

Convocation September 3, 2008
Faculty, Students, Guests
Becoming a Global Leader

Over the six years during which I have been the Head of School, I have used Convocation to make remarks on a variety of topics. In my inaugural year, I spoke to the student and faculty body about the important relationships that develop at the Academy between faculty, staff and students. In subsequent years, I have spoken about the importance of community at the Academy. I have talked of the importance of seeking excellence. I have stressed that we are living in extraordinary times and that we need to seize the day, *carpe diem*. Two years ago my talk served to focus student and faculty attention on the theme of privilege and opportunity. Last year I brought our attention to the matter of pride in our school.

Tonight I want to direct my remarks at what lies at the heart of the Academy...its bold mission statement and what that mission statement means for you. Let me read that mission statement to you.

“The mission of Wilbraham & Monson Academy is to develop global leaders and citizens.”

I can assure you this is one of the shortest mission statements of any independent school in the United States. Yet, at the same time, it has to be one of the more complex and difficult missions to achieve.

When we think of global leaders I'm sure the people who come to mind are on the order of present political leaders such as Vladimir Putin, George Bush, Hu Jintao or Angela Merkel. They might be past political leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt, Margaret Thatcher, Mao Tse Tung, or Golda Meir. They might be humanitarian leaders such as Mother Teresa, Ghandi, or Martin Luther King Junior. They might be religious leaders such as the Dali Lama, or the Pope. Somehow the words “global leader” bring to mind someone whose name is recognizable to millions upon millions of people. And it's pretty obvious there can only be a few such people in the world at any one time. How can we, Wilbraham & Monson Academy, develop approximately 365 students into people who would have an impact upon the world of this order? The short answer is....we can't.

But there is also a longer answer to that question and that longer answer is important for us to explore for a few moments tonight. Recently, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrote in the policy journal *Foreign Affairs* that our nation's future relationships with the rest of the world will be characterized by both competition and cooperation. She wrote (and I quote) "In the 21st Century, greatness is increasingly defined by the technological and economic development that flows naturally in open and free societies. What will most determine United States success in the 21st Century is our imagination". (end of quote) I was struck by this phraseology because it immediately brought to mind one of the most quoted portions of the 2004 report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. In that report the panelists cited (and I quote) "a failure of imagination" (unquote) kept us from understanding the Al Qaeda threat before the 9/11 attacks.

This report and the comments of Ms Rice, while targeted to specific policy making of the United States, can be interpreted to a wider degree as policy targets for all countries in the world. It makes sense that the ultimate success of any country is determined by the amount and quality of imagination brought to bear on the issues and programs specific to the needs of that country.

In fact, I think you all recognize that there are many problems we face not as individuals or as individual countries, but rather as a global collection of human beings. For example, we know that there will be an end to the oil resource upon which we all depend for the production of energy, fertilizer, and medicine among other things. The maximum amount of oil we possess is finite, limited by the volume of the earth. And since a substantial portion of the earth is solid or molten rock, the volume of oil is considerably less than the volume of the earth's sphere. No amount of drilling in our national parks or in off-shore areas or even in draining dry all of the vast Saudi Arabian supplies can support our way of life for much longer than one-hundred years or so. This is a problem the solution of which is going to take imagination of the highest order.

At the Academy one quarter of us come from a country other than the United States. All of us, no matter where we come from expect our leaders to seek ways to improve the life of the people of our country. While each government goes about reaching this goal in quite different ways, the ultimate goal is universal.

Each of you students will someday enter the traditional world of work. I fully expect that some of you are going to choose careers that are directly involved in helping the government of your country make the lives of the people better. Many more of you will only indirectly be of service to your government, but nevertheless each of you as concerned citizens has the possibility to make a positive contribution to the betterment of the whole.

The degree of influence your contribution makes to the success of the whole, to the success of your country, will in some way depend upon how well you have prepared yourself for that challenge while at the Academy. In my estimation, a global leader is that person who follows the classic precept “think global, but act local”. The Academy mission then is to help you become an imaginative person who has global principles in mind when going about his or her life.

Those of you who are returning students know that our Center for Entrepreneurial and Global Studies provides a curricular thread in our program unlike any high school in the country. Most people, when they hear the word entrepreneur, immediately think business person or about something related to the world of business, especially new business.

If you do a Google search on the definition of entrepreneur you will find nearly a quarter of a million references. The typical definition goes something like this: *Entrepreneur*

An innovator of business enterprise. One who assumes the financial risk of starting and operating a business venture. Usually carries the connotation of being creative, self-motivated, and visionary.

At the Academy we are developing our own unique understanding and definition of what an entrepreneur is and it is tied together with the development of imagination. In our definition the concept of entrepreneur is not directly linked to business creation. Rather, an entrepreneur is a person who exhibits entrepreneurial thinking and entrepreneurial thinking combines skills and behaviors. The skills are common to what every great high school develops in its students: the ability to read closely and with understanding, the ability to write convincingly, the ability to calculate and to analyze data, the development of cultural understanding and second language expertise, the understanding of the past and how that can be used to shape the future. An entrepreneurial thinker does all of this and more, combining the above with ambition, with industriousness, with innovation, and with self-understanding.

Entrepreneurial thinking is imaginative by definition. Vision and imagination are closely aligned attributes. Intellectual skills and imagination go hand in hand for the entrepreneurial thinker. And it is through skills and imagination that each of us becomes in a small way a global leader.

I know that almost all of you have completed your reading of *Three Cups of Tea*. You are thus familiar with the story of Greg Mortenson who spent most of his skill building days in two areas of endeavor: medicine and mountain climbing. After his near fatal failure to reach the summit of K-2, his imagination and entrepreneurial thinking led him to help create an educational program in a village which did not even have a teacher, never mind a school building, and in an area where the literacy rate was under 4%. His strong imagination fueled his dream of education in a strikingly poor area of the world. Acting local could make a positive difference in the quality of lives of the people and thus make the world a better place.

I have often quoted the words of the influential educational philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in my time here. The one sentence that has greatly influenced my approach to great education is the following:

“Education is the joining together of the young and old in the imaginative consideration of learning.”

Sitting before you tonight are the teachers who will lead you on the pathway of entrepreneurial thinking. I want to set before us tonight a challenge for the coming year. I want us, faculty and students alike, to keep in the back of our minds as we go about our lives at the Academy the degree to which we are developing our imagination while we develop our skills. I would like each of you to focus your energy not only on the concrete daily-ness of being a student, completing and turning in assignments, and earning grades, but also on the abstract nature of imagining how the state of the world could be made better through some small action entirely within your control.

I would like to leave you with a final quote from the late Robert F. Kennedy. Perhaps, you could incorporate this type of mindset into your work here at the Academy as we do our best to help you develop your global leadership attributes.

“There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why... I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”

Robert Kennedy