

Newsletter, Term 4 2008

From the Editor

Dear Colleagues

Welcome back to Term 4! I am aiming for two Newsletters this term so please keep those articles coming in and share the wonderful events and learning activities going on in your school communities. Our President for the past two years, Eleanor Nicholson, has been given the position of a literacy consultant in New York. She will be sorely missed by our organisation. We all congratulate Eleanor on her appointment and thank her for the immense contribution to the middle school movement in Australia over many years.

Chris French

likely to succeed by focusing and developing our strengths than we are by wringing our hands over perceived shortcomings.

For me, the great strengths of our association are the enthusiasm, dedication and wisdom of teachers who raise their hands to lead and teach in the middle years. I look forward to working with the MYSA Management Committee, Conference Committee, Regional Coordinators and members as we take on our next major project — the MYSA's 6th International Conference in 2009.

Junn Kato

From the President

MYSA has, more than any other body or institution, exerted an enormous positive influence on my teaching practice. My background in middle years teaching commenced 10 years ago when, as a secondary mathematics and science teacher, I was challenged to take a 'core' class of Year 8 students. It was during the uncertainty of my first year that I attended the inaugural MYSA conference and was introduced to the work of James Beane. Needless to say, my teaching was never to be the same again. The learnings from these early experiences have served me well through the different positions I have held.

One of the great privileges and challenges for educators is to make their own contribution to the profession. We all have an opportunity to exert a positive influence on the lives of so many people within our educational communities. Benefiting from the contributions of others is rewarding but there is a sense of obligation to 'give back' to our colleagues and students.

I am reminded of the assumption that underpins all efforts to build resilience in students – we are far more

Management Committee Changes

MYSA recently bid farewell to our President, Eleanor Nicholson. She and her husband, Bob, have both taken positions with the Australian and United States Services in Education, working as Literacy Consultants in middle and secondary schools in New York City. Australians are highly valued in the USA in this capacity – does that say something about our teaching standards here??

Eleanor has been a MYSA member since its establishment in July 1999. She soon was elected onto the Management Committee and during that time has held various roles — Journal Editor, Vice President and was elected President in May 2007. She has also been a member of Publications Committees, Conference Committees and represented MYSA at a range of national and international events.

As Chris French commented in his editorial note, Eleanor is a huge loss to MYSA. Her direction for the Association and commitment to middle years colleagues and to young adolescents will be very much missed in Australia.

Until the next AGM, our current Vice president, Junn Kato, will move into the position of President. We therefore have two vacancies on the Management Committee, one due to Eleanor's departure and the other because Judy Barbe, an elected ordinary committee member, took on the role of Journal Editor as there were no nominations for that position at the last AGM. We will now ask two others to join the Committee, which our Constitution allows us to do.

So, this is the second time this year we have had to say farewell and thank you to long-serving members of MYSA and the Committee. The other is Sue Robertson, who is a Foundation Member, was a Committee

member from the beginning and, most recently, the MYSA Secretary for a number of years. Sue did not stand for election at the last AGM. Enormous losses for MYSA!

We welcome those who have now accepted roles within the Association and look forward to continuing the move forward in our 'dedication to the education, development and growth of young adolescents'.

Susan Hearfield
Executive Officer

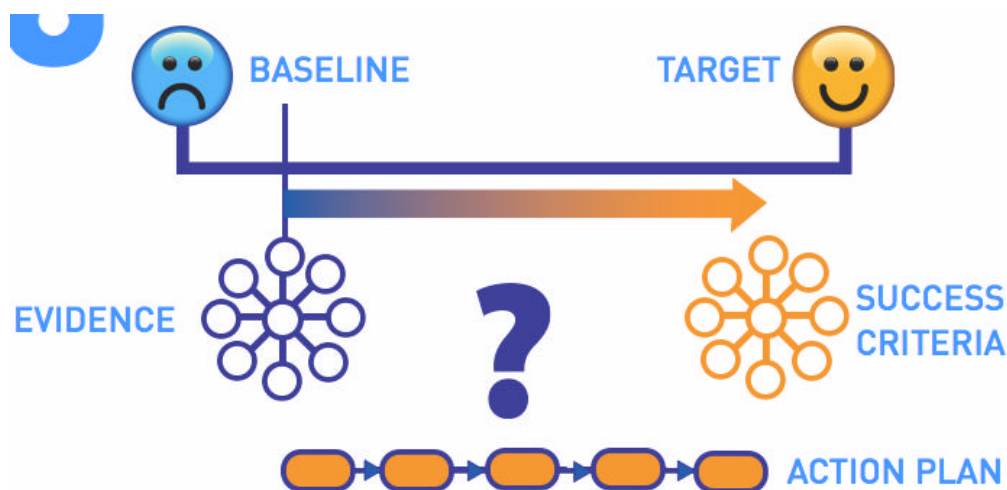
Are you having difficult behaviour conversations with students?

