The child psychologist, Michael Carr-Gregg, recently in the *Sydney Morning Herald* agreed that society's desire to shield children from risk may be doing more harm than good.1

“Children might have fewer accidents because they're not playing outside but I worry about the effect on their mental health.” Carr-Gregg went onto say that “children need to fall out of trees or come off their bikes or simply endure disappointment to build resilience.”

I wonder how as educators we give our students an opportunity in their learning to “fall out of trees” and “come off their bikes” in a safe learning environment?

The challenge reminds me of Bruce Wilson’s reflections on failure:

“We have turned away from the notion of failure, but this has not made failure disappear. If children are to be given the chance to gain the most powerful possible learning, we must be able to expose them to the risk of failure, help them understand failure and success, and support them in trying again at something which has so far defeated them.”

Experience tells me the notion of failure and disappointment is somewhat unpalatable and unfashionable in an adolescent’s journey through high school. Arguably, parents at times act as ‘helicopter parents’ and in trying to protect their children from feeling disappointment they have unintentionally added to, and become part of, the problem.

King Suddhodana raised his son in great luxury and shielded him from knowledge of human suffering. The Prince reached the age of 29 with little experience of the world outside the walls of his luxurious palace. It was only once the young Prince, through his curiosity, left the Palace that he realised the realities of old age, disease, and death. It was in this letting go that the journey of enlightenment had begun.

Our students, like the young Buddha, need to leave ‘their Palaces’ so they can ‘come off their bikes’ and feel disappointment and pain in their learning. This wisdom will serve them well as they become global citizens in the 21st Century. As educators we too need let go of some our thinking and practices for this to happen.

“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined” – Matthew 9:17

For too long we have trained our students to be afraid of crossing out answers for fear of getting them wrong; or trained them to wait for us to arrive to class before learning can begin or continue. For too long our students have found the easy way out by giving up or getting mum to ring up and complain to the school because of a poor exam result; or our students have expected their teachers to do the thinking for them because it was too hard or they felt they couldn’t try.

Psychologist have even coined a phrase for this: ‘self-worth protection’ where students are saying they can’t do things even before they try them.

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1 Education Today – Term 4 2014

‘Letting them fall’ – promoting resilience through innovative practices

*John Muskovits, Assistant Dean and Director of Curriculum, Mount St Benedict College*
The lack of resilience for students in schools, and especially for girls, is on the rise.

A recent study in Norway defined resilience as "firstly, a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence; secondly, a belief in one's own self-efficacy and an ability to deal with change and adaptation; thirdly, a repertoire of problem solving approaches." A

Arguably, there has been an over emphasis by parents into their child's happiness and self-esteem in order to protect them from adversity. This protection paradoxically leads to the erosion, rather than the enhancement, of resilience. Carol Craig, Chief Executive for Confidence and Wellbeing, in Glasgow Scotland sums this up well when she says "how can we grow as individuals if we reject responsibility for our errors and don't learn from them?"

In this paper I will argue that innovative practices, will provide a foundation for our students to successfully problem solve, adapt and develop self-efficacy and thereby become more resilient in their learning and well-being. This will require from both teachers and students a shift from spoon-feeding to independent, creative and critical thinking; from consuming knowledge to co-creating and constructing it; and from pessimism to adopting a positive narrative.

School of Education, Visible Thinking course teachers are asked to explore how can they activate students' thinking to build understanding?" And how can they help students to think more critically and creatively at the same time? Regular use and documentation of thinking through The Routines® and Artful Thinking Palette® build an innovative culture of thinking in our learning spaces where the class, as well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking Routines Matrix</th>
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<td>From the upcoming book: Making Thinking Visible by Hatchett, Marrion &amp; Church (Spring 2011)</td>
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**Routine** | **Key Thinking Moves** | **Noise**
--- | --- | ---
Draw Think Wonder | Description, Rationalising & Visualising | Could yield a strong or complex visual sketch
What if? | Description, Inference & Interpretation | Variation in the reasoning stage, using only portions of an image
Think-Puzzle-Explore | Justifying prior knowledge, monitoring, planning | Think of a leading question for a puzzle or problem to explore and uncover new understanding as well as re-organise your thinking.
Curry Venn | Unifying prior knowledge and asking questions | Open-ended discussion on paper. Ensures all views are heard, given thinking time.
311 Bridge | Activating prior knowledge, questioning, planning & connecting | Work well when students have prior knowledge but challenge them in a new direction. Can be done over extended time like the course of a unit.
Compass Points | Decision making and planning, understanding personal priorities | Reduces the group's ideas and reactions to a proposal, plan or possible decision.
Explanation Games | Observing details and building explanations | Variations of SVT that focus on identifying parts and explaining them in order to build up an understanding of the whole from its parts and their purpose.

