

# Diversity and Equity in Education

Ron Hurley



***'The current emphasis on the identification of measurable educational outcomes for students should not be allowed to degenerate into a catalogue of vocational skills which diminishes and disguises the worth of initiative, individuality and creativity.'***

**E** DUCATION SYSTEMS around the world are struggling with the dilemma of providing an equal educational opportunity for all students while developing a diversity of educational institutions. In New South Wales we also ponder whether it is possible to attain equal priorities for equity and diversity. Both government and non-government school systems retain central control over curriculum fundamentals and elements of resourcing to ensure minimum standards are met. At the same time there is increasing encouragement to opt for different approaches, independent philosophies and individual strategies so that schools may seek their own identity or sphere of excellence.

In the State system this has meant a proliferation of Selective, Technology, Performing Arts, Agriculture and Language schools. This has induced schools to identify their specialty so that they can attract certain students, e.g., TAFE, senior school or vocational/educational combinations which might attract more post-compulsory students. If competition and identity distinction become the dominant philosophy for schools then perhaps we must ask who will enrol, educate and take responsibility for the 'difficult' student, those slower to mature and those from deprived socio-economic circumstances? Will the competition for students, striving for diversity and provisions of greater choice, exaggerate the inequity which some students, parents, staff and schools now experience? Is paucity for some the inevitable outcome of excellence for others or can broad-based equity compensating programs retain a level of equal opportunity for all?

As educational leaders I believe principals have a responsibility to provide intellectual integrity for their school and, by extension, their education system. To be better site manager, promoters and administrators is not an end in itself. We have the responsibility for education of this generation of students so that they can meet the challenges, organise the systems and manage the resources for future generations. The education profession has, over the years, been blamed for and asked to do many things - some worthwhile and valuable, some fatuous and transitory. Our credibility rests on providing the best edu-

cation for all, based on an ability to read, to reason, and to communicate. It is essential that we manage our schools in the best interests of all students and our vision should extend beyond parochial self-serving considerations to that which will provide us with the benefits of a more enlightened population.

Principals' responsibility for equal opportunity for all should extend to the fundamental aspect of curriculum, a subject somewhat neglected in recent times. The current emphasis on the identification of measurable educational outcomes for students should not be allowed to degenerate into a catalogue of vocational skills which diminishes and disguises the worth of initiative, individuality and creativity. Concepts of teamwork, social awareness and ethical standards will be as vital in the world of the 21st Century as they have been during the 20th Century.

An appreciation of self-worth is still our best safeguard against anti-social egocentric behaviour. Failure to recognise this important fact could result in the recreation of a class-based society of the educated and the uneducated, the employable and the under-class. The costs and elements of self-destruction implicit in such a system are evident and must be resisted.

There will always be an important place for different schools, different courses and different classes. In fact, it is axiomatic that a school has an identity based on its community, its students, its teachers and its curriculum pattern. **We need to be aware of the dangers inherent in exaggerating these differences to the point where we create an underclass of students, parents and teachers who through circumstances beyond their control, become alienated from what is projected as desirable and effective education.** We must re-assure the community that there is real value in education provided by the local comprehensive high school serving the needs of all students in its community. We must ensure that we do not achieve diversity at the expense of equity. □ 17.2.93

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# ACROSS THE NATION

## NEW SOUTH WALES

THE 1993 DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION Priorities in New South Wales suggests that the period of extensive managerial restructuring of the Scott Review is drawing to a close. We are now entering a phase of consolidation with a re-emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning. The Priorities have been synthesised as follows:

- Student Outcomes
- Performance Management
- Quality Assurance
- Post-Compulsory Education
- Community Participation

Each of these Priority Areas has particular significance for the work of schools in New South Wales for 1993.

### *Student Outcomes*

The identification and measurement of student performance in designated areas will entail a great deal of work for teachers and principals in 1993. There will need to be a careful co-ordination of State, national, school, TAFE and employer credentials to provide a comprehensive and credible assessment for students.

### *Performance Management*

The extension of performance management to all executive staff in schools will need to be accompanied by clearly enunciated objectives and strategies. The team perspective of total quality management will need to co-ordinate with the personal aspects of performance management.

### *Quality Assurance*

The development of procedures and practices which will validate the quality of schools, yet not distract them from their essential purpose, will require extensive consultation and careful evaluation.

### *Post-Compulsory Education*

The impetus of the Finn, Carmichael and Mayer proposals will require extensive examination and modification before national school, TAFE and employer credentialing is fully integrated.

Caution will need to be exercised to ensure that the rights of all students to a broad-based education are guaranteed.

### *Community Participation*

The extension of the number of School Councils and the refinement of their operations will enable all involved in education to see that they are not to be feared, cannot take over the running of State schools but can be of great support to staff and students.

The New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council will this year have as its highest priority the professional development and credentialing of principals, and of those preparing to be principals. □

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## Diversity in New South Wales: How Far Has it Progressed?

Jim Harkin

**F**OR MOST OF THE LAST century, New South Wales has had a strongly centralised public education system. Curriculum, staffing and resource determinations were made by a centralised bureaucracy up to 1200 strong and reinforced by mirror bureaucracies in a dozen or so regions. Virtually all of the 400 high schools were comprehensive, catering for Years 7 - 12.

In about 60 smaller country towns, central schools catered for either K-10 or K-12, usually with relatively few secondary enrolments assisted by correspondence or Distance Education facilities. There were a smaller number of Selective Schools, four Agricultural High schools and the Conservatorium (of Music) High School. The vast majority of young people attended their local school. Zoning was pretty rigid although in older urban areas it was possible to choose placement in one of about twenty single sex high schools.

Since the present Liberal-National Government was first elected in 1988, there has been a quantum shift in thinking about choice and diversity. The political basis for this shift was research carried out by the Liberal Party prior to the 1988 election which led to two conclusions:

- parents wished to exercise choice in selecting secondary schools for their children; and,
- for this choice to be meaningful, schools needed to be able to become more diverse in their offerings.

A third factor was primarily economic. In some areas, one school could experience a population boom necessitating multi-million dollar extensions while a nearby school with declining enrolments could have equally expensive facilities underutilised. After the election, the new Government quickly took a number of steps.

### *Dezoning of Schools - the Issue of Choice*

All children, primary and secondary, have the right to attend their local school and defined school zones still exist. Parents may choose non-local placements for the children provided the chosen school has

room after placing its local students. Enrolment ceilings have been set based on the extent of permanent school accommodation. It is not possible for a school to gain additional permanent or transferable accommodation because of an increase in non-local enrolments.

Parents of children entering high school have exercised this choice in large numbers. **In many high schools, less than half the Year 7 intake is local.** Principals have quickly become adept at promoting their high schools to potential enrolments. A quality prospectus, briefing notes for parents, Open Days, information evenings and press releases highlighting school achievements are just some of the accepted methods of attracting students. School signage now features promotional slogans e.g., 'A School for the Future' or 'Excellence in Music Education'. Some schools are avoiding closure by attracting non-local placements.

Not all of the consequences of dezoning are intended or even desirable. The cost to the Government of 'free' school transport has blown out to about \$300 million a year, an increase of some 60 per cent. The Government is at present considering a \$10 per term per child levy as one means of reducing this cost. In some areas, school choices appear to be influenced by ethnicity. Many parents make choices for reasons which have nothing to do with education. There is certainly a snob value in some school addresses and the 'wannabees' express their desire in inability to live in a favoured suburb by at least sending their children to school there. **Public impressions of 'good' and 'bad' schools are sometimes based on the most superficial of prejudices and these are often difficult for the schools themselves to overcome.** What is clear is that choice is popular, especially in the metropolitan middle class.

### *Schools With a Difference - the Issue of Diversity*

It was clear that the new Government was committed to diversity as part of the rationale for choice. Dr Metherell, the new Minister, was a reformer of the radical right, deeply influenced by his English equivalent, Mr Baker and determined to

rapidly reform the public education system in a number of areas. It is now history that his lack of consultation and ruthless adherence to rigid policies succeeded in uniting almost all education groups against him. For the first time, teachers and parents (private as well as public) bureaucrats and unionists were united in knowing who, if not exactly what, they did not want. Despite his personal unpopularity, many of the Metherell reforms have endured - even prospered.

### *Centres of Excellence*

This began as an attempt to recognise outstanding qualities of individual schools. Schools were named as Centres of Excellence in areas such as English, Science, Welfare, Girls' Education or Health Studies. At first, it was secretive, political and centralised decision-making. Centres of Excellence had to be found in all regions, in all subjects and focus areas, with a balance between primary and high schools, city and country schools, and so on. Reactions to the announcements were mixed. Most of the chosen schools were pleased to have hard work and success recognised and they new that recognition would attract enrolments. **However, one school's excellence is seen as another school's mediocrity.** Most schools, and indeed most subject departments within the school honoured, were not recognised. Were they somehow being labelled as lacking in excellence? In some schools, the excellence departed with the key teachers who took other positions. Today, the system of recognition remains to emphasise the diversity of strengths within comprehensive schools but there is a much more participative process of nomination and decision-making in place. Centres of Excellence are given \$1000 to recognise their achievement.

### *Technology High Schools*

From the start of 1990, twenty-four schools were designated as Technology High Schools. Since then, another three (including a central school and the specially built Cherrybrook THS) have been added. These schools remain local comprehensives and are not academically selective but they have a focus on technology across the curriculum. Students have an oppor-



tunity to study subjects with a technology focus and these schools are used to pilot courses which later become generally available. The Technology High Schools were usually sited near colleges of TAFE, had spaces for non-local enrolments and usually had some technology expertise.

From the start, school-industry links of great variety were established. Some secured substantial sponsorship from companies, others developed innovative work experience programs while others developed extensive networks with local industries to enrich the learning experiences of children. The emphasis on 'challenging the future' has led to these schools concentrating on developing more student-centred techniques for learning and instruction. **The system clearly sees these schools as having a 'lighthouse' function** These schools have been extensively resourced.

