

## Newsletter, Term 1 2008

### From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of the Newsletter for 2008. What an amazing reaction to my request to feature our wonderful schools! I have received 15 articles to date and these will be highlighted in Newsletters throughout the year. Networking and sharing the expertise of colleagues throughout Australia and overseas is a goal of MYSA and contributions to the Newsletter allow this to happen. Thank you!

*Chris French*

### From the President

Welcome to MYSA for 2008. We trust you are energised and planning for the challenging year ahead for the young adolescents in your care.

The highlight of our new term has been the MYSA 'Travelling Scholar' - Jack Berckemeyer, Assistant Executive Director of the National Middle School Association (USA).

Jack once again entertained us with his insightful, hilarious and emotional empathy with middle years students and their teachers. As with his keynote address at the MYSA International Conference in 2005, he affirmed for us the importance of empathy, love and firm relationships with our students and why we love our profession.



#### Brisbane Workshop

L to R: Janette Salmi (Trinity Lutheran College), Jack Berckemeyer (NMSA), Patrick Grehan (St Brigid's School), Danielle Priday (Carina State School)

His workshop, *Understanding Young Adolescents: A Focus on the Practical*, was enthusiastically received in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne and of course he was a highlight at the Rockhampton Regional Conference on the 6 and 7 March at Rydges Capricorn Resort. For me, as a middle years leader, Jack's workshop was a much needed focussing oasis and

distraction from the concerns of the National Testing agenda. It was a time to reaffirm the vital importance of positive pastoral care and challenging pedagogy in our middle years classrooms, rather than dwelling on the assessment.

On Saturday, 1 March, Jack spent a valuable morning with the MYSA Management Committee building the future for MYSA. He focussed us on long term planning and goal setting, supplying us with invaluable ideas and challenging our team as MYSA itself moves into 'early adolescence' as an organisation.



#### Some Committee Members

L to R: Sue Robertson, Junn Kato, Jack Berckemeyer, Eleanor Nicholson, Susan Hearfield, Jane Blackburn

It was very exciting to see the logos of NMSA and MYSA sitting side by side on the flyer and we look forward to future co-ventures. We thank NMSA again for their incredible generosity and financial assistance in sharing their passionate Assistant Executive Director with us for two weeks 'down under'. As he has been nick-named Kangaroo Jack in NMSA Headquarters in Columbus, Ohio, we were delighted in Brisbane when the heavens cleared and he could whip down to the Gold Coast for some legendary Australian sun and surf.

I wish to publicly thank our Management Committee for the many hours they volunteer to MYSA after long days of responsibilities in their own schools, universities and organisations. A special thanks to the tireless efforts of our Secretary, Sue Robertson, for her mammoth administrative duties; Chris French for braving Mackay floods to attend meetings and publish Newsletters; Nannette Murphy for leading the push for Rockhampton's Conference and Susan Hearfield, our dedicated and loyal Executive Officer.

Enjoy your upcoming holiday break!

*Eleanor Nicholson*

## Technology and 'Dumbing Down' the Brain?

I am always amazed at how there seems to be a divine glow around technology and a greater push to increase its use in schools to the point where some schools allow mobile phones and the use of email to run rampant. Interestingly, there is a growing body of research that is taking the shine off technology.

In one study with 1100 people, researchers at King's College, London, have found that modern technology diminishes cognitive abilities more rapidly than some illicit drugs. The study found that the daily use of technology resulted in surprisingly high levels of fatigue, drowsiness, lethargy and an increasing inability to focus. The study also found that email in particular had an addictive, drug-like quality and participants' minds were all over the place as they faced new questions and challenges every time an email dropped into their inbox. Moreover, productivity at work suffered and the effect on staff that were unable to resist juggling new messages with existing work was the equivalent, over a day, to the loss of a night's sleep. According to Dr Glenn Wilson, a psychologist from London University's King's College, this phenomenon is very real and widespread and the average IQ loss from emailing was measured at 10 points, more than double the four point mean fall found in studies of cannabis users.

