
Newsletter, Term 2 2008

From the Editor

I hope your Term 2 has been a rewarding and refreshing one. This edition includes the President's Report delivered by Eleanor Nicholson at the recent AGM. I encourage you to read it and absorb all the information relating to MYSA operations over the past 12 months. Congratulations to our hard-working President, Eleanor, who is leading the association with passion and creative vision. Enjoy your holidays and safe travels to all our colleagues.

Chris French

From the President

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all this evening to the Middle Years of Schooling Association General Meeting. In more than eight years in the Association, I have pleasure in presenting the President's Report.

MYSA Conference

This time last year MYSA's 5th International Conference was a resounding success with over 770 delegates from all the Australian States, Territories, New Zealand, USA, England, Singapore and Hong Kong. The tremendous commitment of the Conference Committee must be acknowledged along with the fabulous energy of our Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield, in making our conference such a resounding success both professionally and financially. Following the success of 2007, planning is well under way for the 2009 Conference which will be held from 21–23 May 2009, at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre. The keynote speakers have accepted their roles in making our 6th International Conference a great event. It will have a digital theme and is titled 'Connecting in the Middle Years – Switch on! Jump in! Take off!'

MYSA Position Paper

The author of our Position Paper, Dr. Donna Pendergast from the University of Queensland, has submitted to us a well refined, published position paper which outlines our

beliefs and aspirations. The Management Committee is presently providing feedback about the paper before we send it to MYSA members for further refinement. We look forward to publicly launching and publishing the MYSA Position Paper later this year.

Publications

I would like to thank Chris French for his tireless contribution in producing MYSA's Newsletter each term. Chris has had such overwhelming contributions that he has been able to publish two newsletters in some terms. This networking and sharing of expertise of colleagues throughout Australia and overseas is a major goal for MYSA and your contributions to the newsletter allow this to happen.

Pam Matters led the Publication Committee in the printing of the *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling* in October last year. Having moved to another position at a new university, Dr Matters has since resigned her position on the MYSA Management Committee. The Journal Subcommittee is presently handling the publishing of the *May Journal*, for distribution in June. Submissions of refereed and non-refereed articles for our October issue are most welcome.

MYSA Regional Activities

We have been very busy this year supporting our MYSA Regional Networks with their professional development learning activities. In March, MYSA's travelling scholar, Jack Berckemeyer, enthusiastically entertained us in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane with his workshop 'Understanding young adolescents: A focus on the practical'. Jack is Assistant Executive Director of the National Middle School Association of USA and was a keynote speaker at the Rockhampton Regional Conference at Rydges, Yeppoon, in March. The MYSA Mackay region had a seminar on 14 April focussing on QCAR, whilst Guy Claxton was the leader of a workshop in Melbourne on 17 April. The Sunshine Coast MYSA Region held a most successful Middle School Summit on 7 May and the Hunter and Central Coast Region of NSW held a Cyber Bullying Seminar last week. MYSA's ACT Region is currently offering the 'Stepping Out' program. The Melbourne Region is in the planning stages for a conference in September, whilst Toowoomba is looking



towards October for their mini conference.

As MYSA is a national association, the Management Committee is very mindful of supporting our regional subcommittees throughout Australia in the planning and implementation of professional learning pertaining to the middle years.

AGQTP Project in NSW

The Sydney Regional Coordinator, Sarah Hay, was successful in gaining 2007 AGQTP funding for a project that involved four teams of schools from Sydney, the Hunter area and Bulahdelah.

They worked with academic partners from universities in action learning where each cluster identified their own particular focus. These included: Visual and Critical Literacy, Using ICT to Enhance Student Learning, Using Lesson Study to Evaluate the Teaching of Mathematics and Responsive Expectations for Middle Years Students. The Association offers hearty thanks to Sarah for initiating and coordinating this successful project.

