliantly poised and receptive to possibilities and endless adventures: a world more colourful than anything packaged or purchased. Your intrinsic creativity was limited only by your imagination. What you were doing was designing.

As a parent it is a marvellous sight to see one’s own children embark on flights of imaginative fancy. As educators, watching our girls do this points us towards promising educational methodology that can help lead us to meet some of the big challenges we face in twenty-first century learning and earning.

While such creative methodologies have long been adopted by our early childhood counterparts, seemingly purposeless and unstructured imaginary play in curriculum at all stages of education can engage learners deeply, fostering flexible, informal and fluid problem solving that does not rely on prescribed rewards, methods or structures. The rendering of their imaginings into concrete, physical forms involves children thinking and designing with their hands — like playing with Lego, sketching with pencils, building prototypes, and in my area of the curriculum, representing their skills in digital systems, artefacts or physical technologies.

Standardised testing in primary and secondary education is headline news internationally. Many respected educationalists agreeing this type of staple assessment means our young innovators and budding entrepreneurs get less time to push the envelope and action their innate heuristic capacities to solve unrehearsed or complex problems that matter most to them. To put it bluntly, a system which focuses its students on point-in-time, micro-skill testing inevitably compromises their entitlement to practise Design Thinking and engage design principles to tackle open-ended, big-picture problems. System wide we need more time to sojourn in the depths of design challenge. Creating novel prototypes, digital products and systems, or a combination of all three, requires Design Thinking and making sense of the complex structures and the methods required to approach them. We cannot measure this easily in high-stakes examinations; after all, innovation by definition is something that cannot be standardised (Shaffer, 2006).

The education system could be considered more aligned to analytical and convergent processes (Brown, 2009) centered more so on the current priorities and pressures in education that inhibit the creative abilities to flourish in the young. Shaffer (2006) suggests that the academic disciplines of history, English, math, and science are not the only way to divide up the world of things worth knowing. He argues that real world innovators have ways...
of thinking and working that are just as coherent and fundamental as any of the academic disciplines.

There is a myth about creativity and innovation which holds that great ideas leap fully formed from the minds of geniuses (Brown, 2009). In reality, most innovations result from having a good understanding of relational systems, logic and self-discipline. Innovators believe that an idea or venture has real potential to creatively disrupt current trends, improve business models or just make things better and less complicated for everyone. Innovation also comes through staying with the problem, and working just beyond the boundary of what you can already do (Shaffer, 2006).

Designers take risks and confidently use their insight and skills to test competing ideas against one another with the likelihood that the outcome will be bolder (Brown, 2009). Innovation also has a lot to do with mixing curiosity with design process and Design Thinking and we can integrate this ‘geography of thought’ (Nisbett, 2003) into our school curriculum. To support this, John Cleese once said ‘creativity is not a talent; it is a way of operating’ (1991).

Designers in all industries, through training and experience, develop different lenses through which to see the world (Stokes, 2014). Whether associated with design in creative arts, farming, engineering, law, social sciences or industrial designing, their job is to refine process or product and to simplify complex challenges. Consider world leaders in industrial or user experience and interaction design — Apple, IDEO and Dyson. Their products are simple yet highly effective with a clear link to innovation and disruption within markets. These companies spend a lot of time in design ideation and empathy, getting to know their customers’ needs and undertaking comprehensive product testing until they reach excellence in design. From an outsider’s rationalist perspective, it may seem that these designers are merely playing or dreaming, but the proof of this design pudding is in the success that this process has brought to these now globally renowned outfits.

Proficient skills in design process, human and environmental empathy, ergonomics, isometric and oblique sketching, scaling visual representations, visualising 3D systems, and systems mechanics, fit well not only with world leaders in design, but also with our young job creators of the future. Absorbed in their passions, our young creatives will certainly continue to be intrinsically motivated to be inventive and to stay in the grey of complex problems. It is just a matter of cultivating their passions.

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Through the window of the late twentieth century, it was clear that educational imperatives for the twenty-first century would be about innovative ways of doing and thinking in our teaching and learning. We may have imagined but could not have articulated the impact of technology and globalisation as this new century began life with a will of its own taking us into vast expanses of uncharted territory, many of which we still struggle to define and negotiate. Education has always had a busy agenda of change and transformation in its short history of schooling but the dramatic speed with which changes are occurring in local and global society, in technology and economics, threatens to leave it languishing in an outdated past.

Educationalist Dr Yong Zhao (2011) reminds us that we cannot bet on the future. Zhao is Presidential Chair and Director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education, University of Oregon, where he is also a Professor in the Department of Educational Measurement, Policy, and Leadership. He points out that we cannot prepare students for a future where such unremitting change means that our usual reference points will no longer be relevant. When there was the luxury of looking forward to this century from the safety of the past, we knew as educators that the world would be in all probability unrecognisable and that we had an obligation both morally and practically to think about how to prepare our students. But without a blueprint, some aspects of education took refuge in pursuing a subject-based approach with government-imposed standards that have not quite escaped the ‘one size fits all’ model.

We only need to look at local and international testing as benchmarking to still see how measuring and weighing is keeping us in a holding pattern of prescribed endings that in some ways reference nineteenth century schooling. Putting test scores and tertiary entrance on a pedestal provides only short-term readiness for our young people without setting them up for real adult life. Zhao (2011) contends that standardised testing is about compliance and not about encouraging innovative thought or passion. To underscore his opinion he has written several blogs arguing that the acclaimed international PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) rankings are misleading and are taking us back to the past. He is certainly part of the serious and exciting discussions taking place internationally about the need to speed up the necessary paradigm shift in education. Many of the theories and practice of this shift already exist in educational and scientific research but translating them into the actuality of school-based student learning is rarely evident.

A key and recurring concept across various forums on the direction of twenty-first century education is that of entrepreneurship. Zhao believes education should look to ‘cultivate a more diverse, creative, and entrepreneur citizenry’ (2014). In June 2013, the European Commission published an extended paper, *Entrepreneurship Education: A guide for educators*. While there could be an assumed
ISABELLA REBOUL / 12B (DETAIL)
focus on business, this concept in the educational framework is not simply limited to commercial or business entrepreneurship. We now inhabit a world where consumption and communication changes fired by technology evolution and revolution mean that our social contexts, as well as the world of work, are already different landscapes compared to those of a decade ago. Rather, entrepreneurship is to be used in a wider sense to mean social entrepreneurship, policy entrepreneurship, and ‘intrapreneurship’ (entrepreneurs fostering an idea and product within a large corporation).

If we cannot anticipate the jobs of the future, then we need our education to anticipate the capabilities essential for the future. What could be workable? The role of our students in the future will rely not just on cognitive skills but also on capabilities of confidence, agility and flexibility of thinking and invention, risk taking, initiative, autonomy and perseverance, resilience and social capital. Students need to be creative, collaborative, adept at communication and not only able to solve problems but also to identify them. Schools and the realm of teaching and learning may be encouraging these capabilities but companies and work domains are expecting them. Yong cites US figures indicating that fifty per cent of graduates with specific career degrees are unemployed or underemployed. The challenge therefore is to create work rather than to seek it (2014).

In addressing this new focus in education there has been a move to the concept of project-based learning. According to the European Commission’s paper, ‘Entrepreneurship education is more than preparation on how to run a business. It is about how to develop the entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and knowledge which, in short, should enable a student to “turn ideas into action” (2013). This is real life experience — an approach that gives students ownership of their learning. They are the ones driving the project, determining the outcome and asking themselves the critical questions to find out the what, the why and the how. Zhao calls this product-based learning (2012).

The arts are here to help. These disciplines provide an excellent model for entrepreneurship learning. Whether composing and performing music, designing and building theatre or creating a work of art, students in the arts must make decisions and lead and negotiate their ideas to resolve a work. It is a process that often involves elements of frustration and failure — essential ingredients for arriving at a fruitful, desired outcome. In the end the product attained is of their imagination, making and owning. Importantly, they are in constant communication and collaboration with peers or teachers and this conferencing builds the skills and capabilities of the social capital they will be expected to use in their future work-life experiences. Furthermore, in an attention deficit age, the arts can be an oasis of reflection and attentiveness as students grapple privately and more publicly with charting a path to a completed project and product.

So how does this product-based learning play out in the arts learning precincts where collective and individual features are allowed to shine without being overshadowed by competitiveness? Using Year 12 student work as a reference should serve as testimony to the entrepreneurial nature of learning in the arts.

Composition and performance feature large in Curriculum Music and the final project for senior students is their individual collaboration with the professional and esteemed ensemble, Topology. Each student becomes the ensemble’s composer. They are the authors of the work and decide the form it should take. The product is resolved to a professional level through a process of conferencing with teacher and ensemble members.

Visual Art students in Year 12 work to a theme of ‘Life Fabric’ where they select their own contextual references or explore other social, cultural and technological contexts for their inspiration to achieve expression in a work of art. This oeuvre is manifested in a variety of media, skilfully crafted by the students.

