

# In Praise of the *Vertical Curriculum*

*Australians want schools that stimulate intellectual development by setting high, but realistic, expectations of their students. They also want schools that develop a sense of personal value and confidence in themselves to take with them into adult life. They want the notion of 'personal best' translated into schooling as a goal for students (McGaw et al. 1992.)*

Two essential beliefs drive the unitised vertical curriculum at our school:

- the need for all students to extend their skills as responsible decision makers – skills which are constantly emphasised and developed over time; and
- the identification of opportunities where students may be encouraged to strengthen their self-esteem as learners.

## **Flexibility and fluidity are the keynotes**

Our students are encouraged to view their learning within the framework of short-term goals (set by units they have selected) and a longer-term pattern of study (based on units they have accumulated). Achievement is assessed over the course of the units and reported formally to parents at the conclusion of each unit four times a year. For students at risk of not completing outcomes, there is an interim report system activated midway through the unit.

Opportunities for integrating learning across the administratively rigid divides of primary, middle and senior schools have been noted and explored at our school. Through research conducted with local primary schools, effective and lasting links have been made. Students now

have the opportunity of undertaking enrichment and accelerated programs in mathematics, languages (Japanese and Italian), science, visual arts, computer studies, history and English.

Outstanding students have the opportunity to accelerate with ease in their area of study, and where students complete the learning outcomes of full units before entering high school those units are credited and more advanced units become immediately available. This is an initiative which has been explored successfully with individual students in mathematics, computer studies and visual arts.

## **Catering for students with special needs**

Students with special remediation and welfare needs are responded to rapidly. Examples include the incorporation of a sequence of units designed for a group of students with striking literacy deficits, identified through English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA). Special classes are formed in mathematics, science and personal development/health/physical education, and run over one, two or three quarters; this allows students to enter and leave the program as their skills dictate.

In addition, special units are designed and run to address identified needs as and when they are required. We have made available units which emphasise self-esteem, management skills, leadership and the like; these demonstrate the capacity of the structure to respond rapidly to demands. Meanwhile, additional support is readily attached to identified students in specific units.

Evidence provided by the 1997 School Certificate entries indicates the diversity of student learning pref-

erences that are accommodated and demonstrate the school's ability to provide flexible curriculum options.

## **Flexibility in course patterns**

Students undertake study according to specified time lines and sequential learning pathways. The curriculum content is flexible although exceptions exist where the Board of Studies dictates specific content such as in mathematics, Australian history, geography and the 100 hours of continuous study required in languages other than English. In these areas, while the content must be studied, students have some control over when they undertake that course of study.

## **A wide choice of electives**

Beyond the constraints outlined above, it is in the area of additional elective study that the highest degree of flexibility in curriculum offerings exists. Students may concentrate their course so more time is given to English, maths and/or science; they may choose to concentrate on a narrow range of electives which they study for 200 hours; or broaden their experiences by taking the maximum number of electives for 100 hours. The vertical structure operating at our school has allowed as many as 74 students to complete an elective in computer studies, while at the same time allowing as few as eight students to complete an elective in drama (sample size 121).

## **Staffing flexibility**

Vertical curriculum structures allow a school to redress the constraints imposed by the Department of Education and Training staffing formula that, in conventional contexts, confine the allocation of the teaching

resource and determine the courses that may be sustained.

The vertical curriculum also provides the school with more control over the fine tuning that characterises the flow of the year: adjustments from term to term enable the school to accommodate intermittent staff movements – for example, secondment to directorate positions, long-service breaks, maternity leave and long-term illnesses. This has further benefits for the school in the nature of the adjustments made and the opportunity this provides for personnel to relieve in a variety of positions.

### The timetable

Each student selects six units of study per 10-week period from a list of units available to them. These are dependent upon prerequisites, mandatory units and special needs.

Each unit is studied for two 40-minute and two 80-minute periods per week. This allows students to concentrate their learning each term.

All subject areas receive the same time allowance per unit, which has made many of the mandatory 100-

hour courses in subjects such as music and visual arts more meaningful to students. In a traditional structure, students would be undertaking these subjects for only two periods per week at 40 minutes each.

The timetable grid is constructed according to student choice and the availability of staff across the school. Students are allocated to the timetable first and then staff are assigned.

Members of staff are also afforded the opportunity to take on timetabling responsibilities each term, and the timetabler is given an allocation of six 40-minute periods to undertake the task. This means that a range of staff now have timetabling experience.

### Community acceptance of the vertical system

The vertical curriculum structure has operated for four years at our school and has been well accepted by students and parents.

A community survey in 1997 showed that the majority of the parents were happy with the structures and that assessment and reporting practices were well received.

The vertical structure has provided students with a greater choice, both within and between subjects, allowing for greater individualisation of the curriculum and a matching of the curriculum to student needs, interests and readiness. It has broken the 'lock-step' progression of students providing for different rates of progression as well as allowing for 'enrichment' and 'catch-up' studies.

Students are counselled in the units appropriate to their abilities and aspirations by head teachers or subject co-ordinators, house teachers, careers adviser and parents.

