

N.S.W.



## Carr and Board heed principals' calls

Most Sydney principals have met with the Minister and Premier in small gatherings called by the Premier to hear their concerns at first hand. There have been animated exchanges of views but full marks go to Premier Bob Carr for displaying a genuine desire to listen. By the third meeting the Premier was opening up by listing the issues on which he had already received loud and clear messages. At this rate there might be nothing left to talk about by the time the last group meets with the Premier.

The Department and Board of Studies have responded to wails of anguish from principals over the indecent haste to introduce changes to the School Certificate. The changes will now be phased in over four years and eventually will include the external tests in English literacy, maths, science and Australian history, geography and civics. History and geography teachers are gearing up to

shift the Australian focus into Year 9 and 10. As one colleague suggested: send the bushrangers up to Year 10 and bring the Egyptians back to Year 7. Piece of cake, really!

Now the excitement and political posturing have subsided and the real work to implement most of the McGraw Report begins. Task forces have appeared like mushrooms to resolve many complex issues, among these the difference between 'standard' and 'advanced' courses and whether schools will be able to offer a reasonable range of both. Meanwhile, universities are standing aside with a 'let them play their silly games and then we'll decide the rules' attitude.

The ritual end-of-year festival of school staffing, generated the usual excitement last December. Most of the recent changes to procedures seem to be working except in the case of advertised positions where the panel has to contact all three referees for each interviewee. One diligent panel tracked down a referee in Britain while others spent hours on the phone contacting up to 24 referees for each position.

On the subject of annual school

reports you will recall the NSW government insisted that the first of these be the 1996 report to be issued at the end of 1997. As this operation degenerated into high farce even the Minister conceded that perhaps he had a big enough sample of 1996 reports. The definitive word came in a memorandum from the assistant Director-General, Corporate Performance who decreed that 'there will no longer be a requirement to complete a 1996 report ... the report to be completed in term 1, 1998 will be titled the 1997 report'. Watch for the next exciting episode.

Finally, more changes are looming for our own Secondary Principals' Council. Principals overwhelmingly supported a hike in fees in order to improve our support structure. Our invaluable Executive Officer will be joined by a professional officer in 1998. This person will play a research and advocacy role as well as offering much needed welfare support for principals.

*Chris Bonner is the Principal of Asquith Boys High School and a member of the Principal Matters editorial board*

# Principals in *Cyberspace*

## Future Schooling – How We're Heading for Online Education

How will the Internet impact on the future of education? Already we are witnessing its influence in many schools. The demand, for example, for the use of 16 Internet-connected machines in our library is overwhelming and we are about to connect two of the computer rooms so they may be used for access when not in use with computing classes. We are seeing the benefits of e-mail communication for students of foreign languages. If you have a school-age child or a child at university, you will know how often they use the Internet for information, changing drastically the breadth of resources available to them. Teachers are finding it impossible to keep up with the information, a fact forcing them to examine the purpose of assignments and how they are to be marked.

Look out for the next wave. Courses are now available on the Internet, and it won't be long before secondary students can decide to take one, or all, of their courses over the 'Net. You don't believe me? Look at some of the sites reviewed below.

### Key to Ratings

**Bomb:** A waste of time. Don't bother looking!

**1 hat:** If you have absolutely nothing else to do, take a peek.

**2 hats:** Definitely worth a look. Pass it on.

**3 hats:** Very useful to principals. Add it to your bookmarks now.

### A word on ratings: an editor's flight of fancy.

I am not sure what has come over the editor of this esteemed journal – hats and bombs indeed!\* What began as a simple rating of 1, 2 or 3 for web sites has turned into a strange creature involving academic head wear and explosive devices! However, We of the Webber Webber will shrug and continue on regardless.

### ART 101: Art Appreciation

<http://www.suu.edu/WebPages.MuseumGaller/artapp.html>

This is a fully accredited university course offered over the 'Net. It is a course in art appreciation offered by Southern Utah University. You can enrol and then study the course over the 'Net. You can even study the course concurrently with high school study! The enrolment form is on the web site – you just fill it in and supply your credit card information. There is a course outline and an orientation page providing information on the way the class works, the textbook required, weekly modules, how discussions take place, passwords, quizzes, final projects and how the course is graded. Furthermore, completion of the course gains credit points towards degrees.

This site gives you a good idea of what is possible. It would appear that it is not necessary to be a US citizen to enrol in the course although there is a box in the application form for US citizens requesting a social security number.

Will we be competing with schools and other institutions from inside and outside Australia for students? I believe this is highly likely. If this is the case, what are the likely implications for our schools? What can we do to make certain we are not left behind? We need to find answers to these questions quickly.

Take a look at this site: the course itself is not presented here, but it gives you an idea of what is possible.



### Virtual School

<http://www.virtualschool.edu/vs/index.html>

This site is not what its title suggests – it is not a secondary school. However, it is a virtual college, offering a range of courses over the 'Net and about the 'Net. It is a joint project of George Mason University and Alternative Technology Corporation and offers courses, supplemented with videos which students must purchase. Courses are not cheap, nor are the videos.

Unlike the art appreciation course, these courses are offered on a not-for-credit basis. Location is irrelevant – you can enrol no matter where you live. You may even visit the courses as a 'visitor' and take a closer look. Once again, worth a look to see what's becoming available.





**NSW HSC Online**  
<http://hsc.csu.edu.au/>

This is a site set up to help students and teachers with topics in a range of NSW Higher School Certificate courses. Having a science background I looked up 'biology'. It presents 'tutorial' topics on some of the core and elective sections of the course, past HSC exams and exam reports and, under the heading Resources, links to associated web sites. While not providing the current HSC biology course on offer, it doesn't take a great leap of imagination to see the possibilities for the future. Its present usefulness is obvious from the number of visitors to the site – 81,035 at the time of writing.

Worth a look.



**Workplace Writing with the World Wide Web**

<http://kalama.doe.hawaii.edu/hern95/pt019/index.html>

This is an example of the use of the web to aid student learning. The project is designed to support students with six major sets of writing assignments covered in English 060 at the Hawaii Community College on the Big Island of Hawaii. It's worth a quick look for those who want to understand how the web is being used for such purposes.



