

## SHAPING SHARP MINDS

THINKING ABOUT THINKING IS THE FOCUS OF A NEW SCHOOL-WIDE PROGRAM AIMED AT EXPANDING THE LEARNING STYLES OF STUDENTS AND STAFF AT THE GEELONG COLLEGE **P28**



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# THINKING ABOUT THINKING

AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAM FOCUSED ON IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE OF HOW THE HUMAN BRAIN WORKS IS HELPING STUDENTS AND TEACHERS EXCEL IN THE CLASSROOM, WRITES OLIVIA REED



*Cognitive neuroscientist Dr Jared Cooney Horvath with year 10 students Clara Paton and Spencer Cleary at The Geelong College where he is part of a new program. Photo: Alan Barber*

STUDENTS of The Geelong College are harnessing the power of their own brain to unlock their learning potential as part of the school's Neuroscientist in Residence program.

Led by Dr Jared Cooney Horvath, a former teacher and now educational neuroscientist, the sessions help students take control of their own learning while spurring new thinking and experimentation in teachers.

The whole school Neuroscientist in Residence program was launched this year by The Centre for Learning, Research and Innovation at The Geelong College.

Exploring the foundations of thinking,

learning, memory and metacognition are all part of the journey Jared takes students and staff on.

Jared, who embarked on his neuroscience career with the aim of bettering his teaching, explains that the way students learn in school has likely remained unchanged "since man walked upright".

But he says most people were never explicitly taught how to learn, and reflects that when he went to school it was simply hoped that students would learn via osmosis.

"Unlike previous generations who had to struggle and fight to discover the learning process, often times as adults we are aiming to

make the process clear and unambiguous at a younger age," he says.

"Once they understand that learning is simply a process, then they can assume more ownership over their learning journey and be ready to step up when the supports of school are removed in uni and beyond."

Jared will conduct sessions with The Geelong College staff and students multiple times throughout the year.

The school's director of teaching and learning Emily FitzSimons says students are enthralled by Jared's great energy and dedication to education.

Students have learned to harness the capability of their memory, rather than assuming some people have better memories than others, Emily enthuses.

"What I wanted to do with the Neuroscientist in Residence program is to bring someone that was a researcher into the classroom and bridge the gap between scientific theory and classroom practice," she explains.

"He's all about empowering teachers to know and understand what's going on inside their learner's brains and that helps the teachers understand what they need to do as educators to get through to young people."

In conjunction with Independent Schools Victoria and Jared, The Geelong College participated in the Cognizance Research Project last year to help students understand how the brain works and how to leverage this knowledge in study and life.

**"AS CONFIDENCE AND UNDERSTANDING INCREASE, SO TOO DOES AGENCY."**

Jared says the ultimate goal of the research project is agency – encouraging students to take control over their own thinking and learning processes.

"To date, the results have been incredibly strong. Students even two years out from the program not only remember key concepts



Geelong College leaders Charlie Lazzara, Georgie Cullen, Matt Thacker and Annabel Unkenstein and Dr Jared Cooney Horvath. Photos: Glenn Ferguson and Jack Li

explored, but report having changed their study and school habits as a result," he says.

"As confidence and understanding increase, so too does agency.

"We've even had a handful of kids change gears to pursue the cognitive sciences in their later-years electives."

Jared says he became interested in neuroscience when he realised that if he understood the brain then he could be a better

teacher, so he left the classroom and entered the lab.

But he says the translation from research to practice is not as clear-cut as he thought it would be which is why he works with teachers to help them adapt learning principles for their practice.

"It's an odd fact that knowing how people learn is very different than knowing how to teach – so I will never tell teachers how to do their job," he explains.

"As a researcher, I know how things work in a lab – but the real world is a very different place. As such, the goal is for teachers to use the science of learning as a framework to begin developing and testing their own ideas within their specific classrooms.

"They understand teaching, we just want to layer learning underneath as a foundation and impetus to spur new thinking and new experimentation."



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