A further intriguing result found by Dr Wilson and his colleagues was that participants felt a compulsion to reply to each new message, leading to constant changes of direction which inevitably tired and slowed down the brain. Moreover, 20 percent of the study's cohort jeopardised their immediate social relationships by rushing off to check their email while in the middle of conversations and other social interactions. These individuals felt that breaking off from meals or social engagements to receive and deal with messages was acceptable behaviour and a further third felt that, while answering messages during face-to-face meetings or office conferences was perhaps rude, it was nonetheless acceptable and seen as a sign of diligence and efficiency.

While email and 'texting' are one thing, the research above is not an isolated anomaly. A study of 100,000 students in 31 countries concluded that computers made kids dumb. Researchers in this study used the OECD's PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) tests to measure the skills of 100,000 15 year olds and concluded that holding other family characteristics constant, students performed *significantly* worse if they had computers at home. It also appeared that avoiding PCs in the classroom and at home improved the literacy and numeracy of the

children studied. Indeed what the researchers found was that when social factors were taken into account, PC literacy was no more valuable than the ability to use the phone.

Most of us have witnessed the addictive qualities that come with technology, 'texting' and emailing. School communities are also having to deal with a rampant and worrying phenomenon known as 'cyber-bullying'. Undoubtedly, the addictive nature and psychological ramifications of bullying via the air waves create unneeded stress in an already stressful world. The stress hormones, especially cortisol, and damaged cells in the memory centres of the brain are of specific concern. Therefore, given what we are beginning to uncover about the links between email, text, technology, cognition and stress, we must carefully question the role these technologies play in the day to day context of 'schooling'. As important as technology is, it is also important to remember that it is not an educational destiny devoid of scrutiny and its design and use flow from human choices.

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## Young Achievers Program

***To succeed ... you need to find something to hold on to, something to motivate you, something to inspire you.***

Tony Dorsett, NFL player

Children face many challenges in their daily lives. Often a child who wanders through life, not exceeding anyone's expectations or creating waves of attention to themselves, can go unnoticed because they miss opportunities to be rewarded for their personal



Renee Cutler with Year 7 student, Hayley French

achievements and successes. Success to some can be an 'A' on a report card and, to others, it is simply remembering to pack lunch in the morning. Students should be constantly rewarded for their efforts in all areas of life if we are to prepare and motivate them as aspiring life-long learners.

The Young Achievers Program (YAP) is a new initiative developed for the Middle School at Whitsunday Anglican School. It is a rewards-based system that focuses on all areas of Middle School life and uses documentary evidence to showcase and celebrate student achievement through individual portfolios. YAP supports and encourages students to record their individual successes and scaffolds goal setting with parents and teachers.

A student's success is not limited to academic achievement. It also includes sport, cultural activities, leadership and service. YAP incorporates all of these under the umbrella of the Middle School's Character Counts Program, a values education framework. YAP aims to:

- recognise and reward achievements of all students throughout their time in middle school
- set achievable goals for students
- reflect on participation and effort
- create a working folio that documents achievements and successes
- allow students opportunities to reflect on their own work ethic and behaviour and concentrate on areas for improvement through goal setting
- reward students who meet the criteria with a celebration event at the end of each term
- create another avenue to enhance the student/parent/teacher relationships.

Through YAP we believe that every child is a Young Achiever!

**Renee Cutler**  
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The main school, at Newcastle, developed a Middle School in 2001 after careful research, consultation and planning. A key feature of all the schools is the use of technology. Students

entering Year 7 at Newcastle or Port Stephens have the option of commencing a laptop program. The College has invested in technology and is on the leading edge in the integration of Tablet computers in the classroom. The College seeks to be a leading provider of quality Christian education in the region and greatly appreciates the support networks of various professional bodies such as MYSA.

The Middle School, adopted the slogan, *'Enjoying the Journey'* and this is a key focal point in the educational planning of activities, excursions and special theme days that support the curriculum in ways relevant to adolescent development. In 2008, all Year 7 students commenced the Life Long Learning Program, developed by Dr Jennie Bickmore-Brand. Construction of a purpose-designed Middle School building will commence by the end of Term 1 2008, with completion expected in early 2009.



