



Professional Learning
Research
Innovation

Learning in Practice

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About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Dr Brad Merrick is currently Director of Research in Learning and the Barker Institute. His PhD examined the influence of motivation and self-regulation on student understanding and learning. He has co-authored several music textbooks combined with scholarly chapters, articles and papers that explore emerging approaches to teaching and learning, most recently in the 'Oxford Handbook of Music Education' and 'The Routledge Companion to Music, Technology and Education'. He is the immediate Past Chair of the National Executive of the Australian Society for Music Education. His passion is examining new research, pedagogy and emerging practice in education.

The final interview of the Barker Journey: a glimpse inside the thoughts of our veterans from 2008-2017



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Abstract

In 2008, a study that investigated the journey of the then youngest members of our Barker Community, our Year 3 classes, has continued to examine the journey of these boys, both collectively and individually, through to their completion of Year 12 in 2017. Using a semi-structured interview combined with field notes and video footage, data was collected and analysed. This small collection of information reports on ways that their experiences shaped their character and, more importantly, how they understand their own learning as they reflect on their personal growth. This paper specifically focuses on the recent interview undertaken with the boys in Year 12 prior to departure from the School.

Background to the study

Towards the end of Term 3 2017, I concluded the remaining interviews with the 43 boys as they were completing Year 12. This was a considerably longer process than the interview undertaken in 2008. Whereas the original interviews took around five to six minutes in the Junior School, for many of the boys it was not uncommon to talk for well over half an hour to an hour of time as they reflected personally on a learning journey that many felt had disappeared in the blink of an eye. Here, the significance of the end point in the journey was not in any way lost, but rather quite a powerful means of drawing on the most personal and reflective insights of each boy. Each boy relived their journey since Year 3 and recounted their final recollections as they completed their final days prior to commencing their Higher School Certificate examinations.

This vignette of the research is a very brief, yet powerful reminder of the significant impact that the learning process has on the social and emotional development of each student, combined with the more tangible academic progress that tends to dominate the educational experience.

The data and discussion – The Year 12 experience

The students highlighted that this year had been 'the best year ever' and that 'they had enjoyed everything, their classes, the social aspect and the teachers'. As they reflected on their journey and what it had meant to them, there was an overwhelming sense of joy and gratitude for all that the Barker experience has constituted for them. This in turn opened my eyes regarding what learning signifies in the present day.

Their sense of pride in school and community

Interesting data emerged from the key questions around the relationships they had developed at school, combined with a sense of pride and value they felt for their Barker experience for which many were so grateful to be part of for the last ten years.

The impact and importance of working with a strong co-educational Senior School community and staff who really interact with and share their expertise was evidenced through so many of the responses including:

- The value of being around others and the friendships that they had made
- The ongoing feedback from teachers and the friendships has been great
- There is a strong sense of care from the teachers for each student
- Support received from peers and friends along the way
- The sense of personal connection with the teachers and students, a camaraderie that has brought the boys closer together as a year group

When the students were asked: "For what are you grateful?", the personal responses and reflections of the students highlighted the depth of their thought combined with the strong sense of appreciation that they all expressed for having had the opportunity to attend Barker:

- The experience of my entire education
- Growth as an individual
- Support of my parents
- Just coming to Barker
- The people and the teachers; their sheer commitment and passion
- Realising how much I have learned along the way
- Co-curricular activities, the sport, the sense of wellbeing and the community

Formation of the individual and their character

Towards the end of each interview, one of the questions asked to each participant was: "How do you feel that Barker shaped you as a person?" This question elicited a range of very personal responses about their time at the school:

- It has taught me about respect and friendship
- To be accepting of each other
- I have had role models around me
- The culture, the interaction and the values that form the whole School from Year 3
- It has shaped my moral compass, given me a building platform and allowed me to grow
- I have learned to avoid being brash and to respect the opinions of others
- It has fostered a sense of empathy and hard work which will stay with me

Although these only represent a selection of responses, the comments further highlight how the underlying values and interactions that each student experienced on a daily basis, impacted the individual character and personality of the participants whereby they were now acting out the virtues of their experiences, learnt both formally and informally during their time at Barker.

