

## Term 2 2007 Newsletter

### From the Editor

What an amazing reaction I had to requests for MYSA Newsletter articles. My email in-box had quite a workout. Thank you so much for your interest and willingness to share current research and best middle schooling practice and activities from the coal face! Due to this huge response, another Newsletter will be distributed early Term 3.

*Chris French*

### Annual Report

**Presented at the 2007 AGM by Geoff Sippel, outgoing President**

It has been another active and productive year for the Association. Whilst the core business of the Association continues to be the promotion and development of young adolescent education, the focus has been on continuing to provide and develop quality services to members. This has been achieved through newsletters, journals, professional learning activities, active participation in state and national forums, improved benefits for members and support for Regional Networks.

During the past 12 months, MYSA has continued to grow as an Association, both in memberships and the range of activities offered throughout Australia. It is important to note that MYSA actively promotes and supports a cross-sectoral approach in our management structures, membership and activities. Current membership is 529; 2 Life, 26 Concessional, 196 Individual and 304 Institutional. Our growth continues to create new and exciting challenges for the Association as it strives to provide an effective and efficient service to all our members. As an example of reactive change, the Management Committee now consists of two members from North Queensland Regional Networks who attend Committee meetings regularly.

The past 12 months have seen several new initiatives and ideas implemented, most notably the

commencement of developing a MYSA Position Paper. Members will be invited to give feedback throughout the process during the next year. Another initiative, negotiated with Hawker Brownlow publications, is the 25% discount for resources for MYSA members. In 2006, MYSA conducted its first Study Tour to the USA, visiting middle schools in the state of Georgia and culminating with attendance at the NMSA Conference in Nashville, at which several members of the tour group delivered presentations.

During 2006/2007, MYSA has continued to promote the achievements and efforts of those involved in meeting the developmental needs of young adolescents. These were acknowledged at the International Conference, Regional Conferences, professional development activities and the Middle Years of Schooling Showcase. The establishment of new Regional Networks in Victoria, ACT and Sydney further emphasises the growing interest there is in middle schooling and indeed the growth of MYSA from a Queensland based association to a national association. These activities allowed colleagues to share their best practices across all educational sectors for the benefit of our educators and, ultimately, the students.

The Association's Newsletters and *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling* continue to provide an avenue through which achievements of young adolescents and those involved in their education can be promoted. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Publications Sub-Committee members and thank them for their hard work. In particular, we wish Tony Cartmel, who resigned from the Committee earlier this year, all the best for the future and thank him for his commitment and support.

MYSA has also continued to increase its interest in pre-service teacher education through sponsorship of awards at UQ, QUT and USQ in the area of middle schooling and supported for the Middle Years category at the Teen Challenge Student of the Year Awards.

In an effort to inform educators, parents/carers and the wider community about the nature of responsive education in the middle years of schooling, MYSA has sought membership and representation on a variety of educational groups and forums, such as the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Reference



Group, the National Education Forum, the Joint Council of Queensland Teachers Association and the Values Education Coordinating Committee. This has also been enhanced through MYSA presentations and trade displays at conferences and workshops.

The work of the Association continues to be enhanced by the ongoing work of MYSA's Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield, who plays a pivotal role in supporting Regional Networks and promoting the ideals of the Association. In addition, the Executive Officer has been further supported by the Management Committee, which meets monthly.

In conclusion I would like to thank our Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield, and the Management Committee for their friendship, professionalism and ongoing commitment to the Association: Eleanor Nicholson (Vice President), Sue Robertson (Secretary), Peter Crombie (Treasurer), Neil McDonald (Professional Learning Coordinator), Nanette Murphy (Month of the Young Adolescent Coordinator), Jane Blackburn, Amanda Pentti, Emily Sangster and Chris French. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Peter Crombie (Treasurer), who did not stand for re-election, for his dedicated service and support to the Committee and Association over a long period of time. We wish him all the best for the future. To the incoming Committee, I wish you every success as you pursue the vision and goals of MYSA.

- provide a voice to those committed to the education, development and growth of young adolescents
- identify and encourage relevant research in middle schooling.

We are still basking in the outstanding success of MYSA's 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference, *Middle schooling: Reaching new heights - Building our future*. The 773 delegates came from all Australian states and territories, New Zealand, USA, England, Singapore and Hong Kong, gathering at Jupiters on the Gold Coast to share and discuss latest research, relevant resources and practices to brighten the potential learning future of our young adolescents. Not only did we hear from leading researchers, the opportunity for professional networking and camaraderie were excellent. Keynote and Theme Paper presentations can be accessed on MYSA's website: [www.mysa.org.au/conferences](http://www.mysa.org.au/conferences).