Teachers have difficult conversations with students every day. The trick is to be sensitive to their emotions, as well as achieving a result. But emotions do get in the way and, all too easily, things can become confrontational.

The Model Learning website (www.modellearning.com) provides a range of visual tools to assist teachers to deal with difficult behaviour conversations by providing a system to:

- avoid students losing face
- direct attention towards creating solutions
- record the conversation in 'real time'
- plan for future problems.

When planning a meeting with a student regarding difficult behaviour, Model Learning suggests the following steps:



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Calling For Responses

MYSA Advocacy and the National Curriculum Board

On 27th June this year, the National Curriculum Board conducted its first forum with invited representatives from around Australia. Following this consultation, a further forum was conducted in Brisbane on 17th July as part of an ongoing national consultation. The Board has been formed by the Federal Government with the task of developing a national P/K-12 curriculum. In the first phase, national curriculum will be developed for in the areas of Mathematics, Science, English and History by 2010. This will be followed by development in the areas of Geography and Languages in the second phase.

During the Brisbane forum, participants were invited to respond to a series of propositions concerning the nature of a national curriculum. These responses were gathered as a way of directing future work on curriculum documents. MYSA has had representation at the National Curriculum Board forums in all other states and territories. We believe it is important for us to very clearly represent the concerns of our members. In order to guide subsequent advocacy, we ask our members to consider the following propositions put forward by the National Curriculum Board.

The Propositions

1. That national curriculum in each of the four subject areas be developed on a year by year basis, P/K-12.
2. That achievement standards be identified in relation to stages of schooling on a two year basis: for example, P/K-1, 2-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, and 11&12.
3. That curriculum content be expressed in 'syllabus' terms not in less specific 'framework' terms.
4. That cross curriculum areas of learning be embedded in syllabus statements – not as stand alone statements.
5. That achievement standards be expressed in terms that send a clear message to teachers, students and parents about levels of required performance.
6. That the curriculum statements for each of the four subject areas become the informing framework for assessment – both formative and summative.

7. That the content statements for each of the four subjects be expressed in ways that make clear, by implication, the most effective processes for learning/pedagogies for teaching.

What do you think?

The Board is conducting forums in each of the states and territories. MYSA encourages all members to consider the propositions put by the Board and to email their responses to office@mysa.org.au. These responses will be compiled and provided to delegates attending subsequent forums of the Board on behalf of MYSA.

Junn Kato
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The Everest Program

Mountains are the means, the man is the end. The goal is not to reach the tops of mountains, but to improve the man.

Walter Bonatti, Italian climber

The Everest Program at Kristin Middle School has been introduced at Year 7 and 8 to help boys develop the organisational, social and motivational skills necessary to achieve their potential as they progress through the Middle School.

They are set the task of 'climbing Mt Everest' in a series of stages as the year progresses. Points are awarded to students based on specific criteria such as attending weekly meetings, consistent use of the homework diary and a range of other positive organisational behavioural outcomes. The more points earned, the higher students climb up the mountain towards the ultimate goal of reaching the summit.

At weekly meetings, strategies for organisation and positive participation are discussed. The boys set measurable goals in specific areas of their life at Kristin. These goals may encompass cultural, sporting and academic pursuits. For those boys who achieve their goals for the term, and as a reward for their perseverance, trips away from school are timetabled once a term.