**The Playwriting Seminars**  
<http://www.vcu.edu/artweb/playwriting/>

This site is a full textbook in playwriting. It claims to be the first textbook in the humanities to be presented on the Web; surely it will not be the last. Once more, a new way of presenting educational material to students, and worth a quick visit.



**Electronic Learning in a Digital World**  
<http://www.edgorg.com/index.htm>

This is not a site containing courses; rather, it is about learning to use the Web. While directed at tertiary edu-

cation, there is much of relevance for secondary schools. The author believes electronic learning involves 'electronic admissions, advising, registration, mentoring and counselling, a digital library, an electronic bookstore, electronic co-curricula and student activities, electronic assessment of student learning and a sense of community'. He believes the Web will transform the shape of education: 'The World Wide Web, a transforming technology – not just another technological advance – is unfolding in an explosive fashion. It is destined to become the world's largest library, shopping mall, museum, university, health information provider and entertainment vehicle.'

There are many thoughts about the way the Web will transform education, much useful information and many useful links (including links to the above sites).



There are many courses offered online. If you ask the ANZWERS search engine to search for the phrase 'online course' you'll get over 2,000 matches. If you limit your search to Australia, you still get 526 matches. Online education is a happening thing, and we must ensure we take advantage of what it has to offer for the benefit of our students.

Other sites worth investigating include the following:

**Shadow Minister for Education and Training, Victoria**  
<http://werple.net.au/~bruce/>

A fearless and enterprising gentleman, Bruce Mildenhall, sent me an e-mail suggesting I include his web site for review. This I have done. The value of the site depends on whether or not you are from Victoria. As a Victorian you may be interested in the speeches and media releases giving the Victorian Opposition's views on education in that state as well as the results of a study of the 1996 education budget. Oddly, I could find no concluding remarks pertaining to this study, only tables of figures. If you are from interstate you might be inter-

ested in some of the links to Labor party sites as well as schools in Australia and around the world on the Web. Unfortunately, the two links listed as being linked to educational sites and resources came up with the familiar 'Error 404 Site Not Found' message.



**SLONET Education**  
<http://www.slonet.org/global/education/res7.html>

SLONET is the information site for the city of San Luis Obispo in California. The education section at this address has a wide variety of links under a number of categories, including a section with links to sites on the Web containing papers on school reform and improvement. There are many sites listed, most with a helpful comment from the person who compiled the list of links. Some sites are case studies of school reforms in the US involving block scheduling (an American term for longer lesson lengths). This would be a good springboard if you were to look for ideas on the use of extended length lessons or were interested in trends in school improvement.

Another section on this site has lesson plans and projects – definitely worth passing on to your teachers. There are links to libraries, museums, magazines and newspapers as well as to subject-oriented links. All in all, a potentially useful site.



Contributions may be sent by e-mail to: [stavert@zip.com.au](mailto:stavert@zip.com.au) or by regular mail to Bruce Stavert, Mosman High School, Military Road, MOSMAN, NSW 2088

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please ensure all responses to this article are submitted to Bruce by **27 February 1998**.

*\* Editorial response: The purpose of hats and bombs – a mystical, artistic and editorial device used to symbolise the good and the bad, the worthy and the unworthy, and ultimately more significantly, the deeply conflicting dialogue between aspiration and reality which characterises the modern principal's inner landscape.*



## In Praise of Single-sex Schools ...

### Testosterone Tribulations: The Boys' High School

Among the increasingly exotic species of schools in Australia must be the boys-only school in the government sector. Boys' schools have been an endangered urban species for some time with those in Sydney gradually diminishing in size, closing down or being merged with sister schools. Where they survive they are usually the smaller relative of the ubiquitous girls' school where families will do almost anything to get a foot in the door.



The stereotype of a boys' school is of a nasty brutish place where rugby rules, girls and women are marginalised and the whole culture is geared to developing among boys a very dated form of masculinity. Perhaps the most extreme statement of this was (or is) the traditional boys' boarding school where much of the formal and informal routine deliberately enforced a 'suitable' masculinity. This was achieved through strict dress, discipline (often accompanied by institutionalised violence), academic hierarchies and competitive sport – all quite masculinising processes.

While elements of this culture survive in some boys' schools the real picture is far more complex. Boys' schools have evolved into many forms, depending on the community they serve, the context of surrounding schools and the vision of school leadership. Some boys' schools, especially in the non-government sector, remain quite traditional and comfortably serve the needs of their conservative marketplace. Boys-only schools are often preferred in non-Anglo communities and some schools in suburban Sydney have found a new *raison d'être* because of this.

Others such as my own school, Asquith Boys High School, were forced to redefine their purpose and eventually their whole culture. Located in a relatively low-income part of Sydney's north shore, Asquith Boys High was always in the academic shadow cast by girls' schools, private and socio-

economically selective schools and more recently a new government selective school. It inevitably embraced vocational pathways and a higher student welfare profile. It became what I describe as 'assertively comprehensive' and has quite successfully retained diversity in curriculum and a healthy range of student interests and outcomes.

More important, it began to gradually redefine what boys and boys-only schools should be in the late 1990s. Central to this is a diversification of opportunities for boys and an ongoing challenge to the stereotypical images and opportunities created by families, community, media and school. Inevitably much of the inspiration for this has also come from leading thinkers and writers on masculinity, and I have synthesised much of their work in my own presentations on boys' education issues.

So it can be argued that there is a place for boys-only schools. However, it is easy for these schools to get it wrong, and it is a long and hard road to try to get it right. Without an effort to take the long, hard road, boys' schools will quite willingly sustain what one could call a natural 'default position' characterised by tradition, hierarchy and power relationships, a *laissez-faire* approach to issues of violence and an emphasis on stereotypic boys' subjects and interests – in all, not a pretty sight.

What Asquith Boys High has probably done is exploit and develop some of the 'advantages' created by the boys-only context. Some of these include:

- a potential reduction in gender bias in curriculum by eliminating labels of 'boys', or 'girls', subjects. Subjects such as visual art and drama are strong and growing and have been joined by cooking, band, dance and musicals. This diversity is quite remarkable in a small boys' school.
- a potential for a different type of 'balanced development' in a boys-only school. In the absence of girls, boys can more easily be projected into caring and welfare roles in programs such as peer support, and other programs which are often dominated by girls in co-ed schools. In a similar way boys are able to assume responsible leadership roles, for example prefect and student council activities.