Since 1989, about \$100,000 of State and Commonwealth funding has gone to each school as well as purchasing concessions from some computer companies. There is a staffing supplement (one teacher-day per week) for computer co-ordination. There is no guarantee of any special

The seventeen Selective High Schools and the four Agricultural High Schools (which are also selective) clearly fly the flag for public education in the Higher School Certificate, especially as the top 1000 are published by name and school in the newspapers and the very best students become media stars.

**Entry to Selective High Schools is based on primary school results and a special test. In 1993, there will be 2850 places in Year 7 and 13,500 applicants sat for the test.** Many parents wish their children to attend these schools and are prepared to have them travel long distances to do so, at least as long as transport is free. Selective High Schools receive no additional resources. In fact, they have large class sizes and no staff to assist with learning difficulties which can still exist with the gifted.

## Language High Schools

Fifteen high schools were reclassified as Language High Schools in 1991. These tended to have an existing focus on LOTE and were assisted with grants of \$10,000 and 0.2 staff a year for two years. Language High Schools enabled LOTE to con-

## Issues for the Future

Choice and Diversity are here to stay. Additional Selective, Technology and Language High Schools are being designated in 1993 more in response to community representations than by centralised political decrees. Port Kembla High School is being converted over a four year period to the Illawarra College, catering for non-academic senior students and adults. Classes will run until 10p.m. In this way, a small local co-educational comprehensive with seriously declining enrolments can avoid closure and meet local needs in an area of very high unemployment. This is the challenge for schools or groups of schools. Can restructuring using choice and diversity avoid closures and meet changing community expectations of post-primary education?

There is a great concern about the effect on ordinary comprehensive schools when specialist schools are established nearby. 'Residualisation' of enrolments and resources is a reality for some. Many parent see specialist schools as fashionable or desirable. **The Government has made them a focus of attention to the extent where many comprehensive local, co-educational schools feel somewhat neglected or second class.**

In 1993 about seventeen per cent of high schools will have a special focus, up from about five per cent in 1989. The philosophical debate continues. Should all schools just be local and comprehensive? How much diversity should there be in a comprehensive public education system? Should there be resource equity for specialist schools? Is school diversity an alternative to school closure? Peak teacher and parent bodies have accepted, with reservations, the diversification of public secondary education. The Teachers' Federation clearly supports the primacy of the local comprehensive co-educational secondary school. So does the Federation of Parents and Citizens Association. Both bodies accept the legitimacy of specialist schools provided there is equity, adequate consultation and a demonstrable local need. The Principals' Council is also concerned about equity and the apparent emphasis given to specialist schools in Government and Departmental business. It seems reasonable to assume that eventually many schools will develop different focuses with about one in five being considered sufficiently different to be specialist, either in enrolment or curriculum. □

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funding continuing into 1993 or beyond. The Technology High Schools are normal schools in many ways but are certainly innovative and focused on the future.

## Selective High Schools

Prior to 1989, there were only seven selective high schools located in two regions. Six of the seven were, and still are, single-sex schools. Special schools for the gifted and talented have long provided a flagship for public education and are in extraordinary demand for various reasons, some of which are educational. In 1989, eight additional schools (all co-educational) were designated as selective followed by another two in 1990. Six regions now have selective schools, thus providing access for many more gifted and talented young people in major population areas. About four per cent of secondary enrolments are in Selective Schools so even the largest country towns with three high schools are unlikely to have one of them reclassified. In these places, the residual effects on other schools' enrolments would be dramatic.

solidate in some schools at a time when expanding curriculum options in most schools were threatening the continuation of traditional elective studies in languages. Like the Technology High Schools, these schools remain local and comprehensive but attract non-local enrolments because of their special focus.

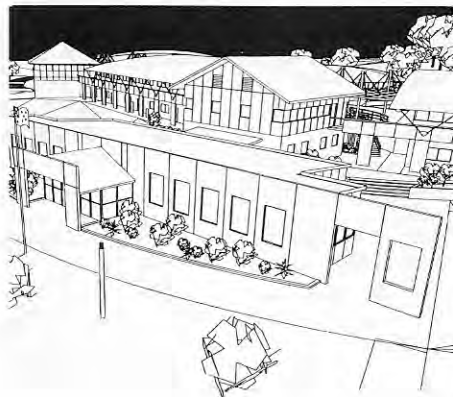
## Other Schools With a Difference

A number of individual schools are going down different paths. Newtown High School of the Performing Arts is one of four such schools. St Mary's Senior High School, Lucas Heights Community School (K-12) are other examples. Westfields High School is now a Sports High School with links to sporting associations and the AIS in Canberra. Bradfield College in Northern Sydney will open in 1993 providing school and TAFE courses for Years 11 and 12 for all ages.

An enterprise agreement covering the working conditions of teachers there is being negotiated with the Teachers' Federation.

## Diversity in NSW: Cherrybrook Technology High School

Peter Gillam



**C**HERRYBROOK Technology High School (CTHS) is one of a number of alternatives to the comprehensive high school within the NSW Department of School Education (DSE).

The school was opened by the Premier in May 1992 with approximately 500 students in Years 7, 8 and 11. It was decided to introduce senior classes in the first year to provide student leadership and prevent staff from becoming deskilled through the absence of opportunities to teach senior subjects. Currently there are 810 students in Years 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 (1993). The school will grow to accommodate around 1000 students in 1994 although innovative operating hours may account for a greater student establishment with existing facilities by that date.

### *Architectural Innovation*

CTHS is the pre-eminent Technology High School in NSW and the only one of 27 that has been 'purpose built'. The school cost \$17 million to construct and equip, and to a degree, is an architectural test site with approximately 80% of the structure outside established school building codes. All buildings are steel framed with very few internal load bearing walls. This allows the interior spaces to be reconfigured at minimal cost, to suit changing educational needs. A service cable-way runs through the spine of the school and allows easy

access for cable installation and service. The cables emerge through the centre of each building for lateral distribution. Between the four main buildings are smaller specialist technology buildings.

One end of the school contains spaces associated with subjects such as Science, Design and Technology, Textiles and Art while facilities for Music, Drama & Dance, Media, Human Performance, Sport and Food Technology are at the other end of the school. Specialist rooms include a robotics room, two computer laboratories, an electronics room, a Computer Assisted Design/graphics laboratory, a darkroom, industrial technology workshops, a commercial kitchen and a horticulture complex. The library is centrally located and is the hub of the school. Below the library is the single staff study which can accommodate 55 teachers at workstations with power, computer cabling and some network connections.

### *Business in Education*

Through the concept of Technology High Schools, the DSE has generated interest from a wide variety of businesses. CTHS has IBM as a principal partner plus a number of agreements with other companies. The IBM partnership was initiated by the Minister of Education and subsequent partnerships have been established by school personnel. The stature of IBM in the business community has had an agglomeration effect on other businesses and the high national profile of the school has focused the benefits for all partnership companies. Presently the school has links with IBM, Lotus, Roland, Asteg, Lego-Dacta, Dick Smith, Co-Design, JI Case, Microsoft and Telecom. It is common to see business people and technicians in and about the school. Students often see people apart from teachers working in the school environment. Conversely, business representatives are learning about the education process and are better able to understand educational needs.

**It is important to note that the word 'partner' is used rather than 'sponsor'. The latter implies a dependency while the former implies a mutually beneficial relationship between equals. There is no charity involved in these relationships and schools cannot expect a largesse.**

Despite difficulties in quantifying the advantages that flow to the partnership companies, such flows are no less real and the lexicon at Cherrybrook remains that of education not of business.

Partner companies have shown no interest in broad pedagogical issues or the management of the school. They are interested in how their products are being used, how they can better cater for the needs of Australian schools (numerous products have overseas origins); having students and teachers becoming familiar with their range of products and maintaining a high profile in the education community.

The link with partnership companies is maintained through the CTHS Business Links Committee, an annual business breakfast at the school, newsletters, school tours for company guests, the student work experience program and invitations to school events such as Presentation Night. It can be seen that activity associated with nurturing these relationships takes considerable time.

### *The Computer Support*

The school wide Local Area Network (LAN) takes technology beyond the computer laboratories to the general learning spaces. A Novell Token Ring LAN extends throughout the school and is bridged to the Ethernet administration system, allowing executive staff to access both systems. The LAN has the potential to provide access to common software (including graphics and multi media), library services and communication channels across the school and beyond the school.

The original 67 PCs (386SX) supplied by IBM have been supplemented by the purchase of 20 machines in the CAD/graphics area and 14 semi-portable 386 computers. The school is currently using some loan machines, including laptops, from IBM to help determine long range computing hardware needs. The file servers are 386 tower units, with 3 on the network, 1 in the library and 1 in the administration office.

Lotus Developments Pty. Ltd., the second major partner, provides the full suite of integrated office software (Lotus works, Lotus 123, Amipro, Freelance and CC MAIL) for use throughout the school. This system is widely used in industry and



the school considers it important that this same software is used by students, teachers and school assistants. The language associated with these programs has become the *lingua franca* of the school and this has not gone unnoticed by the company. Lotus has also provided staff training and backup services.

## *The Curriculum*

A Technology High School offers a comprehensive curriculum which is taught with a problem solving approach and with an enhanced opportunity for students to experience technology applications in all subjects. These schools have tended to be leaders in educational change, particularly in terms of classroom practice and cooperative learning, although it should be said that many traditional schools are also at the forefront of such change. There is no parallel between 'technical' schools with their vocational bent and technology schools with their emphasis on leading education into the twenty-first century and producing polymath graduates.