Our enormous thanks go to our marvellous conference organisers, ICMS, whose personal attention to detail and professional expertise have once again proven our ongoing trust and faith in their abilities. To our Conference Committee and Extended Committee from throughout Australia and New Zealand, thank you for your tremendous commitment of time and expertise juggled in the midst of full time jobs. A special thank you to our brilliant Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield, for her incredible commitment to our cause and attention to both minute and personal detail. Without her, none of this would have become a reality.

Next term we look forward to the presentation of the first draft of the MYSA Position Paper. The author, Dr Donna Pendergast, University of Queensland, has been refining and writing the reflections of the Working Party who met to discuss our beliefs and aspirations as an Association. We anticipate providing you with further feedback on the Position Paper in the coming months.

I would like to acknowledge all the effective and tireless work of our outgoing Management Committee over the past year, especially that of our immediate past president, Geoff Sippel. Geoff's expertise in, and devotion to, the issues confronting young adolescents, and to us as middle years teachers, have been of enormous benefit to the Association as we continue our work as a peak body for middle schooling in Australia.

Thank you sincerely, Geoff, and we look forward to your continued involvement in the future. Our enormous thanks also as an Association must go to our outgoing Treasurer and Life Member, Peter Crombie, for his

## From the President

Welcome to the Term 2 MYSA Newsletter and my first as President of our Association. In my eight years as an active member of the MYSA Management Committee, I have held the positions of Journal Editor, Journal and Conference Sub-Committee member and Vice President. The President's role is one I am honoured to hold and I look forward to engaging with you to advance the cause of middle schooling.

This seems an appropriate time to refocus on the aims of our Association, which are to:

- inform individuals, professional educators, parents and the wider community about the nature of responsive education in the middle years of schooling
- promote the achievements and efforts of those endeavouring to meet the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents



constant financial oversight during the many years he held this position. This professional attention to detail and fiscal advice has allowed MYSA the great benefit of being able to employ our part-time Executive Officer.

There was unprecedented interest in nominated positions for this year's Management Committee. This augurs well

for the bright future of MYSA. Thanks to all those who nominated and congratulations to this year's Committee.

*Eleanor Nicholson*

## MYSA 2007-2008 Management Committee

NOMINEE	POSITION	LOCATION	EMAIL
President	Eleanor Nicholson,	Canterbury College	e.nicholson@canterbury.qld.edu.au
Vice-president	Neil McDonald	Springwood State High School	neil.mcdonald@eq.edu.au
Treasurer	Emily Sangster	Queensland Studies Authority	Emily.Sangster@qsa.qld.edu.au
Secretary	Sue Robertson	Queensland Studies Authority	Sue.Robertson@qsa.qld.edu.au
Website Manager	Amanda Pentti	Queensland Studies Authority	Amanda.Pentti@qsa.qld.edu.au
Newsletter Editor	Chris French,	Whitsunday Anglican College	cfrench@wac.qld.edu.au
Professional Learning Coordinator	Karena Menzie	University of Queensland	kjmenzie@netspace.net.au
Journal Editor	Pam Matters	Macquarie University	pamela.matters@mq.edu.au
Ordinary Member	Jane Blackburn	St John Fisher College	jblackburn@bne.catholic.edu.au
Ordinary Member	Nanette Murphy	Rockhampton Grammar School	nmurphy@rgs.qld.edu.au
Ordinary Member	Junn Kato	Cavendish Road State High School	jkato1@eq.edu.au

## Standardised Testing Won't Grow Dendrites!

In the near future middle school students, as well as some of their primary counterparts, will participate in state wide literacy and numeracy exams. Given the current educational climate and a drive towards greater accountability and standards it is timely to reflect on the nature of these types of exams. In this edition of the Newsletter, I would like to provide a short neurological, as well as educational, perspective.

Firstly, it is important to note that a great deal of research highlights the frailty of standardised testing when it comes to overall academic achievement and neurological development. Indeed, many critics decry standardised tests as the lowest form of intellectual

endeavour. Given new understandings of how the brain works and learns there is some merit in this for we know that repetitive opportunities to engage in **personally meaningful** experiences within in an **enriched environment** provide the greatest opportunity for the brain to learn. Neuroscientists know this for they can actually record the growth of dendrites amongst neurons which demonstrates that learning has occurred. The growth of dendrites and the communication between neurons (synapses) is the first indicator of neural restructuring or what we might commonly refer to as learning. Limited opportunities for this type of neural firing exist when students engage in standardised testing. So, why do we do it and what are the advantages?