At the same time there are disadvantages with single-sex education where it comprises all six years of a boy's secondary schooling. Our school is currently seeking approval to enrol girls in Years 11 and 12 – a proposal the Department of Education and Training has, for the time being, firmly placed in the 'too hard' basket.

Meanwhile, the school is a growing boys' school – surely an oxymoron in the 1990s –

and is making tentative claims to have found its 'place in the sun'. *The Author: CHRIS BONNOR is Principal of Asquith Boys High School NSW and a member of the Principal Matters editorial board*

### While there are Inequities, Girls' Schools will Remain

A school aims to develop a student intellectually, spiritually, physically and emotionally. Few schools would disagree with these basic aims in order to help students develop an awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, and in developing good moral character. But how might those aims best be met? Supporters of single-sex girls' schools believe that these aims can best be achieved in an all-girl school environment.

A relatively new group called the Alliance of Girls' Schools (Australasia) has been set up by the heads of girls' schools from all three sectors as a forum for discussion about issues relating to girls' education.

The goals of the Alliance are:

- To provide leadership in girls' education to ensure the best opportunities and outcomes for girls.
- To promote the education of girls in girls' schools through creating public awareness of philosophy and practice of girls' schools.
- To act as a reference group on girls' education.
- To publish and disseminate research and to provide a network of collegiality among principals of girls' schools.

Opponents of single-sex girls' schools often argue that the separation of boys and girls is 'artificial' and that it is 'natural' in society for them to mix. However, I believe this will only become relevant in an educational sense when the status of women is genuinely equal to that of men in society. Despite equal opportunity and affirmative action plans, equality of women's pay, position and opportunity is still elusive with men remaining dominant in many senior executive positions, in politics, and so on. This reflects an imbalance in society's attitude and interest in women and its direction.

We are constantly bombarded with male and female stereotypes in the media, and society's pigeon-holing of men and women, most educators would agree, must change. It is most important that girls are taught at school that they may follow any direction and that achievement is a result of ability.



## NSW



## Midsummer Mayhem Heralds Flexible Staffing, Restructure

During each festive season Director-General Ken Boston flies a new kite. In 1996 it was school closures; his most recent yuletide offering was to resurrect the hoary old chestnut of flexible staffing in a proposal which would allow 15 per cent of a school's staffing entitlement to be allocated by the school according to local needs. Such a change would appeal to principals seeking greater flexibility in allocation of resources such as staffing. While hardly radical by some standards, it remains to be seen how far it will progress.

### Restructuring ... again?

Recurring Nights of the Long Knives are now part of the enduring (perhaps endearing) culture of the education bureaucracy in NSW. The most recent restructure in late 1997 saw TAFE absorbed into an enlarged Department of Education and Training (DET) with Ken Boston as surviving supremo. While the impact of the 1995 restructure was felt at all levels, the 1997 change seems to have only affected the most senior levels so far.

### Close encounters

Despite the restructure – or perhaps because of it – there is continuing genuine consultation between the DET and secondary principals. Senior bureaucrats, who are now burdened with huge portfolios, seem most anxious to retain their links with reliable sources of advice including the principals' councils. Meanwhile the NSW Secondary Council is re-thinking its own structure to reflect the changed DET. The Council's quite effective reference groups will be reshaped and Col Cooksey, the new professional officer, looks like having his work cut out for him.

### Supervision divisions

Ken Boston is the central player in another unfolding drama. At issue is the supervision of students in the half-hour before school. The DG insists principals implement such supervision, the need for which is another issue emerging from the Wood Royal Commission. When principals at a state meeting expressed reluctance to unravel the goodwill they had built up in their schools the DG responded with a broadside in which he stated that the supervision requirement was a directive. Well, what else does one need to know? Inevitably, the courts will decide the issue.

### HSC results

To help us adjust to a shorter annual vacation, the Board of Studies released the 1997 HSC results earlier than ever before.

The media frenzy normally accompanying the publication of results was subdued by the confidentiality of Tertiary Entrance Ranks and the reduced capacity of the media to compare schools.

As a consequence one of the biggest noises came from the principals of academically or socio-economically selective schools, now deprived of their annual ego buzz. Meanwhile, the rest of us applaud quietly at this effort to level the playing field.

### And the fun continues ...

... as 1998 gets underway. Among the issues sure to take on significance in 1998 is vocational education (with our new TAFE friends), drugs (big new system priority), school annual reports (the awful format continues), HSC and School Certificate changes (so much to do and so little time) and much, much more. What a great time to be alive in NSW!

*CHRIS BONNOR is Principal of Asquith Boys High School and a member of the Principal Matters editorial board*

## **Annual report angst**

Government school principals spent much of March labouring over their 1997 annual reports. Temperatures rose considerably across the state as, on command, they shoehorned their treasured school achievements into an inflexible and unforgiving computer template report format, complete with standardised pre-set headings. The consequences for getting it wrong included a 'mugging' from the local School Improvement Officer whose job it is to make sure that the reports are meaningful (a big ask, given the format), politically safe (it's not clear who for) and conform to all sorts of critical standards such as which words should start with capital letters. What could be a useful evaluation and accountability process has degenerated into one in which the main agenda seems to be about control.

## **Black holes**

An increasingly common word in principal parlance in NSW is 'black hole', in reference to policy issues which have remained unresolved for considerable time. It is possible, however, that the very designation of an issue as a 'black hole' matter might excite some action. Some useful discussions have been held with the Department of Education and Training (DET) to resolve some of these issues: they include head teacher review and executive restructuring, flexible staffing, inefficient teachers and suspensions policy. These and other issues are variously victims of recurring restructurings, protracted industrial negotiations or an excessive amount of time sitting in the bottom of the 'too hard basket'.

## **Widening horizons by narrowing schools?**

Alongside the success of a senior high school in Sydney's west has come the inevitable decline of the senior years in nearby schools. In 1997 one of the schools affected by the changes was targeted by a daily newspaper for the apparent 'failure' of its students. Clearly any impoverishment of comprehensive schools that lie within the shadow of 'special designation' schools is a most undesirable outcome. In his recent 'widening horizons' announcement of a new senior high school (in the Nirimba Education Precinct) the Minister showed that he was well aware of the problem – he has decided to completely abolish the senior years in surrounding schools and turn them into junior high schools.