Students learn about technology, and learn by using technology in any subject. Technology is viewed as a tool to aid learning and the students indirectly develop skills related to the world of work plus an understanding of the impact of technology on society. In addition to the comprehensive curriculum is a range of specialist electives such as electronics, robotics, food and textile technology, sports science and video production. Students may choose to select a curriculum pattern similar to that of non-technology high schools or may supplement their studies with an array of the more specialist technology subjects. Either way, they must complete the subject prerequisites applicable to all NSW students in order to qualify for the certification granted by the Board of Studies at the end of Year 10 and Year 12.

To support the goal of catering for the individual differences among students, the school developed a compulsory Enrichment, Acceleration and Review (EAR) subject in Years 7 & 8. Within this subject students may gain intensive help in Mathematics or English, work on independent research contracts, have music tuition, or be engaged in an acceleration program in areas where their strengths are obvious. Because the class-time devoted to EAR was extracted from the core subjects (English, Mathematics and Science in particular) there is a weighting of EAR content towards these subjects. A particular EAR class exists for approximately six weeks after which all EAR classes are re-constituted to best serve the educational needs of each student. Classes do not progress from one activity to another in lock-step fashion and each student can typically expect to be placed in five or six different EAR classes during one year. The

program has grown to involve Year 7 and Year 8 students in the one EAR class. Primary school students (and teachers) are also becoming involved in the EAR scheme on the high school site.

The school uses a range of data to better understand the capabilities of each student. All Year 7 and 8 students complete the Richmond Tests (an English variation of the Iowa Test), complete a self evaluation and present a parent evaluation of their strengths, weaknesses and interests. Individual student logs are maintained to record student progress during EAR and a number of students are retested in the following year to gauge any impact the school may have made on their progress. It is during EAR that students are given the opportunity to gain some control over their learning program.

Design and Technology is a compulsory course in Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) which

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encompasses problem-solving experiences involving selecting, using and evaluating appropriate technology and methodologies. Teachers of this subject, become facilitators and, as with EAR, may come from a variety of subject areas. Students are introduced to de Bono's CORT lateral thinking models and an array of problem-solving exercises. Many techniques and technologies are used in this course so that students understand the potential and safe operation of all the equipment in the school.

There is a conscious effort to move away from lock-step student progression, to a model which embraces both self responsibility and cooperative learning, where students are encouraged to interact and cooperate in their efforts to meet challenges. **The teacher will increasingly becoming a manager, a motivator, and a trouble-shooter rather than a lecturer.** Technology, in the form of hardware and software as well as the problem solving approach, is

supporting this change in direction in student/teacher interaction and helping to integrate a diversity of traditionally compartmentalised attitudes, knowledge and skills (Nolan and McKinnon 1989).

Demand for student placement at CHTS exceeds capacity by a factor of two, and given the investment of public funds, a critical question is how to determine which students will be fortunate enough to attend. All local students residing within a defined boundary are automatically accepted and a school/community placement panel fills any remaining student places according to criteria they define (interest/ability in technology, travelling distance and evidence of self responsibility).

## *Staffing the School*

All executive appointments were subject to advertisement and 50% of the 1992 teaching staff and 100% of the additional 1993 teaching staff were gained through advertisement. **A school with innovation as its *raison d'être* needed staff with energy, predilections towards creativity in the teaching process and specific expertise associated with the specialist facilities.**

The school is organised around eight Key Learning Areas (similar to faculties), and aims to appoint a Head Teacher for each KLA when the school is fully operational. Because staff were not selected on the basis of their computer expertise, a Head Teacher of Technology and Information was appointed with the brief to in-service teaching and non-teaching staff and maintain a technology base as close to the cutting edge as the school budget would allow. Additional Head Teachers have been appointed to view individual student progress horizontally, i.e., across all subjects for a given age group. Thus there are Head Teachers for Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8), Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10), and Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12). Stage Head Teachers, who are more concerned with the education of the whole child, have two Year Advisers on their staff and consult with the Head Teachers KLA who are the curriculum specialists when specific educational needs have been identified for individual students.

Many of the characteristics of CHTS are being contested within the educational community. Should a large sum of money be invested in one school? Should schools be allowed to select their own staff? How should students be selected? Should education and business mix? The debate continues, albeit at a lower volume than in the past? □

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## St Mary's Senior High: A Pacesetter in NSW and Beyond

Bernie Shepherd



***Until this year, St Mary's Senior High was the only senior high school in NSW, catering for students who were not well-served by the traditional provision. Others are now jumping on the bandwagon in a search for new ways to educate those who need a different approach.***

In 1988, when the Education Minister of the day proclaimed that St Mary's was to be the site for the Government's first senior school, the move appeared to many to have come from a clear blue sky. All of a sudden, sections, branches, departments and committees ranging from architects to librarians had to come up with plans for this new thrust into what hadn't yet come to be called post-compulsory education.

There had been a previous attempt, in the Mt Druitt area, to establish a senior high serving a cluster of would-be junior highs. That move foundered amid protest from the teachers' union and the local community. The new proposal was different in two important respects: First, it would be a stand-alone school, with no designated feeders. Consistent with the new Government's policy of choice, students from anywhere would be able to elect to come to the senior high in Year 11 or attend their local school.

Secondly, the school staff and the local community would be closely involved in the development process. The Assistant Director-General, Metropolitan Area, Reg Pollock, committed himself to this and after establishing a framework, let them get on with the job unencumbered. In the ferment of excitement, ideas, guesswork, haste, bewilderment and scepticism it was by far the best way to go.

The senior high had to be in place in around six months. Given the pace, it was intuition, experience and expedience, rather than measured research, that pointed the way on the ground. A small consultative group began to gather the best ideas they could from here and from the experience of other states and systems, filtering them through the basic test of 'What could/should a State senior high school contribute to the educational opportunities in western Sydney?'

For its part, the Government clearly wanted to make a tangible impact on retention rates in the west. It also wanted to be seen to provide for choice within the Government system, hence the announcement of the senior high was made in almost the same breath as that of a number of new selective and specialist schools.

As far as the school community was concerned, it wanted a broad and flexible

curriculum of Board subjects, together with a range of non-Board courses, generally vocational in nature and TAFE-linked to provide sound credentialling. They were also concerned to develop an integrated student support system, attuned to the needs of the older student population.

Some basic principles quickly emerged. Clearly, the school should use its unique opportunity to do things which would not be practicable in other schools - there was little point in simply duplicating what was already available. To a large extent, this was seen as providing for those senior students currently not well served by the system, i.e., those without any immediate tertiary ambitions, or those with learning difficulties for whom the usual run of HSC subjects represented an uncomfortable mismatch, or those who wanted a second chance at education.

Another principle to become established early, flowing from the first, was that the senior school should be comprehensive and inclusive in its intake. Specifically, it should not select students on an academically competitive basis. Framing all of this, the staff and community wanted to create a working atmosphere in the school which combined some of the best features of secondary and tertiary organisations. In particular, we wanted to retain the high level of student support which St Mary's High was accustomed to provide, but combine it with the sort of adult learning principles which characterise TAFE or university life.

In all, it was a delicious challenge! Over its first few years, the school has realised all these goals to a remarkable degree, though not without working through some dilemmas and difficulties along the way. For instance, the hasty, intuition-driven attempts to provide vocational options led to some embarrassment. Having spent much time and effort organising a course program with the local TAFE College and surrounding schools, we had only one student take it. The course, an 'Office Practices' Certificate course, looked good on paper and was, in fact, quite successful. Other 7-12 schools in the District provided large numbers of starters, but not the senior high. When we looked for the reason, it was obvious enough: contrary to our best-laid plans and assumptions, most of our in-



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coming students were seeking fairly traditional, academic programs.

It seemed that, in spite of our avowed intention of delivering the ultimate comprehensive curriculum, our clientele had other ideas. Often this was an appropriate choice, but almost as often it wasn't. Nevertheless, four years of perseverance and increasing retention rates have changed the situation somewhat. While the majority of our prospective students are still looking for an academic program, it is becoming easier to persuade some of them that tertiary entrance is not the only criterion for picking HSC courses. Around ten to fifteen per cent of our 1993 intake selected a non-TER program.

An 'adult' learning environment implied a measure of independence, autonomy and freedom. Of course, 'freedom' does include the freedom to fail or drop out and in the first few years a disturbingly large number of students did just that. An analysis of the leavers showed a fairly consistent pattern and pointed to, among other things, a need for more intensive course advice at the enrolment stage.

Our students come to us as relatively unknown entities and in our first year we believed what they told us and naively assumed that the HSC program they selected was the result of sound advice from their previous school and careful consideration by them and their parents. After that, we became more pragmatic. We now operate an intensive pre-enrolment process in which each student receives a maximum of individual counselling from subject and career specialists.

Our goal of being inclusive and non-selective has also taken something of a battering from the need to match the number of applicants to the available places. How do you 'select' without becoming 'selective'? Our earlier analysis of the dropouts provided a clue and our answer at the moment is to give applications a priority, based on those characteristics, evident from their reports and submissions, which indicate a student's degree of commitment, effort and persistence, regardless of their actual achievement and results. The declared aim of the process is to recognise those students best able to cope with the independence and responsibility they will have at St Mary's and who will be most likely to stay the distance to their HSC.

At the end of the day, we can look at our student intake and dissect it in many ways. In provenance terms, there are ex-Year 10 students from Government schools (65-70 per cent), ex-Year 10 students from non-government schools (10-25%) and re-entry students, including those of mature age, returning to pick up or re-attempt secondary studies (ten to fifteen per cent). There are academic stars among them, as

well as those with severe learning difficulties. There are sporting stars among them, though most don't see sport as a major part of their life. They come from a constellation of ethnic and social backgrounds.

The one feature of the population that can't escape mention is the fact that around two-thirds are female. No, we don't know why, but it has been a consistent feature of our intake from the start. It is a moot point as to whether this is cause or effect, but it is frequently asserted that St Mary's is a good place for girls who want to achieve. There are lots of interesting hypotheses here for budding researchers to follow up!