Standardised testing in itself was designed to provide government bureaucracies with some measure of generalised student achievement. Quantifying

educational performance is, however, fraught with difficulties in that trying to draw comparisons between schools or individuals would require an unattainable measure of consistency between and amongst what are often referred to as 'like' schools. That being said, there is a level of comparison that can be beneficial to each and every student. If we look at the level of progression an individual student makes from one year (or exam) to another then we are afforded an opportunity to look at individual growth over a period of time. This is indeed useful for a teacher and a school as they can then look for evidence of learner success or difficulty on an individual basis. The end result of this type of endeavour is a greater opportunity to assist individuals, ensure growth and improve teaching. After all, the day to day experiences in class and in school are where authentic 'learning' takes place and where the opportunity to grow dendrites is most prolific. At the end of the day, this is far more valuable than comparing 'like' schools.

**Dr Michael C Nagel**  
**Senior Lecturer**  
**Faculty of Science, Health and Education**  
**University of the Sunshine Coast**

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## International Conference Workshop – a student's perspective

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May some students from 8A, 8B and 8M were selected to attend the MYSA International Conference at Conrad Jupiters to be a part of the workshop, *When the kids come first: Planning meaningful integrated curriculum*, with Dr Nancy Doda.

When we arrived it was simply and briefly explained to us by the presenter why and what we were doing. After 15 minutes we were to pair up with a friend from our school and sit at a table. Then they allowed the conference delegates to enter the room. There were a lot of surprised faces as many of the educators thought they were just receiving a lecture!

People from all over the world attended the conference. Some were from New Zealand, Alice Springs and even as far away as Singapore. The ideas and methods Dr Nancy Doda from the USA had discovered were ingenious. I even took notes for future reference. After the conference, I was thriving with ideas and suggestions to tell some of my teachers at PBC. In general, this conference was an excellent experience and I am happy and appreciative of being invited to represent PBC, the Gold Coast and Australia.

**Caitlyn Cridge, Year 8**  
**Palm Beach Currumbin State High School**

## Regional Reports

### Sunshine Coast

The Sunshine Coast MYSA Region held its Term 2 Forum on 6<sup>th</sup> June at St Andrews Anglican College, Peregian Beach. Unfortunately, the teeming rain prevented a site tour and limited the number attending. Dave Elley, host and our MYSA Regional Coordinator, chaired the session with several teachers from the College sharing aspects of their program. This was followed with snippets from the MYSA conference and open discussion.

Of particular interest to everyone was the presentation by Jane (St Andrews) about

#### *The T.I.G.G.E.R. Story*

Year 8 students during their study on the environment viewed *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's movie. This was their Negotiated Integrated Study. They became passionate about the topic, but could not find a reference point or index on the web that listed environmental issues. So – they decided to develop their own which was launched on World Environment Day.

**You must check this out at**  
[www.saac.qld.edu.au/tigger](http://www.saac.qld.edu.au/tigger)

For further information on St Andrews Middle School, contact Dave Elley (Head of Middle School at SAAC): [delley@saac.qld.edu.au](mailto:delley@saac.qld.edu.au).

The Regional Committee is strongly committed to ensuring that term meetings cater for the interests and needs of local members. We closed our Term 2 meeting with a brainstorming session on how to best do this and decided to continue to include a tour of the host's campus incorporated into the meeting structure.

Many topics have been presented for future forum themes and we will be busy for a few years yet to address them all.

Term 3 Forum will be held at Matthew Flinders Anglican College, Buderim, at a date yet to be fixed.

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## Sydney

Earlier this year, the Sydney MYSA Regional Team was successful in receiving an Australian Government Quality Teacher Program grant of \$18,500. The 'MYSA Middle Years Pedagogy Project' is an action learning project, consisting of four cross-sectoral teams of teachers, each working with an academic partner. The purpose of the project is for small teams of teachers to focus on a common area of interest (around pedagogy) and trial some new strategies to better meet the needs of middle years students. So far, teams have met during a planning conference and have initiated the first action learning cycle. At this stage, the following areas of interest are guiding the different teams: visual literacy; differentiation; using ICT. The project will conclude in mid Term 4.

**Sarah Hay**  
**Deputy Principal - Middle Years**  
**Chifley College - Bidwill Campus**  
**Bunya Road, Bidwill NSW**  
**Phone: (02) 9628 2222**

the Victorian Network will continue to be a priority for the region. We thank MYSA Office and Management Committee for their continued support.