The spin-offs to our structure have included greater student responsibility and sense of ownership of the curriculum, increased motivation and improved learning outcomes. In addition, our students have gained markedly in the development of decision-making and planning skills.

### The Authors

JANELLE ELDRIDGE is principal and SUE ANDERSON is leading teacher at Greystanes High School in NSW

## How the Unitised Curriculum Meets Students' Individual Needs

Based on the philosophies of Dr William Glasser, Castle Hill High School NSW has been implementing a student behaviour-management program since term 4, 1991, to firmly place the ownership of student behaviour in students' hands. This approach seeks to develop a system in which students are responsible for their own behaviour, and increasingly students are accepting responsibility for their actions.

In order to complement our student welfare and discipline approaches the next phase of school-wide change was directed at students taking responsibility for curriculum choices. A unitised vertical curricu-

lum was developed and implemented. This major change of emphasis from school-determined curriculum to student-selected curriculum based on individual needs required a different school structure.

### Towards a student-centred curriculum

Major restructuring occurred from term 4, 1994, and curriculum delivery for students in years 7 to 10 became a student-centred and individualised learning approach where students evaluated and adjusted their studies every 10 weeks. Students' curriculum was integrated into a vertical timetable, with each subject timetabled by

units rather than by years.

For students the unitised vertical structure creates opportunities to emphasise learning. Students are not locked into time-bound class groups, but are able to progress in the courses at a rate chosen by them and their parents.

Progress in a subject is dependent upon achieving certain outcomes in each unit each term. The timetable also changes every term. Students' work is assessed in relation to performance and achievement of course objectives, not through comparison with classmates. Prior learning in a subject area may be acknowledged and students are not placed into classes to repeat learning outcomes they have already achieved.

The Board of Studies requirements for School Certificate are satisfied by the school specifying the required number of units that must be studied in each subject. Students can pursue areas of interest, as compulsory units

resource and determine the courses that may be sustained.

The vertical curriculum also provides the school with more control over the fine tuning that characterises the flow of the year: adjustments from term to term enable the school to accommodate intermittent staff movements – for example, secondment to directorate positions, long-service breaks, maternity leave and long-term illnesses. This has further benefits for the school in the nature of the adjustments made and the opportunity this provides for personnel to relieve in a variety of positions.

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The Board of Studies requirements for School Certificate are satisfied by the school specifying the required number of units that must be studied in each subject. Students can pursue areas of interest, as compulsory units

do not require all student time. Hence, the overall time a student spends studying each subject depends on the courses of study chosen and the number of units selected.

Because they progress at different rates, students should be able to progress through the school curriculum at a pace suited to their needs and interests. Schools such as Castle Hill High School have adopted the unitised vertical curriculum approach because it caters for individual study programs. The benefits of such a system, as we see it, include:

- increased motivation, enthusiasm and achievement because students are given a choice of what they can study;
- greater responsibility by students for their own learning;
- greater ability by students to set short-term goals and develop a long-term outlook;
- reduction of peer-group pressure on students;
- catering for gifted students

through accelerated learning, while catering for remedial students through the establishment of special units in the timetable;

- decreased absenteeism;
- the ability of students to study in areas suited to current needs;
- ‘mastery’ learning as opposed to ‘mystery’ learning;
- control by students over their own learning;
- removal of many classroom management problems;
- the ability of students to go beyond the syllabus in enrichment and extension units;
- the valuing of students as individuals;
- making school more interesting and relevant;
- a new view of learning – that is, learning for learning’s sake;
- no more ‘locking in’, and no more promotion of failure;
- improvement in student self

esteem, since they have power over the curriculum;

- less pressure on individual students;
- more time spent ‘on task’;
- more students and parents becoming involved in course planning and having a better overall idea of where students are heading;
- flexibility for students to change to a more appropriate course where the need arises;
- the development of students of independent learning skills; and
- the ability of students to progress easily from School Certificate to Higher School Certificate studies in any subject area while engaged in the unitised vertical timetable.

### The Author

*DAVID JAFFE is the principal of Castle Hill High School in NSW*



## Of Policies, Legislation ... and Procedures

After 18 months in the making, after much consultation and after a last-minute rewrite in the ombudsman's office, the new suspensions policy has arrived.

The media has trumpeted the 'powers' for principals while principals themselves are left wondering how they may implement the new convoluted procedural provisions and remain in control at the same time.

We'll just make it work - like we do everything else.

### Teacher registration —

By the time this edition of *Principal Matters* is printed, you'll all know the fate of the teacher registration legislation in NSW. The proposed Teaching Standards Board, as welcomed by principals, the Minister then proceeded to get the members in the education community offside.

If it survives the Legislative Council it will be more by good luck than by good management.

### ... and inefficient teachers

Meanwhile, the Department of Education and Training has won points with principals by producing new streamlined procedures for dealing with inefficient (is good teaching really about 'efficiency'?) teachers. The process will involve a shorter timeframe and most of the avoidance loopholes used by such teachers in the past have been closed. Principals have pressed for these measures for years.