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## Feature School: St Philips Christian College - Newcastle, NSW

The College was founded in 1982, with 25 students and two staff members, to provide a truly Christian school for children. Steady growth and expansion have occurred and the College now has campuses at Port Stephens, Cessnock and Gosford. Additionally, there are two pre-schools: the DALE (Dynamic Alternative Learning Environment) school for students in Years 7-10 who would be at risk of not completing the NSW School Certificate and a Young Mothers' School for teenage mums. The combined enrolment of all of these schools is over 2300, with a staff of 350.

## Feature School: Kristin feed Ronald McDonald House

The Kristin Middle School Student Council took on the mammoth task of cooking dinner for 130 residents at Grafton's Ronald McDonald House as part of their voluntary work in the community. A total of 18 students and three teachers arrived at Ronald MacDonald House not knowing quite what the task would entail. After some thorough instructions from Volunteer Manager, Jessamy



Neilsen, they got stuck into preparing a 'Kristin dinner extravaganza'. The Council has been involved in many projects this year which included fundraising for those in poverty overseas. Through Sandy Evans, an ambassador for Ronald McDonald House, the Council learned of the work that could be done helping families who had sick children at Starship Hospital. Student, Lewis Fry, said, 'We decided to do something that at first seems quite a small part of everyday life but in fact it is something quite big for

a family who has had a stressful and emotional day. We felt privileged to cook their dinner and help them out'. The students loved being involved and interacting with everyone. They experienced the importance of giving back to the community and were deeply moved by the experience. All students know they made a difference to the lives of others.

**Edward Berry, Principal  
Kristin Middle School**  
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## Feature School: Holy Spirit School, Bray Park

This year is our first year of middle schooling. Holy Spirit has approximately 500 students ranging from Prep to Year 7. We have introduced a 'Senior School' which combines our Year 6 and Year 7 students, embracing the philosophies of middle schooling by using negotiated curriculum, student based learning centres and structured a day where students leave the classrooms to attend Science, Art and Religious Education.

Increased use of technology is a primary focus for our 'Senior School'. Currently we use laptops and a multimedia room for many lessons, but will enhance this through the installation of interactive whiteboards. The use of digital cameras, ipods and mobile phones will be used as key components for lessons throughout the year. The rotational day has been very successful. It provides an opportunity for students to use specialised facilities, adapt to different teaching styles and learn to manage their time and responsibilities.

As a team, we evaluate our programs to ensure the diverse needs of students are met. We meet regularly to discuss progress, adapt programs and research middle schooling philosophy. Our goal is to create a publication on middle schooling in the near future.

At the end of Term 1, we are inviting parents and families to a 'Celebration of Learning' morning. Students will share their learning and showcase their accomplishments to peers and families.

**Fiona Hicks**  
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## Students' thoughts on the start of a new year!

### Middle School Captains' welcome at first Middle School Assembly

'I welcome you all to a new and exciting year where new challenges and experiences are waiting to be explored. We hope you had a safe and relaxing holiday and have come back refreshed and enthusiastic. I also welcome all new students and teachers to our College and trust that your time here will be a pleasant experience. To all Year 5 students, I know you will easily adapt to the minor changes in Middle School and you are looking forward to using lockers and participating in House activities. This year, our College motto is "do all the good you can". The motto can be interpreted differently but for me it means helping others, getting involved and achieving to the best of my ability, whether in the school yard, classroom or at home.'

'I heard a story about a boy walking along a beach one morning, after a storm had washed up thousands of starfish on the beach. As the boy walked along, he was stopping to pick up starfish and then threw them back into the water. As he was doing so, a man walking along the beach noticed what he was doing and looking at the thousands of starfish that had been washed up on the beach, he said to the young boy, "Why bother, you can't throw them all back? What difference will it make?" Bending down, the boy picked up another starfish and threw it back into the water then turned to the man and said, "It made a difference to that one." This story shows that sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks that lie before us and feel that our efforts are of no significance. Yet every act, no matter how small, can make a difference.'

