Principle 2
Encourage the spirit of critical inquiry and creative innovation
informed by current research

Case Study 1
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As a playwright, theatre director, drama educator and chair of Applied Theatre at Griffith University, I believe that the art form of theatre is not only an extraordinarily powerful discipline, it has the potential to enhance the scholarly, professional and personal learning of my students, and even transform their lives. I also believe that theatre is a potent learning medium that can generate learning and understanding across disciplines.

The Law School Innocence Project involved law students working with their lecturers and professional lawyers to investigate cases of unjust incarceration, especially involving DNA evidence. I was approached to develop a public performance by Applied Theatre students to launch the project in Australia, and then to take the project into Queensland schools. A first year class took on the performance aspect as their Applied Theatre project, researching cases of wrongful incarceration and the theatre styles best fitted to dramatise this research as a play. The play was then performed at the launch of the Innocence Project as part of the practical requirement of the course Playmaking. A number of final year Applied Theatre students worked with this performance group and then took responsibility for creating the performance and workshop that went into schools. This part of the project became their work-integrated learning task in the course Industry Studies Project. The final year students who intended to enrol in the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education in 2007 to train as teachers took on the roles of teachers. This cross-discipline, cross-faculty project was extremely successful in achieving its outcomes. Feedback from the Law School lecturers and the school teachers involved was uniformly congratulatory. The students involved in the project rated it as an exceptional learning experience that both inspired and motivated them, and a number of them identified it as having a crucial impact on their learning and their lives.

In 2007 the final year Applied Theatre students in the course Stagecraft researched and performed Slow Falling Bird. Written by Christine Evans, a young Australian playwright, the play is set in the Woomera Detention Centre and deals with the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. Despite winning prizes in Australia and America and having a critically acclaimed run in the United States, the play had never been performed in Australia. Researching the experiences of refugees and the whole context of detention centres, meeting refugees, and then performing roles as detainees and guards, had a profound impact on the knowledge base, understanding and empathy of many of the students.

Hear Bruce Burton talking about research-based learning in Applied Theatre Studies