### Slow the flood

The Department is also looking seriously at the flood of memoranda, policies and other material which inundates our desks each day. They are seriously looking at both rationalising much of the inflow or at least summarising it every now and then. But why worry? There will probably be a change of government next year, followed by the ritual freeze on new policies and the inevitable restructure.

### Election fever

Schools in NSW have four-term years and governments have four-year terms. Elections are included among the predictable and cyclical festivals which grace the educational scene, with the next event featured in

March. Voters have the chance to renew the mandate of our current conservative government or elect an even more conservative government. With a bit of luck they'll all lapse into the usual 'laura norda' auction and leave schools alone.

### Annual reports

I simply can't let this one go: with election fever in the air, the present Minister of Education will post out annual school reports (which all look alike) from the government printer to all families in NSW. He has also directed that each school have its own community meeting, held to pontificate on the reports, in the same week.

Based on attendances at last year's meetings we could have both events on the same night and book just one meeting place - a telephone booth perhaps - for all NSW schools. Still, we are permitted to put some words in bold type in this year's report, which I firmly believe is the beginning of the road back to self-managing schools in NSW. Readers in other states, please don't laugh: this is serious, cutting edge stuff!

*CHRIS BONNOR is principal of Asquith Boys High School, in NSW*

# Principals in *Cyberspace*



## Speech Making ... with a Little Help from Quotation Land

Inspired by Jim McAlpine's recent and excellent article on principals' sermons (*Principal Matters*, July 1998), and driven by the necessity of preparing yet another inspiring speech for yet another presentation night, I lit upon the idea of searching cyberspace to find ideas and borrow inspiration from others. I discovered that the 'Net is not the caring-sharing place it once was. What I found were mostly commercial sites; essentially, you don't get much if you don't pay. However, there is enough to be useful in crafting that special speech.

I used several search engines, variously entering the words 'speech writing', 'speakers', and so on. There certainly is a great deal out there. If you are willing to pay, there are many who will write your speech for you. An example can be found at <http://www.superwriter.com/speechwr.htm>

### Speech Writing Service

<http://www.speechwriting.com/speech.htm>

This is also a professional speech-writing service. However, the sample speeches you can access from this page are worth looking at. One speech, 'Straw Man: Learning Vs. Earning Culture' contains the following, which is well worth repeating: 'George Bernard Shaw set back education with his widely quoted comment: "Those who can, do. And those who cannot, teach." I believe we have to rewrite Mr Shaw, to say: "Those who can do, can do more by teaching."'

The speech on inspirational leadership is also worth reading and could give you some ideas, particularly for the beginning and end of your speech. 'Laurels for Tech Laureates' is a speech of congratulations and thanks and has many usable ideas for that presentation night speech. 

### Matt's Speech Writer

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Lair/8462/speechmain.html>

For practical tips on the art of speech writing, you probably can't go past Matt's Speech Writer. This is a bare bones, step-by-step look at the process of developing a good presentation.

There are no examples to illuminate (and perhaps copy), but for those interested in crafting good speeches, the advice is good. 

### Quotations Home Page

<http://www.geocities.com/~spanoudi/quote.html>

If you are looking for quotes, this site is a must because it has a vast range of quotes. You can search by author or by topic ('alpha by author' or 'alpha by topic'). There are 34 quotes on education, from the cynical – 'Education is the process of driving a set of prejudices down your throat' (Martin H. Fischer), to the positive – 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime' (Chinese proverb). It contains some great quotes about effort which could be used by us all. For example: 'It is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed. In this life we get nothing save by effort' (Theodore Roosevelt).

One particular section of this site, 'Getting off to a good start' (<http://www.geocities.com/~spanoudi/quote-26.html>) seemed to hold great promise. It contains the opening lines to 161 stories or novels. A few could be useful in particular circumstances. For example, the first lines of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* by Douglas Adams begins: 'The story so far: In the beginning the Universe was created' could be followed in my case by 'and the school hall has finally been repaired following the disastrous fire three years ago'. However, most would be difficult for

a principal to use. For instance, could anyone work 'I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong hills' (*Out of Africa*, by Isak Dinesen, 1937) into their speech? 

### Quote Search

<http://starlingtech.com/quotes/search.html>

This is another site for finding quotes. A search under 'Education' came up with some good quotes, for example: 'Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one' from Malcolm S. Forbes, and 'Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten' from B.F. Skinner. Unfortunately, the search engine it employs finds any quote containing the word you enter. Searching for 'effort' came up with totally inappropriate quotes. It is possible to search through several different databases of quotes from this site. 

### Executive Speaker Library

[http://www.executive-speaker.com/lib\\_m.html](http://www.executive-speaker.com/lib_m.html)

If you are looking for speeches for your inspiration, don't bother trying the Executive Speaker Library. There are two problems with this site. First, you have to order speeches by mail or subscribe to their monthly newsletter. Second, although there is a small selection of speeches on the site from their recent newsletters, the samples I looked at were business-oriented and not of much use to principals of schools. However, it has some great ideas accessible from:

 [http://www.executive-speaker.com/spk\\_m.html](http://www.executive-speaker.com/spk_m.html)

Here is one example of a great opening: 'As Groucho Marx once said at an occasion similar to ours tonight: "Before I speak, I have something important to say."' I also loved this humorous pointer: 'Now, it's not all that easy to learn real lessons from history, or from historians. You remember that marvellous variation of Murphy's law, which states that the first rule of history is that "History doesn't repeat itself - historians merely repeat each other.' Or the famous

Churchillian quote: "History is simply one damned thing after another."