Drama tasks students with devising and making theatre that reimagines theatrical traditions for a contemporary audience. Students manipulate the dramatic languages with increasing complexity and dexterity in an inherently collaborative environment. As with Music and Art, Drama students are researching, imagining, designing and shaping
a performance that goes live to a discerning audience and consumer just as any market product will.

These final products in the Senior School across each of the arts are the result of years of careful instruction and guidance under the attentive mentorship and expertise of teachers. Whether it be through musical and theatrical literacy, skills of artistic practice or product development, these attributes are built as students undertake increasingly sophisticated projects and are guided and directed through the learning curve over time.

But these student products are also elevated and enhanced by the development of attendant disciplines in the capabilities of attitude and thinking with which students in the arts must engage. The capabilities listed earlier that define entrepreneurship and are so endemic in the arts are a perfect fit for the wider entrepreneurship that young people will require to live and work with wisdom, imagination and integrity.

We might be moving relentlessly further into the twenty-first century but in many ways the future remains uncertain and tinged with trepidation, perhaps as it always has been. Nevertheless, it is also exciting to seize ideas from a new angle, to pioneer a novel thinking about how we might educate our students and ready them for this future; to uncover and practise the types of learnings that will inspire and impel them to be globally aware, contributing and empathetic participants steeped in diversity and creativity so they may indeed be change agents in the brave new world.

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When study gets tough, the tough play sport

SALLY NORTHCROFT, DIRECTOR OF SPORT | 11 SEPTEMBER 2014

Underpinning sport at Brisbane Girls Grammar School is the fact that academic progress and achievement is a pre-cursor to following any sporting dreams. Daphne Pirie (Welch 1949), no doubt the best athlete in the School at the time, was reminded of this when she was banned from representing the School in the Interschool Athletics and Interform Athletics because Lady Principal, Miss Lilley, believed ‘Daphne was in too many sports to the detriment of her school work’ (Harvey-Short, 2011).

One could forgive Miss Lilley for not understanding how much of an impact this would have on Daphne, but also because the absolute expectation was that academic work took priority over sport. In 2011, Daphne was awarded the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Women and Sport trophy for Oceania in recognition of her life-long commitment to women and sport. Upon reflection, given Daphne’s passion for her sport, it could be argued that in this case, her sport and her schooling were of equal value. Or perhaps, it may have in fact been that Daphne has achieved so greatly in life as a result of her sport participation, and not because of her improved results in French!

In the same year that Daphne was recognised by the IOC, Brisbane Girls Grammar School awarded the Dux of the School prize to Caitlin Clifford, who interestingly, was also the QGSSSA School Sports Captain. However, had Caitlin been at school with Daphne, she may not have had the opportunity to be given such a significant leadership position in the School, and neither may she have been given the absolute honour of representing her school in both swimming and water polo, all while achieving the ultimate academic prize. So, if we apply a similar line of questioning — we could ask, was it because Caitlin played sport that she was able to achieve so much academically?

What is the impact of playing sport on academics? Is there a case for encouraging the participation of sport alongside the pursuit of academic excellence? We know that there are certain benefits to being physically active, but is there a case for actually pursuing sport to benefit your academic and future career aspirations?

The health benefits of physical activity are well documented and accepted. The Mayo Clinic (2014) explains many of them and they extend to include improved sleeping patterns, improved concentration, healthier self-image and improved overall health-related fitness components (aerobic and muscular endurance, flexibility and muscular strength). It is well accepted that a baseline level of physical fitness has the potential to provide students with the best platform upon which to achieve better grades due to improved overall health (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008, and Chaddock, 2012).

In addition, the link between brain function and improved physical fitness has been published worldwide (Rosewater, 2009). The inclusion of physical activity is now seen as one of the accepted treatments for Alzheimer’s and dementia patients to alleviate memory loss and improve brain function (Blondell, Hammersley-Mather & Veerman, 2014).
Now let us consider the impact of engaging in the structure and competition associated with playing a sport compared to simply being physically active. Some benefits of playing sport have been well publicised. The psycho-social benefits such as increased self-esteem, an increased feeling of connectedness to the School, an improvement in self-identity, and a provision of a connection to social groups — this last benefit being a highly-desired outcome for adolescent girls (Rosewater, 2009).

There are also a number of life skills that girls learn from playing sport. Some girls learn communication skills by overcoming their shyness and others learn to listen better by being less outspoken. Organisational skills develop and girls learn to work together on the playing field — they also begin to understand that being successful can mean many failed attempts. Girls learn to deal with adversity and put the situation into perspective when a match is lost in the last minute due to the uncontrollable factors presented on the court. The persistence and discipline displayed in activities such as getting up in the cold early hours of the morning and staying behind at the end of training to work on a particular skill, are invaluable life skills that will transfer to the next stage of their journey (Kniffin, Wansink & Shimizu, 2014, Holt, Tamminen, Tink & Black 2003, and IOC, 2014).

Finally, there are the leadership and service opportunities that exist in the sporting environment and honing these attributes can make girls better prepared for university and their future careers. Recent research has highlighted the fact that ‘student-athletes — captains and non-captains alike — tend to be exposed to important pro-social values through experiences that provide them with generalizable and persistent skills and lessons for life and work outside of sports’ (Sitkin & Hackman, 2011). The most remarkable report that has been released on the link between leadership skills and sports participation is by Postdoctoral Fellow, Dr Terrance Fitzsimmons. His research showed a major contrast between the childhood experiences of male and female CEOs. All but two (out of thirty) of the male CEOs that Fitzsimmons interviewed had captained football teams (Fitzsimmons, 2011). They had learned leadership and other skills broadly applicable to work life prior to entering the workforce. In her 2011 article, The Secret To Being A Power Woman: Play Team Sports, author Jenna Groudreau states:

Playing team sports in school not only helps women succeed in business, it sends them straight to the top. PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi played cricket in her native India; Kraft Foods CEO Irene Rosenfeld played four varsity sports in high school and college basketball at Cornell University in New York; and SEC Chairman Mary Schapiro played lacrosse and field hockey at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania. A sports background instilled in them valuable lessons for the boardroom, a mental and emotional toughness and the ability to speak a key business language obscured to those who don’t ‘get’ sports.

It seems there is sufficient evidence, therefore, that sport participation should be encouraged and promoted for the duration of girls’ time in school. The unfortunate trend is that girls’ participation in sport is declining as they age from fourteen to seventeen years. In the USA, girls’ participation in sport decreases by twenty-three per cent as they go from middle school (Years 6, 7 & 8) to high school (Sabo, 2013). In 2012, Brisbane Girls Grammar School reflected similar reductions: in 2012, fifty-five per cent of the girls in Year 9 were involved in sporting activities and in a cross-sectional comparison, twenty-eight per cent of the girls in Year 11 participated in sport. Participation data from the United Kingdom reflects a similar trend in that between the ages of five to eight and seventeen to nineteen, girls’ activity drops by sixty-six per cent — from ninety-one per cent to thirty-one per cent (DCSF, Children and Young People’s Participation in Organised Sport Survey, 2009). Similarly, the 2012/2013 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reflects a decrease in the percentages of girls participating in organised sport as they age from eight to fourteen years old. Unfortunately, the ABS does not gather the same statistical data for children aged fifteen and older.

Over and above the social capital and the health benefits, perhaps the positive relationship between playing sport and academic performance will be the determining factor that keeps girls involved in sport — particularly as the growing
body of evidence presents the benefits of playing sport to improve at best, or maintain at worst, academic performances while in school.

Hobsons Research Agency released a report that identified: ‘... There is a correlation in the data suggesting that student performance in regards to grades increases as their participation in sporting activities elevates in secondary school’ (2014). Further research has identified the future potential economical value of participating in sport (Kniffin, et al 2014). In this particular publication, two studies examined how the participation in competitive youth sports appears to be relevant for early-career job prospects as well as late-in-life outcomes. A well-documented trend identified that student-athletes ‘tend to earn significantly higher incomes than people who do not play sports’ and these athletes also learn a set of skills (identified earlier as life skills) that are highly valued as bargaining commodities in the workplace.

Multiple studies (Eccles, 2003, Hartmann 2008, Marsh & Kleitman 2003) have reported on the relationship between sport participation and academic performance. Structured activities, especially sports, have a positive relationship with school grades and interscholastic team sports produce stronger academic effects due to their formalised rules, level of commitment required and the competition associated with the activity (Broh, 2002). Marsh and Kleitman (2003) also reported that participation in high school sports had positive effects on many Grade 12 postsecondary outcomes. Both Feijgn and Broh had reported these outcomes previously. In his fixed-effects approach to evaluate the extent to which ‘extracurricular involvement increases human capital’, Lipscomb’s (2007) research indicated that the benefits of playing sport are associated with a two per cent increase in math and science test scores. In addition, participation in sport is associated with a five per cent increase in Bachelor degree attainment expectations.

As we digest these findings, it can be argued that the sport itself may not be solely accountable for the causal linkage to the likelihood of improved academic results. The health benefits and the life-skill acquisition contribute to the teenage girls’ set of tools to create the best sculpture of her envisaged self.