How successful have we really been and how do you measure this anyway? Every time we have sounded the opinions of students, the result has been overwhelmingly positive, with the 'adult' atmosphere and the quality of the student-teacher relationships being most frequently cited. The number and quality of the pile of applications is another kind of measure - around three applicants for every two places. In keeping with our comprehensive nature, HSC results have spanned the full range from a satisfying representation in the State order of merit lists through to all other parts of the spectrum. By all of these measures at least, we are entitled to feel that we have addressed our mandate.

Nevertheless, in a school where more than half of the students each year are new enrolments, nothing can be taken for granted. We have so little time with each new group, there is none for complacent back-slapping. Matters such as developing and evolving a school culture remain a real challenge. Notwithstanding our concern for an adult environment that looks and works like a TAFE College or university, the last thing we want to lose is the 'feel' that we associate with being a school - all of the things like mutual respect and caring, individual concern, cohesion and corporate identity that add up to the old-fashioned notion of 'school spirit' - a feature largely absent from tertiary institutions. □ 29-1-93

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernie Shepherd is the Principal of St Mary's Senior High School.



'We're going to choose a school for him where they do at least four R's.'

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## ***INSITE at Auburn Girls'***

AUBURN GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL is a multicultural high school in the inner western suburbs of Sydney. Approximately 90 per cent of students are from non-English speaking backgrounds and many are new arrivals in Australia. Major language groups include, Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Polynesian.

For the last four years the school has been operating a special program called INSITE (Increase Student Interest in Total Education) focused specifically on the needs of senior students. The aims of the program are to raise student self-esteem, promote positive attitudes to senior schooling, improve individual study and organisational skills and encourage realistic career choices.

During 1992, all Year 11 students completed a school questionnaire on personal skills and abilities, attitudes to school and work and expectations about careers and the future. Most students also participated in a diagnostic study skills survey conducted by the University of Wollongong. These two activities were followed up by individual in-depth interviews by teachers where open discussion, feedback and positive support led to the development of targets by each girl. A study skills day based on students' expressed needs was conducted in September.

Student evaluations of the program indicate a higher level of interest and motivation in Year 11 and greater involvement by each student in her own learning. Students have been able to investigate their needs, strengths, weaknesses and career aspirations. They have been encouraged to set goals and to develop and apply new knowledge and skills. For teaching staff there has been increased awareness of student attitudes to teaching and learning, increased awareness of the level of students' skills, resultant changes in classroom teaching practices and greater rapport between staff and students. □

### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

*Brian Ralph is the Principal of Auburn Girls' High School.*



## Newtown High School of the Performing Arts: A Case Study

Robin Amm

**N**EWTON HIGH SCHOOL OF THE PERFORMING ARTS draws performing arts students from the whole of NSW. However, it is not a specialist high school, although it fulfils the function of one through its Performing Arts programs.

In 1984, the Department of School Education and the NSW Teachers' Federation agreed that the school could be established as long as there was a local area intake at the same time. Petersham Girls' High School and Newtown Boys' High School would be amalgamated on the site of what was to become Newtown High School of the Performing Arts. The two schools came together in November 1989 and at the same time, the first auditions were held for 40 Year 7 students in Dance, Drama and Music. A Performing Arts Head Teacher was appointed in 1989 and a Dance/Drama teacher. Except for these two teachers, the staff of the new school was formed from the dissolved boys and girls schools.

In 1991 and 1992, 50 auditioned Year 7 students were admitted with a further twenty Year 11 students in 1992. In 1993 there will be a 230 auditioned students out of a total school population of 720. Performing Arts students are admitted in Years 8, 9, 10 and 12, provided there are vacancies. However, the Performing Arts population is increasing. The mandatory requirements of the Board of Studies (NSW) and the Department of School Education for the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate, limit the amount of time spent on Performing Arts subjects, particu-

larly in Years 7 and 8. All Year 7 students follow the same curriculum, studying four Music, two Dance and two Drama periods each week (a period is forty minutes). In Year 8, two electives are studied of four periods each. All auditioned students must study two performing arts subjects. In Years 9 and 10, three electives are studied and students may choose to do double electives in Dance, Drama and Music, and one other elective in either the Performing Arts or other subject areas. All students have the same access to Performing Arts subjects. In the core, only five periods of English, Mathematics and Science and four periods of a Social Science can be studied. As a consequence of the emphasis on Performing Arts, other subject areas are declining in numbers, some are disappearing and there is a change in staffing based on the change in curriculum patterns.

It is important that auditioned students experience the stimulation of being together in class (students can 'talk' dance, music and drama). There are two classes of auditioned students in Year 7, one predominantly Dance, the other Music, with Drama spread between them. Ideally, each area should have a class each so as to maximise the students' talents, and the small amount of teaching time. In Years 8-10, there are 'teacher nominated' classes but 'interest' classes are available as well. Students who show talent at a late stage may transfer to the teacher nominated classes. In Year 9, a class is organised which allows for cross-curricular study. All students have access to Performing Arts classes. The curriculum followed in Years 7 - 10 are the Board of



Studies (NSW) Dance, Drama and Music Syllabuses leading to the award of School Certificate. In Years 11 and 12, students can choose from Dance 2 units, Drama 2 unit, Classical Ballet 2 unit, Music Course 1/2, unit and a Music 2/3 unit. One unit equals three periods a week. All courses have an externally examined performance element. The study of these courses with English and at least one unit of a technology-based subject leads to the award of the Higher School Certificate.

As part of the Performing Arts curriculum, auditioned students must belong to an ensemble. This is extra-curricular, usually lasting for at least two hours and is taken by the Performing Arts teachers. Teachers are expected to take two ensembles for which they receive a very inadequate four period allowance. A yearly allowance of 56 periods, or the equivalent of two teachers, is the only concession with 20 relief days at audition time, given by the Department of School Education. Students audition to be a member of the Dance, Drama and Music ensembles. Currently, there are four Dance and Four Drama ensembles and a variety of Music ensembles such as a saxophone quintet, a woodwind quintet, a chamber orchestra, concert bands at various levels, choral groups and rock bands. Next year there will be a stage band, a jazz band and a percussion ensemble. As the number of ensembles increase, there is a need for teachers with suitable qualifications and preferably professional experience teaching in other faculties may be able to take ensembles. Students who are unsuccessful at auditions for ensembles may join Special Interest groups. The ensembles are the 'public face' of Newtown High School of the performing Arts and perform at Regional and State festivals, school spectaculars and other venues.

A tutorial program is run for Music and Drama. Private vocal and instrumental tutors are employed by the students for half-hour lessons a week. The Year 7 to 10 students come out of class on a rotational basis. Year 11 and 12 students do their tutorials at lunch time. Students are assisted financially if necessary, however, there is no extra allowance for this. In Drama, voice tutorials are held out of school. Other curriculum initiatives are master classes, and attendance at concerts such as 'Meet the Music', the theatre, the ballet, the Sydney Dance company and so on. The classwork, ensembles and tutorials form an integrated curriculum. Tutors are briefed as to the classwork and ensemble outcomes.

As performance is part of the Dance, Drama and Music curriculum, we hold a series of twilight and Showcase concerts each semester. The twilight series is a presentation of classwork, sometimes cross-curricular and often innovative. The 'Showcase' series presents the work of the ensembles. Such concerts are held in the Studio Theatre, a 200 seat learning space with a 48 channel computerised lighting desk and a sixteen channel audio desk. As with all technology, we are constantly seeking to upgrade this equipment. The Studio Theatre, a professional level facility is hired out and pays off itself. Other facilities include four music classrooms, ten practice rooms which the tutors use for their tutorials, a triple classroom size Drama studio, two studios with barres, mirrors and Tarkett flooring for Ballet, Drama and Dance. Eventually, the two Dance Studios will be located in St George's hall, a 600 seat heritage building which is to have a \$2 million uplift in 1993. Another \$3 million is required. There is an amphitheatre in the playground. These are basic facilities for a specialist high school.

The Performing Arts staff, which consists of a Head Teacher of Dance, a Head Teacher of English/History, a Head Teacher of Music, as well as three dance/drama, two drama and three music teachers were all appointed by interview. The school has been most fortunate in the calibre and commitment of these staff. So much time is spent out of school hours in ensembles, rehearsals, 'bumping in and out', designing the lighting and sound, planning

the items and attending performances at other venues. It is essential to interview these staff. Concerts mean all staff are rostered in the holding rooms (as each concert has more than 150 students performing), at the stagedoor, the front of the house and so on. It is very important to have all staff committed to the school programs.

The Department of School Education places notices in the papers and sends applications forms to government and non-government primary and high schools. The auditions are held for Year 6 and Year 10 applicants in Term 2 and last a week. Currently, we audition all serious applicants. The application form includes a parent and principal section. Principals are asked to comment on achievement in the curriculum as well as on skills and commitment to the Performing Arts.

The audition process is a workshop lasting from two to two and a half hours, conducted by three workshop leaders, two from school and one from outside. No material pre-prepared by the applicants is used, except in music (but even then it forms a small part of the process). Students are ranked on demonstrated skill, potential, ability to work in groups and individually, to follow instruction and to improvise. Successful workshop applicants are interviewed by the principal and the School Counsellor. A problem facing all performing Arts Schools, which can be overcome to a large extent with a whole year calendar planning, is rehearsal and performance time. This planning allows subject teachers to organise their lessons and assessment timetable. The use of contractual learning will increase to assist in this problem. Staff will need to devise flexible teaching programs to accommodate the performance calendar.