'We encourage everyone to get involved and make the most of the wonderful opportunities our College has to offer. As Middle School Captains, we are committed to facilitating you to make a difference and will encourage you to strive to do that little bit better academically and in the sporting arena. Also aim to do that little bit better in showing respect and understanding towards each other. Together we can make a difference and inspire others through our actions. Remember, the combined efforts of all can be far more effective than the individual effort of one.'

'Thank you.'

**Joanna and Edward  
Middle School Captains**  
**Overnewton Anglican Community College**  
**Keilor Campus, Victoria**

## Orewa College – Values Education

Orewa College is a secondary school, Years 7 to 13, located north of Auckland in a thriving beachside community. We have embraced middle and senior school philosophies with a coordinated structure.

Last year, the New Zealand Ministry of Education released a new curriculum document with a compulsory section on 'Values'. Orewa College has a values program called Manaaki Orewa. Manaaki is a Maori word which describes many values and this program enables us to nurture and support our community. The daily program focuses on three areas: Respect for Self, Respect for Others and Respect for the Environment. The focus is initially on Middle School students because research indicates they need daily reassurances of being worthwhile people.

Manaaki Orewa is promoted throughout our whole school community. The focus is to reward and recognise student achievement and encourage student modelling. By exploring and promoting values, positive habits are formed. The program moves from extrinsic rewards and motivation in the Middle School to an intrinsic focus at the Senior School.

**Anna Kenny**  
**Director of Middle School**  
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## 'Get with it...Explore, Experience and Update'

On March 6 and 7, the MYSA **Rockhampton Regional Network** held its fourth regional conference at Rydges Capricorn Resort, Yeppoon. The conference focussed on encouraging teachers to:

- **Explore** a deeper understanding of the lives of the students in the middle years
- **Experience** new trends in information and communication technology in the classroom
- **Update** and refine behaviour management practices

The following is a brief summary of messages conveyed by **Jack Berckemeyer**, Assistant Executive Director, National Middle School Association, USA:

- be committed to this age group [know that you make a difference]
- are you committed or about to be committed?

[there's nothing wrong with having a lot of fun with them, even be a bit crazy!]

- every day, unconditionally, someone waits for me [meaning, you, the teacher]
- what job do you do? [be proud]
- pick a favourite kid, walk up and go 'WOW' [know them and talk to them; tell them what you have observed; be there for them].

**Donna Pendergast**, Associate Professor and Middle Years Program Director, University of Queensland, spoke about how middle schooling does not happen in an office but only in the classroom. She also asked if you were to draw a picture that reflects the middle school teacher and the classroom, would it change over time?

**Dr Christine Richmond**, Richmond Educational Consultants, focussed on behaviour management and encouraged colleagues to find out what works best for them. Giving generous acknowledgement, timely corrections and clear expectations were reinforced. She also highlighted the importance of good humour and respect.

**Derek Bartels**, Executive Officer: ICT, Lutheran Education Queensland, focussed on technology and the value it has in education. He encouraged the use of The Learning Federation and stated there is \$170 million worth of software and curriculum innovation coming our way!

Participants were also exposed to an array of local and notable state-wide workshop presenters who provided yet another dimension to the already interesting program. Furthermore, participants were also exposed to the varied and wondrous talents of local middle school students.

*"We have to love them until they love themselves."*  
 Nancy Doda

Many thanks to Susan Hearfield and the Rockhampton Conference organising committee for their hard work. A special thank you to the committed students and teachers of the Rockhampton and surrounding districts.

**Nanette Murphy**  
**MYSA Rockhampton Regional Co-ordinator**  
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**Conference Dinner**  
 L to R: Susan Hearfield, Jack Berckemeyer, Arthur Kelly, Nanette Murphy, Lynda Kennedy and Tyson Wood (SMART teachers—sponsor)