Routines for SYNTHESIZING & ORGANIZING IDEAS

| Routine | Key Thinking Moves | Noise |
--- | --- | ---
Heartline | Summarising, Capturing the Heart | Quick summaries of the main ideas or what stands out.
Circle Talk | Capturing the heart through metaphors | Not used until there is clarity & visual connections
decolonise-my-concept | Unifying and organizing prior knowledge to identify connections | Highlights the thinking skills of making an effective concept map that both organizes and reveals over thinking.
Correct-Erred-Challenge | Connection making, identifying new ideas, raising questions | Key thinking moves for dealing with new information in whatever form it might be presented: books, lecture, notes, etc.
The 5 C's | Connection making, identifying key concepts, raising questions, and considering implications | A tested routine that helps identify key concepts of complex text for discussion. Demands a rich text or book.
More Lab | A protocol for focused discussion | Can be combined with other routines and used to prompt reflection and discussion.
I used to Think | Reflection and re cognition | Used by teachers to assess how free thinking has shifted or changed over time.

Routines for DIGGING DEEPER INTO IDEAS

**What makes you say that?** | Measuring with evidence | A question that forces students to think more deeply about their evidence for their assertions.
Circles, Horizons | Perspective taking | Identifying of perspectives around an issue or problem.
Step inside | Perspective taking | Looking into a position and feeling of setting from that perspective to gain a deeper understanding of it.
Red Light, Yellow Light | Monitoring, Identification of true, raising questions | Used to identify possible errors in reasoning, over reasoning by authors, or areas that need to be questioned.
Claim Support Question | Identifying generalisations and theories, reasoning with evidence, counting arguments | Can be used with text or as a basic structure for mathematical and scientific writing.
Tag of War | Perspective taking, reasoning, identifying perspectives | Identifying and budging both sides of an argument or the problem.
Word-Phrase-Sentence | Summarising and de tiling | Text-based protocol aimed at eliciting what a reader found important and useful, used with discussion to look at themes and implications

**Who are we?**

**What do we believe?**

**What are we learning?**

**How will we know?**

**What are our next steps?**

---

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as the individual’s thinking is valued, visible and actively promoted. The routines challenge students to adopt a working hypothesis in their learning by taking risks, being curious, using play, and being confident to say “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure?” and let’s see how I can find out so I can understand.

Visible ‘Thinking used strategically in a culture that values risk taking in safety exposes students and teachers to the risk of failure, helps them understand failure and success, and supports students in trying again at something which has so far puzzled or defied them. Vygotsky (1978) brilliantly captured this idea of classroom cultural forces when he wrote: “Children grow into the intellectual life around them.” When innovation reflected through risk taking, flexibility, play, problem solving, and learner agency become the norm then resilience and independence will flourish.10

“Teachers demonstrate that they are learners too” is one of the UK Harris Student Commission’s ‘12 early ideas about learning.’11 When teachers become learners and reflect on their success and failings in their teaching then this will lead to a learning which the Hungarian Czikszentmihalyi describes as “flow” where students are so absorbed in their learning that they are in the moment and immersed in the present: resilient; independent; and engaged.12

The work of Martin Seligman, a founding father of Positive Psychology, and more recently a solution focused approach to wellbeing and learning grounded in Positive Education is an effective framework for dealing with students’ lack of resilience.

A meta-analysis conducted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning and Loyola University Chicago9 showed that:

“Social and emotional learning programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school…and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades.”

The Solution-focused questions can help students identify what their preferred learning and results will look like when they have overcome their problems or challenges. They help the students notice things in their learning that they are in the moment and immersed in the present: resilient; independent; and engaged.10

If they have gone down the scale I would ask them:

“What did you do that helped you to move up the scale?”