Analogies are inevitably drawn between the many challenges presented with climbing up to and above the 'death zone' in the Himalayas and the day to day challenges that life at Kristin presents the boys. Students

are encouraged to look out for their team mates 'on the mountain', in order to appreciate the interdependence that breeds success at all levels within any community structure. It is hoped that by helping and supporting each other, the boys will achieve positive improvements in all spheres of Kristin school life.

The ultimate responsibility for working towards positive change lies with the boys themselves. Seeing them punch the air in jubilation after scoring maximum points during a meeting gives their teacher immense satisfaction and confidence that those students will very soon be healthy, balanced young men.

Russell Hughes
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Lanterns to Learning

The Year 8 cohort of St Ursula's College, Yeppoon, began making lanterns as a symbol of light to guide them through the changes in their learning this year. The lanterns were constructed in small groups using bamboo, tissue paper and glue. The girls were formally welcomed into their 'Middle Years Learning Journey' by Year 12 student representatives. At the same ceremony, the Dean of Studies presented parents with information about the learning process and gave many helpful suggestions for them to support their daughters during the middle years. Mrs Jeni Dunn, Head of Middle Schooling, coordinated the successful event which culminated in a sausage sizzle.

A selection of the lanterns currently hangs in the middle years classrooms. As these lanterns are symbolic of the 'Middle Years Learning Journey', a ceremony is planned for the end of Year 9 which will involve the burning of the lanterns as girls move through to the Senior phase of learning.



Students at St Ursula's College creating a lantern:
 Shearna Smith,
 Tianna Bowling and
 Wendy Smallcombe.

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Student Talk

In 2004, I organised a Sister School Exchange Program with the Jim Hill Middle School, Minot - North Dakota, USA, after attending a NMSA Conference in Minneapolis. In 2005, we took 38 Year 7/8 students to Jim Hill and had the time of our lives. Last year, 30 students, parents and staff from Jim Hill allowed us to return the hospitality as we hosted them at Whitsunday Anglican School and showed off the wonderful sites of North Queensland. The third chapter of this program was completed over the recent holidays and Year 8 student, Jordyn Price, shares some of her thoughts below.

Chris French
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International Exchange Program

Who would have thought in a short period of three weeks, a group of 26 Year 7 and Year 8 students would live a dream, experience thousands of unforgettable memories and make lifelong friends. Over 12 months of teacher preparation and student meetings ensured an amazing trip! We arrived in Los Angeles and ventured immediately to California World, still jetlagged but who cared! During the next two days, we visited Disneyland and Universal Studios. Disneyland's Space Mountain ride was a favourite for everyone! On the way to Universal Studios, we took many photos of the 'Hollywood' sign and after mixing with the stars and touring movie sets, our expectations were fulfilled. We flew out of LA for Rapid City, South Dakota, and viewed one of the world's great landmarks, Mount Rushmore. We were amazed by the enormity of the four Presidents' faces. After exploring the beautiful scenery of the Black Hills, we set off to the Crazy Horse Monument and immersed ourselves into Native American history. We then departed for our Sister School, the Jim Hill Middle School in Minot, North Dakota, by bus. We were supposed to sleep but many people could not. It was difficult getting comfortable and we were too excited about the two weeks ahead. Their Principal, Mrs Mau, greeted us with welcoming hands and a warm heart. She was a most wonderful person and did everything for us. The 'Welcome Assembly' was the most nerve racking experience of my life. Waiting outside the gymnasium ready to run into a 'Pep Rally' theme welcome with over 700 screaming students was awesome! Jim Hill was exactly like the movies. There were huge corridors, two metre long lockers and each classroom had their national flag proudly displayed. They also had a huge cafeteria with a large selection of food! We went to classes with our American 'buddies' and experienced American Middle Schooling at its best!

Attending a Minot High Homecoming Football game and having our very own 'Aussie Float' in the city's homecoming parade was another highlight. During the two weeks we were billeted with the most wonderful and caring host families. The school organised many activities which included horse riding in the Badlands, a tour of the Scandinavian gardens, being guests at the Minot Air Force Base, visiting schools on Indian Reservations and performing our Aussie Show, which highlighted the talents of our group through poetry, drama, music and story telling. We were also honoured by Native Americans through our participation in a Pow Wow. We are so privileged to have this type of exchange program and I encourage any school to do the same!