Website

Management Committee member Amanda Pentti is in the process of revamping the MYSA website and is currently investigating quotes to secure a larger, updated and more user friendly design. Earlier in the year, the Committee voted to upgrade and further advance the site with more links.

MYSA Involvement

MYSA has responded to a number of national items during the past year. Management Committee member, Jane Blackburn, and Susan Hearfield put together a comprehensive response from the middle schooling perspective to the Senate Enquiry. I have attended two conferences with Teaching Australia in my position as President of MYSA. In March, it was my great pleasure to be involved in the launch of the Charter for Teaching Australia and next month will be representing the Association at the Teaching Australia Network Forum in Sydney. MYSA is also a member of the Joint Council of Queensland Teachers' Association, the National Education Forum and the Associations' Forum. Our Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield, represents MYSA at these forums.

MYSA Office

Over the years we have had our offices in two Education Queensland schools – Indooroopilly State High School and Kelvin Grove State College. It seems quite fitting now that we have moved to the non-Government sector – Holy Family Parish Centre at Indooroopilly. Our Executive Officer works from this office and it is also the venue for our Management Committee meetings.

I would like to formally thank all members of the Management Committee for adding, so generously, their roles in MYSA, to their already very demanding

positions. A special acknowledgement for our outgoing Secretary, Sue Robertson, who has been with the Committee since MYSA's conception in 1999. Her passion for middle schooling, her immense intellectual capital and her incredible attention to detail will be hugely missed. Thank you Sue!

A special thank you to Neil McDonald, outgoing Vice President, who has assisted over many years with our professional learning activities in the Brisbane region. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of committee member, Karena Menzie, who has so ably and enthusiastically organised the professional learning in Brisbane throughout the last year.

Personally, I must acknowledge MYSA's Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield. Her constant good humour, amazing energy and dedicated commitment are the foundations that hold our Association together. It is Susan's ability to juggle so many balls in the air that allows MYSA to continue advancing the cause of middle schooling.

Therefore It is important to refocus on the aims of MYSA, which are:

- to inform individuals, professional educators, parents and the wider community about the nature of responsive education in the Middle Years of Schooling
- to promote the achievements and efforts of those endeavouring to meet the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents
- to provide a voice to those committed to the education, development and growth of young adolescents
- to identify and encourage relevant research in middle schooling.

Eleanor Nicholson

Talking Point

The National Testing week has come and gone. What are your thoughts on the National Testing Program? Were the administration guidelines of the tests well planned and appropriate? Was the content of the tests suitable for the students in your school? How valid do you think the results will be as a means of comparing student achievement across the different states and territories? There has been a lot of media focus on this in recent weeks. Share your thoughts and they will be summarised in the next Newsletter. Email comments to: cfrench@was.qld.edu.au

Body and Mind in Motion !

If an adolescent is doing music, sports or academics, those are the connections that will be hard wired. If they're lying on the couch or playing video games or watching MTV, those are the cells and connections that are going to survive.

J. Giedd (Chief of Brain Imaging, U.S. National Institute of Mental Health)

There is growing interest in understanding neurological development during adolescence and much has been written about the adolescent brain. One of the most fascinating transitions that takes place in the brain during adolescence involves the pruning back of unused neural connections and the cementing of neural highways based on experience and sensory stimulation from the environment. This is incredibly important in relation to the arguably growing sedentary nature of educational environments as students move through their years of classroom endeavour. Now, more than ever and directly related to overall health and well-being, neuroscientific research is telling us that regular daily exercise is vitally important for the brain and may actually enhance our cognitive capacities.

People have known about the physiological benefits of exercise for many years. Exercise is good for much of our body and physical well-being. However, recent studies have also shown the remarkable effect regular exercise has on our brains and mental wellness. For example, did you know that students who play hard every day may be making their brains, as well as their bodies, stronger?

Researchers at the Medical College of Georgia and led by Dr Catherine Davis, an Associate Professor of Paediatrics, found that children who play vigorously for 20 to 40 minutes a day may be better able to organise schoolwork, do class projects and learn mathematics. Davis and her team also noted that children who are not active may be at a disadvantage academically.