## **School Certificate and HSC**

This year's School Certificate will be made up of grades awarded by schools on the basis of Course Performance Descriptors (CPDs) in all subjects. Teachers of English, mathematics and science are being rapidly inserviced on how to assess students on the basis of descriptors for their subjects. Naturally, in the interests of 'rigour', there will still be external tests in the core subjects. The real test, however, is whether the credibility of CPD assessment and reporting will be strong enough to combat the inevitable tendency to sum up the achievement of students in as yet ill-defined tests. Meanwhile, the fine-tuning of the HSC continues with the curriculum structure to be based on single two Unit courses in each subject, with additional courses most likely in English and mathematics.

*CHRIS BONNOR is the NSW editorial board member for Principal Matters*



## Focus on Performance Gives Students Chance to Develop Team Leadership Skills

At Rooty Hill High School in Sydney's west, the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge is a highlight of the school's extra-curricular program. The specially choreographed rock-dance routines, each based on a different theme and story, attract around 120 enthusiastic students between Years 7 and 12. Rehearsals begin in February and culminate in an eight-minute performance – together with performances from 80 or 90 other NSW schools – at the state Rock Eisteddfod Challenge held in August each year. Students are given the opportunity of a lifetime – to perform before a crowd of 15,000 at the Sydney Entertainment Centre.

As with any artform or performance, students are expected to make a large time commitment. At Rooty Hill, where rehearsals are scheduled out of school hours, students must be able to prioritise their commitments so there is a balance between time spent on rehearsals and performance and their studies.

Why choose performance as a key focus for our school's extra-curricular activities?

The explanation rests with an underlying effort to develop leadership and team building skills in students. The Eisteddfod has become a feature of the school's leadership program; as a result the school has for some years enjoyed a considerable reputation for offering both. Under the guidance of former principal, Malcolm Leaver, Rooty Hill High became a lighthouse in the development of training programs for student leaders, which have been published and used by schools throughout NSW.

### From modest beginnings to a Blaze of Glory

From small beginnings in 1985, the school's performances have regularly won awards at the state and national finals of the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge. In 1993, for example, the piece, 'Scotland the Brave', won the national championships. In 1995, 'Blaze of Glory' (based on the American Civil War) took out the national finals. And in



1997, the work of Rooty Hill High was recognised with an invitation to feature in the Schools Spectacular – an annual showcase of the best performing arts from NSW public schools.

The link between the Eisteddfod and leadership development is very clear in the way each aspect of the event is developed and refined. Senior students, for example, are initially coached by the school-based choreographer and eisteddfod co-ordinator, Kathy Manning. These students then each work with a team to create and produce the choreography, staging, lighting, set design and costumes. More experienced students work with parents and teachers to bring the production together. At any time during preparations, 15 to 20 parents can be working on the parent committee and as many as 100 parents can be involved in the final stages of the production. It's a matter of team effort all the way.

### The team approach

It was co-ordinator Kathy Manning's decision to establish a teams-based approach to putting together the production, and under her guidance students work together co-operatively in small and large teams. This way they develop a sense of commitment to the team as well as the project.

One emphasis in a team-based environment is the individual's contribution of ideas for improving the performance. This approach is similar to the Japanese 'kaizen' approach used in management training, where small improvements suggested by individuals in the team are used to contribute to a process of overall improvement. Attention to detail is strongly encouraged and

this has resulted in the recognition of students' dancing skills and performance attributes over the past 12 years.

Discipline is an important feature of the program, both during rehearsals and in supporting the team. Students must be able to communicate their needs and listen to the needs and ideas of others. In other words, they must become both leaders and effective team members.

So, what's in it for the students? Clearly, there is huge recognition for them in performing before such large audiences and in winning kudos, and prizes, at the Eisteddfod finals. The fact is that, upon entry into the program, students don't necessarily need to be great dancers. Dancing skills and choreographic abilities develop over time; what is more important is that student confidence and self-esteem is greatly enhanced.

In addition, students from competing schools tend to form long-lasting friendships. Indeed, one particular year when Rooty Hill was unable to participate in the annual Eisteddfod, students helped another school with its preparations. There is a great sense of support during such events as well as a vigorous sense of competition.

The Rock Eisteddfod gives our students opportunities to refine leadership and team participation skills to a high level. These are the very skills which will equip them to meet the expectations of employers when they leave school and to prepare them for adult life.

### The Author

*CHRISTINE CAWSEY is Principal of Rooty Hill High School in NSW*



# Sermons for Today's School Leader

*Stuck for ideas for your next school assembly? Tired of dredging up the same uninspired line to your captive audience? Next time you hold that all-important assembly, try another approach and keep them rivetted – or at the very least, keep them awake! JIM McALPINE offers some tips.*

The assembly starts in five minutes. You think: What did I talk about last week? How can I inspire them? What will make the staff happy? I wonder if any parents are present? Will I be 'good bear' or 'bad bear' today? Has anyone organised a guest speaker? Shall I speak first or last?

Principals can't afford to take risks with assembly sermons, the most visible of their regular performances. These days, principals' exhortations are the only occasions when many students get the opportunity to hear a grand sermon – full of fire, brimstone, light and love. The sermon is the principal's big chance to create a lifelong difference, to inspire young minds to higher things.

The principal is charged with the responsibility of so many souls that a sermon cannot be entered into lightly. It only takes one mistake in front of the whole school for the future direction of the school – and one important career – to take an unscheduled change in direction.

Not all that many years ago, I was inspired to avoid mistakes at assembly when a deputy, who was keen to save souls from smoking, announced to a thousand eager listeners: 'There are better things to suck on than cigarettes!' I have never since heard such applause for an assembly speaker, and it proved to me that the nonchalance of a teenage audience masks a fervent desire to listen for the assembly message. I was also converted to the view that teachers have human fallibility; their countenance can change from the impassive to the passionate in less than a nanosecond when inspired by a great speaker or a public error by anyone in an executive position.

Principals appreciate articles that comment on the changing role of the principal. They enjoy going to conferences where they find out about curriculum changes, resource cutbacks, maintenance demands, recentralised autonomy, drugs, weapons, welfare, racism, sex and annual reports. These, however, detract from sermon preparation – undoubtedly the most rigorous and demanding challenge principals face on a regular basis.