Had Miss Lilley known about this research, I am sure she would have reconsidered allowing Daphne to compete. Or perhaps, the life lesson of persistence and overcoming adversity was a life skill that Daphne needed to motivate her to be the irrepressible role model she ultimately became. And what of all the girls who decide to stop playing sport to focus on their schoolwork?

Perhaps it is worth reconsidering how their participation in sport could help them achieve the grades they are looking for. Perhaps they will be more organised and more determined because they play sport and perhaps the physically, socially and emotionally challenging aspects of sport stimulate our girls’ brain function so they are able to produce their best work — both on the field and in the classroom. Perhaps, they may also need the experience of playing on a sporting team to demonstrate to their future employers that they have the leadership skills that will earn them the promotion they deserve!

Next time your daughter discusses the idea of stopping playing sport, you might want to quote the title of this article to her — or better yet, take her to training yourself; secure in the knowledge that you are contributing to her academic performance.
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Nurturing the capacity for creativity

RUTH JANS, HEAD OF MACKAY HOUSE | 18 SEPTEMBER 2014

Inspired by an episode of the ‘Life Series’ that recently aired on the ABC, Life at 9 (Peedom, 2014), which explored the notion that creativity and imagination is ‘at the heart of childhood’, I was prompted to consider how this translates to adolescence and the high school education system. In a nutshell, the series follows the growth and development of eleven Australian children and their families, carefully chosen to represent the wider Australian population. According to the psychologists interviewed in Life at 9 ‘childhood creativity is an even greater predictor of success later in life than IQ because creativity is about how we think, not just artistic ability’. However, they also cite widespread concern that levels of childhood creativity have never been lower than they are now.

So what is nurturing creativity and what is hindering it? Throughout the episode the psychologists observe and comment on contributing factors such as levels of resilience, the fear of making mistakes, the amount of screen-time dominating a child’s life, as well as the busyness of their lives.

The definition of creativity as offered by the ‘Life Series’ is corroborated by educationalists such as Sir Ken Robinson (2007) and Dr Yong Zhao (2014) and essentially boils down to this: creative thinking is about the creation of ‘original ideas that have value’ (Robinson, 2007) combined with the ability to ‘not only solve problems but also identify them’ (Yong, 2014). In addition, Dr David Cropley — Associate Professor of Engineering Innovation at the University of South Australia — argues that creative and divergent thinking go hand in hand; both ways of thinking are about identifying many possible answers to a question and indeed even lots of possible ways of interpreting a question.

One could argue that in this day and age, thinking flexibly — being innovative in one’s approach to solving problems — has never been more important. Sir Ken Robinson goes so far as to say that ‘creativity is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status’ (2007). Such thinking is important to the Girls Grammar context. We believe ingenuity can and must be nurtured and that we achieve this through the delivery of our diverse curriculum, through developing the resilience of our students, and by encouraging a more productive view of ‘failure’.

Interestingly, the child who scored the highest level of creativity in the Life at 9 episode was also the child who had developed the most resilience. This may have been due to the fact that he had to adapt to more challenges in his life than many others, such as having a younger brother who is significantly disabled.

Resilience clearly has an impact on creative thinking as it is ‘a form of being able to react and [overcome] adversity in very particular ways’ (Peedom, 2014). If a student can face challenges, experience failure and still find the determination to try new and different ways to resolve situations without any loss of enthusiasm, then little will impede them on their journey to success. As Professor Robyn Ewing stated on Life at 9 ‘people who are able to
think more flexibly are more resilient to coping with the things the world throws at [them].

This concept is built into the core of many of the subjects taught at Girls Grammar and is one of the pillars of the Philosophy of Learning curriculum delivered to Year 8 students. Such repetition is necessary, as we are faced with — what Joann Deak writes about in How Girls Thrive — a ‘self-esteem crisis in this country [which] permeates every aspect of a girl’s life including her looks, performance in schools and relationships’ (2010, p. 9). Adolescence is difficult and high school is by no means easy either, so getting the balance right to ensure the three Cs — Competence, Confidence and Connectedness — are experienced, not just talked about and taught (p. 62), can be a daunting task.

This is one of the key reasons why Girls Grammar is so committed to our Outdoor Education Programme at Marrapatta. The School camps built into Years 8 to 10 are not just a historical tradition, but are also considered an important part of our curriculum, hence their compulsory nature. For some students, simply getting onto the bus and leaving home can be a hurdle and this is neither minimised nor dismissed. Nonetheless, the experience of leaving the comforts (and devices) of home, facing the physical and mental challenges of hiking, camping out, bunking with their peers, high ropes courses and orienteering, is critical in their development and growth. Experiencing these sorts of challenges and overcoming them with the support of their peers, their teachers and the highly qualified and empathetic Outdoor Education staff, helps the girls develop a sense of connectedness and confidence in their own competence — the three Cs.

In addition to resilience being a significant contributor to creative thinking, overcoming a fear of making mistakes is also an important hurdle. Josh, one of the children in Life at 9 has, since birth, been reluctant to attempt tasks he does not think he will be able to do perfectly the first time. For him, this preoccupation with getting things right and avoiding making mistakes has developed with the approach of NAPLAN in Year 3. Knowing how our students are doing academically in the broad spectrum of Australian education is clearly a positive aspect of NAPLAN and we can all be proud of the fact that ‘in Year 9, Brisbane Girls Grammar School had the highest combined average score’ in Queensland (Chilcott, 2014); however, it is the ‘anxiety about measuring’ (Peedom, 2014) that may in fact be contributing to Australian students’ fear of making mistakes.

Building ‘academic resilience’ (Smith, 2014) and helping students ‘contain their fear of failure’ (O’Sullivan, 2014) are concepts embedded in the Student Care Ethics Programme, in the Philosophy of Learning subject and in the rhetoric used by teachers and academic leaders here at Girls Grammar on a daily basis. We are very focused on this because, as JoAnn Deak argues, educators understand that making mistakes is absolutely essential in the learning process. In fact, there is a part of the brain that is activated when students realise they have made an error; it is called the: Anterior Cingulated Gyrus or the ‘mistake filter’.

Learning and memory are enhanced by the power of the mistake filter. In simple terms, the brain seems to have been designed to learn more and remember more when we make a misstep compared to doing something perfectly right the first time (Deak, p. 79).

What this means for creative thinking is that if students have a fixed mindset and only place value on getting the answer right, then it can come at the cost of seeing the value in ideas and trying new ways of doing things. Certainly if there is a strong fear of making a mistake — ‘failure’ — then academic risk taking is hindered.

Life at 9 declared that ‘creativity is not something that you’re born with and that’s it; it can be taught and developed’ (Peedom, 2014). At Brisbane Girls Grammar School we believe that creativity can be nurtured and, as a recent Insights article, The Challenge of Future-Proof Learning (Thornquist, 2014) clearly articulated, we do this well. Schools with a strong emphasis on musical, artistic and dramatic creativity have an obvious advantage but it is also the plethora of co-curricular options available to our girls such as OptiMinds, DaVinci, the Felgate Society, Debating, Creative Writing, the Athene club and Community Service clubs, which celebrate divergent and flexible thinking.
Nonetheless, a key point made in the Life at 9 episode concerned how the busyness of children’s lives can have a negative impact on their time for free play and the development of their imagination. Virginia Woolf’s ‘great cathedral place of childhood’ where children have time to play and daydream is so crucial not only for brain development (2014) but also for ‘a healthy [and] satisfying mental life’ (as cited in Popova, 2014). Jerome L. Singer, a psychologist working at Yale in the 1950s, produced a ‘groundbreaking series of research into daydreaming [which] laid the foundations of our modern understanding of creativity’s subconscious underbelly’ (Popova, 2014) and echoed T. S. Eliot’s ‘idea incubation’, Alexander Graham Bell’s ‘unconscious cerebration’ and Lewis Carroll’s ‘mental mastication’. Students and parents must keep in mind the importance of a balanced timetable — too much co-curricular might not be so good in the long run. Boredom, on the other hand, may be a positive experience away from the overstimulation of various electronic devices, allowing the opportunity for the imagination to be activated and to flourish.

According to Life at 9, creative thinking is cultivated by developing resilience, encouraging academic risk taking and the precious asset of time — time to think and imagine. Things that can hinder it are the fear of making mistakes, placing more value on marks than on thinking, being too busy and having too much screen-time. However, there doesn’t seem to be a recipe for success — one size does not fit all. Among the children featured in the series, Wyatt was the most creative and resilient yet he struggled at school and lacked confidence; Josh was a high achiever yet loath to take risks and try new things for fear of failure; Sofia’s schedule was incredibly hectic with adult-led co-curricular activities but never watched television. All three children were very different, yet all three were able to improve their creative thinking ability when provided with the right environment — at home and at school — suited to that particular child. This goes to show that in the end, if we can help our students see their creative capacities for the treasures that they are, to see the value in ideas and not just in high marks, and to provide an environment with a good balance of caring and challenge, then we will have surely done well by them.