During a three month study, Dr Davis and her colleagues worked with 163 sedentary, overweight children aged from 7 to 11. The children were divided into three groups: a control group that did no physical activity after school; a group that did 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity five days a week after school; and a group that did 40 minutes of such activity on those same days.

The groups involved in physical activity played intermittent, high-energy running games such as

'capture the flag', relays, jumping rope and modified basketball. They also wore heart-rate monitors and were rewarded for maintaining a high average heart rate. All the students were also given cognitive-function tests at the beginning and end of the study. They were tested for their mathematics and reading achievement and 'executive function'. Executive function includes skills important for planning and organising, focusing on schoolwork, resisting impulses, self-monitoring and using strategies to achieve goals. The findings of this study were very interesting.

The children in the 40-minute activity group showed significant improvement on an executive-function test compared with the control group. They increased about 4 points on a cognitive-performance scale. Those in the 20-minute group showed about half that improvement. There was a small improvement in mathematics achievement for both exercise groups but no signs of improvement in reading. Moreover, those children involved in the exercise groups lost about 1% to 2% of body fat.

Brain scans were also conducted on each participant and indicated that the children who were exercising appeared to have more neural activity in the frontal areas of their brains, an important area for executive function. Other research studies have also found strong associations between mathematics performance and aerobic fitness amongst primary and middle-school aged children. For those of us getting on in life, studies have also shown that executive function improves in older adults who become more physically active. The implications of this and other research in the area suggests that any initiative to have students engage in physical activity every day is, pardon the pun, a step in the right direction. Make no mistake, exercise not only changes the body, but it impacts on the mind as well.

Dr Michael C Nagel
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Feature School: Ruyton Girls School, Victoria

Extension and Enrichment Program at Ruyton Junior School

Highly able students are nominated by teachers to attend workshops, activities and events in areas such as Mathematics, Science, English and General Knowledge. The focus is on pursuing excellence and encouraging curiosity. Extension also occurs within the classroom program by differentiating the curriculum. Thinking skills are embedded in all classroom programs, allowing students with high order thinking skills to operate at advanced levels of performance. Some program examples include:

- Extended School Day Program, with a focus on high level academic achievement.
- Accelerated French (Year 6).
- Gifted and Talented writing competitions.
- Holiday Gifted Network Program held in conjunction with the Victorian Enrichment Centre.
- Tournament of Minds – cross-age teams in Years 5 and 6 solving highly complex challenges.
- Mathematics Challenge for Young Australia – Primary Stage. Three weeks to solve four problems, with an emphasis on processes and solutions.
- Mathematics Challenge for Young Australians – Enrichment Stage. Incorporates advanced thinking skills applied to varied Mathematical scenarios.
- Mathematical Olympiads – develops flexible problem solving skills and strategies.
- Writing Computer Mathematical Programs – students write their own programs using high order thinking mathematical content.
- Accelerated Mathematics – Year 6 students are taught the Year 7 Mathematics curriculum by a senior school teacher.
- Year 5 Mathematics Extension Program – streaming of nominated students in eight-week blocks.
- Public Speaking Program – students are formally taught the art of public speaking in Years 5 & 6. The program features a Showcase Afternoon where parents and friends are invited to listen to speeches.
- Year 6 Science – students work in Senior School Science laboratories with a Senior

- School Science teacher.
- Leadership Program – Year 6 students.
- Tablet Technology Laptop Program in Years 5 and 6.
- The Green Sustainability Team: Prep – Year 6 (recycling, nutrition, worm farm, vegetable garden).
- Clubs – chess, Chinese knotting, French games.
- LOTE Reading Program for French and Chinese students.

