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## Term 3 2007 Newsletter

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### From the Editor

I hope you enjoy the first Newsletter for Term 3. Thank you to all those colleagues who contributed articles. Please feel free to send articles to me at any time and I will endeavour to include them in forthcoming editions.

If you send photos, please ensure names are listed and you have approval from individuals for publishing. There is a form available on the website, under 'Document Store', called 'MYSA Release Form' that can be used for this purpose.

Best wishes for a successful and enriching Term 3!

*Chris French*

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### From the President

Welcome to Term 3 and I trust you all enjoyed some form of semester break and have speedily slotted back into a hectic school life. Our trusty Newsletter Editor, Chris French, is to be congratulated on the last issue and, as he was inundated with articles and responses, he has been able to publish another Newsletter quite quickly. I thank Chris for adding the MYSA Newsletter to his already demanding role.

Our last Management Committee meeting broke the record as we started at 3.45pm and did not finish the last item until 9.40pm. We did, however, manage to discuss all our agenda items!

You may wonder what, in fact, we could discuss over that period of time so I thought in this report I would touch upon some of our agenda points.

After our healthy Treasurer's Report, due to the highly successful Conference, we moved to discussing MYSA membership and possible ways of increasing our numbers through targeting particular areas.

Our Executive Officer, Susan Hearfield, reviewed at length our 2007 MYSA International Conference and outlined plans that are on the way for our 2009 Conference. We also discussed possible ways of increasing our Regional Network memberships to enable us to offer our more remote members as many quality benefits as possible. Susan reported on the state of MYSA's new office which is located in Holy Family Parish Centre, Indooroopilly.

The *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling* has a number of articles that have been submitted for the October issue, both refereed and non-refereed. We always need colourful photographs for our issues so please submit them to Susan at the MYSA office for selection by the Editorial Committee.

Professional Learning was further refined by Neil McDonald and Karena Menzies for the August Showcase in Brisbane. Jane Blackburn reported at length to the Committee about Values Education — funding that is still available and exciting curriculum units which are soon to be available. Amanda Pentti described further advances for our website whilst the Committee voted to upgrade the site with further possible links.

Our MYSA Position Paper, being written by Donna Pendergast in collaboration with the Working Party, is bubbling along well and we hope to have more concrete information to report in our Term 4 Newsletter.

As a committee we would welcome your input and concerns as we continue to enhance the learning and wellbeing of our middle years students.

*Eleanor Nicholson*

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## University of Southern Queensland - MYSA Student Awards

In support of pre-service teachers, MYSA provides student awards for trainee teachers in their final year of middle schooling courses. Ashleigh Greensill and Mary Whibley from the University of Southern Queensland were given registrations to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> International MYSA Conference held recently at the Gold Coast. They teamed with USQ lecturer, Steve Smith, and co-presented a workshop titled *Student-centred teaching: what does it look and feel like?* They have demonstrated tremendous commitment to their studies and are worthy recipients of this award.



Trainee teachers, Mary Whibley and Ashleigh Greensill, with USQ lecturer, Steve Smith

## MYSA's 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference Jupiters, Gold Coast 17-19 May 2007

In the two months since the conference we have been evaluating all aspects, from pre-conference organising processes, to the final product, to collating evaluations. This information will be invaluable as we plan for 2009 – yes, already! I have been asked on numerous occasions why we do not have an annual conference – this is why it takes two years to plan. This is one of the reasons we have regional conferences in the other year and also to support members in their own regional areas.

We are very pleased to acknowledge the success of this year's conference. The feedback from delegates, and the many emails we have received since, confirm this. Some examples:

*best conference I have ever attended*

*inspirational keynotes*

*highlight of my teaching career*

*our staff gained so much from the experience*

*we are inspired, we are renewed, we are reassured – and we had fun!*

*I have never failed to benefit in terms of what I learn, what is confirmed for me and the conference's ability to recruit/inspire/provoke key people I bring along.*

The collated delegate evaluations generally show a range in the value people perceived of the various presentations. When people's needs are so diverse, it presents quite a challenge in designing a program that attempts to cover that range. There did seem to be undisputed consent in the value of the presentations by our two international keynote speakers — Nancy Doda and Guy Claxton. They were truly inspirational.

Most keynote and theme papers can be accessed on our website: [www.mysa.org.au/conferences](http://www.mysa.org.au/conferences).

Of course, there were also suggestions for ways we might improve and ideas for future conferences. We plan to send a survey to members asking for their suggestions for 2009, so please give us your thoughts on speakers, content, program design etc. We will look forward to your response.

We will notify members as soon as dates, venue etc have been finalised for the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference, 2009.

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## Talking Point

The dates for the National Testing Program for 2008 have been announced and assessment direction is a major 'talking point' in staff rooms in Australian schools.

***What assessment practices are colleagues finding most effective in the middle years classroom and how is the information collected to inform teaching practice?***

Email your comments to the Editor ([cfrench@wac.qld.edu.au](mailto:cfrench@wac.qld.edu.au)) for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

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Susan Hearfield

## ***HOTmaths* is Hot Stuff!**

As a school embarking on a middle years program, and looking for alternatives to the traditional forms of assessment, we have been trialing a relatively new on-line program called *HOTmaths*. I first saw it at a New South Wales mathematics conference two years ago and decided to trial it. The program has been an instant success with our students and teachers. It provides lots of variety with notes, worksheets, quizzes, animation, new opportunities for learning, informal assessment and record-keeping.

