CRI TICAL ISSUES I

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Schools are not only being asked to produce students ready for the ‘creative economy’, they are expected to be creative and innovative in the way they deliver a 21st century education. Here, 11 schools describe programs or practices they have introduced that are making a difference to students or staff and the work they do.

CREATIVITY & INNOVATION
WHOLE OF SCHOOL

NURTURING A CREATIVE SCHOOL
Mentone Girls’ Grammar School, Mentone, VIC

Mentone Girls’ Grammar School is a day school for girls, with 700 students from early learning to Year 12. Principal: Mrs Fran Reddan.

NURTURING a creative school is something that takes persistence and energy. It is a matter of conscious choice and disciplined action, a blend of perennial ‘professional discontent’ with the status quo and ‘productive paranoia’ (Collins & Hansen 2011).

Ideas matter

At Mentone Girls’ Grammar School, we have been on a path of highlighting creativity and of making it visible in all its many forms. From School Council to staff at every level, we nurture creative thinkers and encourage colleagues to ‘think outside the square’. Ideas matter: from strategic planning to the details of classroom practice, our people value ideas. Because they value ideas, they have lots of them, and these have a powerful impact on the directions of the School and also on teaching and learning practices.

As a focus of our professional learning activities, staff members have learnt how to harness a creative thinking process, a powerful system where they are able to ‘dream, design, decide and do’ in every aspect of life and work. Important in this process has been learning as individuals to suspend judgment so as not to crush a fragile new idea. Staff members also gain confidence from knowing that they are part of a community that fosters action, and that time spent coming up with creative ideas won’t go to waste.

Creativity in the curriculum

With the benefit of a single K-12 campus, we see the creative journey of our students as an adventure travelled through every area of the curriculum. This vision has even influenced the building of our new Creative Learning Centre, where innovative architecture and curriculum design for Years 7 and 8 students make a powerful statement about the importance of creativity at the School.

From a student’s earliest years at the School, we promote and unify the use of higher-order thinking skills, emotional engagement, motor development and intercultural and ethical considerations. Howard Gardner’s Five minds for the future (Gardner 2006) provides the theoretical framework for our approach to creativity, aligned with the priorities described in our WAVES development program: promoting the Wellbeing, Achievement, positive Values, Enterprising nature and Success of young women in their globalised world.

Gardner describes the kind of ‘Mentone girl’ we are trying to develop into a ‘remarkable woman’:

The creator stands out in terms of temperament, personality and stance. She is perennially dissatisfied with current work, current standards, current questions, current answers. She strikes out in unfamiliar directions and enjoys — or at least accepts — being different from the pack. When an anomaly arises... she does not shrink from that unexpected wrinkle, indeed she wants to understand it and to determine whether it constitutes a trivial error, an unrepeatable fluke, or an important but hitherto unknown truth. She is tough skinned and robust... Only a person who is willing to pick herself up and ‘try and try again’ is likely to forge creative achievements. (Gardner 2006; page 83)

Flexible learning spaces that work well for how girls like to learn, and an innovative use of iPad technology, have also contributed to our development of an innovative trans-disciplinary curriculum that also respects the importance of excellence in the subject disciplines.

For example, creative approaches in mathematics and science promote inquiry based on logical thinking, experimentation and problem solving. We believe it is vital to nurture inquiry in the key STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics from a very early
age, which for us begins in our Early Learning Centre (ELC). Across our ELC and Junior School, we incorporate the fundamentals of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program with the scope and sequence of the Australian Curriculum. We also utilise our single campus model and the strong relationship we have between Junior and Senior Schools to ensure our Junior students benefit from our dedicated facilities and the extensive knowledge of our specialist STEM teachers.

Our STEM focus advances at each age and stage, with dedicated STEM classes from Year 5. Key questions such as ‘What if?’ form the basis of the creative pedagogical approach. With learning based on the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s e5 Instructional Model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate), students also develop much deeper creative thinking and comprehension.

In English, our students ‘Live the Text’, a method of studying texts developed to cater specifically for the needs of girls and ensure maximum interest and participation. Students immerse themselves in the text. This can mean taking on the language and traits of the characters at all times, writing and performing songs and essays or developing a range of products with quotes from the book. As a result, student learning of the text is happening all the time, intentionally and subconsciously.

Still learning

We are still learning about human biology, genetics, the potential of technology and the workings of the human brain and, as we learn more, we will understand more about how we can contribute to the development of people who can lead productive, creative lives. We are called to develop remarkable people who will understand that the key to overcoming challenges is not a well-learnt answer; the key is quality thinking that generates brilliant questions that then become stepping stones to breakthrough ideas.

FRAN REDDAN
PRINCIPAL, MENTONE GIRLS’ GRAMMAR SCHOOL

REFERENCES