Brad Nelson, Head of Junior School
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Feature School: Ryan Catholic College

Writer in Residence for Middle School

Middle school students of Ryan Catholic College enjoyed a week with Writer in Residence, James Maloney. James is one of Australia's best-known authors for young people, having written more than 20 books. His early works included *Dougy* and *Gracie*, based around an Aboriginal family in western Queensland. He was awarded the Children's Book Council Award for *Bridge to Wiseman's Cove* in 1997.



James Maloney with Year 7 students (from L to R): Joshua Millar, Michaela Altadonna, Jason Paul and Kate Thomas

James worked with students in Years 5, 7 and 9 hoping to inspire them to become story tellers and giving them the tools with which to do so. He is particularly interested in adolescents because, he says, they can often become disengaged from language.

Most kids have a pretty active imagination and plenty of ideas. Part of my role is to show them how to use that. I show them structure (withholding information so that the reader has to second guess), ways to create dramatic

moment, how to highlight the importance of showing rather than telling and explore ways to create interesting characters. (James Maloney)

The Deputy Principal of the Middle School says the students have responded enthusiastically to James' workshops:

Our students have really enjoyed the opportunity to work with such a reputable author. Most of them have read at least some of James' books, and they have been fascinated by his craft. This initiative is part of our literacy program for the Middle School and it has been so successful, we hope to repeat it in the future. (Cheryl Horner)

Ann Parker, Director of Development

Feature School: Spinifex State College

Spinifex State College is a multi-campus secondary schooling facility situated in Mount Isa, North West Queensland. With over 1000 students, it is the only state operated residential campus in Queensland, with 16 communities using the college. The Senior Campus caters for Years 11 and 12 while Year 8–10 students attend the Junior Campus.

The Junior Campus 'school within a school' philosophy is supported by a Deputy Principal and Head of Department at each year level. This allows the effective management of individual students. As the Year 8 Deputy Principal, I oversee support structures for Year 8 students and implement transition programs with feeder schools in the district.

Our Gifted and Talented Transition Program introduces identified students to Senior Campus life and curriculum through a 20-week program that focuses on student acceleration. This ensures the most talented students remain in the state sector for their secondary education.

Each feeder school visits Spinifex separately to become familiar with the Junior Campus expectations, personnel and the physical site. This transition program culminates in our two-day 'Tools 4 Change' program in which students work through orientation and leadership activities.

In Year 8, integrated units reduce teacher numbers for each class through the use of core teachers. The Head of Department and I spend time each week in classes promoting positive behaviour and assisting with learning

activities alongside the core teachers.

Our middle schooling program continues to evolve as we strive to achieve the greatest possible outcomes for our students.

Rachel Ooteboom, Year 8 Deputy Principal
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Regional Updates

QUEENSLAND

Mackay

On Monday, 14 April, the Mackay MYSA group hosted a forum for teachers throughout the region on QCAR – Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework. The guest speaker for the session was Judy Gardiner from the Queensland Studies Authority in Brisbane. Judy highlighted the Essential Learnings Statement which will provide schools the opportunity to audit their curriculum based on syllabus documents and student outcomes, as well as provide clarity about what to teach in the classroom.

Standard and Assessment was also a focus for the information session, and the Assessment Bank and QCATs (Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks) were reviewed. From June, up to 560 tasks will be available to download in each key learning area, in a bid to provide access to quality assessments and resources. The QCAR Framework provides a variety of ways to support student learning through Planning, Teaching, Reporting and Assessing Modules. Also, in combination with Essential Learnings, the framework highlights the knowledge and capabilities that students need to develop now, and draw on in the future, as active, responsible citizens and lifelong learners. Fifty educators from the Mackay area attended the forum.

Renee Cutler
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Sunshine Coast Summit – 'Managing the Middle Years'

Our region's inaugural professional learning event was held on Wednesday, 7 May, with over 70 delegates attending. Professor Nan Bahr outlined the latest research and understanding about the Millennials, those students currently in our schools who form part of Generation-Y. The presentation reinforced the