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Moving house and moving on

KRISTINE COOKE, DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES | 10 OCTOBER 2014

It has been claimed that moving house is one of the most stressful events in life. Therefore, how traumatic would moving a library be, with all of its resources, facilities, personnel and furniture? It is an imminent task for the staff of the Beanland Library. Throughout 2014, it has been impossible to ignore the construction of the new Research Learning Centre emerging out of the ground right on the boundary of the current library. As we prepare to relocate there in time for the 2015 school year, it is an ever-present reminder of the opportunities for innovation and challenges it presents.

Thus, the move is not simply an exercise in relocation: the planners of the new Centre have invested a great deal of thought and expertise into creating a venue with more space, more light, more interactivity and more originality — but, more importantly, a significantly enhanced experience for the students. The new library will enable library staff to use the rich physical collection and their informational and digital expertise to encourage successful scholarship because, as a recent study by the American Association of School Librarians has found, ‘School libraries with more staff and larger collections lead to stronger academic performance’ (DeNisco, 2014).

The new building and the efforts to enhance the library experience are validated not only by the Brisbane Girls Grammar School’s impressive usage figures, but also by another comprehensive study conducted in the United Kingdom which found a ‘significant association’ between ‘frequent library use and reported wellbeing’ (Fujiwara, Kudrna & Dolan, 2014, p. 9). The current Beanland Library is always well populated with students from every year level who love, as one current student said, to ‘make the space our own’. This sense of belonging must be promoted in the new spaces so they too become a new home with all the attendant warmth, security and support. It must become that special place that encapsulates the essence of scholarship.

However, there are some commentators who claim the modern student does not need a designated physical library space; that she shows a clear preference for the digital. In the education field, where universities are leading the way in online learning, it has been ascertained that it is not a simple ‘either/or’ choice. It is ‘progressively less about crafting a stand-alone digital experience, and more about ensuring that digital and physical play to their respective strengths and provide a blended experience that is relevant and consistent’ for what has been labelled the ‘location-agnostic’ student (McMahon, 2013, p. 6). This is the type of whole-library approach planned for our new Centre. It is one that offers the full range of preferred student working methods, while maintaining professional assistance, support and teaching, especially for younger students who come to this School with a range of digital backgrounds and require guidance in dealing with information strategies of increasing sophistication.

This is why the new Centre cannot afford to ignore the digital ‘space’. It must be designed and managed as carefully and as thoughtfully as the rooms and the shelves but its main advantage is the ease with which it can be changed and enhanced — more readily than a building. Therefore, the physical move will also be reflected in a ‘digital move’. The library pages on our intranet and on Moodle will transition to create an enhanced experience for digital users. The catalogue is constantly being upgraded to ensure it is responsive to user needs and can be accessed from any
device and any location. Users will be able to download a wider range of digitised resources and access information assistance specifically tailored to each particular task and the needs of individual students.

While students now have access to more data than would ever fit on a library shelf, the emphasis has shifted from simply finding the information, to discerning what is the most relevant and effective information for the specific task. This generally means selecting a judicious blend of books as well as digital, and unlocking that special secret of librarians: metadata. If the youngest student has even a basic understanding of this concept, she will be able to ‘ … winnow down a huge set of results to manageable proportions’ (Manifold, 2014, p. 4). It is within this research and information process that students generally discover Google and Wikipedia are not necessarily their best friends and the library staff members are generally the bearers of these sad tidings.

In addition to the volume of data available, students have myriad ways of thinking, working, and approaching information and the learning tasks they are given. It is the responsibility of the modern library, and especially the school library, where the users are still developing their information attitudes and skills, to encourage, welcome and cater to individual differences and preferences. This means the flexible application and integration of thinking strategies, technology, and physical spaces. Students need the wisdom of educators, both within the classroom and the library, to help them understand and explore how to use these tools in a positive and productive way.

Allied with this variety of users and data formats, there is also a corresponding and complicating variety of access media: a laptop, a page, an iPad, a phone, a desktop and a projection. This list will continue to grow and the interesting aspect of modern information is that, in texts and on screens, it is generally presented as an increasingly complex combination of visuals, text and sound bites etc. Professional library staff members are aware of the challenges of today’s information environment and work to select resources that are relevant, suitable and varied. However, they also work with users, helping them develop the skills to curate their own information. By encouraging discerning use of digital tools and information management, students learn to develop a sense of control over what they learn and how they learn it. While Girls Grammar has invested in bricks, concrete and glass, it continues to value human interaction — there is no ‘you have your own laptop; you’re on your own’ at this School — our students are assisted by trusted, qualified teachers and support staff.

The new Research Learning Centre is, therefore, an opportunity to craft a new and cohesive library experience. If a school library is viewed in the terms that Dubner used in his opinion piece to the American Library Association, it is now a ‘different sort of institution’ with a new mission, ‘a sort of public square … where we meet, where we mix, where we consume and produce whatever we need to consume and produce at (any) given point in (our education)’ (2014). Our new home will allow us to continue the traditional partnerships in innovative ways, promoting excellence in scholarship and preparing students for a smooth transition into tertiary courses.

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According to Dr Libby Weaver, an Australian nutritional biochemist, many women suffer from this ‘Rushing Women’s Syndrome’ and feel ‘tired yet wired’ due to their urgent approach to life (Weaver, 2012). This condition involves sympathetic nervous system dominance, which can be experienced by women who run themselves ragged with a never-ending list of tasks. For those who frequently answer ‘stressed’ or ‘busy’ to friends’ questions about their welfare; when a trip to the dentist becomes the only opportunity to sit still and abstain from talking; when coffee becomes akin to religion; and when sleep is hard to come by, Rushing Women’s Syndrome may provide a means of understanding their experience.

Although not scientifically proven, the term ‘Rushing Women’s Syndrome’ resonates with many, particularly those fulfilling multiple roles, such as working full time and assuming primary responsibility for child rearing and housework. Multitasking is the new norm, and many parents are constantly juggling smart phones and children while undertaking routine jobs and even playing in the park. Dr Weaver cautions that significant physical and psychological consequences can occur due to such a lifestyle (Weaver, 2014).

One of the remedies suggested for Rushing Women’s Syndrome, or indeed life in the frenetic, technology-laden twenty-first century, is mindfulness. Triggering the parasympathetic nervous system, which assists the body to relax and restore, mindfulness has been espoused as the antidote to the modern world. While it is thousands of years old and originates from Buddhist philosophy, modern day mindfulness is non-secular. It is not a religion, but rather a form of mental training. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a Professor of Medicine and the pioneer of modern day mindfulness, defines it as ‘paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally’ (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Not limited to simple awareness, mindfulness involves acceptance of, and openness to, both pleasant and unpleasant internal and external experiences. By paying careful attention to thoughts, feelings and body sensations, mindfulness assists one to acknowledge and respond to experiences, rather than react hastily (Lowe, 2014). While it can include meditation, mindfulness can also be cultivated through informal practices such as paying attention to everyday activities like brushing your teeth, eating or watching a sunset.
Mindfulness has been shown to have many physical and psychological benefits. Numerous studies have shown a reduction in stress, anxiety, exhaustion and depression, as well as improvements in concentration, visuo-spatial memory and creativity. Physically, cortisol levels can be reduced, blood pressure lowered and immunity enhanced by engaging in mindfulness (Pickert, 2014). Functional brain imaging has allowed researchers to study the specific impacts of meditation on the brain, revealing changes in brain circuitry, helping people feel happier, calmer, more energised and more engaged (Weare, 2012; Williams & Penman, 2011). Furthermore, meditation has been shown to stimulate the insula, suggesting that mindfulness can enhance one’s empathy, compassion and sensitivity, enabling richer and more successful relationships with others (Williams & Penman, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, mindfulness is gaining popularity around the world and has been adopted by global companies like Google, as well as universities, schools, hospitals, banks and the US Marines. Medical students are being introduced to mindfulness as a way of preventing burnout, as are members of the UK Parliament, who were exposed to mindfulness training earlier this year. As a result the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was established to consider ways in which mindfulness could be incorporated into UK public policy. In its recent parliamentary report, the APPG proposed that all doctors and teachers be trained in mindfulness as a way of reducing the burden on the National Health System (Berry, 2014). Perhaps part of the appeal is that mindfulness teaches professionals the idea that ‘slowing down is necessary, and that sometimes “not doing” can be just as productive as “doing”’ (Etty-Leal, 2011). Executive functioning, which is required for both self-regulation and academic achievement, has been shown to improve following mindfulness activities (Chambers, Chuen Yee Lo & Allen, 2008). As mindfulness offers students the opportunity to sustain attention and be still and silent, effective learning can therefore take place.

As a leader in the holistic education of adolescent girls, Girls Grammar has carefully examined the available mindfulness research and considered its applicability to our staff and students. We have begun introducing mindfulness education and activities into the classroom, which has been favourably received, and we continue to investigate international approaches to mindfulness education programmes.