Invariably such minor distractions fade to insignificance just as the assembly

bell rings and the butterflies flutter. Will the walk to the assembly provide sufficient time and inspiration for an address that will have maximum impact? If you say nothing, will that be inspirational, or quirky?

To help with your next sortie over the channel, I have consulted broadly with some experienced bosses for useful themes for generic sermons: one for every occasion. There is no need to acknowledge the intellectual property of Terry, Bob and Bruce when you try a sermon, and you can be confident that their prayers will be with you. The more adventurous principal can combine themes, play with different and confronting facial expressions, and even find appropriate music as a backdrop to a compelling performance. I won't. I shall try to remember to take a piece of paper with me with one of the following jotted down.

## Generic sermons

I have tried to give a catchy title to each sermon as a mnemonic. Principals can use their own diverse and rich experiences to develop more memorable phrases. I assume that all principals have been selected on the basis of their public speaking skills and that they can determine the best vocal and visual strategies for an effective delivery.

Academic dress may be appropriate in some schools or circumstances, and drama teachers may give you some interesting suggestions for your stage wardrobe.





### Young Mr Grace

This is the address that begins: 'You've all done very well.' It is for those rare occasions when you want to congratulate the whole school for an achievement. Don't try this one unless you can be certain everyone was part of the achievement. For maximum impact, make this a complete surprise. If the school is expecting the wrath of an Old Testament principal because of adverse media attention over the weekend, praise all the English students for the improvement in writing skills that they have publicly demonstrated. There is no need to mention the graffiti. This theme is one that suits itself to embellishment by examples of the triumph of the human spirit within your school. Try to keep these recent; list them on your bar fridge door in your office as they occur.

### Horace Rumpole

'You don't establish your innocence by proving the guilt of others.' Principals in their inexorable search for truth can learn much from Rumpole and a well-placed quotation in a sermon can give the impression of erudition. This address is particularly useful when you have had a harrowing schedule of interviews with those whose loyalty to friends is not as strong as their instinct for a free pardon. References to responsibility

can be garnished with clever puns that you know will be appreciated by one or two maths teachers, for example, 'The onus is on us', and other such witticisms. This theme should be avoided when you are conducting an important investigation, as it may interfere with the evidence you want.

### The Life of Brian

'Always look on the bright side of life' is undoubtedly one of the classic philosophical one-liners. A sermon that encourages optimism can be a valuable distraction and should be used wisely. It can be very effective if you offer visual cues that make you look optimistic. Sprint to the microphone when it's your turn, smile broadly, use friendly hand gestures, and produce a small, likeable student as a prop to show the effects of optimism. Try to finish your speech with something inspirational that will make the staff want to get back into the classroom and teach. A relevant quotation from Homer of Springfield fame should do the trick; even Principal Skinner can provide a pithy phrase.

### Goethe

'True generosity gives recognition.' One way of avoiding saying too much is to present trophies, banners, certificates and Mars Bars to deserv-

ing students. Most students deserve recognition every week for something, and it is not too hard to dream up new, occasional awards. A healthy working relationship with the school canteen can allow room for a last-minute theme, and the smiling student with the chocolate frog will be a testimony to your generosity in recognising good manners shown to the visiting superintendent. I have heard of principals giving awards to teachers on assembly. Good idea – but be careful whom you omit.

### Antediluvian

There is nothing more inspiring (for the principal, at any rate) than to deliver a good, old-fashioned sermon. It does not matter that no one appears to be listening – this is sometimes the only way young teachers can hide their embarrassment at being unfamiliar with the genre. The use of big words, I find, can stimulate research and discussion by our young listeners' enquiring minds. I used 'antediluvian' in one address and it certainly had an impact. Risk-taking principals should try this at least once.

### Further topics

Space and good taste prevent me from providing details of many other sermons that principals and those aspiring to leadership could experiment with. The more adventurous might devise their own approaches on the following themes: 'An eye for an eye', 'The Messiah: what a wonderful counsellor', 'A current affair', 'Ecclesiastes 12:12', 'Olympus versus Olympia', 'The meaning of life', 'Dostoevsky', 'Spring is sprung', and many other such seasonal themes.

I trust that you now look forward to the next assembly with greater enthusiasm and commitment. Just remember the old adage: 'The last laugh is on you.'

*Amen.*

### The Author

*JIM McALPINE is Principal of Tumut High School in NSW*



NSW



## Publish and Be Damned

Government schools in NSW must surely be trailblazers in accountability, but the *Sydney Morning Herald* wants more. Led by a disgruntled former ministerial staffer, the newspaper periodically publishes school comparisons on whatever school data it can ferret out of the Department. This form of tabloid journalism has revealed school-by-school retention rates, bank balances and more. The bank balance information proved to be entertaining yet unreliable reading, proposing as it did a guide to school 'wealth'. There was one 'million-dollar' school which was saving for a major project. My own school was shown to be reasonably poor, so I put on a brave face to my community by piously announcing that 'at this school we believe in spending every cent on our students'.

### Bouquet time

In a gesture of goodwill the NSW Secondary Principals' Council congratulated the NSW government on recent legislation which prohibits the carrying of knives to school. One colleague had discovered to his amazement that there was a loophole in the previous legislation which

made it impossible to prosecute a student for bringing a knife to school. While knife-carrying has not been a burning issue for most principals the change in the law has been most welcome.

Into the midst of our quite reactive political/educational climate in NSW (yes, there is another election looming) has come a welcome initiative from the Department. The Department and the Secondary Principals' Council have combined to identify the ingredients for creating positive school culture and to enable schools to learn from each other in this critical area. A major successful conference has spawned the creation of what might be a useful 'think tank' of ideas and resources for schools. If we can only keep the 'control freaks' in the bureaucracy away, this project might prove to be most beneficial.

The third ongoing bouquet goes to the ELLA (English Language and Literacy Assessment) program which annually tests students in the first two years of high school. Even hardened test cynics like myself have marvelled at the wealth of detailed and diagnostic information given to schools, students and parents about the progress of students in Years 7 and 8. The tests not only provide reliable 'value-added' information, they also quite effectively bring home the message to teachers that literacy is everyone's responsibility.