A Performing Arts High school is expensive if funded properly in facilities, staff, equipment and time. Teachers, students and parents must commit themselves to much out-of-school activity. However, it is a most rewarding place when the talent, time and energy merge in a wonderful performance. □

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Outcome-Based Education in NSW

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ALL SYLLABUSES DEVELOPED BY the Board of Studies since 1980 have included outcomes. Those developed before 1990 have had outcomes statements incorporated throughout 1991 and 1992. The inclusion of outcomes in all syllabuses has issued a significant challenge to educators. If we have to clearly identify what students know and understand, what they can do (skills developed) and what they value or appreciate, then how are we going to do it? How will we incorporate outcomes into teaching and learning programs? How will we incorporate them into assessment policies and programs? How will outcomes affect or influence teaching practices in classrooms? Throughout 1993, teachers will be expected to come to terms with these questions.

**The Director-General has identified student outcomes as one of his priorities for 1993. Quality Assurance has also been identified as one of the priorities for this year.** What is the connection between the two? Will Quality Assurance teams visiting 25 per cent of schools this year be asking questions about student outcomes and how we are going about identifying them, assessing them, labelling them (in levels of achievement terms)?

We now work in a climate of accountability and performance and outcomes-based education is part of this climate. Teachers have now had two years experience in applying the School Certificate Descriptors to the work of students in Year 10. Will this experience help to prepare teachers for the experience of evaluating current programs and practices? Will those teachers who have already developed profile reporting systems for students and parents be well on the way to developing an outcomes-based reporting system?

When teachers planned units of work and programs which included sections entitled: 'what students will know and understand' at the end of a unit on 'x' of 'y' lessons (anywhere between 10 to 60 or more lessons) and 'what students will be able to do' (or do better) at the end of a unit and 'what students will value and appreciate' at the end of a unit, they are in fact incorporating student outcomes without necessarily formally using the term 'outcomes'.

In 1993, we are going to launch into the concept of an outcomes-based curriculum at Beacon Hill Technology High School. We are going to incorporate student outcomes into teaching, learning and assessment programs by using these following strategies.

- Four ASTs will have curriculum responsibilities. They will develop draft programs including outcomes for Years 7-12 for their respective faculties for discussion. Various formats will be presented to the whole staff for discussion and further refinement.
- Developing a Draft Profile reporting statements reflecting the student outcomes for Year 7 only. We will decide whether the Year 7 profiles will include levels of achievement for the outcomes.
- Developing a 'final statement' for Year 12 for their HSC folders, for the subjects in their faculty. In 1992 we experimented with a school statement for Year 12 2U Computing Studies which indicated what students should know as a result of having studied the course for two years. We did not indicate levels of achievement but we may on the revised 1993 statements.
- Collecting various pro-formas from Board of Studies Support Materials and other sources which give teachers some ideas about the incorporation of student outcomes and making sure some staff development time is made available to study the material.
- Including Curriculum Outcomes and the reporting of them as a priority in the School Management Plan for 1993. □

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Restructuring: Look Both Ways And Maybe, Proceed With Caution

Ron Hurley



**'We should recognise that the convergence of courses in secondary schools and TAFE may disguise the importance of general education and over-emphasise vocational pursuits. Principals must be vigilant if they are to ensure that 'the tail does not wag the dog'.'**

**I**T IS IMPORTANT at regular intervals to question the purpose of the education we provide for students in our schools. The current emphasis on the vocational aspects of education in the latter years of secondary education needs to be kept in perspective. Schools are clearly a microcosm of the society they serve and, on their own, are unable to cure all of society's ills. Any restructuring of the curriculum and its delivery should be directed towards developing personal worth. The extension of a student's individual capacity in diverse fields must remain our primary objective.

A persuasive case can always be made for education to be made 'relevant' to those receiving it. Students want a balanced education - one that will meet their current expectations, will be flexible enough to satisfy their personal interests, and comprehensive enough to permit diverse vocational and recreational choice. It is unrealistic to assume that at age twelve, sixteen or eighteen everyone in the cohort will wisely choose the right option to fulfil their life's goal. The embryonic nurse at twelve years of age may prefer veterinary science by the time she is sixteen and eventually at eighteen, choose horticulture. For this reason, it is important that our schools, and our educational organisation, do not prevent students from changing direction. In fact, we should be very cautious about promoting the 'virtue' of single-minded direction.

This view, however, does not necessarily preclude the role of special schools, classes or organisations designed to enhance student performance in particular fields. What I hope it does, is to remind us that we must continue to query our direction and in so doing, ponder whether it is really our direction imposed on others.

The decentralisation of management must not destroy the delivery of effective education for all. In meeting local needs we must remember the increase in social mobility and the cultural parameters which underpin our State, our nation and the world.

Perhaps we should not meddle too much with some traditional divisions which, by their names, indicate their intent. The pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary and

vocational divisions may still have a great deal to recommend them. The blurring of these boundaries in the real world and the continuity of education for life are axiomatic. There is perhaps a danger in considering existentialist philosophy or cosmic conversion before learning the skills of playing together, or the fundamentals of language and number.

As well, we should recognise that the convergence of courses in secondary schools and TAFE may disguise the importance of general education and over-emphasise vocational pursuits. Principals must be vigilant if they are to ensure that 'the tail does not wag the dog'.

We all know schools which claim remarkable achievements for their students through specific structures or programs. However, the real or opportunity-costs of a particular organisational choice must always be carefully examined. Does the lengthened school day, for instance, restrict time for family, play or social interaction? Are the gains of a post-compulsory timetable options made at the expense of the access of junior students to senior staff counselling or senior student role models? Should the school provide opportunities for self-expression at the cost of collegiality and teamwork?

**This is not a reactionary tract but a determined attempt to encourage debate and to ensure that school leaders do what they have done well through the ages: to question what they do, to question why they do it and, in the end, ensure education is relevant to all stakeholders, both individually and collectively.**

Fortunately, we have been freed from many of the restrictive organisational practices of the past. Principals and their schools are now in a position to incorporate the best of both worlds: the well-founded broad-based requirements of our society and the specific needs of our school community. Our desire to achieve the latter should not be at the expense of the former.

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Ron Hurley is the President of the New South Wales' Secondary Principals' Council and is also the Principal of Holsworthy High School.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

RECENTLY, the *Sydney Morning Herald* initiated a media bonfire on school violence after it obtained a leaked copy of a draft report being prepared by a working party of the Principals' Council. Great agitation ensued. The Minister, pressured into policy decisions on the run, toughened procedures on suspension and expulsion, giving more power to principals. The Director-General pointed out that consultations with the Council could only proceed if those consultations were secure. The Council was compromised. On one hand, it had to disown the leak but not disown the work of the principals who were preparing the report. It also has to consult widely with its 400 members but somehow maintain the confidentiality of subsequent discussions with the Director-General and his staff.

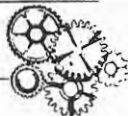
Some principals could see such leaks as worthwhile, as they produce results. Such a short term view ignores the fact that consultation with principals on a whole range of vital issues is crucial in an age of 'right-sized' bureaucracies, often staffed by decision-makers with little or no background in schools. **This consultation will only occur if security is virtually guaranteed.** Principals' organisations nationwide need to juggle the widest possible consultation with their members with the need to maintain a secure negotiation procedure with systems. We will all lose if consultation with systems on sensitive issues is reduced. □

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Harkin is the Vice-President of the NSWSPC.

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## Birds of a Feather Fly Faster

Collegiality is vital to the professional development  
of all new principals.

Ros Moxham

**T**HE DAY OF MAY 21 1992 will always be memorable for me: it was the day I began as the Principal of Davidson High School.

The first challenge I accepted was to create a positive school culture, prepared to accept change and providing for the future needs of students, staff and community. The problem of poor public image had to be tackled, along with the associated problem of declining enrolments. Staff morale needed uplifting desperately. The 'will I be the next to go?' syndrome was only one of several staffing problems - this particular one caused staff to hide problems, in case they were perceived as the weakest (and therefore most susceptible to being moved on).

Entering the principalship via the pathway of Leading Teacher gave me a background in leading school change through the professional development of staff, in a way which emphasised collaborative decision making. I had also played a key role in the transformation of a secondary school to a K-12 school, with a performing arts speciality.

The teaching staff expected change, some even welcomed it. Many were waiting for the opportunity to be part of changes which would benefit Davidson High School. Others did not see the need to change at all - we met the needs of most students; why change for just a few?

I spent the remainder of Term 2 looking, talking and listening to parents, students and staff. Terms 3 and 4 were taken up with the collaborative process of strategic planning for the school, a time-consuming but extremely valuable exercise. For this purpose, I encouraged a small group of enthusiastic teachers, parents and students to lead the process, and they performed this task most successfully.

One of my greatest difficulties during this first year was to balance the time needed to:

- look at issues holistically;
- plan thoroughly;
- meet with staff, students and parents;
- deal with issues that arose each day;

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- successfully resolve unforeseen and critical incidents; and,
- maintain staff and parent enthusiasm when planning, rather than implementing change.

1993 has provided an opportunity to implement small changes. However, the challenge to change the big picture remains. Part of the reason for the delay is the ease with which one can become consumed with small, but nevertheless urgent, issues and in the process, stray from the larger, more visionary tasks. Vast amounts of time have been consumed by discussion. Yet it is important to continually consider the positive and negative aspects of our

**'I now value discussing ideas, problems and issues with other principals, some of whom have similar problems, and some whose vast experience provides an important source of learning.'**

plans, despite their magnitude. And it is vital to convince the reluctant few of the need to change the ways in which we educate. This task alone has taken a vast amount of time and energy but is a worthwhile investment in staff professionalism. At Davidson High School, all stakeholders are given a chance to consider and discuss issues which are important to them. Teaching staff find it difficult to accommodate changes that could be compared with jumping off a cliff and manufacturing the umbrella to save the fall before hitting the ground. As educational leaders, our greatest challenge is:

- to convince teachers of the need to individualise, or as David Smith, of the University of Sydney described it, to 'customise student learning'; and,
- to assist teachers to develop teaching styles which encourage students to be more directly involved in their own learning.

