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## Newsletter, Term 4 2007

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### From the Editor

I would like to thank all contributors to the Newsletters throughout 2007. Your support and desire to share best teaching practises, educational activities and knowledge have provided outstanding professional learning and information for colleagues throughout Australia. I wish all members a very merry and safe Christmas holiday and look forward to continuing our middle years journey in 2008.

*Chris French*

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### From the President

2007 has been an exciting year of projects and accomplishments for the Middle Years of Schooling Association, foremost of which must have been our 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference at the Gold Coast in May. Plans are well on the way for our next conference in 2009.

As I write this, our second edition of the *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, which you will be receiving this month, has gone to print.

Our MYSA regional networks have been busy this year and we look forward to Jack Berckemeyer's visit to Australia bringing with him greetings from the USA and the joys and humour of his experiences teaching middle school students.

I wish to thank you for the dedication, commitment and energy that you instill into the ongoing education of our young adolescents. Many thanks must go also to our MYSA Management Committee for their willing support and assistance throughout 2007.

We wish you and yours a safe and energising Christmas break.

Best wishes.

*Eleanor Nicholson*

Eleanor Nicholson  
President




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## TEACHING AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE 9-11 SEPTEMBER 2007

The Teaching Australia Conference on the Gold Coast in early September essentially examined the emerging implications for leadership and teaching in uncertain futures.

Forty principals and 40 presidents from professional teaching associations attended the conference where it was emphasised that teachers of the future needed to be learning specialists, rather than content specialists of the past.

Teacher leaders were characterised by being collaborative, supportive, learning focussed role models who were reflective practitioners. They need to direct their teams towards improvement and change, while being active, agile and forward thinking.

Continued professional development for teacher leaders was seen as vital as they themselves need to be engaged, challenged and inspired in the learning process. The luxury of time is needed by leaders to examine their beliefs and practices and connect with real life situations. Collaboration with colleagues from other systems and schools was seen as vital for the development of good leaders. I see this connection with other systems and schools as a huge strength of MYSA's philosophy.

Teaching Australia proposed that our leaders needed to be 'futures literate' to support and develop the



## Australian Teacher Education Association Scholastic Teaching Development Grant 2007

Winners – The University of  
Queensland Middle Years Team

At the recent Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA) conference, The University of Queensland Middle Years of Schooling academic team was the recipient of the annual national award for innovative teaching. This award recognised the innovative and integrated way the Middle Years Team has designed and implemented the pre-service middle schooling education programs at Ipswich.

These programs have the goal of developing, educating and sustaining teachers for the middle years of schooling who can contribute innovatively and creatively to addressing the educational challenges of social, community and technological change. The first of the programs has been in operation since 2002. Since its commencement, data has been gathered from students of the program via surveys and interviews. This has contributed to an understanding of why participants are interested in the middle years of schooling area and the ways in which the 'middle years' are conceptualised. The impact on the pre-service teachers' practice and the implications of the program for teacher education reform at the regional and national levels have also been evaluated.

The award grant will expand on this longitudinal project to locate and interview teacher graduates from this program who are now teaching in schools. The focus of this project is for the purposes of gaining an understanding of the efficacy of their teacher education within our program. A database and website will be established as part of this process.

The successful team comprises: Associate Professor Donna Pendergast (Program Director), Dr Nan Bahr, Dr Shelley Dole, Ms Barbara Garrick, Dr David Geelan, Professor Rob \_\_\_\_\_, Dr Eileen Honan, Dr Jayne Keogh, Dr Katie Makar and Dr Tony Wright.

## 'Carina State School – A place for everyone'

Carina State School students have been working on a whole-school Art project to celebrate the multicultural nature of our school. The student council created several options for a school motto that would capture the essence of our school. They were voted on by the entire school community and 'Carina State School – A place for everyone' was selected.



The students then worked with staff and community representatives to design a mural incorporating mosaic and painting with a focus on the motto and what it means to be a 'Carina kid'.