## Big changes in Secondary Principals' Council

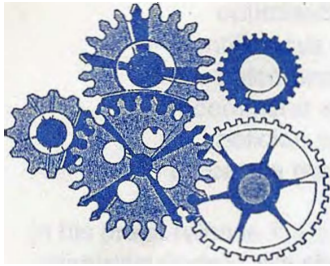
An era has drawn to a close with the departure of popular Jim Harkin after many years as President of the NSW-SPC. Jim's term as president was enlivened by two education restructures and a corresponding restructuring of the Council. At the recent annual conference he was presented with life membership and given a standing ovation. New in the hot seat is Larissa Treskin, Principal of Burwood Girls High School. Ken Newton also retires (for the second time) as our first executive officer. Meanwhile, principals have agreed to pay big increases in fees to provide both executive and professional support for the Council and its members.

### A Kiwi invasion

Why attend an overseas conference when you can transplant your own offshore? The NZ Principals' Council is holding its annual conference in Sydney in July and inviting 50 NSW principals as guests. Highlights include workshops, school visits and a trans-Tasman debate on the final day. In the interests of dialogue our members are 'gitting riddy by taking a cresh course in the lengwich' and practising their underarm bowling just in case.

CHRIS BONNER is Principal of Asquith Boys High, NSW and a member of the Principal Matters editorial board





## STATE NEWS BULLETIN

Volume 10:2  
October 1998

### NSW

#### **Tying up the loose ends of Term 3 ... and preparing for the final onslaught**

The end of term three in NSW has seen a serious effort to establish a teacher registration authority for all schools. The media has again highlighted 'violence in schools' while principals wait patiently (how is 18 months for patience?) for the new policy on suspensions.

A program to cleanse our schools of Year 2000 bug-affected technology has raised a few eyebrows ('You want it when?!') and schools are completing a stocktake of everything that plugs in and turns on. Meanwhile, principals are increasingly talking to TAFE managers in an effort to better understand the impact of VET in schools.

Principals are also in daily touch with the Board of Studies which has promised to have completed syllabus packages for the new Higher School Certificate in schools by July next year.

*CHRIS BONNOR is the Principal Matters editorial board member for NSW*



# COMMENT

## The Common Youth Allowance – Solution to an Existing Problem or Political Chicanery?

On 17 June 1997, the federal government announced the Common Youth Allowance Scheme. The Common Youth Allowance replaces five existing payments and offers incentives for participation in education. The payments replaced are:

- Austudy for 16–24-year-olds (and certain 15-year-olds)
- Newstart Allowance for 16–20-year-olds (and certain 15-year-olds)
- Youth Training Allowance for 16–17-year-olds (and certain 15-year-olds)
- Sickness Allowance for 16–20 year olds (and certain 15 year-olds)
- Family Payment (for more-than-minimum-rate) for secondary students aged 16–18 not receiving Austudy.

As well as replacing five different payments with one, the Common Youth Allowance reduces 13 different rates of payment to five. Under the new scheme there are winners and losers, but the government assures us there are more winners than losers.

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) became aware of the proposal to introduce the scheme in early 1996 and made submissions to Dr Kemp and the DEETYA machinery charged with the implementation of federal government policy, expressing alarm at some of the implications of the proposal in its original form.

Both Dr Kemp (the scheme was spawned well before the advent of Senator Chris Ellison who is now Minister for Schools) and DEETYA took notice of what were cogent arguments presented to them.

The scheme was modified several times before its introduction, so ASPA can claim some impact, although there are still shared misgivings about it.

One of the main concerns expressed by ASPA in its advocacy is that the effect of removing the Youth Training Allowance (one of the five payments mentioned previously) from young people not in full-time education or training inevitably produces a 'double jeopardy' for schools. It is likely to force a large number of young people back to school who had previously disenfranchised themselves from mainstream education. After two years or more out of the system, such young people are unlikely to find school more palatable than when they left it. Because social service benefits are no longer available to young people they are coerced into staying on at school when, in fact, they want or had planned to leave.

The date initially set for the introduction of the Youth Allowance – 1 July 1997 – would certainly have guaranteed that returning students could not hope to successfully achieve any educational outcomes in terms of credentials, particularly in NSW. How were schools going to add value to the lives of young unemployed people given that they had already signalled their disenchantment and unwillingness to accept help? What impact would they have on the existing school culture, given not only their reluctance to learn but also the fact they had become more 'worldly wise' than the students they were to join? How could programs be developed or adapted when no resources were to be allocated to schools to meet their problems?

The final shape of the Common Youth Allowance has gone some way to ameliorating these concerns. The date of introduction changed and students in receipt of the Youth Training Allowance who left school before 1 July 1997 will continue to receive their benefits without the need to return to school. There is a wide range of exemptions.

The federal government also wrapped up and presented states with the \$22

million dollar package, 'Full Service Schools for Students at Risk'. This package is aimed at establishing a small number of projects in each state which design innovative programs addressing the perceived needs of returning students or students who have been forced to remain at school directly as a result of the federal government's initiative. Solutions for 'at risk' students must be in place by January 2000; the funding lasts only until that time!

The whole scenario played out around our displaced youth is a fascinating interplay between federal and state politics. The federal government claims that student retention is a state problem and that it (the federal government) already resources its solution through recurrent expenditure which is allocated on a per capita basis.

The effect of the introduction of the Common Youth Allowance is to translate a perceived social security problem (supposedly 'owned' by the federal arena) of unemployed youth into a school retention problem ('owned' by state governments). The number of youth forced to return to school has greatly attenuated the youth unemployment problem and accordingly political fall-out has been diminished. The net effect is to camouflage youth unemployment with minimal electoral damage.

Once again, Australia's youth have been short-changed; no solution whatsoever to youth unemployment is offered. Instead, the government has acted to hide a major problem.

The Common Youth Allowance is simply a political trick to understate the number of genuinely unemployed young people in this country.

### The Author

OWEN KENNY is principal of Berkley Heights High School in NSW



## From Desperation Tactics to Teaming

'Desperation' is not a word that readily occurs in educational literature; it smacks too easily of sweaty palms, perspiring foreheads and heaving stomachs. Indeed, it is contrary to the image of contemplative heads sagely sitting around university tables shaded by groves of ivy, arms clad in leather-elbowed tweed jackets.

However, in 1993 Granville South High School staff were confronted by the intake of a particular group of Year 7 students who seemed to have been born 14 years of age. They matured quickly – too quickly for many – found their way around the new environment in a matter of days and were emulating the attitudes and behaviour of their seniors in what teachers considered an unacceptable and confrontational way.

