

## **Creativity – and a high regard for the concept of scholarship**

Amanda Bell. 3 April 2009

*Students must choose between being a good scholar or a good student as ... the school system rarely encourages them to be both - Dr Mark Lopez [1]*

Dr Mark Lopez was speaking at the Sydney Institute last week on teaching history. But his words resonate alarmingly for all teaching. The debate has been rigorous and relentless regarding national testing of students and the dangers of undermining the importance of continual development of rich curricula and innovative, deep learning experiences as opposed to “teaching to the test”.

Leaders in the profession know that well trained, well resourced, enthusiastic, supported and engaged teachers will devise exceptional and relevant programmes for their students to capture their imagination and develop the all important content understanding combined with sound problem-solving techniques. Imposed requirements being considered by governments on mandatory subjects, hours of instruction, testing and reporting can have the potential to dominate the independence of schools to implement appropriate curricula for their clientele and interfere with the continuity and incremental development of good teaching and learning programmes.

Unfortunately, an emphasis on testing to satisfy government benchmarking can also unduly influence parental and student expectations about what schools should deliver and how subjects should be taught. The teaching and learning process is then in danger of becoming results orientated, rather than individually developmental. While assessment has its place in the overall education process, and it certainly forms an important function for assisting students and their teachers to devise strategies for remediation, improvement and extension, it should not drive the education agenda. Lopez further warned that “students who decided to pursue high marks had to be prepared to sacrifice opportunities to develop their intellect and creativity.”

The Queensland Government has named 2009 the Year of Creativity:

*Creativity is an essential skill for all young people in the 21st century. Creative skills will help solve world issues such as climate change, disease and famine, drive innovation and technology across the globe, as well as tackle more local issues including improved public transport and skill shortages. It will promote productivity and growth in new industries, and generate social benefits including improved learning outcomes and greater appreciation and respect for others. All schools and teachers have a key role in fostering creativity in their students. Creativity should be developed across all areas of the school curriculum - from science, mathematics, technology, and humanities to the arts.[2]*

If all schools and teachers are to rise to this challenge and ensure our students develop their creative capacity, then they are going to have to focus on developing the concept of scholarship and a high regard for what it stands for-and certainly not just be concerned with teaching for benchmarking. Easier said than done when competition between schools and systems is fostered through comparative results published in the media.

Professor Erica McWilliam, at a recent forum on Creativity and Innovation[3], made the point that while you can't *teach* creativity, teachers are part of the wider creative workforce and as such, can be “epistemologically agile” and inspire imagination in their students. McWilliam also believes that teachers should equally inspire pleasure in their

students for the "rigour of thinking"- "low threat" in thinking results in a low challenge for the learner-and both teachers and learners must be challenge rich.

As with Courtesy, Respect and Responsibility-our focus in 2008, Challenge and Imagination are the two words Brisbane Girls Grammar has chosen to guide our thoughts for students and staff alike this year. The importance of challenging ourselves and ideas is important to retain active engagement in learning and building resilience in overcoming difficult concepts and problem-solving. Failure is and should be a part of experiencing demanding challenges, and many believe that the richest and most effective learning arises from reflections on one's failures. Partnered with a positive approach to challenge is the ability to be imaginative when overcoming obstacles. The time to be imaginative can be empty of stimuli, or may be filled with inspiration-perhaps through poetry, music, art or the natural world-but whatever excites the imagination will create the formation of new thoughts and ideas.

By challenging our young women to enjoy the difficulty of rigorous thinking and encouraging them to find imaginative solutions to dilemmas will hopefully ensure this School develops scholars rather than merely students.

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*Dr Amanda Bell is Principal of Brisbane Girls Grammar School. This article was published on the BGGGS Website in April 2009 <http://www.bggs.qld.edu.au/?p=5333>*

#### **References**

[1] Justine Ferrari, 'Scholar Student, but not both, says Mark Lopez', The Australian, March 25 2009

[2] <http://yearofcreativity.deta.qld.gov.au/>

[3] Independent Schools Queensland, Centre for Educational Leadership and Innovation, Creativity and Innovation: Possibilities, Practices, Partnerships, 3-4 March, 2009