As Kabat-Zinn explains, mindfulness is not a passing fad, but instead a practice which requires embodied engagement to receive benefits (Williams & Penman, 2011). Given this, one of the first stages of incorporating mindfulness into our School is to prepare our staff by providing information and training about the topic. To this end, we were delighted to have invited a guest speaker to
Staff Day at the end of Term III. Through simple breathing and posture exercises, the guest speaker demonstrated how observation and acceptance can cut through some of our most stressful thoughts and result in the release of tension and lowered cortisol levels. The presentation was not only well received by our staff, but the principles of mindfulness were thought to be potentially very useful for our students.

As the world does not appear to be slowing down, Girls Grammar must continue to consider a wide range of approaches to help our students thrive. Mindfulness, although promising, will not be the answer for everyone. However, the concept of pausing, noticing and accepting may just prove an essential life skill for those students inclined to develop from rushing girls into rushing women.

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The exquisite pressure and privilege of educating young women for the twenty-first century

ANNA OWEN, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL (ACADEMIC) | 24 OCTOBER 2014

On the occasion of her first overseas visit as First Lady, Michelle Obama made a memorable speech at a girls’ school in London, passionately making the case for every girl to take her education seriously. Posted to the TED Blog as ‘an idea worth spreading’, the video has since been viewed more than 600,000 times.

In her speech, Ms Obama cited education among the list of factors that contribute directly to women’s health, and she encouraged young women to reduce the gap between the way the world exists in its present state, and how women know it should exist. She told the students, ‘In pursuing your dreams, use your talents, be resolute, create the world as it should be, not as it is’ (Obama, 2009).

Taking advantage of every educational opportunity that is presented to girls will empower them. It will help them take control and make a positive contribution that not only benefits other women, but also communities at large.

At the heart of Brisbane Girls Grammar School is our Statement of Intent: ‘Proud of our Grammar tradition, we are a secondary school that establishes the educational foundation for young women to contribute confidently to their world with wisdom, imagination and integrity’.

This statement guides our School community in helping to ensure our girls have everything they need to achieve their goals, through their learning network, their families, their extended families and their friends. If our students truly love learning and know what helps them to learn, they will be successful in life. We encourage our girls to embrace knowledge and their individual learning styles and to be twenty-first century learners.

Communities and countries and ultimately the world are only as strong as the health of their women (Michelle Obama, 2009).
American writer and futurist Alvin Toffler once said, ‘The illiterate of the future are not those who can’t read or write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn’ (Toffler, 2014). To achieve in contemporary life and find their place in the world, our students must have transitional attitudes while remaining flexible, honest and open. This combination of attributes also underwrites the building of resilience in young people. At what stage in the schooling of a Grammar girl are they ready for the ‘real world’? And how is this achieved?

Students must be academically resilient. Academic resilience in a changing world requires the ability to absorb new problems and encounters and create new systems and skills to conquer the challenges. Furthermore, a sharply honed intellect, nurtured through the highs, lows and challenges thrown at us by life can result in a heightened ability to create unique solutions. The young women of today can take up this challenge if armed with skills.

The support, nurturing and love shown by today’s schools and parents is essential, however hardship and challenges are part of everyday life and therefore education must offer a balanced approach. We would never wish tragedy or unhappiness upon our students, however evidence shows that a little bit of hardship builds character and makes us more resilient — so while we want to nurture our girls, we do them no favours by protecting them from reality.

In the words of Samuel Smiles (1859), ‘We learn from failure much more than from success’. When our young women are challenged, or if they feel tired or uncomfortable it is often a time of personal growth. Building resilience is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. Our girls need to practise handling the challenges life will present to them and build confidence through practice to know they are capable of facing adversity. After all, it has been said that the only thing worse than an unhappy childhood is having a too-happy childhood!

Teachers are architects for learning, designing the environments for developing minds and preparing students for a somewhat unknown future. Teachers of today must use higher-level thinking, processing vast amounts of information related to the students they teach, the abstract and essential learnings of the subjects they teach, and the most effective instructional strategies for each situation. It is the role of every teacher in every classroom to bring these aspects of every student’s learning journey into focus.

However, the getting of wisdom is a very individual journey. In their 1991 text, Caine and Caine asserted that to acquire meaningful knowledge, ‘students must be able to perceive relationships and patterns to make sense of information’. To do this, they relate it to their past unique experiences and the current environmental context and interactions. They describe ideas of disequilibrium and self-organisation as central to knowledge acquisition. Disequilibrium is ‘when the original state of equilibrium is disturbed’. So when a learner meets new information that is confusing or disturbing, he or she enters a mental state of disequilibrium. This state is reconciled when ‘the learner moves to a broader or more inclusive notion’ (Caine & Caine, 1991).

Transfer of learning and the development of intellect are the most important reasons for designing concept-based curriculum and instruction models (Erickson, 2008). Transfer of learning supports new learning, and retrieval of past understandings as a student travels their own educational journey.

To prepare our students for life beyond school and a life of contribution and service, we provide the advantage of the open-ended study of topics and encourage a liberal, broad-based curriculum that addresses the central developmental aspects and skills of the curriculum. These are known as enduring understandings and ensure experiences and judgments of what a student knows and what a student can do. The design of curriculum and instruction enables students to take increasing responsibility for constructing their own knowledge.
It is essential that the randomness of current thinking in education, the busyness of knowledge and the presentation of facts in the media, does not disorder our students’ individual learning journeys. A young woman’s education is ultimately about her slow, measured accumulation of facts, skills, an understanding of her own learning, and the getting of wisdom, imagination and integrity. This education will prepare her to go on and create a world for all women, as it should be, rather than as it is.

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Looking back on my childhood and adolescent life through the lens of today's standards of safety and risk minimisation, I feel lucky to be alive. It seems everything my friends and I did outside school was high risk. We loved climbing trees and playing on dangerous playground equipment, we rode bikes without brakes and helmets, rode in cars without seatbelts, ate food without use-by dates, enjoyed fireworks on Guy Fawkes night and engaged in neighbourhood combat games, to name a few. It was a life of freedom, exploration and creativity, where survival depended on awareness of danger, quick thinking and reliance on others.

At school the daily routine was strict, limited in scope and highly regulated with rules for everything. We marched into class daily to a rousing Sousa march, and sat in straight rows, chanting tables, memorising spellings and historical dates, and always motivated by fear of corporal punishment. Regulation textbooks provided all we needed to learn and any extension was to be found in the *World Book Encyclopedia*. Weekly tests were common and if the textbook was studied, good grades would follow. In short, creativity, individuality, research, problem solving and risk taking were not part of school life. There was no love of learning and the accumulation, reproduction and recall of facts and knowledge were the hallmarks of a successful scholar.

Fortunately, in 2014 our awareness of personal safety has significantly developed, and in schools, progressive educators understand and encourage creativity, exploration and risk taking as essential elements of educating young people — so students today live in a safer world in terms of both personal safety and educational outcomes.

In McWilliam and Taylor's 2012 paper, *Personally Significant Learning*, they discuss the significant changes brought about by the digital revolution, the dramatic effect it has had on the education of young people and the unpredictability of their future. They argue teachers cannot continue to ask young people to remember lots of discipline-bound ‘stuff’ but build their capacity to thrive in a very different world. They suggest students need a broad net of creative capabilities as learners but most importantly among these capacities is a ‘disposition to welcome the instructive complications of error making, rather than simply “playing safe” through passive imitation and memorization’.

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**Risk taking: The catalyst for achievement**

**Mark Sullivan, Director of Instrumental Music | 7 November 2014**

*The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experiences* (Eleanor Roosevelt).
GABRIELLE CALLOW / 9E (DETAIL)
They go on to say that ‘learning matters more than knowing’ and the best teachers can do ‘is to ensure our young people develop a high-functioning disposition to learn and to make smart choices about what, how, where, and when they learn’. According to McWilliam and Taylor, this will require the ability to unlearn and relearn, which will mean choosing the discomfort of unfamiliar concepts and new ways of thinking and doing:

The way forward for schools is to maintain the high level of learning support we now know to be appropriate, but to increase our expectations of kids in terms of risk taking and innovativeness. This means, among other things, designing tasks that allow kids to ask better questions, not just give correct answers. It also means that high praise is not easily or quickly won, because complex task design militates against instant or easy success. Support is high but so too are expectations and challenges (McWilliam & Taylor, 2012).

With these thoughts in mind I set about preparing the Brisbane Girls Grammar School Chamber Orchestra for their performance at the Brisbane Grammar School String Fest. String Fest is an annual event where the most advanced string orchestras in the State prepare very challenging repertoire to perform as individual orchestras as well as together as a festival orchestra.

The professional model of orchestra rehearsal is of the all-knowing conductor who, like a puppet, master directs every aspect of the music, instructing, cajoling, scolding and inspiring his charges to a perfectly executed performance of his interpretation of the composer’s work. Similar to the twentieth century model of teaching, this is a very safe model for the high school orchestra or band as the responsibility for success rests largely with the conductor who also provides a sense of comfort, security and confidence for the players, particularly under the pressure of performance. With McWilliams and Taylor’s work at the forefront of my thinking and their exhortation to raise the bar on risk and challenge, I replaced the Sage on Stage with the Meddler in the Middle and transferred the full responsibility for the final performance to each individual player, so every student would experience learning as personally significant.