This behaviour had developed despite our efforts to organise a 'bottom' class which was to be taught by experienced senior and head teachers. Unfortunately, due to the vagaries of staffing and transfers, most of the intended teachers disappeared. A resultant Year 7 class 'ghetto' formed which was taught, as it turned out, by teachers of varying experience and talents, with adverse implications for the remaining Year 7 cohort and for the rest of the school.

As a staff we despaired: what were we to do to ensure this situation did not arise again?

As a staff we also determined to reconsider the problem of transition between Years 6 and 7 and to approach it in a more holistic manner.

Thus, during 1994 and under the auspices of the NSW Disadvantaged Schools Program, the school began to research structures which could assist the integration of Year 7 students in a more co-operative and supportive manner. The trial model established was a team teaching one in which a group of teachers became attached to one class. Teachers agreed to teach across more than one subject area and to meet on a regular basis to consider welfare and academic needs of the students.

### Primary model for secondary setting

Supporting this concept was a series of 'homerooms' for each Year 7 class, each refurbished to make it more hospitable and welcoming. The essence, in fact, was drawn from the primary school model: few teachers, one room, few

interruptions, teachers rather than students moving to homerooms between teaching periods, and a sense of security for students. Classes were designated special names: Topaz, Emerald, Ruby, Sapphire, Pearl – our 'precious gems' in more than one sense of the word. Parents were invited to class on afternoons twice per term where students displayed and performed their work. Class newsletters were to be published once per term.

Teachers were to be relieved from normal class duties for two hours, twice per term, to meet their teams and to consider common approaches to student welfare and discipline issues. Each team nominated a 'leader' to co-ordinate meeting times and meeting agendas and to assist in the programming of teaching and learning material across the key learning areas. Teams themselves consisted of the 'core' subject teachers: a maths/science teacher, an English/roll class teacher, a geography/history teacher and a PDHPE teacher. Teachers of non-core subjects such as visual arts, music, design and technology were invited to attend team meetings and functions.

### The upside of the team-teaching approach

Bolstered by our new approach teachers of Year 7 were ready when the new group of students arrived at the beginning of 1995. Results throughout the year were dramatic: Year 7 absences were halved, referrals to head teachers were reduced, and fractional truancy became less of a problem. Students themselves reported satisfaction with class composition: surveys revealed that 84 per cent of Year 7 students had close friends within their class. Eight-nine per cent of Year 7 students thought the concept of teaching teams a 'good idea'.

Since the introduction of the system, staff have indicated that the positives associated with teaching teams centred around increased communication, increased knowledge and understanding of students and increased opportunities to detect problems and to act quickly to resolve them. Support and teamwork among staff and the sharing and exchange of teaching ideas were also seen to be beneficial. The system also assisted the integration of a Year 7 literacy scheme – the Heather Harvey program – across all classes.

### A slap of paint and afternoon tea makes a difference

Staff and students appreciated the attractiveness of their homerooms. The most appealing aspects, according to students, were things like the freshly painted walls, the display of their work, the carpet and new equipment such as whiteboards. A significant number mentioned the fact that they did not have to move between classrooms as a positive thing; however, others saw this as a negative.

Almost all team members and, on average, eight parents or guardians per class attended the class afternoons during 1995. In all, some 92 parents or guardians of Year 7 students visited homerooms and shared in classroom experiences or afternoon teas with team teachers. The parents and guardians attending the functions were very positive about the use of teaching teams and a number of them commented that teamwork is very much the trend in their own workplaces.

### The meetings nightmare

The main problem we experienced, however, was organisational.

The difficulty in procuring casual teachers meant that team meeting times often became times of great disruption to Year 7 classes in particular and to the school in general. Despite the overwhelming support of teaming across the school and in the community (it was decided to take teams into Year 8 in 1996) it was obvious that for such a structure to continue, the difficulty with meetings had to be solved.

In 1996, again using the resources of the Disadvantaged Schools Program, the school hired an experienced teacher to co-ordinate the movement of teams into Year 8 and to investigate the difficulty of meeting times for team members. The school was fortunate to already have a designated meeting time for staff and committee meetings, since this had been built into the school timetable; now, the executive was requested to increase the cycle to include meeting times for teaming teachers.

A complication, however, was caused by teachers being members of two Year 7 teams or of a Year 7 and Year 8 team – all meeting at the same time.

This was solved by the judicious use of a combined recess and cross-school reading time which allowed 20 minutes per week for staggered meetings, as well as the utilisation of timetabled meeting periods. This organisation continued into 1997.



## From teaching to learning teams

As the student welfare rationale for teaching teams became less of an issue due to the effectiveness of the program, it was decided to consider the pedagogical emphasis within the teams.

In 1997, one class was used as a trial for 'learning teams' a model based upon the Grange-Eumanning College structure in Victoria. The basis of this organisation was the formation and utilisation of student teams within a team-teaching approach where co-operative learning techniques and peer tutoring could be developed. Teachers were inserted as a team and supported each other in their venture during meetings. Some forays into integrated curriculum were developed – for example various CLA emphases on the topic 'The United States of America', were planned and delivered. These strategies were recorded and evaluated to become the basis for in-services for other team members when the approach was integrated into Year 7 in 1998.

An attempt has also been made during 1998 to integrate the whole-team structure more closely into the school's organisation. Team members have been provided with a one-period-a-week allowance and team leaders are given two periods to plan, co-ordinate and attend meetings. There is no overall co-ordinator, although initially the leading teacher and I, provided guidance to team leaders during meetings. The Heather Harvey program now runs through all Year 7 classes as well as an integrated literacy framework developed by the school's literacy committee. All Year 7 classes are operating under the co-operative learning structure which is planned to continue into Year 8 in 1999.

While teaching teams at Granville South High were established initially as a student welfare management issue, the structure has evolved into one where the emphasis is now squarely on teaching and learning. Staff, parents and students are committed to the concept. Regular meetings of teachers, the opportunity to share, discuss and experiment, the increased contact with parents, the homerooms and the obvious benefit to students have led to what we consider a successful educational change that, ironically, stemmed from a sense of desperation with some very wily Year 7 students.