**Ruth Shulman**  
**Middle School Learning Specialist**  
**Beaconhills College, Valley Campus**  
**Pakenham, Victoria**



Michael Grose and Victorian participants at the recent workshop

## Victoria

29 May 2007

### **GUEST PRESENTER: MICHAEL GROSE – YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAM**

On a rainy windy afternoon, almost 60 people from the Victorian Network gathered – middle years educators from all sectors of education, hungry to share middle schooling stories, programs and knowledge to enhance the teaching and learning of the young adolescents in their care.

After a substantial afternoon tea, the members moved to the reading area of the large friendly Beaconhills College Library for Michael's presentation. His practical content-rich program examined ways to develop leadership skills and attitudes in middle years students. We worked together using a framework to build a custom-based program and were provided with heaps of practical activities that can be used with a whole class or a small group. Michael is a relaxed and confident presenter and relates well to teachers, especially for an after school workshop. The Network meeting received many positive reports and all look forward to another gathering in Term 3. The advantages of Middle Years of Schooling Association membership were promoted and growth of

**Did you know that MYSA is a member of NEF?**

The National Education Forum (NEF) is a coalition of national education associations aiming to enhance their individual and collective capacity to respond to national education policy, issues, initiatives and directions.

The purpose of the NEF is to monitor and provide a rigorous critique of current educational policy and practice by providing a forum through which national associations can maintain a critical appraisal of developments in Australian education.

[www.nef.edu.au](http://www.nef.edu.au)



## Regional Coordinators

### ACT

Scott Anderson  
Burgmann Anglican School  
PO Box 456  
MITCHELL 2911  
(02) 6255 7700  
sanderson@burgmann.act.edu.au

### NEW SOUTH WALES

#### Hunter

Vacant at present

#### Northern NSW

Karin Lisle  
Bishop Druitt College  
PO Box 8004  
Coffs Harbour 2450  
(02) 6651 5644  
klisle@bdc.nsw.edu.au

#### Sydney

Sarah Hay  
Chifley College—Bidwill Campus  
Bunya Road  
Bidwill 2770  
(02) 9628 2222  
sarah.hay@det.nsw.edu.au

### QUEENSLAND

#### Cairns

Monica Halbert  
Cairns West State School  
PO Box 97M  
Manunda, Cairns 4870  
mhalb1@eq.edu.au

#### Gold Coast

Wendy Wise  
Palm Beach Currumbin State High  
School  
Locked Mail Bag  
Currumbin 4223  
(07) 5525 9333  
wwise1@eq.edu.au

#### Ipswich

Anthony Vandermolen  
Ipswich Grammar School  
Darling Street  
Ipswich 4305  
(07) 3280 1300  
avandermolen@igs.qld.edu.au

### Keppel Coast

Penn Lanson  
42 Evelyn Street  
Lammermor Qld 4703  
(07) 4933 7704  
plans1@eq.edu.au

### Mackay

Lindley Kynaston  
Mackay North State High School  
PO Box 8333  
Mt Pleasant 4740  
(07) 4944 3254  
lkyna1@eq.edu.au

### Rockhampton

Nanette Murphy  
The Rockhampton Grammar School  
Archer Street  
Rockhampton Qld 4700  
(07) 4936 0607  
nmurphy@rgs.qld.edu.au

### South West Queensland

Judith Barbe  
Education Officer - Curriculum  
Toowoomba Catholic Education Office  
PO Box 756  
Toowoomba 4350  
(07) 46874339  
Fax: (07) 46874399  
Judy.Barbe@twb.catholic.edu.au

### Sunshine Coast

David Elley  
St Andrew's Anglican College  
40 Peregian Springs Drive  
Pergian Springs Qld 4573  
(07) 5471 5555  
delley@saac.qld.edu.au  
and  
Jan Simpson  
Nambour Christian College  
PO Box 500  
Nambour Qld 4560  
(07) 5442 1866  
jans@ncc.qld.edu.au

### Townsville

Norena Mendiola  
St Margaret Mary's College  
PO Box 1806  
AITKENVALE 4614  
(07) 4726 4900  
n.mendiola@smmc.qld.edu.au

### VICTORIA

Ruth Shulman  
Middle School Learning Specialist  
Beaconhills College,  
Pakenham 3810  
(03) 5941 2655  
RSU@beaconhills.vic.edu.au

### Victoria — Western Division

Steven Solomonson  
Belmont-Highton MY Cluster  
Brighton High School  
90 Outer Crescent  
Brighton 3216  
(03) 5243 2420  
solomonson.steven.p@edumail.vic.  
gov.au