And here is a good closing remark from the same resource: 'And finally, Oscar Wilde was once approached by the most boring man in England who asked him: "There is a conspiracy of silence against me. What ought I to do?"' And Wilde said, "Join it." You then sit down. 

### The Idea Bank

<http://www.idea-bank.com>

In a fashion similar to most of these sites, you pay up or you only see samples. Some samples of quotes are worth looking at, many not. At \$250 US for 500 items, it ain't cheap. 

### The Funny Firm

<http://members.aol.com/funnyfirm/funny.htm>

The Funny Firm advertises itself thus: 'The Funny Firm contains comedy, jokes and show prep for radio personalities, writers, and public speakers.' I was directed to it from *Professional Speaker* on-line magazine (which is an industry journal and contains little of use to principals).

The Funny Firm may help you to spice up your speeches with a little humour. It is updated twice weekly and is thus very up to the minute. However, the humour is very American, and it took me a good while to search through the vast number of stories and jokes to find anything I really thought was suitable or funny, but I did like these: 'There is always a lot to be thankful for if you take time to look for it. For example, I am sitting here thinking how nice it is that wrinkles don't hurt', 'Reason to smile: every seven minutes of every day, someone in an aerobics class pulls a hamstring', and 'The best way to keep kids at home is to make the home a pleasant atmosphere ... and let the air out of their tyres.' (Dorothy Parker). 

### The Toastmasters Treasury

<http://www.mindspring.com/~georgeh/>

This has some more nice quotes to help you. Some examples: 'A prob-

lem is a chance for you to do your best' from Duke Ellington, and 'Nostalgia isn't what it used to be' from Peter De Vries. However, there is no organisation to the quotes and the Speech Ideas page was blank. It has a link to a page with some basic tips for speakers at <http://www.toastmasters.org/tips.htm> 

### LEGEND

**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.

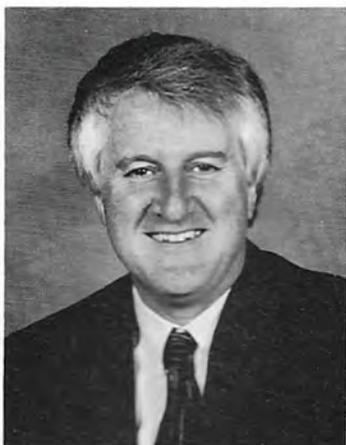
**3 hats:** Very useful for principals. Add it to your bookmarks now.

Finally, don't forget how you will put your opening or closing quote, and your speech, across to your audience. To illustrate this point I refer you to a little quote from the site: <http://www.speechwriting.com/advice.htm> 'A common assumption is that a speechwriter needs a speaker to the same extent that a pregnant woman needs a doctor - for delivery only! Nothing could be further from the truth. In this Oprah Winfrey world, audiences expect a personality, not self-serving pronouncements. Audiences want to hear a real person who can express a purpose, a sense of playfulness, and, above all, a passion.'

By and large, I am a little disappointed by the results of my trawling through the web on this topic. There is a lot there if you are willing to or able to pay; but mostly speech making and quotes are directed at the corporate world. I would be interested in knowing about any helpful or more accessible sites on this topic.

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 5 March 1999.



**New South Wales**  
**Chris Bonnor**

THE SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' Council recently completed a survey of principals on issues relating to their own welfare. The results were somewhat concerning and were followed by a series of recommendations put to the Department of Education and Training. The initial DET response was to proudly (with some justification) point to all the inservice courses, policies, kits and checklists which have been issued to support principals and schools. A follow-up meeting established that much of this support missed the point, and often became part of the problem. What is being put to the test is not so much the bureaucrats' willingness to help but their capacity to understand some of the everyday stressors in secondary schools.

### Executive Structures in Schools

One of the many Mexican stand-offs between the Department and the NSW Teachers' Federation, over many decades, has been related to the executive staffing of schools. The current formula was drawn up when Noah went to school and sees head teachers appointed when a group of subjects reaches 81 periods per week. Exhaustive work by principals and the DET has produced a new formula which would create some equity and commonsense to executive staffing. All it now needs is agreement with the union.

### Securing Their Future

Planning for the big changes to the HSC is generally on track and proves that both the Board of Studies and the Department can move quite quickly, though not always in the same direction. The pace set by the timeline has been at the expense of the quality of some of the draft materials. As usual, the biggest pressure will be on schools in Terms 3 and 4 to implement new syllabuses and assessment procedures in time for Year 11 in 2000. Both despite, and because of, decisions made higher up we'll just make it work . . . as usual. In any centralised or quasi-centralised education system it is important for those at the centre to have quick and effective commu-

nication with the outposts. By the end of the year all schools will be connected to the Department's Wider Area Network. ISDN lines are currently being connected and all principals will have web-based email by mid-year. Apart from the usual control agenda, one aim is to reduce the flood of paper going out to schools and to give schools ready access to the over 400 separate policies which they are obliged to implement.