After selecting the musically and technically challenging piece, the Moorside Suite by Gustav Holst, and spending some initial rehearsal time on survival mode learning notes and rhythms, I shocked the players by announcing the festival performance would be un-conducted. When the initial crisis of confidence subsided, it became obvious that the challenge was accepted, and a new spirit of personal engagement emerged at rehearsals.

The cooperative learning model outlined in Gillies and Cunnnington’s 2014 paper Cooperative Learning: The behavioural and neurological markers that help to explain its success, was put in place. The orchestra was divided into small groups; diverse in age, instruments, and performance standard and each was set the task to work together to perfect all aspects of the music. The important musical elements were identified and all students were given permission to stop the rehearsal any time they felt something needed to be addressed. Every student was expected to have a voice on both technical and musical aspects in this collaborative learning environment. My role was a listening and observing one, asking questions to promote reflection, critical thinking, and clarification of technical issues, but always allowing each group to work independently. This strategy is designed for small groups to work together on a defined goal to develop group ownership, individual responsibility, small group communication skills, critical analysis skills, exploration of strategies, and social interaction.

Each rehearsal concluded with all groups coming together to play and critique the sections that had been rehearsed, to reflect on progress made and to identify aspects that required further work. These sessions were crucial for section leaders to learn how to be active leaders and for the group to build cohesion, trust and confidence in each other.

The second major strategy was a radical departure from traditional thinking, turning the structure of specific sections within the orchestra upside down. Each player was asked to sit next to a player who did not play the same part. This was a real challenge for those who relied on their desk
partner for confidence and security, but it enabled players to gain a greater understanding of how other parts fitted into the texture and more importantly, developed individual responsibility in a high-challenge, low-threat environment. There was nowhere to hide as every member realised they were of equal importance to the outcomes of the group.

As the process developed, so did the level of confidence in achieving the task as well as the frequency of questioning and discussion on many aspects of performance including intonation, dynamics, sound production, balance, bowing, articulation, interpretation and style. There was a unity of purpose, with every player striving for individual perfection for the sake of the group.

Achieving a successful performance for a musical ensemble requires exceptional levels of execution and refinement — close to 100 per cent — on so many variables, from every player. One small error can create a domino effect that can easily derail the whole performance. With a conductor, such errors can be quickly rectified with little or no impact on the performance, but without a conductor, the risk of failure is very high with all players requiring acute concentration and listening skills, as well as the confidence to make an instant decision to retrieve a difficult situation.

At the final rehearsal there were a number of difficult transitions and tempo changes that were not completely secure, filling nervous minds with concern and doubt. This led to a discussion about the goal to perform un-conducted. The fact that the conversation was brief and with little appetite to retreat from the original goal that had been relentlessly pursued over the past month, was an indication to me the project was successful regardless of the outcome of the performance.

With renewed confidence and determination, the orchestra produced a dynamic, musical and near-faultless performance, leaving the stage to tumultuous applause and a deep sense of personal achievement and emotional satisfaction for each player.

Risk taking is an essential part of adolescent life. Without risks young people will never learn about their own capabilities or the joy of achieving against the odds. However, it can be dangerous in learning as well as in broader life. While the rewards can be exhilarating, as experienced at the recent Gala Concert, there is also uncertainty, ambiguity, doubt and the real possibility of failure. For students who take up the challenge, persist at the task, identify their deficiencies and remedy them, and understand that struggle is a natural part of learning, they are developing the growth mindset that is essential for success in both academic and personal life.

Without the pressure of competitions or the imperative of achieving high marks on the test, the Instrumental Music Programme at Brisbane Girls Grammar School provides students at all levels of technical development with the ideal safe environment where they can take risks that will develop their talents, abilities and growth mindset, and ultimately experience the pleasure of the rigour of learning. ■
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August this year marked 100 years since the start of World War I. Four years and three months on from that date, in 1918, on a cold, wet, European autumn morning, a weary and bitter peace was forged at the end of this devastating conflict. But amidst the ravages of lost lives, lost lands and lost civilisation, there were some pearls of humanness to remember the hope of humanity. Memories and remains, of art, of music, and of theatre, brought to life in an ugly theatre of war.

From time to time during the war, military authorities would send in official entertainment: vaudeville and theatre troupes, musicians as well as the official war artists to record the story of war in images. But what of the unofficial, the non-professional, the arts generated by those in the midst of fighting? Art that happened, appeared and formed out of the hearts and minds and hands of soldiers and sailors at the front line. This is not a story about official and professional arts in World War I. The arts in many forms — music, art, theatre, and poetry — are ever present in war zones. In World War I, life in the trenches of Gallipoli and the Western Front in France was mostly the unrelenting thunder of gunfire and shelling; noise and fear and adrenalin, interspersed with spells of quieting of weapons and of minds. The enemy was often only a matter of metres across a no man’s land; at times within conversation distance, at times killing each other face to face. On the Western Front, the trenches zigzagged across the countryside for over 700 kilometres. Rat-infested, dry or muddy or frozen holes that were a cruel kind of home for months on end. Rotting clothes, rotting body — all enough to deaden the human spirit.

But we know differently.

There is another story of how chaos and murderous catastrophe cannot defeat the human soul, which will always strive to express itself, ourselves, to articulate our grief and to create beauty, even perhaps a sad form of beauty to sustain and to renew the spirit.

Imagine these stills of life in the war beyond and in spite of battle: a shiny gramophone player gleaming in the mud and squalor of a trench, sending music into the air and into the spirits of troops; a piano found in a dugout offering music and song to weary soldiers; pocket books of poetry in a soldier’s coat; and journals written in the hands of those in the fighting lines to tell the stories of this war life. Shakespeare performed in an abandoned barn, candle light serving as inadequate stage lighting, maybe even a slam poetry session or two, sketches, scenes drawn in tiny diary notebooks or illustrating a letter home, bits of coloured crayon in an old tobacco tin.

All providing a space to smile, to remember home, to recall another life, to imagine peace.

There is the story of a piano left in the small town of Millencourt in the Somme area of France, an area of intense and prolonged fighting; left behind as the family fled the bombardment and destruction of their town. Australian soldiers attempting to defend the town found...
the piano in the basement where the family had hidden their treasured instrument before leaving, hoping against hope that it might survive the onslaught of battle. In between the bouts of fighting, the Australian soldiers got the piano up onto the street, wrapped it in blankets and clothing found abandoned, and then began an exercise in what might be thought of as pure folly — to move the piano away from this battle zone — to save the piano. This required some ingenuity and our soldiers had plenty of this.

So they devised a makeshift wheelbarrow and pushed the piano on this unsteady contraption along the road, out of town. Without brakes or steering the piano had a bit of a rough journey, at one stage ending up in a ditch. But that night it was a prized and surprise gift for soldiers camped just out of reach of battle lines — the entertainment medium for that evening; an impromptu concert providing a happy release and relief from battle. The next day, the soldiers continued their piano delivery to a neighbouring village where they found the owners in refuge and a happy reunion of piano and family took place.

This part of the war story, the arts story, may have been quietly told down the years, but it is not silent. The arts that found voice on the battlefields of World War I, resounded through the years.

For example, at the end of the war, the first exhibition of art created by soldiers and sailors in battle was held in London.

But it doesn’t end there.

Out of the mayhem of this war came inspiration for great works, significant art movements that crossed theatre, literature, music and art. Surrealism crossed all the arts, and gained momentum from the nightmare and waste of war, continuing over the decades to be a major and historical art movement of enduring influence.

Artists and seminal works of art came out of the experiences and memories of this war. Let me cite a couple of examples.

Ian Fairweather — an artist we claim as our own in Queensland, although he was a man of many countries and cultures — spent time in a German prisoner of war camp illustrating and sketching and determining from then on his future as an artist.

Concert pianist Paul Wittgenstein, an Officer in the Austrian army, lost his right arm in battle and after the war, commissioned the French composer Ravel to write a concerto for left hand only, a truly inspirational work, still performed today.

Erich Maria Remarque had been a soldier fighting in the German army and his post-war work is the haunting and poetic novel he wrote from his first-hand experiences, the celebrated All Quiet on the Western Front; a monumental piece of literature.

Bertolt Brecht’s brief time at the front contributed in no small way to his ideas and to his development of theatre of the absurd.

Then there is the poetry.

The patriotic poetry of Rupert Brook, the pacifist poetry of Wilfred Owen — powerful thoughts and words generated by war.

On Remembrance Day we often recite the iconic poem penned by the Canadian soldier John McCrae after he presided over the funeral of his friend, killed in battle in 1915 on the Western Front:

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\text{In Flanders Field}
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\[
\text{In Flanders Fields the poppies blow}
\]

\[
\text{Between the crosses, row on row}
\]

\[
\text{That mark our place; and in the sky}
\]

\[
\text{The larks, still bravely singing, fly}
\]

\[
\text{Scarce heard amid the guns below.}
\]

1916 was the year of the long and horrendous battle of Verdun in north east France; ten months of bitter fighting between the French and German armies for control of the supply line to the Western Front. They say at least 70 000 casualties for each month. In 1928, French filmmaker Leon Poirier directed his moving and epic silent film recreating this battle and his film will screen this month in the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art cinema, attesting to
the enduring legacy of the arts that arose out of the First World War.