In attempting to provide the most appropriate learning opportunities for our school community we are attempting to turn Davidson High School into a learning organisation, characterised by the following:

- a learning approach to strategy, using participative decision-making;
- open information systems (one-way information is a problem; I often feel that messages flow from my office but don't reach the teachers, who still keep their grumbles too much to themselves);
- adaptable structures;
- self-development opportunities for all;
- an open approach to change; and,
- a preparedness to be, and to do, things differently.

What do I hope for as a principal? Probably much the same as most newly-appointed principals. I hope that my leadership allows for a highly collaborative team effort and that this will provide students with the best possible educational opportunities.

A sense of collegiality with other principals is vital to my continued professional development. When I first entered the principalship last year, I felt like an island, isolated from peer support. I now value discussing ideas, problems and issues with other principals, some of whom have similar problems, and some whose vast experience provides an important source of learning.

As a beginning principal I have spoken with colleagues in similar circumstances. We are all self-starters, doing the job well as well as we can. The intensity of daily demands means it is so easy for us to become over-focused on the life of our own particular school. However, if we are to become truly forward-thinking educational leaders, we need to share our expertise, at group meetings and on a regular one-to-one basis. **While there are opportunities at regional and State conferences, we should also be looking towards more personalised learning for principals.**

Mentor programs between principals of the same region, State, and country are to be encouraged if we are to expand our professional horizons beyond the immediate issues of our own circle of schools. NSW schools can only benefit from such a cross-pollination of ideas. □



## Do We Lead or Do We Follow?

Ron Hurley



**'The nature of education and the expectations of our society suggest that we will probably never achieve definitive results or complete consensus on objectives.'**

**I** HAVE CHOSEN THIS HEADING to summarise some of the perplexing situations which confront school leadership at present. **Should schools be in the vanguard of social change or should they more properly reflect the changes occurring in the society in which they exist?** This question has always been a dilemma for principals. With the increasing rate of societal change it is becoming more difficult to be 'ahead of the game'. The quandary would be less daunting if the outcomes of change were more definitive or more consensual. The nature of education and the expectations of our society suggest that we will probably never achieve definitive results or complete consensus on objectives.

One example of the inherent difficulty for school leaders relates to the expectations surrounding gender equity. Our judicial system, our wage system and even the Church cannot agree upon, let alone achieve, gender equity. How realistic is it to expect the curriculum, the organisation of schools and the teacher in the classroom to achieve that which our society cannot? Do proponents of the cause really mean equality or equity? Are there inherent differences in gender characteristics, either through nature or nurture, which suggest the educated approach is to recognise dissimilarities and counteract them where appropriate and possible?

The 'selective' versus the 'undifferentiated' schooling debate evokes the same conundrum. It is generally recognised that society sorts our incomes, our neighbourhoods and our occupational status, although contradictions and exceptions always occur. Which group of students is ever really homogenous when by definition every member of that group is an individual? However, economic reason and practicality demand that students must be grouped together in some way. Perhaps, sometimes, groupings should favour homogeneity. Sometimes, however, the heterogeneity of a diverse group is of more value. Maybe our desire to produce the 'best', most convenient and uniformly applied solution is not in the best interests of our students?

In the same vein, we should be wary of unseemly haste in accommodating the rapidly increasing retention rate - from 32 per cent in Year 12 in 1983 to 65 per cent in 1993. Furthermore, it is likely that the rapid growth of the past decade will continue into the future. Schools alone cannot pre-empt the measures

society must take to assimilate this change nor can schools alone accommodate the change. Employment must be restructured but expectations must also be readjusted. School leavers who do not become a part of the expanded post-compulsory student numbers must drastically re-shape their own lifestyle and expectations. To make matters worse, the generation gap will widen even further if we show less understanding of the changes society has inflicted on today's generation of students. The development of an unemployable underclass will wreak its own havoc, the consequences of which are yet to be fully understood. Equally damaging in a different way is the maintenance of an existing illusion that perpetual studentship, and the quest for higher and higher credentials will somehow create jobs for all. In fact, all that this credentialism may do is to produce a dependent class we cannot sustain.

The seeds of violence, increasingly evident in our society, are germinating in our schools. Inherent forces, in the adolescent development of peer groups pressure and the search for individual identity, promote outbreaks of conflict. School leaders must guide staff, inform parents and educate students in managing violent outbursts. We will achieve little by over-reaction, repressive regimes or blind denial. Imaginative programs to meet the needs of students, in a climate of firm but fair management, will produce the best results.

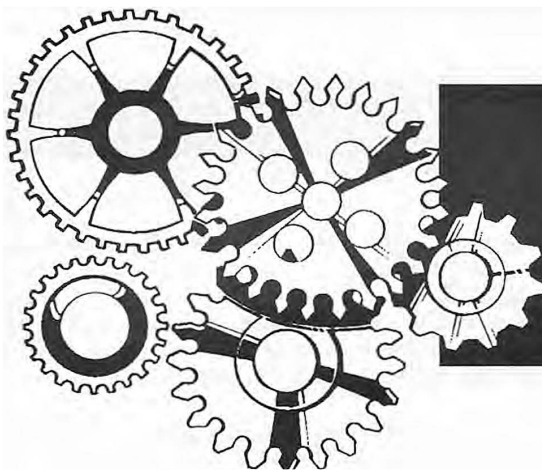
Society must recognise that the canons of good education remain as always:

- the development of individual skills;
- learning to learn and loving to learn;
- caring for those less able; and,
- tolerance for others.

Schools cannot carry this message along by themselves; they are part of society, not separate from it. Changes to the TER, Pathways, the development of national Profiles and the rise in TAFE admissions are all expressions of the continuing adjustment which needs to be made. Fortunately, the education sector is co-operating as never before. Society at large through its legislature, the media and employers must assist by carrying the message that students in the 90s are not the victims. They must be the solution. □

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# PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS THE NATION

## New South Wales

SCHOOLS IN NEW SOUTH WALES have cautiously embarked on the voyage of Quality Assurance. This brings together two distinct aspects of work in education systems; school development and accountability. **Essentially, Quality Assurance is a week-long external review and validation process of a school's purpose, goals and management plan.** Review teams for high schools consist of an external team of about four, drawn from a Quality Assurance unit of selected and trained cluster directors, principals and teachers. Each team also includes the principal and a parent or community representative.

Prior to the Review week, the team leader and the principal negotiate focal areas for the Review and prepare questions designed to collect data from a random selection of teachers, parents and students. Usually, there are three or four focus areas, such as 'Student Welfare', 'Girls Education Strategies', 'Technology Curriculum', 'Decision Making' or 'School Communication'. For each area, a small number of questions are prepared to elicit information. During the week of data collection the Review team (with the exception of the principal) conducts interviews and then (with the principal) debriefs and synthesises the data. On the last day of the Review, a preliminary report is given to the staff. In the next few weeks, the final Report is negotiated between the team leader and the principal. The Report details achievements, findings and recommendations for future planning.

After some initial agitation, the process is becoming increasingly accepted. The union leadership supported the Quality Assurance trials while their more conservative Council did not. Finally, the annual conference of the union endorsed the process. The union uncertainty was reflected in schools. Some were eager volunteers, some withdrew, some were confused. Principals, as usual, were caught in the middle and had their diplomacy skills sorely tested.

School Reports become public documents, generally emphasising the positive aspects of the schools rather than focusing on their deficiencies. They do, however, emphasise the fact that tomorrow's outcomes for students need to be better than today's and yesterday's. **The process is about continuous improvement and development in providing learning opportunities for students.**

In 1993, a trial is taking place in approximately 400 of 2,200 schools. Feedback from trial schools and their communities will re-shape the process. **Despite general support, there are real concerns over the ownership of the Review process by schools, the role and representative nature of parent members, and the exit report on the last day. Refinements can be expected.** □

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**Jim Harkin** is the Vice-President of the NSWSPC and is also the Principal of Morefield Girls' High School, in Kogarah, NSW.



## RAYMOND DART PEEL TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL -NSW

### Collegiality and the Tyranny Of Distance

TO THOSE WHOSE EDUCATIONAL and other endeavours centre in and around the large urban centres of NSW, happenings in the north-west region of that State may seem to be of little consequence. We would, however, like to remind our city colleagues that we are really only a few electronic minutes away when it comes to keeping up with the latest in education.

Principals and teachers in the north-west are a hardy, versatile lot and just as adaptable as our colleagues in the city. To a degree, we are sheltered from the worst excesses of absentee-ism, violence, vandalism and theft. However, we do have our share and are just as upset when these events disturb our daily routine.

Like our city colleagues, we feel the pace of change and there is no doubt that this is increasingly rapid. Much comfort and strength is gained from our membership of the Principals' Council, which meets once a term. Furthermore, our association in the Council provides us with an opportunity to influence policy formulation and direction, with members being nominated to represent the Council on Regional committees. Region does see our input as both valuable and constructive and we have an excellent relationship with senior Regional officers.

Change is having just as great an impact in the north-west as elsewhere, with some important differences. The different pressures we face include the problem of vast distances between colleagues. Here, the telephone and the fax machine are valuable aids to collegiality.

As well, there is the ever present danger of flood, drought and fire. Often it is difficult to obtain resources quickly and cheaply, with the added cost of freight and cartage. Sometimes, the service provided by outside agencies and businesses can be less than average. Sadly added to this is the paucity of local employment for our school leavers.

Professional training and development opportunities for staff, in spite of the best efforts of the Region, are less available and more costly than in the city. Innovative ways have to be found to make the professional training and development dollar go further. Transport arrangements and the distance travelled by students make schooling more difficult. Many students leave home before 7 a.m. and do not arrive back at home till 5.30 p.m. or 6 p.m. in the evening.

Lest you should infer from the above that our lot is an unhappy one, I hasten to add that the north-west does have its compensations.