## The Author

*RON MILES is principal of Granville South High School in NSW. Tel: 02 9892 2654 Fax: 02 9892 276*



# Principals in *Cyberspace*

## Some Sites for Sore Eyes

In this edition I'd like to revisit the issue of professional web sites. Below I have outlined some useful sites for you to peruse. They are rated according to the rating system employed in the past:

**Bomb:** A waste of time. Don't bother looking.

**1 hat:** If you have absolutely nothing else to do, take a peek.

**2 hats:** Definitely worth a look, or good for others on your staff. Pass it on.

**3 hats:** Very useful for principals. Add it to your bookmarks now.

### American Association of School Administrators

<http://www.aasa.org/index.html>

This is an excellent site for school administrators. Although it focuses on American issues, many of the issues covered ring true for us.

Take, for example, the following extract from an article by W. James Popham:

*Teachers these days are experiencing almost relentless pressure to show that they are effective. Unfortunately, in many communities, the chief indicator by which people judge a school staff's success is the performance of that school's students on standardised achievement tests.*

*If a school's standardised test scores are high, it is thought the school's staff is competent. If a school's standardised test scores are low, the school's staff is seen as ineffectual. In either case, because school success is being measured by the wrong yardstick, those evaluations are apt to be in error.*

Sound familiar? The section on Assessment/National Tests (I hope it is still posted there when you access it) makes very interesting reading indeed.

There is a long list of issues on the index page which is updated regularly. Many are relevant to us as principals, for example: class sizes, school sizes, parental involvement, professional development, technology policies and plans, schools to work, the Year 2000 bug and more.

This site is very highly recommended.



### Technology Planning: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/k12/articles/clcjan98.asp>

This site is actually comprised of an article by Peter H. R. Sibley and Dr Chip Kimball on the Microsoft K-12 Education page. It contains some very important messages for principals who are planning the future of technology in their schools. For example:

*As you begin writing your own technology plan, here are seven (of many) 'sins' you should plan to avoid:*

- 1. One or two people write the plan the night before it's due.*
- 2. The network engineer (teacher or staff) is in charge of the planning.*
- 3. No one, especially parents or the community, sees the plan until it's done.*
- 4. The plan could be mistaken for a shopping list.*
- 5. Teachers' needs are not addressed (because teachers 'don't like surveys').*
- 6. The technology support system consists of a computer repair class offered at the community college.*
- 7. Planning for curriculum integration is postponed until more hardware is available.*



The writers also give some rules for technology planning (along with caveat):

*These rules are derived from the very unscientific observations we have made based on working with folks like you.*

*Technology plans closely reflect the technological maturity of the institution.*

*Resources require support.*

*Movement should not be confused with change.*

Well worth a read.



### Microsoft in K-12 Education

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/k12/>

Despite what you may think of Bill Gates and Microsoft, this is not a bad site. Yes, it does contain lots of Microsoft promotion, but it also contains some good links and many good articles. The article reviewed above is on this site. You can subscribe to a free *K-12 Connection Newsletter*. There are sections on teaching and learning, training and classroom resources, networking and administration, technology planning, 'real school' stories (although these are about schools using Microsoft products in learning, there are many very relevant stories and solutions to problems), and Microsoft product and support information (which includes links to many countries in the world – even New Zealand – but NOT Australia!). Despite the Microsoft sell, it is worth bookmarking.



### Ten Ways to Use Technology in Your Teaching

<http://moose.uvm.edu/~jmorris/hied.html>

This site was suggested to me by Graham Speight, principal of Launceston College. It is an article by Joyce L. Morris and its title conveys its meaning. The beauty of the article is that for each of the ten ways it suggests using technology, there are hotlinks to relevant sites. For example, when the author talks about communicating with other educators through listservs, she includes hot-

links to sites that can give you the addresses of many other listservs. This is an excellent address full of ideas to pass on to your teachers.



### Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

<http://www.ascd.org/>

If you have ever referred to the esteemed journal *Educational Leadership*, then this is the site for you. Not only can you access the index for details about the latest issue, but several full-text articles are available for your perusal. You can also access the index and articles from back issues. This is to be applauded. You may subscribe to the *Education Bulletin*, an online bulletin delivered to you by e-mail, for free. This contains lots of news and links.

There is also an online store full of resources that may be purchased, as well as discussions of educational issues and much more. An outstanding site for principals.



### Blue Web'n

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/bluwebn/>

Despite its name, this site has nothing to do with pornography. It is, in fact, a very good site for finding links to sites on many subject areas. Links are grouped under the following headings: arts business, English, foreign language, health and physical education, history and social studies, mathematics, science, technology, vocational education, education, and, community interest.

There are thousands of links, all with a small review so that you know what the linked site is about. You can search the Blue Web'n database to find links on a particular topic.

This is one for your teachers and particularly for your librarian. You can even subscribe to a newsletter that gives you weekly updates.

### New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council

<http://www.w3c2.com.au/nswspsc/>

This is the homepage of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council. It con-

tains a great deal of information for members and as such is an essential link for this state's principals. Here you can find the latest newsletter and some back issues, together with contact details for the executive and the district representatives. There are a small number of links to other Australian sites and information about the Council. You should look up this site just to find out the meaning behind the Council's logo! Three hats for NSW principals.



### Education World

<http://www.education-world.com/>

This is an online education magazine which is updated every week. It is a site for both principals and teachers as it contains articles on lesson planning and web site reviews as well as articles for administrators.

The 7 September edition, for example, had articles on principal assessment and financial planning. The site offers a searchable database of more than 56,000 other sites. As a test, I tried a search for 'class sizes' to see if there was any debate on the issue. It came up with 178 hits, many of which turned out to be class or school homepages. You can, however, search by 'features', which was of little help in looking at this particular issue. Clearly such a discussion is not the purpose of this site.

The site is attractive and would be useful for teachers.

### Contributions please!

Have you any favourite sites that you could share with your colleagues? Please send me the title, address and a brief description and, if possible, a rating on our hats and bombs scale. All contributions will be acknowledged. I look forward to hearing from you.

### The Author

BRUCE STAVERT is principal of Mosman Park High School in NSW

Contributions may be sent by e-mail to: [stavert@zip.com.au](mailto:stavert@zip.com.au) or by regular mail to Bruce Stavert, Mosman High School, Military Road, MOSMAN, NSW 2088

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please ensure all responses to this article are submitted to Bruce by 30 November 1998.