Students in Years 5, 6 and 7

led the way with smashing tiles, tiling, drawing and painting on boards which were placed on the mural site. They then took on leadership roles by helping students in their 'buddy' classes from the early phase year levels to learn the processes of mosaic and mural painting.



The learning processes and engagement students experienced through this project was phenomenal. The enthusiasm, energy, creativity, intuitive nature and community mindedness of our middle school students never ceases to amaze me. The staff and I learn so much from them.

**Danielle Friday -Deputy Principal  
Carina State School**



Above -Year 8 Club Band, St Mark's Church School, Wellington, New Zealand

Below -'Buddies' at Canberra Girls' Grammar



## Endangered Minds – Media Violence and the Brain

In a rampantly advancing technological society everyone tends to have an opinion about the effects of television and media violence on learning and behaviour. Moreover, given that video media and the internet have become increasingly more pervasive in the lives of children and adolescence, a serious question has arisen: Can violent media have a negative effect on brain development and functioning in adolescents? Specifically, can violent media affect reasoning and logical thinking? Some of the most current neuroscientific evidence suggests that this is indeed the case.

Researchers at the Indiana University School of Medicine, headed by Professor Vincent Mathews, found that exposure to media violence may be associated with alterations in brain function whether or not prior aggressive behaviour is involved. This is an important finding given that while many have suggested that violent media may impact on behaviour, there have been few empirical studies to demonstrate that this is the case. In fact, the study noted above built on earlier research that showed exposure to violent media affects the brains of youths with aggressive tendencies differently than the brains of non-aggressive youths. Preliminary results of that study showed less brain activity in the frontal lobe of youths with an aggression disorder as they watched violent video games. Importantly, the frontal lobes, in particular the prefrontal lobes, are involved in thinking, learning and reasoning while also dealing with logic and mediating raw emotions. In summary, the research found that:

- adolescents who had a higher level of violent media exposure had reduced levels of cognitive activity. The more violence they saw the less the thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control areas of the brain were active.
- adolescents who had less violent media exposure had more thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control activity
- aggressive adolescents showed less cognitive activity than normal adolescents did. Aggressive adolescents demonstrated less thinking, learning, reasoning and emotional control.
- on some tasks, 'normal' adolescents exposed to high levels of violent media showed similar patterns of brain activity as adolescents with Disruptive Behavior Disorder (DBD)
- aggressive behavior can be associated with a higher degree of violent media exposure.

The studies above were published in the last couple of years and there is now a growing list of research showing that exposure to media violence causes individuals to be more aggressive. The questions being explored now are to what extent aggression may manifest itself in the every-day

behaviour of adolescents. That being said, there is little denying that what goes in our brain often comes out.

**Dr Michael C Nagel**  
**Faculty of Science, Health and Education**  
**The University of the Sunshine Coast**  
[mnagel@usc.edu.au](mailto:mnagel@usc.edu.au)

## Teaching them how: Analysing author's craft in middle years literacy classrooms

Teaching students to critically view and respond to a writer's craft provides readers with an insight into the world of the writer; to peer through the window of the author's mind and to try to understand the workings and intentions that make words much more than ink marks on paper.

Teaching author's craft means providing students with opportunities to think beyond content and to develop strategies to comprehend the impact the writer has on them as a reader and to recognise the choices made by the writer in constructing their piece. Therefore, the teaching focus is not on the content of the text but how the writing style, structure and elements of the text work together and how the reader works at interpreting the text.

In teaching our students *how to read* and *how to write* we need to be teaching them how to think like readers and writers. Providing students with a language to have conversations about their writing is essential. These conversations need to move beyond simply discussing the content to being able to have accountable dialogue about the author's craft.

Analysing an author's craft is a skill that can be applied to all types of texts, for student of all age groups, and gives further meaning to students' understanding of themselves as readers and to the connection created between the reader and writer. In understanding an author's purpose and writing style, students can then transfer these understandings of how texts work to their own writing.