I have found my colleagues to be a highly caring and professional group. All of them willingly 'go the extra mile' in promoting their schools, trumpeting the successes of state education and attending to the needs of their local school communities. To be sure, the parents of students in the north-west owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the energy and enthusiasm of local principals and teachers.

No doubt, colleagues in other areas, west of the mountains in NSW and in country areas of other States, could echo these sentiments. □

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Raymond Dart** is President of the North-West Region Secondary Principals Council and is also the Principal of Peel Technology High School in Tamworth, NSW.



# FROM THE PRESIDENTS

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## NSW: The Business of Education: Not the Education Business

SINCE THE LAST ISSUE OF 'PRINCIPAL MATTERS' I have taken up a posting to a new school as principal, attended award ceremonies for people involved in education and received an account for services rendered from one part of the system to another. These seemingly unrelated incidents induced me to reflect on some of the recent changes which have impacted on the NSW system, and perhaps, other education systems around Australia.

In the first instance, the change of school reminded me of the dedication of teachers. The vast majority work hard, including labour on special programs and student welfare. Many hours are spent outside of regular school time. The care of teachers for their students is impressive and their teaching effective. The hours spent coaching in band, choir, sporting and special interest groups is exceptional, as are the regular meetings with parents to inform, consult and educate. **In my experience, this dedication has been a unique characteristic of those drawn to the 'social conscience' vocation of teaching. This will continue to be so whether or not there is a system of verification called Quality Assurance, inspection or educational audit.**

At the award ceremonies I attended, I saw many worthy recipients representing all facets of the education process. However, it occurred to me that recognition of particular people in this way has an inherent danger. Many people were not present but were equally worthy. This subtle exclusion is due to a number of factors, including possible differences in attitudes to nomination, a lack of awareness by potential nominators, or simply limited access due to the logistics of the process. Regardless of the reason, I ponder on the merits of a system which recognises the efforts and achievements of some but neglects the equally meritorious achievements of others.

In the case of the manifestation of the user-pays principle, where one part of the system charges another part of the system for its services, I reflected on the two experiences above. To account accurately for costs involved in a project is both commendable and necessary. For too long, many in public service sectors have mistakenly believed that if no money changes hands then there is no cost or accountability. If, however, we elect to turn completely to the user-pays principle, I fear that the current education budget will be unable to afford to pay for all services rendered. The voluntary hours of staff, parents and students on committees, panels and working groups may well dry up if those groups see other parts of the system charging for their services.

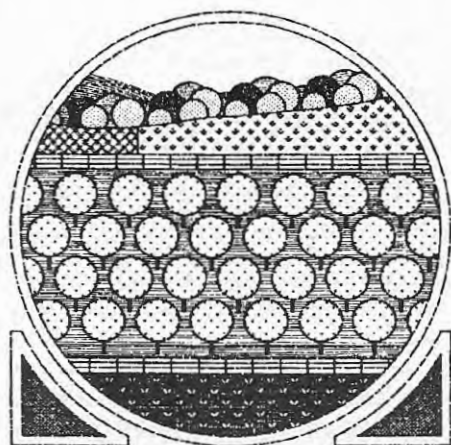
**In summary, recent experiences have led me to question the unfettered embrace of commercial principles and business practice in schools.** Ours is a service industry which enjoys a privileged position in the community. A great deal of the strength of the education sector emanates from the voluntary extra work we all know demonstrates commitment and concern. Also vital to the success of schools is the collegiality of professional educators - a precious but fragile intangible which could so easily wither away under the spotlight of individual recognition and hard-nosed review. **The dedication of staff in so many schools is of the utmost importance to the education of our students. We must be on our guard to ensure that these new principles do not have a deleterious effect on the intrinsic qualities of teaching and learning.**

Without a doubt, any system providing a service to the community requires a validation mechanism to justify the public expenditure incurred. However, **its burden should not be an encumbrance disproportionate to the value it gives** and it should act largely as an affirmation of the quality of the whole education provided. □

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mr Ron Hurley is the Principal of Leumeah Technology High School, in Leumeah, NSW. He is also the President of the NSWSPC.*

# WHAT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS THINK



## PETER FUNNEL - NARRABEEN HIGH SCHOOL, NARRABEEN, NSW

**A**T THE END OF 1992, Narrabeen High School decided to take part in the Quality Assurance (QA) Review trials. The QA process took place during the week of 15-19 March 1993. The school received four weeks prior notice. In retrospect, this was insufficient, due to the time constraints of communicating with, and involving, the wider community. In future, schools may be invited to suggest a suitable time for their Review so that it can fit in with existing school programs. Apparently, advance notice of one term will be provided. It is also understood that details of what is needed for the Review will be available well in advance, in the form of guidelines (to be developed as a result of current trials).

**The identification and clarification of the focus areas for the Review are of critical importance.** If the outcomes of the Review are to provide valuable input into a school's planning, implementation and evaluation, the focus areas should be clearly related to the Management Plan. The process of identifying, clarifying and communicating the focus areas will, realistically, require a term. This is particularly true if there is to be genuine community involvement.

Arising from the focus areas are the questions which will form the basis of teacher, student and parent/community member interviews. The framing of the questions is undertaken by the school and the QA Review panel. **The lesson learned at Narrabeen High was that the questions need to be framed to ensure they are understood by parents and students - avoid education jargon.** It is also essential that the questions be framed in a manner that provides useful data for the review - data that can be processed readily and synthesised for the report. It may be necessary for the panel to reconsider the interview process during the Review, some questions may need to be rephrased, deleted or added.

One aspect of the data collection process is classroom observation. Such observations are determined by the school and serve to provide data appropriate to the focus areas. It is the school's prerogative to determine the nature of classroom observations. We found them to be non-judgemental and non-threatening for the teachers involved.

The Review panel set out to be 'user friendly' and staff members were given no reason to harbour concerns about 'supervision', 'inspection' or any other imposed reporting models. Just as the school was experiencing QA in a very early formative stage, so was the QA panel.

As a member of the panel, the principal is in a unique position. On the one hand, there is the requirement to be an impartial and objective panel member, dispassionately reviewing the information gathered from many different sources. On the other hand, there is the highly subjective feeling of protection and the desire to comment on, justify, defend or even refute uncomfortable or incorrect data. The experience is an interesting one and can be very demanding. During the daily debriefing sessions there may be considerable discussion over whether particular data is significant or whether it is peripheral. These discussions were often lengthy but it should be stressed that the involvement of the principal in such sessions is critical.

The principal should carefully consider the format of the verbal report at the end of the Review. At Narrabeen, it was requested that the minority comments be listed, as well as the significant achievements and recommendations. This was done so that those who expressed minority viewpoints would know their comments had been considered (although not found to be significant overall). However, in retrospect, it was found that listing these minority opinions tended to overshadow the school's significant achievements.

Possibly one of the most difficult tasks of the QA Directorate is to develop procedures for the translation of data gathered from a variety of sources, by a variety of methods, into a report couched largely in qualitative terms. Such procedures should ensure that reports are valid and reliable, and comparable in terms of that validity and reliability.

Meetings with members of the QA Directorate reflect that the whole process very much is in a formative stage, with the experiences of schools in the trials forming the basis of future modifications. Many concerns have already been, or are in the process of, being reviewed.

However, in hindsight, the Quality Assurance Review provided the school with a valuable opportunity to have its programs externally reviewed and validated. Recommendations largely suggest that the school continue processes already in place. And it was satisfying for the school to be commended for its achievements. While the earth did not move, it nevertheless did us good to feel the tremors. □

## GEORGE KENNEDY - TOORMINA HIGH SCHOOL, SAWTELL, NSW

**D**URING THE ENTIRE WEEK BEGINNING 6 SEPTEMBER this year, Toormina High School underwent a Quality Assurance Review. The oral report, consisting of excerpts of the full draft, was delivered to the staff on September 10. At the time of writing, we await the draft report (next week) and anticipate the final report early in Term 4.

A great deal of preparation has to be done by the principal (or delegates) prior to the Review. A staff meeting must be organised to introduce the team leader. Then it is necessary to work with staff to decide upon focus areas and the specific questions to be asked. The number, length and wording of those questions must then be negotiated with the team leader (thank heavens for fax machines!). Meetings and discussions must be set up with groups of staff to decide upon which classrooms, other visits (e.g., committee meetings) and documentation will be viewed. Relevant staff must then be consulted to program classroom visits. Staff, parents and students must then be selected at random for interview. Involved staff are then consulted, as are student



groups. Parents are contacted by mail and then, if necessary, by telephone as well.

We established a Quality Assurance noticeboard, where everything that emanated from the Quality Assurance team leader of this school was made available. As well, details of who was being interviewed, what documents were being made available and what visits were scheduled were displayed.

At this school, eight groups of students were interviewed (five from each year level plus aboriginal and 'support'), thirty four staff members, including all of the executive on a voluntary basis, and twenty five parents. Seven class and other visits took place.

At no time, was I unable to approach a team member and at all times relations with team members and community personnel was very cordial and relaxed.

There was an opportunity for those interviewed to stray from the focus questions and comments both positive and negative about the school or personnel in the school, particularly on leadership roles, were able to be made, with total confidentiality guaranteed.

When the team synthesises information at the end of each day, or when it coalesces information from day to day or at the very end, it relies heavily on weightings and reference to documentation to substantiate claims:- therefore it could be that 'several teachers felt the school tone was poor' or that 'many staff, a large number of parents and a large number of students felt 'the school tone was high to very high'

**'...Although the report was overwhelmingly positive, it was not a whitewash. The principal received a couple of criticisms, the staff a couple, and a number of suggestions were made to change and improve the operation of the school.'**

or, 'several parents reported that some teachers do not write lengthy or meaningful comments on students reports' may be balanced by 'observations of a range of school files which include copies of student reports' do not substantiate this claim'.