### Election Phoney War?

So far so good: at the time of writing the election is just three weeks away and education has escaped unscathed. As anticipated, Laura Norda has copped a pounding and ownership of electricity utilities has sparked (sorry) some interest. Education bureaucrats have held their collective breaths now for many weeks, while at the same time suppressing anything which might hit the headlines. A special medal should be struck in recognition of their efforts and district superintendents should be given bravery awards for their capacity to put out fires against all odds.

*Mr Chris Bonnor is the Principal of Asquith Boys' High School and is also the NSW Contributions Manager for 'Principal Matters'. Email: cbon@ozemail.com.au*



# Testing Times

**CHRIS BONNOR laments one cultural event schools could all do without: the 'Annual Festival of the HSC Result', and its interstate variations.**

ONE OF THE GALA occasions each year in education is the 'Annual Festival of the Higher School Certificate Result'. It doesn't include any special concert or occasion but does include a choreographed media spectacle which includes an annual orgy of headlines, number crunching and recurring controversies about types of schools, boys *versus* girls, confidentiality of results, and the rest. One could quite successfully write the script in advance for each year's spectacle: the characters change from year to year but the chief production houses go on forever, and the storyline is depressingly cyclical.

The 'Annual Festival of the HSC Result' is actually played out in thousands of homes, in dinner table and backfence conversations, all spurred on by the media orgy. "Didn't Ruse do well (again) this year?" "What happened to (name of school)?" "Isn't Killara a top school?" "I'm glad my son went to (whatever) school". What readily becomes apparent is that despite the best efforts of our brightest kids it is the schools which retain the lingering glory.

Thousands of students must feel even slightly cheated: the good results were 'got by schools', the students were just an accessory before the fact.

## Ego Starvation

I always feel sorry for those kids and schools which, through no fault of their own and an accident of geography or demography, don't even rate a mention in this ritual.

**I especially feel sorry for the school principals and staff of such schools. Despite their outstanding efforts, their kids might only just make it to first base and rarely rate a mention, let alone create a headline or two.**

If teachers were to be sustained on the ego tripping that accompanies much of the 'Annual Festival of the HSC Result', then most would professionally starve to death. Thank goodness we are paid so handsomely as compensation!



Then, horror of horrors, it all happened to me! For two years in a row the Year 12 students in my school scored results which, at best, could be described as ordinary. Now this hasn't always been the case and kids who work hard have always done well at my school. The school has what could best be described as a 'subdued profile' in the 'Annual Festival of the HSC Result': it is surrounded by selective schools, private schools, centres of excellence for this, that or the other. It is, in fact, a comprehensive school of the common garden variety (albeit a good one, in my humble opinion).

## Coping With the Shame

Oh, but the shame of it all: just one kid in one subject merit list. Now I've never been into wrist slashing and I'm desperately afraid of heights. So what to do? After much soul searching, the light bulbs started to flash: why not reorganise the school population to make sure the 'school' gets good results in the future? I'm not talking about any of that improved classroom learning/teaching stuff. We do that as well as the headline grabbers. No, instead I've hit on a formula to take my school to greater glory and the odd headline or two.

## Re-engineering 'Results'

Firstly I've decided to get rid of most of the boys. Sorry boys, you are great human beings, and all that, but you just don't score very well in the HSC. I know it is a boys' school but most of you will have to go. I also know you'll end up on top while the other lot eventually bump up against the glass ceiling, but that's no good to me here and now. You have to go! Those of you who remain will be diluted by heaps of girls, preferably good at English, and all that goes with that.

Secondly I'm going to enrol every non-Anglo kid within cooee, especially the ones who are so good at maths and the sciences/technology that it doesn't matter how poorly they score in the humanities. After all, the composite University Admission Index is not confidential – it is the individual subject merit lists which carry a school to greater public glory. Just ask the Maths staff at the school several suburbs down the line!

The kids of recent migrants have always been great mark scorers: they are motivated, hard-working and good citizens into the bargain! (Not being a good citizen really matters in this game: there is no school league table for citizenship!)

## Prestigious Name

Next, you guessed it, I'm going to add 'college' to the school name and charge high fees (and harvest a plethora of government grants). This will attract the children of the baby-boomer generation who believe that you can buy a good education in the same way that you can buy a BMW. Surveys show that, for whatever reason, the children of higher income earners do better at school. I know it is more than just money, but who cares? Anyway, if they don't score high marks, I'll still milk their parents for the new swimming pool or scholarship fund to attract the odd bright little possum that lies dormant amongst the proletariat.

## Emulating Britain

Of course, I won't be happy with just being socio-economically or gender selective, I'll have to become academically selective as well. Why shouldn't a test at the tender age of eleven years decide one's lifetime opportunities? It's what made Britain great!