There are no borders to the arts.

The arts confirm our connections to each other beyond enmity and suffering.

History tells us that the victory of war is short lived, sometimes an illusion. But we do know that there is a longer living victory in that of creativity, of artistic expression of the universal soldier, of every woman and man.

Over twenty million perished in this the First World War — the war they called the Great War — the war that was supposed to end all wars. Twenty million and still counting.

Twenty million souls who continue to speak to us through the millions of artistic expressions that so many of them gave us, inspired in us — then, later and now.

In 1914, Laurence Binyon wrote his poem *For the Fallen*. We know well the fourth stanza, the ode recited as a lasting memorial to those we remember in all wars, in all conflicts.

Please stand for the ode, the Last Post, and one minute of silence followed by the Rouse.

_They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:_
_Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn._
_At the going down of the sun and in the morning,_
_We will remember them._
Valuing professional mindsets

DR KAY KIMBER, DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
| 13 NOVEMBER 2014

Our Year 12s are standing on the cusp of their professional lives. When those final assemblies marking the end of their secondary schooling conclude, they will be poised to commit to the tertiary studies that will shape the nucleus of their professional identity. This article proposes that in their career transformations beyond the picket fence, a layering of the concept of professional mindsets could well prove to be a lynchpin for their continued professional growth.

Frequently in our work with pre-service teachers at Brisbane Girls Grammar School, we promote the mantra, Protect the personal; project the professional. With these words, the aspiring teachers are prompted towards mindful consideration of every moment — to respect the fragility of the private-public boundary and to act professionally at all times. To move beyond the student identity they have comfortably inhabited for at least sixteen years, they need to try on the mantle of their own professional identity. While its fabric is undisputedly their subject expertise, to wear this mantle well, they also need to adopt particular ways of acting, thinking and being.

According to Hargreaves (2000), a professional identity involves both ‘being professional’ and ‘being a professional’ (p. 152). While the former equates to acting according to accepted standards and beliefs, the latter requires an individual to be sensitive to how their actions might be perceived by others. Hargreaves’ parameters indicate how a professional identity is all-consuming — a total way of being — one where actions and standards of behaviour must bring credit to one’s chosen profession and one’s own status across a professional lifetime. Yet indications of the kinds of career opportunities awaiting our Year 12s suggest the essence of ‘being professional … [and] being a professional’ is becoming more challenging.

In recent years we have been led to understand the prospect of several career changes await our young people throughout their working lives. Forbes (2013) has noted ‘the traditional, single-track career pattern of the last century (think ladder) is now more difficult to find’ (p. 1). Two distinct trends in career shaping, particularly for young people, have already emerged: ‘portfolio careers’ (Forbes, 2013) and ‘slashers’ (Nathanson, 2012). These concepts embrace multiple professions, passions and interests. The first draws together chronologically sequenced career positions or successive short-term contracts into one portfolio. By contrast, the slasher holds concurrent positions, either by choice or necessity. Both types of career-shapers demand multiple sets of knowledge bases, efficient organisational skills, and social adaptability. Both prompt speculation on whether such a phenomenon will shape or fracture the development of a robust professional identity.

In the ‘ladder’ career-progression scenario, a person progressively builds her professional identity, simultaneously establishing credibility and status within that profession. The exponential growth of technological advances and social media innovations, however, creates an additional challenge...
for the portfolio and slasher devotees. This challenge lies in the virtual intersection of private and public worlds.

Our information economy has spawned a highly visible, tarnishable, reputation economy, one that has fallen hostage to the blurring of public-private boundaries. Essentially more a cultural shift than a technological one, its reality is with us now. Instances of supposedly private postings of images or comments on social media reaching the attention of employers, current or future, have been publicised, often with sad consequences. Mindfulness of knowing what and when to post should govern the content and focus of actual and virtual conversations more than it does. Connectivity does facilitate social and professional networks, but one can never forget that digital footprints can never be erased. Rather, they can unexpectedly haemorrhage into professional lives. In this reputation economy, one circulated in virtual as well as real-world action, professional identities can be negatively (and positively) impacted by lack of mindfulness — in nanoseconds. This is where the concept of professional mindsets could become the lynchpin.

In conceptualising ‘professional mindsets’, I draw on the notions of professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), quality conversations (Scott, 2009), and deep, active listening (Scharmer, 2007). All three promise a focused layering to being a professional. They help balance thought and action for strengthening workplace relationships and reputations.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) couched the building of professionalism in economic terms. For these respected educators, the value of the professional cannot be gifted or bought; rather, its status is earned through personal investment. In fact, it is the manner of development, circulation and reinvestment that determines its ultimate value. Its accrual requires three kinds of capital investment: human, social and decisional. The character of human investment is always unique, reflecting the talents, qualifications and experiences of the individual; however, it is the strength of that individual’s social and decisional capital that can elevate or sink their professional status or reputation.

Hargreaves and Fullan’s ‘social capital’ concerns relationships, conversations, trust, respect and consistency of behaviour. Its worth can be measured by the frequency and focus of conversations between team members. Scott (2009) would agree, conflating relationships and conversations. She cautioned that ‘while no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a company, a relationship, or a life — any single conversation can’ (p. 15).

For Scott, this interrelationship was cast as ‘emotional capital’ and ‘your most valuable currency’ (p. 20). She cited research with more than 300 top-level executives from fifteen global companies that showed how ‘emotional competencies’ (p. 76) distinguished the stars from the average team players. By recognising the importance of maintaining quality control of the focus of conversations, workplace and personal relationships can also be enhanced.

Significantly, it is ‘decisional capital’ that confirms the measure of one’s professional reputation and status. Yes, options in complex situations need to be weighed up and judgements based on professional knowledge, experience and evidence. From inspired and innovative to difficult and competent, everyday and especially long term, the impact of good and bad decisions cannot be underestimated. Professionals’ decisional capital enables them ‘to make wise judgements where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence to guide them’ (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 94). Through self-listening or self-questioning, the quality of that actual or virtual conversation can be improved, and thus the quality of the relationship and one’s social and decisional capital.

How can self-listening help? Otto Scharmer (2007) claimed that our own ‘voice[s] of judgment, cynicism and fear’ (pp. 42-3) block our receptiveness to other viewpoints or actions, each in different ways. He urged people to recognise and eliminate their own obstacles to active or ‘deep listening’. Perhaps the listener is not open to other ideas because her habitual ways of acting are considered to be the best and only way to act. Perhaps the should-be listener actually becomes a rarely-listened-to because she is a compulsive or high-volume talker who effectively closes down any opportunity for hearing other perspectives of value. Self-critical classification of talk-in-action (or talk-before-action)
helps stimulate the quality of one’s critical reflection and conversation, as well as the future quality of one’s professional relationships.

Perhaps the ideas outlined here could be explored in family conversations. Test the merit of the claim that we live in a reputation economy tied to media power. Speculate on how the world of work might impact future career options or advancement. Debate the validity of human, social and decisional capital for thinking about the forging of professional identity beyond a university qualification.

Map those ideal thinking modes and attributes that could ideally trigger the launch of highly successful careers and enrich the value of one’s professional reputation.

In moving across and between multiple career paths, our aspiring young professionals may find many challenges, but by aiming to shape the consistency and depth of their own professional mindset from the beginning, they should be well-equipped to build robust professional identities with admirable reputations.

REFERENCES


Drug education: a community approach

ALICE DABELSTEIN, HEAD OF HIRSCHFELD HOUSE | 21 NOVEMBER 2014

During October, Brisbane Girls Grammar School and Brisbane Grammar School communities were fortunate to welcome back Mr Paul Dillon, for the fifth consecutive year. Founder of Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia and a former school teacher, Mr Dillon has been working in the field of drug education for more than twenty-five years. He works with many school communities across the country to ensure they have access to accurate information, including updates on current drug trends and best practice in drug education.

Mr Dillon values a whole community approach. For Girls Grammar this included separate presentations for our Year 10, 11 and 12 cohorts, as well as extremely informative sessions with teachers and parents. Similar messages are carried throughout his presentations, each creating a positive dialogue in the hope the conversation relating to drugs and alcohol will continue, most importantly, at the family dinner table.

Unfortunately, due to the busy time of year, fewer parents attended this year’s evening information session held at BGS, which is why Mr Dillon’s invaluable advice is reinforced within this article.

‘Adolescence is a period of intense growth not only physically but also morally and intellectually. “Teens” are often energetic, thoughtful and idealistic, with deep interest in what is fair and right’ (Dillon, 2014). Grammar girls are no exception. They are interested in collecting information that will help them look after themselves and each other. When Mr Dillon is introduced to the students every year it initiates unprompted applause. He has come to expect this ‘rock star’ welcome that he attributes only to Brisbane Girls Grammar School. Mr Dillon’s student presentations are engaging and confronting. He delivers a clear message of safety and sensible decision making, which complements the drug education program offered by the Girls Grammar Health and Physical Education (HPE) Faculty.