The information gathered is collated under three headings - which can be paraphrased as 'positive information', 'issues' (negative information) and 'future directions' (generally criticising the *status quo*).

The oral report delivered at the end of the week was a very positive summary of the feelings of a representative group of staff, parents and students, (including any who wished to be interviewed but were not selected at random) in terms of how they felt about this school. But although the report was overwhelmingly positive, it was not a white-wash. **The principal received a couple of criticisms, the staff a couple, and a number of suggestions were made to change and improve the operation of the school.** The elected staff liaison officer indicated that no concerns were reported from staff.

Some staff, having sat through the oral report, said they felt really good about being part of this school and having the school's strengths and achievements made public. Others, more cynically suggested that 'nothing new or unexpected' came from the Review.

Whilst awaiting the (draft) written report, it is fair to say that the Quality Assurance Review was a detailed, negotiated and professionally organised analysis of the school and its personnel. It was unique in our experience and we look forward to being able to read the report in-depth and work to implement the recommendations.

For my part, there was a lot of work beforehand and long days during the review week (sessions often went from 3.30 to 7.30 p.m.). However, it was worth it. I believe the school community will benefit a great deal from the final findings and the recommendations. □

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*George Kennedy is the Principal of Toormina High School, in NSW.*

### GRAHAM MOSELY SEFTON HIGH SCHOOL, SEFTON, NSW

**T**HE WEEK OF THE SCHOOL REVIEW had concluded. The farewells had been said and the visiting team had driven away. I went inside from the car park to our Deputy Principal's office, sat in one of her client chairs and asked: 'Well, *what do you think?*' 'I'm reminded of that Peggy Lee song', she replied. 'Is that all there is?'

It was a good reply. At that time, and still after one month as I write this, my first reaction is that our Quality Assurance Review was an anti-climax.

But the fact that I see it as an anti-climax is not the fault of the Review team. Each member was professional, co-operative, pleasant and generally left a good impression on me and everyone else in our school. Our team leader, a fellow secondary principal, was fully collegial in his manner and approach and impressed me with his friendly but dignified manner and his organisational skills. The one member of the team who was a director demonstrated his flexibility by working strictly to his 'non-judgemental', 'just one of the team', brief. During team meetings, his considerable experience and insight was demonstrated by the quality of his analysis and synthesis of gathered data.

Nor can my 'anti-climax' reaction be blamed on the New South Wales Quality Assurance Review system. Our Quality Assurance Review certainly came about because of my personal initiative. Before it was confirmed, we undertook wide consultation within our school community: holding staff meetings, Parents and Citizens meetings and School Council meetings. We also conducted a staff survey, a Student Representative Council survey, a prefects' survey and a parents' survey. At one point, however, the matter became industrial, and my sensitivities in that arena probably made me too cautious about the content of the Review. Meanwhile, wisdom after the event tells me, I had generated from the school community acceptance of the process rather than ownership of it, so nobody else was terribly interested in being told in what we were seeking from the Review.

**I found that the New South Wales process, at present, allows the school under Review to dominate the negotiation of focus areas for the Review and the questions to be asked.** The guidelines imply that a school's development/strategic/management plan represents fertile ground from which significant areas could be drawn. **We did that but the result was that at the end of the Review we ended up with our development plan!** Every recommendation made by the review is already in our development plan, even if in different words.

It was gratifying for the development plan to be validated in that way. However, if our school planning was done properly to begin with, and if we had thought more rigorously about the questions we suggested for the Review, we should have foreseen the result of the Review. We hadn't, because we hadn't thought through well enough what we were asking for.

If we were to do it again, I can think of two other approaches I would want to explore. We could either look at what wasn't in our development plan, to see whether it should be, or we could look more specifically at our present plans and target our questions more specifically to the question: 'is there a better way?'

However, I do need to balance my 'anti-climax' reaction by referring to other feelings I have about our Review. It is good to have an external report which I can confidently put before our present, and prospective, community. There is no doubt that the Report reads well, and so it should. We are blessed with a supportive community, a predominance of interested and hard-working students and a skilled committed staff. We have a 'good' school, but it is still comforting to have a report which implies so.

The Review did surprise me with some of its data. **It has left me with a more balanced view of the school's problems.** I now see that I had been the lightning rod for some dissatisfied parents, students or staff members, and that I had been receiving biased feedback about some issues. **I was becoming worried about a few areas which the more broadly-based Review showed were really perceived by most people as being in good health.** Significantly, our Deputy Principal's

advice to me in those areas had been right all along! I suppose I concluded that I really should trust my own judgement more (and that of the Deputy Principal), and that there is more room for proactive leadership.

My last feeling is that the Quality Assurance Review does provide valuable resources to the school which, if focused properly, can be extremely valuable. It was a process which did not intrude too much on the educational program of the school, though the Deputy Principal did have to devote a large number of hours over a three week period to organising venues, schedules and communications. **The opportunity the Review provided to consult with an academically respectable sample of the school community population is one which busy schools can rarely manage.**

To sum up, I found Quality Assurance Review to be non-threatening and to be worth doing. However, I would want to do it better the next time. But that is true for any learning experience and in New South Wales, we are still learning about the system's Quality Assurance process. **I wonder how much longer it will be before it stops being 'the system's' process and becomes 'our school's' process?** □

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mr Graham Mosely is the Principal of Sefton High School, in Sefton, NSW. The school undertook a Quality Assurance Review in August 1993.*

### GARRY BRIGGS - CONDELL PARK HIGH SCHOOL, CONDELL PARK, NSW

**A**S A CONCEPT, QUALITY ASSURANCE CAPTIVATED my interest. The prospect of seeing new and different approaches to common educational issues really appealed. Initially, I shared many of the suspicions felt by my colleagues. Assuming the position of Peer Principal seemed to be an ideal way for me to evaluate operational structures and to assess the impact of this recent import from South Australia.

After participating in the process, my early concerns about the efficacy of the interview model have been replaced by doubts which concern the validity of Quality Assurance itself. These doubts

**'For how much longer will schools be able to nominate apparently peripheral areas and not include fundamental aspects of the school's operation, such as the teaching and learning processes? Only a few schools requested assistance in evaluating teaching and learning through their focus area selection.'**

include the following questions.

- For how much longer will schools be able to nominate apparently peripheral areas and not include fundamental aspects of the school's operation, such as the teaching and learning processes? Only a few schools requested assistance in evaluating teaching and learning through their focus area selection. While most other schools offered some areas of substance to assess, it was not uncommon to be gathering information and reporting on issues which had the appearance of some superficiality. While this trend continues, the ability of Q.A. review teams to provide meaningful feedback to schools must be significantly

limited. Review teams I was associated with had a genuine desire to recognise school achievements and to assist with school improvement and development. The old inspectorial mentality of the 'hatchet man' has been replaced by this professional, evaluative attitude.

- What happens after the Review has been completed and delivered to the school? Theoretically, this is then a line-management matter, with the Cluster Director and the principal working together to ensure that recommendations are enacted. **However, if the recommendations relate directly to leadership issues within the school, how can the people who were responsible for the matters raised be then expected to address these issues, and thus implement the recommendations?** Understandably, schools are never told how to change procedures and practices. However, some team members felt frustrated because they felt that recommendations would not be implemented, and that their time and experience had been wasted.

- How can the issue of accuracy be addressed? Most staff want their school to be seen, and reported upon, in a favourable light. This is both predictable and natural. At times, however, responses were given which were significantly at odds with emerging trends. **At other times, questions were deliberately constructed to keep Review teams away from issues which became increasingly obvious, but which could not be commented upon directly.** The developmental significance of the Review in such situations must be questioned. Some schools did not appear to want findings of any substance to be reported; their major priority seemed simply to get the Q.A. visit over and done with!

- The potential for future school reviews to become increasingly schools-oriented and increasingly systems-directed must be resisted. Already, Program Evaluation has been added as a component.
- Quality Assurance is an expensive program to maintain - thus the question of resourcing must be addressed. **Budget over-runs must not come from school-based funding.** The educational potential of Q.A. must take precedence over possible political implications.

Quality assurance has helped me to better understand my school - used correctly it can be a powerful tool for development and goal setting. **However, schools still have the right to control the agenda.** So long as this continues, and schools use the process in meaningful ways, we should be able to drive both quality and assurance from the process. □

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mr Garry Briggs is the Principal of Condell Park High School, in Condell Park, NSW.*

**RAYMOND DART**  
**PEEL TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL - NSW**

**T**HE MAJOR PROBLEM FOR THOSE IN SCHOOLS preparing students for the future is that the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) has become, for the majority of students, the malignant creature which stifles curriculum broadening and results in

students undertaking courses in which they have little or no interest or aptitude.

I agree that there has been a tremendous change in the nature of students presenting for the HSC/VCE. The majority, who are not university bound, are clearly rejecting the old academic courses. 'Parity of esteem', in the terms expressed in Professor Sam Ball's argument in the last issue of *Principal Matters*, is not the issue. It is more that recognition should be given to the successes in all subjects, in such a way that individual talents can be rewarded appropriately.

All students are not compulsorily required to present subjects which are counted for the TER. However, the pressures brought to bear by the universities, the community and the students' own parents, about the need to study these subjects, has a negative effect in schools. More often than not, students are condemned, for two or more years, to study subject material for which they have no further use.

I agree with Professor Ball that the scale on which a given subject is reported should be consistent with that used for any other subject. Why shouldn't TAFE subjects be given a similar status in terms of reporting as university type subjects? Why shouldn't courses developed by industry and other training institutions be allowed the same access to the HSC/VCE as those with which academics are happy.

Surely, the point is that schools are for students. We should do our utmost to give every student as many opportunities for success as possible. **Get rid of the TER, have a reporting scale which presents a high/low dichotomy and let those outside the schools use the results as they will for their own purposes. Let the schools get on with the job!** □