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**I'll have such a test and, on the side, I'll write a few books to help kids cram to pass the test.**

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It won't matter that many amongst my selective intake won't make the grade. The media doesn't often ask

questions about them. I'll have enough runs on the board to rattle Ruse and make Grammar green.

## Riff-Raff Removal

Then, in the best Basil Fawltly tradition, I'll get rid of the 'riff-raff', meaning any student who cannot possibly score a scaled mark of more than 90 in any subject.

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**All these kids are doing is spoiling my batting average. I won't need a reason to get rid of them, just a good story to tell to the parents and bureaucrats who may have to answer the ministerials when the kids start flooding the job market.**

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Anyway, both the community and the educational hierarchy will feel more than compensated by the inevitably improved school annual report. I know many misguided people think that schools should serve the needs of all students. I used to believe that. Such beliefs will carry you through the pearly gates but not onto any subject merit lists. Sorry, the non-academic students will just have to go!

## Out With Musicals!

Finally I'll strip the school calendar of anything that doesn't potentially contribute to academic glory. I know the school musical has been a ripping success - I'm sorry, it has to go. Peer support? Forget it - let them bash each other up like they did in the good old days. Well-rounded citizens - who cares? There are no merit lists for 'well-roundedness'. Art exhibitions, displays, special days, dances, camps, and the like, are all a distraction, and all must go. Equity programs? Give me a break! On the other hand, I might just keep grade sport. After all, if students are to score well they should do nothing but compete with each other and get used to grinding each other's noses into the dirt.

## The Magic Formula

There are many other useful strategies to mention but what worries me most is that others might steal some of my formula for success. Fortunately I might get away with it for at least one year because I think that I'm the only person in NSW to have discovered the magic formula. If others get up to the same tricks I guess that next year's HSC merit lists will be dominated by schools which are academically or socio-economically selective, charge high fees, are dominated by girls and have the award-winning ethnic mix.

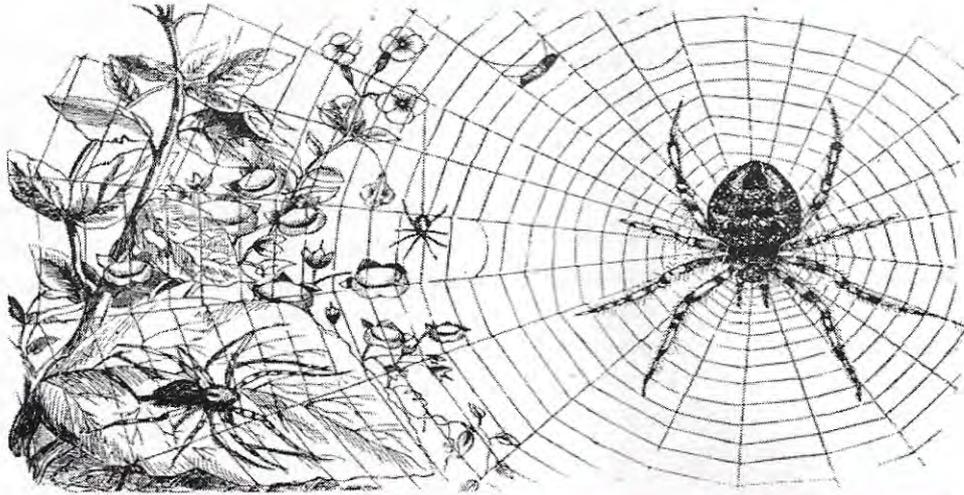
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mr Chris Bonnor is proudly the principal of a comprehensive secondary school in NSW.*



# Web-Threat Alert

## What Would Your School Do?



**GRAHAME WAGENER** describes a situation involving student misuse of the Internet. What would you do in the same circumstances?

LET ME RUN a hypothetical by you. Imagine that one, or more, of your students develop their own web site, utilising the services of an overseas free web site provider. The introduction to the web site has personal details about the students, and makes some uncomplimentary comments about the school they attend. The web site goes on to list a number of friends, and also lists, under a threatening heading, a number of students and staff that the students dislike. What do you do when the matter is brought to your attention? What follows is an outline of an event that happened, an event we never imagined would happen.

### Not So Private Web Site

While the web site is meant to be private, with access supposedly only available through knowing the correct address, one of the developers gives the address to a fellow student and suggests that they might find their name on one of the lists. The student looks up the site, finds their name on the threatening list, and because teacher's names are also mentioned, informs the computer stud-

ies class teacher. The teacher prints out the web site, and takes the document to the principal. Understanding the teacher's concerns, the principal also considers:

- the legal position, given that this is a 'private' web site;
- how 'real' the threat should be considered, given the text of the whole document;
- the position of the school in relation to threats issued via a web page;
- whether there a policy or memorandum which gives some guidelines in such a situation;
- whether the staff and parents of the students listed be contacted, and what should be said; and,
- whether the police should be notified.