It is the explicit teaching of author's craft that our middle years students require through structured mini lessons, modelling, shared reading and writing experiences, to then be able to independently practice strategies involved with analysing and responding to texts.

**Kate Story and Marg Sneddon**  
**Authors of *Teach them how: A resource for reshaping reading and writing classrooms***  
**(Hawker Brownlow 2007)**



## Middle Years of Schooling Association



### Value of MYSA Membership

As a member of MYSA, you have access to an extensive range of benefits.

#### In 2007 we:

- held our 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference with 775 delegates from throughout Australia and overseas
- published two editions of the Australian Journal of Middle Schooling
- produced five Newsletters
- continued to operate our *listserv* as a means of communication among members
- maintained our website as a means of communication with members and to advocate for middle schooling practices to the wider public
- supported the development & operation of regions
- conducted a range of professional learning and other activities in the following MYSA regions:
  - ACT
  - NSW – Sydney, Hunter/ Central Coast, Coffs Harbour
  - Queensland – Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, SW Queensland, Brisbane
  - Victoria – Eastern Division, Western Division
- were represented on the National Education Forum, Values Education Qld Coordinating Committee, Joint Council of Qld Teacher Associations and at the Teaching Australia Conferences and in their various consultation processes
- supported universities with middle schooling programs through the provision of pre-service teacher awards and guest lectures
- negotiated with Hawker Brownlow Australia to obtain 25% discount on the purchase of middle schooling resources for MYSA members
- secured funding for members of the Sydney/Newcastle region to conduct a middle years pedagogy project in the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program
- responded to the Senate Inquiry into the Academic Standards of School Education.

#### Our plans for 2008 include:

- workshops by Jack Berckemeyer, February/March, in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.
- regional conferences:
  - Rockhampton: 6 – 7 March
  - Toowoomba: 22 – 23 May
  - Melbourne: 4 - 5 September
  - other regions to be confirmed
- professional learning activities in regions
- workshops for middle years leaders
- publication of journals and newsletters
- publication of a MYSA Position Paper
- redevelopment of the MYSA website

## From Kristin to Hogwarts

Kristin Middle School had a very special visit from an Alumni student when they welcomed back Chris Rankin, aka. Percy Weasley, to speak at a Middle School Assembly. Chris is now a professional actor and is best known for his role as the ambitious Percy Weasley, one of seven pure-blood wizard siblings in the *Harry Potter* movies.

–Chris is a New Zealander and attended Kindergarten Year 1 at Kristin School in Albany. His mother was a teacher at the school and his family moved to England when Chris was six years of age. Although very young, Chris' first experience on stage was at Kristin, playing a brown bear in the poem 'There's a Spider in my Shower

Two Year 8 students, Joel Granger and Hannah Foreman, toured Chris through the school and pointed out all the new facilities. 'My tour guides were fantastic. In fact, all the Middle School students I met were so confident and polite. Very different to England! he said.

At the Middle School Assembly, Chris received a thousand cheers and whistles. One teacher pointing out that Chris almost cast a spell on them as they seemed to listen so attentively.

Chris' visit was the finale to a busy week at home where he entertained a number of other fans at the Armageddon Expo and spent some time with his godparents. He returns to London where he has a small professional theatre company. 'It's time to get back to work, but I'm looking forward to coming back for another flying visit soon', he said.

Wizards can do that.

**Mr Ted Berry**  
Principal, Kristin Middle School

## What's on in your region?

### QUEENSLAND Sunshine Coast

7th May 2008 , 1.00—5.00PM  
ICT Centre at USC  
Keynote Speaker: Nan Bahr  
Cost: \$44 MYSA members  
\$66 non-MYSA members

Contact: David Elley  
[delley@saac.qld.edu.au](mailto:delley@saac.qld.edu.au)



Trinity Lutheran College,  
Ashmore