Reflecting on the Journey – How did it feel to the participants?

As the final section of each interview and as the discussion drew to a close, the participants were asked to provide a one-word answer to the following statement: “My Barker Journey has been ...”. In this one small, yet significant part of the interview, their considered responses (often witnessing the boys pause for a considerable length of time) were incredibly moving, amplifying the thoughts and sentiments that they had for the School and all that it had provided and challenged them with along the way. Here is a selection of keywords from the responses:

- Transformative, Insightful, Inspiring, A pleasure,
- Memorable, Amazing, Turbulent, Eye-opening,
- Unforgettable, Challenging, Sensational, Motivating,
- Extraordinary, Incredible, A rollercoaster, Thought—provoking, A gift.

Concluding Observations

Although only a glimpse of the journey completed by a series of young adults, this Year 12 interview clearly indicated the depth of connection and strong feelings that each boy had for the School, despite the fact that for each participant, the journey had its own unique direction combined with a myriad of similar curricular and co-curricular experiences, albeit quite varied in the way that each individual engaged in and allowed the various learning opportunities to shape their sense of being while also driving them to follow their dreams and passions.

Whether it was the aspirant Year 3 boy who had dreamt of being a NBA Basketball player and looked destined to fulfil his ambition as he was planning a move to a USA College next year, the small boy (now a more than six foot tall young man) who just told me that he was proud of becoming more confident in himself as an individual and that his journey has provided him with the skills to move into the world with a sense of belief, or the young man whose experience in the world of creativity and engineering had made him realise that his passion was now in clothing design, and that he intended to pursue this overseas, every unique and individual journey had the same characteristics of character formation and a personal sense of direction at the heart of their reflection.

Whether the students were sharing comments about the significant teacher they had been taught by in Year 4 who had impacted their respect for others, the myriad of musical and dramatic opportunities that allowed them to perform on stage and realise a totally different world of aesthetic experience, the camaraderie of their friends who shared notes and resources to assist them in their learning, the sense of collaboration and connectedness was continually presented throughout the range of personal and collective examples discussed in these interviews.

This ten-year Barker Journey Study has highlighted that education is so much more than marks, content, lessons or assessments alone. Rather, it includes a whole range of opportunities combined with an intricate web of memories, experiences, interactions and opportunities that shape the being of each student at the deepest level. The boys often noted that although they could not always recall exact detail of their Junior School years, the teachers, the guidance, the encouragement and sense of belief developed in their individual strengths and passion areas were all critical components in their early years.

As educators and parents, it is important to keep the broader definition of learning in perspective and to be mindful of the impact of so many experiences that shape each student. This study has highlighted the importance of reflecting on the past and connecting understanding in meaningful and purposeful ways. We should never underestimate just how much impact the environment has on the shaping of minds, character and aspirations of our future leaders.

The intention is to continue to track these students as they move beyond the Mint Gates and make their mark in society. We look forward to sharing more of the story in the years ahead as each member of this unique group of participants makes their mark on the world.

A unique and highly personal experience as a researcher, it has been a privilege to interview these boys over ten years, completing more than 470 interviews in total. I thank each student for their willingness to share their thoughts and insights between 2008-2017, allowing me to better understand how significant their educational experience was for them.

By sharing this information with the parents, staff and broader community in the recent months, it has reaffirmed the importance of a consistent and meaningful educational journey that allows each student to follow their passion, while also having a strong sense of purpose and direction. Most importantly, it has confirmed that for an individual to realise their capacity, the environment is a highly significant component of this journey. The boys who commenced at Barker in 2008 and completed their examinations in 2017 are testament to this indeed.



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