### International Context

Due to the unusual nature of this threat, and the international events that had taken place at the time the discovery was made, the principal thought it necessary to make contact with the District Office and Legal Services before any immediate action

was taken. After consultation with a number of parties, the following action was decided upon:

- notify the police;
- inform each member of staff listed;
- inform the parent or caregiver of each of the students whose name appeared on the threatening list;
- send a copy of the document and a Critical Incident report to the District Office;
- notify the Department media liaison officer; and,
- interview the main student involved.

A staff meeting was called to inform staff of the events, quell rumours, and reassure them that suitable action was being taken. The police local Area Commander ensured that there was a police presence at the school, and the Department of Education and Training District Superintendent attended the school to monitor progress.

One of the first concerns was the fact that the main student involved could not be immediately located, and this became a priority for action. The



student's parent was contacted and asked to attend the school, and information was sought as to the possible location of the student. When the student was located, the police conducted an interview with the student, the parent, and a sister.

### Just a Joke?

The family expressed concern that the school had over-reacted and that the whole thing was a 'joke' granted, in poor taste, considering that had transpired internationally since the web site was developed. The family pointed to certain words in the text of the document that supposedly reinforced the notion that the whole thing was a 'joke'.

### Threat Taken Seriously

Neither the school, nor the police, disregarded the seriousness of the threat, and made this clear to the family. While the police could not find grounds to take the matter further, the school suspended the student for ten days. During the ten days of the suspension some of the staff and one parent of a student involved in the threat, decided to take further action. These staff members, and the parent, felt that, because the student had a history of dysfunctional behaviour, their personal well-being needed protection. This attitude was enhanced by recent international events. These staff, and the parent, made application to the court to have Apprehended Violence Orders taken out against the student. The staff were advised and assisted by Legal Services, who were supportive throughout.

It was towards the end of the suspension that the court hearing was held, and this coincided with a similar event, which occurred at another high school located elsewhere in the State. Given the international publicity and the publicity occurring at this other school, media attention soon focused on the court hearing

and the school. Literally, a media circus ensued, something one would not wish on anyone. The advice in this case is to say nothing, or as little as possible, and allow the media liaison people to handle all enquiries. If you do comment, you risk being misquoted, or quoted out of context, to create a more newsworthy scenario.

The AVOs were issued by the court, along with a media suppression order. This disappointed the media, but did not stop them. Students were approached outside the school, and staff were approached at their home. Fortunately, media interest slowly decreased, and the suppression order ensured that little harm was done. At the suspension resolution interview, it was decided that the student would make application to enrol in distance education.

### Helpful Guidelines

Here are some of the things you need to keep in mind when dealing with this type of situation.

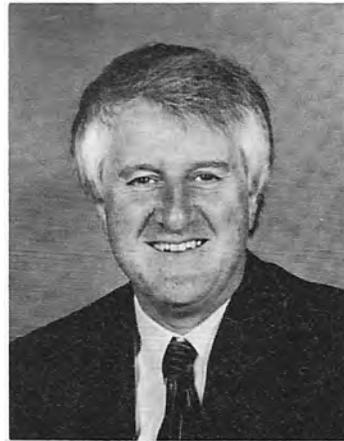
1. Keep the staff well-informed about what is happening. Inform the Parents' and Citizens' Association executive of what is happening.
2. Use the resources of the Department to the advantage of your school.

The Department will assist with a legal representative if it is necessary to apply for an Apprehended Violence Order, although staff should be aware that they could request the use of their own legal adviser.

3. AVOs, when appropriate as a course of action, should include a statement preventing the named person approaching the PINOC (Person In Need Of Protection) at their workplace, i.e., school.
4. Let the experts in handling the media handle them.
5. Discuss the issue with colleagues, and seek advice when you're not sure.
6. Be aware of the feelings of all parties involved.
7. Inform the parents who need to be informed, but respect privacy.
8. Clamp down on student gossip.
9. Check the school's computer directories, which record Internet usage, i.e., cache or temporary Internet files, regularly.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Dr Grahame Wagener is Principal of Oak Flats High School, in NSW.*



## NSW NSWSPC

ONE OF THE triumphs of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council has been the development of a definitive paper on the future of education in NSW, and our part in that future. The paper, to be endorsed in August, is the result of two years work by a team headed up by Maurice Brunning, from Nambucca Heads High School.

One-third of the principals in NSW have actively worked on the project at various stages, ensuring a very high level of ownership and commitment. The paper has already received wide acclaim and, when completed, should have the capacity to make a substantial contribution to the future of education in NSW. Issues in the paper relate to leadership, managing change, planning for the 21st Century, school culture, technology in learning and the political-educational interface. Look out for it on our web site later this year.

### **Annual Conference**

The annual conference proved to be most successful, if one discounts the contribution of the current Minister,



who gave the usual tedious political harangue, combined with a verbal mugging of the NSW Teachers' Federation and a 'tut tut' to all those who doubted that the new HSC wouldn't be delivered on time.

This was small compensation to the countless principals who have seen teachers and bureaucrats burn out to meet absurd timelines in the development of new courses. (While in Britain I listened to teachers anguishing over having just fourteen months to prepare for new senior courses. Their anguish reduced when I explained that in NSW we have to do the same thing in half the time).