With our Year 7 and Year 8 students, we have faced the problem of what and how to assess whilst trying to follow curriculum outcomes, but assessing in terms of criteria. *HOTmaths* provides the opportunity for students to work at their own pace through each of the topics covered in class. Students are able to try quizzes at the beginning, middle and end of each topic on a variety of difficulty levels. How differentiated is that! Students are also able to retry the quizzes as often as they want. In terms of criteria, therefore, we have been able to track progress in selected, or all, topics and report more accurately where students are at and how they have progressed.

Students are more comfortable with this practice as they no longer have to face the 'big test' and can work on these tasks when they are ready, at home or school. We give students some structure and deadlines but most are able to have several attempts at each of the tasks.

So without even knowing it, students are being informally assessed on a regular basis. We have other forms of assessment, such as project work which incorporates self and peer assessment and an end of semester exam, but *HOTmaths* allows us to take the pressure off students during the semester. The students have become more motivated to improve as they can see their own progress. There is also a basic number skills competition in which students enthusiastically participate.

We have taken a differentiated curriculum approach to our course structures for Years 7 and 8 and *HOTmaths* facilitates this even more. Try it ...

[www.hotmaths.com.au](http://www.hotmaths.com.au).

**Buino Vink**  
**Head of Mathematics**  
**Australian International School, Singapore**  
**[buino\\_vink@ais.com.sg](mailto:buino_vink@ais.com.sg)**

## **What's on in your region?**

### **ACT**

20 August  
 2007 Mini-Conference  
*Ingredients of a successful middle years curriculum*  
 Small group discussion forums

Contact:  
 Scott Anderson, [sanderson@burgmann.act.edu.au](mailto:sanderson@burgmann.act.edu.au)

### **VICTORIA (Western Division)**

30 August  
*Transforming the middle years*

Contact:  
 Steve Solomonson,  
[Solomonson.Steven.P@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:Solomonson.Steven.P@edumail.vic.gov.au)

### **NORTHERN NSW (Coffs Harbour)**

10 August  
*Middle Years Program – Critical Questions*  
 Sharing forum

Contact:  
 Karin Lisle, [klisle@bdc.nsw.edu.au](mailto:klisle@bdc.nsw.edu.au)

### **SW QUEENSLAND**

17 October  
*Teaching the Y-Generation*, Anthony Summers  
 USQ, 5.00-7.00pm

**Regional Conference 2008** — calls for Expressions of Interest for Conference Committee

Contact:  
 Judy Barbe, [Judy.Barbe@twb.catholic.edu.au](mailto:Judy.Barbe@twb.catholic.edu.au)

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## How middle school students can succeed

Parents and teachers need to know how to help students become successful and be the best learners and people they can be. Adolescents are often described as being rebellious, unpredictable, irrational, self absorbed and obsessed with peer relationships; not too much different from adults at times! They can also be funny, insightful, open, responsible, rewarding and capable of achieving high levels in a wide range of adult areas. Here are a few observations on what it takes for middle school students to succeed.

### 1. *Students all want to believe they can be a success – parents can help!*

Good middle schools offer students a smorgasbord of opportunities during term time.

Holidays, however, provide a chance for parents to make a conscious decision to do different things — visit new places, attend exhibitions, try out different activities, participate in sports and read together. Like fishing, more baits parents put out the more successful they will be in engaging their children.

### 2. *Students want to do worthwhile and practical activities*

Many teenagers become bored with talking about things, but are switched on when involved in 'hands-on' activities. Mix this up with students being given some responsibilities in organising special events then you can really watch them fly!

### 3. *Students need physical activity*

Good teachers will always ensure that it happens every day within the classroom and out in the playgrounds. Parents should also make physical activity part of their family's holiday plans.

### 4. *Students act according to the expectations parents and teachers have of them*

Students will usually perform as well or as poorly as they are expected to. When treated with respect, and when adults have clear and high expectations of them, there is little that they cannot accomplish.

### 5. *Students want to be liked, accepted and to be taken seriously*

Although young adolescents are very influenced by their friends, they always need the direction and time

of their parents and teachers. Students want to be listened to, treated calmly and encouraged. How we recognise the worth and contributions of every student is vital in helping them achieve the friendships and respect that they need.

**Ted Berry, Principal**  
**Kristen Middle School, New Zealand**  
**eberry@kristin.school.nz**

## Boys in the Kitchen

St Thomas' School, Mareeba, recently launched a mentoring project, 'Boys in the Kitchen'. The aim is to strengthen communication effectiveness, social skills and confidence in the context of small group cooking classes. 'Boys in the Kitchen' is held on a weekly basis for ninety minutes after school. Students prepare recipes together and the food is eaten in a "sit down meal" environment. Some of the recipes prepared have included Toasted Cheese Tortillas with Guacamole & Sour Cream, Chocolate Hazelnut Puddings with Chocolate Sauce, Tandoori Chicken Pieces, Chicken Noodles and Apple Pastries.

The eight boys participating in the project were identified by staff as having more ability than their current academic achievement levels revealed. It was also thought the boys would benefit in the strengthening of one or more of their core social emotional foundations — confidence, organisation, persistence, getting along with others and emotional resilience. Inspiration for 'Boys in the Kitchen' came from Stephanie Alexander's Kitchen Garden Project initiated in schools across Victoria.

Feedback from students and parents has been very positive. The boys feel they have learnt valuable lessons for life and have made new friends along the way as they developed skills to effectively work in teams.

**Evan Morris, Year 7 Student**  
**Judy Seawright, Teacher**  
**St Thomas's School, Mareeba, Queensland**