If they have gone down the scale I would ask them:

“How have you prevented from going all the way down to 0?”

“What will be the first sign that things are heading back up the scale?”

This relationship centred approach is innovative as the questions are future orientated, not focusing on the past; operating from an achievement and not a deficit model; and from an optimistic not a pessimistic outlook. It embraces the premise of Carol Dweck’s Growth Mindset model,12 [as opposed to a fixed mindset] where:

“People believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.”

Being aware of this narrative first as teachers in our relationships with each other and then with our students will help equip them with the tools to deal with the bumps and bruises that inevitably come from ‘coming off their bikes’. Unsurprisingly, research commissioned by the UK Government, found “facilitating a safe space for dialogue and positive interaction” is one of key ingredients for resilience-building teaching activities.17

Valerie Hannon, Director of the UK Innovation Unit, in a white paper ‘Developing an Innovation Ecosystem for Education’ encourages blue sky thinking:

“While school improvement must continue to be pursued, simultaneously a ‘learning ecosystem’ should be created. Such a mutually supportive system would engage a much wider range of partners and players, and would locate learning in a new variety of spaces and places. The conditions needed to create such a system are suggested from the evidence of highly innovative sectors.”18

In was in this spirit that our College became involved, through an invitation from AITSIL, in their LearningFrontiers initiative which brings together clusters of schools and other interested parties in ‘design hubs’ to explore professional practices that increase student engagement in learning.19

The College, led by the MY Bennies Innovation Leader, has developed a Year 7 Integrated Project for next year with seven 54-minute periods allocated in a fortnight with classes divided into 21 students. Students will meet in half blocks in a flexible learning space that will support a diversity of visible learning.

There are three units for the year:

- Unit One: What Does It Mean to be a Bennies Girl? – Term 1–2;
- Unit Two: Going Global – Term 2–3;

The aim of the project, based on the AITSIL design principle of Integration, is for “integrated learning [to] use assessment… [in] a variety of forms, to inform and respond to the learning experience. Students undertake high quality projects that facilitate learning across subjects and offer choice as well as obligation.”

It is hoped that the concepts and spirit of this project can be scaled both within the hub and to the broader education community. We hope that the project is a vehicle through which our parent community can also develop meaning and a sense of purpose for their daughter’s learning [which resonates with the fourth component of the PERMA model] so they

Students will meet in half blocks in a flexible learning space that will support a diversity of visible learning

“What is happening now that was not happening at your previous number?”

“How have you been able to achieve that?”

“What did you do that helped you to move up the scale?”

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Left: Seligman's solution focused approach to well being: Year 9 Camp activity.
“accept that adversities are a natural part of life and so encourage, rather than retard, resilience”.22

Through implementing programs like the resilience doughnut,23 we aim to support the parents, especially those who, as Dr Wendy Mogel the author of The Blessing of a Skinned Knee and The Blessing of a B Minus, describes, “choose a different path to overprotection and can sometimes feel as though they are neglecting their children because they are ‘salmon swimming against the tide’ in society.”24

Failure in this endeavour may have far reaching consequences, as Dr Mogel continues: “Unless you do it, what happens is the kids are not prepared to go off to college or university because the parents have been at their side, the combination of a Sherpa, a butler, a concierge, the secret police, an ATM and a talent agent.”25

Through the innovative practices of the Harvard Visible Thinking Routines; A Solution Focused approach to wellbeing and learning; and the Year 7 Integrated Project I have shown how students and teachers are able to come out of ‘their Palaces’ so we can expose students to the risk of failure, and support them in trying again at something which has so far defeated them’.26

At the recent Year 12 Academic Award ceremony our Principal in her address quoted Winston Churchill: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts.” Perhaps as educators, we need to have the courage to let go a little of our teacher-centred classrooms, and take risks in implementing innovative practices, role modelling to our students that we do not know everything and that we too can learn from our failures.

Often it is building on the fruits of these failures and not our successes that we inspire in our students the courage to overcome, to dust themselves off and begin again. Just like they did when they first learned to crawl before they could walk and when their journey towards enlightenment began.

Readers are invited to make a comment by dropping an email to: jmuskovits@msben.nsw.edu.au

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