Principals were hoping the Minister might suggest where the money to resource the new courses might come from but were told that the changes didn't need significant resources. A month later, from the safety of his own office, the Minister launched yet another cyclical (and cynical) campaign pointing to the 'millions' of dollars allegedly lying in school bank accounts.

It seems in NSW that, any time we need funds to implement his bright ideas, he will usually point to our bank accounts, while chanting 'cost neutrality' when asked to fund anything else.

The Director-General was better received by principals. Ken Boston's passion for public education (despite, or because of, state and federal government policies) is felt to be genuine, even if his prescriptions for its defence are not always seen to be adequate. Dr Boston identified three key issues that will influence the competitiveness of NSW state education.

1. The implementation of the new Higher School Certificate.
2. The development of VET and a closer integration of schools and TAFE.
3. The promotion of the Collegial Model.
4. The latter involves a re-definition of 'comprehensive', requiring greater flexibility in staffing and school organisation to support new course structures.

Other papers from our Conference are available on our new web site ([www.nswspc.org.au](http://www.nswspc.org.au)). They include papers from Dr Keith Suter, Dr Julia Atkin and Dr Peter Ellyard, as well as a final stress-relieving session from Ms Amanda Gore.

### That Boy/Girl Thing

Our boys *vs* girls achievement controversy is a little early this year - usually it breaks out after the HSC results are released. The universities have decided to include two units of HSC English in the UAI, and the advocates for boys are crying 'foul'.

The usual protagonists have lined up to do battle: on one side you have those who want to change the rules and shift the goal posts to favour boys. On the other, you have those who want to change the boys and drag them into the 20th century at this penultimate hour. The battle continues!

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Mr Chris Bonnor is Principal of Asquith Boys' High School, the NSW Contributing Editor for 'Principal Matters' and the Deputy President of the NSWSPC.*

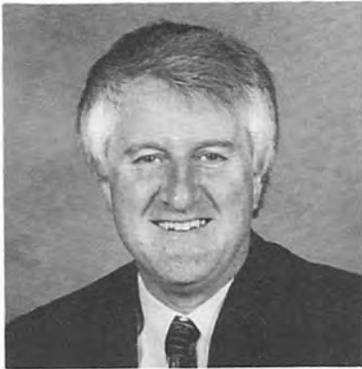
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## State of the Nation

### Issues, Trends and Developments Affecting Principals and Principals' Groups in Australian States and Territories



**New South Wales  
NSWSPC: Chris Bonnor**

AN INTERESTING debate is starting to unfold in NSW following the release of the Secondary Principals Council's *Preferred Futures for Public Secondary Education in NSW*. The Council's Futures Project (on our website at: [www.w3c2.com.au/nswspc/](http://www.w3c2.com.au/nswspc/)) has provided a challenge to all stakeholders in NSW, and has already been thrown around in current salary negotiations. To cut a long story short, Preferred Futures is about shifting agendas in what is a 'top-down' relatively inflexible education system. Principals essentially believe that greater flexibility, in such areas as school management and curriculum delivery, is essential to retain the relevance of government secondary education in the future.

At the same time, other stakeholders, such as the NSW Teachers' Federation and the P&C Federation see both the NSWSPC and the Futures Project as advancing a 'government agenda' (which, in NSW, sounds like an oxymoron) to shift schools in directions taken in other States and New Zealand. They see 'flexibility' as threatening a state-wide system which they see as providing security for teachers and equity for students. The challenge for the NSWSPC and others is not so much to start the journey down the flexibility path but to say where the journey is taking us. The good news is that useful discussions are taking place and the agenda is certainly shifting.

### Riding the Tiger?

The NSWSPC is not an industrial organisation and, in fact, is partially funded by the Department of Education and Training (DET), in such areas as training and development. Consequently, it is often accused of filling a void in policy development in NSW (guilty as charged!). Some members even resent the enormous work in seemingly 'doing the Department's job'. Others argue that this provides a window of opportunity to achieve significant breakthroughs on a range of issues which have stumped bureaucrats and others in NSW for many years.

Numerous restructures have diminished the level of corporate knowledge (and understanding of schools) in DET to the point where it cannot 'smoothly' run the system without input from the NSWSPC. The achievements in terms of policy breakthroughs have certainly been 'on the board' in the last few years, but we still have a long way to go. The biggest challenge is in encouraging DET to seriously review its own operations and procedures. As I always say: it would be easier to shift the Bridge Street building one metre to the left!



## Equity Challenges

One of the ongoing difficulties in achieving any significant change is that 'cost neutrality' is presented as a non-negotiable condition by politicians and bureaucrats. The NSWSPC has been faced with either walking away from some issues or trying to tackle them on odious 'cost neutrality' terms. On two recent issues the Council has achieved breakthroughs, but at a cost to some schools. The executive restructuring policy may yet be implemented, and a more recent proposal has seen support teachers distributed more equitably across NSW. My own school has lose out on both policies but many schools have gained, and will gain a fairer slice of the cake. Equity can often hurt but at last we can hold our heads high as an organisation. We are also able to insist (with considerable integrity) that the same principles of equity should underpin other areas of government policy.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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