Jordyn Price
Year 8 Student
Whitsunday Anglican School



Jordyn Price and Sylvie Giguere in a B52 bomber

The following article was produced and submitted by Middle School students and edited by the Middle School Co-Captains of Ipswich Girls' Grammar School. The excerpts are from a speech the Co-Captains delivered at the Year 9 Celebration which is the School's graduation evening from the Middle School.

Anna Owen
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The Middle Schooling Years

The middle schooling years can seem to have no significant point to most students but it is different at Ipswich Girls' Grammar School. In Primary School there is always the excitement of learning something new and in Senior School there is assessment and the knowledge of only a certain number of days left to keep you motivated. What is the significance of the middle years? Having a Middle School is very important, especially for Year 9 students as they are given opportunities for leadership and a feeling of importance amongst all students. The separation of Years 7—9 gives younger middle schoolers something to aspire towards and view peers closer to their age level as role models.

There are many events in the Middle School. Our Years 7—9 buddy system is really good for the younger girls as they have someone they can always talk to and feel comfortable with. The Middle School assemblies are where all the modest events, which are usually bypassed in full-school formal assemblies, can be recognised in a more relaxed, fun environment. The pool party at the end of the year for all middle schoolers is another featured event. Leadership roles are taken by girls as Form Class Co-Captains and this allows the leaders of each class an opportunity to shine. The Middle School dances are always fun, especially the socialising with boys!

Our Middle School events have important traditions based upon historical significance. In Year 7, girls upgrade the uniform from culottes and shirt to a navy dress with white tie. Year 8 is where all the friendship groups are usually formed and a feeling of not being the youngest middle schooler develops. Year 9, we personally think, is the greatest year. This is when friends become like sisters and teachers and students start to have more of a friendly relationship. It is the year of burrowing into assignments but without the major pressure of senior schooling. Finally, Year 9 is being the leader of something before turning into the little fish in the last big pond in Senior School.

This is an excerpt from Emily O'Connor and Sharnie Kunde's Year 9 Celebration speech:

The greatest part of everyday schooling is the fun we have especially when something new or exciting happens like our sporting carnivals, the last day of stockings (winter uniform) the first day of socks (summer uniform), camp and the first day back from holidays. Just to see everyone's faces again and see the happiness even though we know a new term has begun. No one can say they hate EVERYTHING about school because there are so many enjoyable times spent here, even though sometimes school seems never ending.

Never forget friends, the people that make us want to go to school, have fun with in lunch hours, holidays and in class. They help us enjoy every moment of being in the Middle School, because you only get to experience it once. Friends help us to learn to get to know ourselves and learn to like ourselves. This year has been such a great year to represent the Middle School. Both Sharnie and I are so privileged to have been selected for the role to lead such a nice group of girls who have made our job a lot easier.

Regional Reports

Sunshine Coast

This year we maintained our once per-term forum networking discussion meetings but took the first step towards a larger scale event with our seminar in May which was very well supported by middle years practitioners and others interested in adolescence. This has provided the regional committee with confidence to pursue the vision of having such an event every two years.

After the past two years in the role of regional co-chairs, David Elley and Jan Simpson are stepping aside and the Region's committee will have Troy Ascott from Chancellor State College as the interim chair leading into 2009. David and Jan are very grateful to the committee members of the past two years for their support and input to developing a regional network that reaches across all sectors.

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Gold Coast

The Gold Coast Region will be having their Term 4 meeting at Aquinas College on Wednesday, 12 November. The guest speaker will be Jenny Nayler. More information is available from Wendy Wise, Palm Beach Currumbin State High School.

Wendy Wise
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Victoria—Western Division

This year, our educational focus has been on Positive Psychology. We have treated educators, from all walks of life, to Professional Development that has focussed on the 'Signature Strengths' of individuals, class groups and year levels. Martin Linkins, the visiting scholar in residence at Geelong Grammar School, has shared with the participants his extensive knowledge in this area.

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