Our collective message is one of prevention and reduction of harm from drug use by building more resilient adolescents. We understand the importance of a whole school approach to building this resilience and developing social and emotional competencies. HPE includes the drug education units: ‘I Decide’ (Year 8), ‘Party Safe’ (Year 9) and ‘Get REDI’ (Year 10). These units focus on developing protective behaviours such as responsible decision making, calculated risk taking, the facts about drugs and the practical ‘how to look after your friends’. The Year 10 Heath and Physical Education unit aligns perfectly and purposefully with information imparted by Mr Dillon.

Presentations to Years 10 and 11 are themed primarily around alcohol: the facts and ‘what should I do if something goes wrong?’ Mr Dillon provides real life narratives of situations involving inappropriate ‘care’ and where help was not called for in time. ‘One of the best ways to reduce risk is to have as much information and then plan ahead’ (Dillon, 2014). When girls are in a situation
where one of their friends is unwell owing to alcohol, help involves accurate and appropriate assessment and action:

- Ask a responsible adult to help
- Get a bucket for them to hold if they are feeling sick
- Do not force them to drink a lot of water. Give them a little bottle of water and tell them to drink when they feel like it
- Watch them carefully. This involves sitting them up on a hard-back chair and sitting opposite to them. Tell them to keep their head up and encourage them to talk to you. If they look sleepy click and clap in front of them. If their head falls to one side and they cannot support themselves upright in the chair, seek further help
- An unconscious drunk is a medical emergency. Call for help immediately.

The constant message throughout all presentations was to delay the consumption of alcohol for as long as possible.

One topic that hit home for all students and parents was the effect of alcohol on the brain. Fortunately we now know more about the adolescent brain than ever before, and that it is only around eighty per cent developed. According to Carr-Gregg (2010), adolescent ‘brains are more susceptible than their adult counterparts to alcohol and other drugs. Binge drinking (drinking more than four standard drinks for females) has been found to result in a smaller hippocampus — the part of the brain involved in information processing, thus loss of potential’. Mr Dillon argues that because of this, females should not drink until twenty-one years of age (once the brain has completed construction). Statistics show there is a significant increase in drinking alcohol from Year 9 to Year 10, when adolescents demand more independence and want to ‘spread their wings’. Delaying their drinking for at least six months at this stage can make a huge difference.

Mr Dillon’s Year 12 presentation focused primarily on schoolies week and the laws surrounding alcohol and driving. In essence he told the students to ‘plan ahead, know the risks and be prepared’. Questions posed to the attentive audience included ‘Do you all have a copy of and have you each read your accommodation contract?’ and ‘Do you have an emergency plan?’ Mr Dillon also offered a strong word of advice to all Year 12s attending schoolies: contact (phone or message) your parents twice daily.

The statistics Mr Dillon showed at all presentations demonstrate the young people of Australia, for the most part, are making wise decisions in regard to alcohol and drug use. Over the past four years the trends have been promising. The 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that fewer twelve to seventeen-year-olds are drinking alcohol and the proportion abstaining from alcohol increased significantly between 2010 and 2013 (from sixty-four per cent to seventy-two per cent). However, while these statistics are indeed comforting for parents, tragic events still do occur. Every weekend one young person dies and in fifty per cent of these cases, it is the result of alcohol (NDSHS, 2013).

According to Mr Dillon, we are on the cusp of significant change. ‘While schools have a role to deliver education about the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse, it is firmly [the] parents’ role to deliver permissions and consequences for their children. Schools are a channel for information, getting targeted messages to parents, encouraging actions at specific times in their child’s development.’ All parents can really do is be there and do their best. Mr Dillon acknowledges that ‘there are a lot of different circumstances that will dictate how a parent responds to any problem that may arise’. However, in saying this, children still need parents who make the tough decisions, who accept not being ‘liked’, and who delay (delay, delay!) for as long as possible any alcohol consumption by their children. There is an expected shift in parenting from a high level of warmth and nurturing up to the age of ten, to a firm, high moral expectation and discipline through to at least sixteen years. Say no to your children regularly, follow up on consequences and encourage discussion about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

Put simply, if parents want to prevent or delay risky drinking or illicit drug use they should consider the following:
• Know where your child is and who she is with
• Keep informed and get involved in their lives
• Lead by example — you are their most powerful influence
• Keep the lines of communication open at all times, make it natural and let them talk. Promote positive norms. The majority of fifteen-year-olds classify themselves as non-drinkers
• Negotiate some rules about acceptable behaviour and set boundaries. Make your values absolutely clear and explain your reasons
• Tell your children they are great, at every opportunity. Focus on the positives.

Unfortunately no one part of the community can work in isolation. Schools can provide the information and quality pastoral care. Brisbane Girls Grammar School does this through our comprehensive House structure, support from our school Psychologists, Ethics lessons, Health and Physical Education classes and Marrapatta experiences. That said, schools cannot ‘fix’ the problem.

Parents are encouraged to actively engage in their child’s life in and outside of school. Mr Dillon was compassionate and practical in his delivery to our parents. Parents should not be ‘bullied’ by their teenage daughters. They need to hear ‘no’ regularly. The ‘tough love’ style of parenting, which combines warmth and discipline, is the most effective in ensuring against children developing an unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

For more information please visit: www.parentingstrategies.net or visit the Drug and Alcohol Research Training Australia website at www.darta.net.au

REFERENCES


As another year draws to a close and we look forward to the holidays and festivities, it is an ideal time to look back on the year and reflect on our experiences. This year has been one of a number of firsts for me: my first look at our new Year 7 students, eager to begin their journey at Girls Grammar in 2015; my first experience as a grandmother; and my first time attending the National Transplant Games.

Each experience has helped shape me in new and unfamiliar ways and has provided an opportunity to take a fresh look at people who are all beginning a new life. Each experience has also had its own particular flavour, and each has had its highs and lows; but they have all taught me to look at life differently, with renewed hope and a grateful heart. I would like to share some of my experiences this year and some of the important lessons in gratitude, perseverance and a positive approach to life, as they apply to us all at this busy time of year.

In September this year I attended the National Transplant Games in Melbourne. These are biannual sporting events where participants are organ and tissue transplant recipients. The opportunity came about through a new family friendship with Tom (not his real name). Twenty years ago, at the age of thirty, Tom was informed that his only chance in life was to have a kidney transplant. Luckily for Tom, after waiting a mere twenty-three months he received this gift of life. He now lives life to the fullest, and every two years, attends the Transplant Games, both nationally and internationally. This octogenarian still competes in the track and field events annually, as well as in bowls and swimming. His outlook on life, his attitudes to health and the daily counting of his blessings have been paramount to his success. What was a bleak situation has become a life-affirming event thanks to the kindness of others and his attitude to life. What struck me too, was just how much his grandchildren have gained by having him in their lives for all those years.

While each person had their own stories, those told by the children were some of the most poignant. Now aged ten, Jaime is healthy with a new liver; Beth with a new kidney; and so many more. These children were competing in several events with such determination and grit. I had to really look at myself and think of the number of times I have taken the easy way out. I had to marvel at their spirit and positive outlooks. These children, as well as their siblings there to support them, pushed themselves to the limit each day, showing what true winning really looks like.

Behind each of these stories, was of course, a sad back-story — the people who had lost their lives. There were many...
donor families present, but their sadness was offset by the thankfulness of the recipients. Each donor and their families were honoured with tributes and ceremonies. The families had lost young children, teenagers, parents and partners, but from each death came such a gift of life.

A theme running throughout the games was ‘discover, decide, discuss’, aimed at encouraging members of the public to find out about organ and tissue donation, decide whether they would be prepared to do it, and to discuss their decision with their families. While this initially seemed maudlin, it did prompt me to reconsider my own decisions and to look at my life, and the life of others, differently.

These reflections on the Transplant Games are part of my journey of self-discovery. They have, along with many other experiences, shaped my life this year. Preparing to welcome a whole cohort of new Year 7 girls to our School, and seeing their excitement, anticipation, and in some cases trepidation, has also certainly enriched my year. I have met both the Year 7 and 8 girls from Gibson House, and have spoken to them about the importance of embracing new opportunities. We will also spend a considerable amount of time next year encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences and their learning; taking the time to reflect and grow.

Of course, the joy of becoming a grandparent and watching this new precious life discover the world around him, and being involved in his journey, has been the pinnacle of my year. What he has taught me is the value of perseverance. Watching him try to sit, stand and eventually walk, yet fall again and again; I can only marvel at his perseverance. The tears are short lived as his desire to learn takes over. We can learn so much from this.

As we come to the end of another busy and productive year, it is fitting to reflect on all that has occurred — to look at the good moments and to be grateful for them, and to look at those moments that were not our finest, and to learn from them too. Most importantly, it is a time to look into ourselves and begin to reimagine a new year, where we take every opportunity offered and live our lives to their full potential. Let’s all practise gratefulness, perseverance and joyful anticipation this holiday. I look forward to beginning a new year with you all in 2015, where together, we will start out on a new journey.