



lightsout

AUSTRALIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION LTD.

Issue 03 | September 2009

Vol. 02 | Quarterly Newsletter

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Last year the UK Network Rail, which owns and operates Britain's rail infrastructure released a video as part of a safety campaign showing a young man playing "chicken" with a train traveling at 80 kph.

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EXERCISE

Not all of us are greatly attracted to exercise. It can hurt, it is time-consuming, it can be boring and it requires you to wash your hair rather more than you would otherwise do.

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HOW DOES A BOARDING SCHOOL AFFECT STUDENT OUTCOME

In this article we look at different perspectives that can explain 'how' boarding school affects students' academic and non-academic outcomes.

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POSITIVE PASTORAL EDUCATION

Issues of adolescent mental health are critical for boarding staff. Given that 20% of adolescents in Australia will be diagnosed with an anxiety depressive disorder during their formative years

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Finding Yourself

By Dr Tim Sharp (Dr Happy)

I'm trying everything I've read to find happiness but don't seem to be getting the results; am I not trying hard enough? I've read everything I can about happiness and personal development but just don't seem to be able to find the answers I want; what's the secret to living a truly fulfilling and flourishing life? I've been on a journey and searching for years but I still feel lost; how and where do I find myself?

To begin with, I'd like to address one of the biggest mistakes made by those wanting to live a better life and experience more happiness; some people simply try too hard! Further, if what you're trying is not working then trying even harder is not likely to lead to a successful outcome either!

Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American writer, was once quoted as saying that "happiness is like a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you."

I'd like to add to this my version of another quote which goes like this: if at first you don't succeed, try a different approach.

Now I'm not suggesting that one should give up easily, at the slightest hint of adversity; nor am I advocating laziness, slothful living or apathy. What I am encouraging you to think about is the notion that happiness does not necessarily come to those who work the hardest but rather to those who work the smartest; and in the context of happiness, working smart often involves just being (or, as Hawthorne states, simply sitting down quietly). It concerns me somewhat that many of us have lost the art of

constructively doing nothing; because with constructive nothingness comes reflection and contemplation; and with reflection and contemplation often comes a greater appreciation of life and of others which in many instances contributes to happiness. So rather than asking if you're trying hard enough, try asking if you're trying the right approach.

Second, and this is an easy one to answer, there is no secret to happiness. Even if there were something that worked well for me each and every one of you reading this would need to find something else; because we're all different; and because even though we know the general principles that'll work for most people the specific applications will vary from individual to individual and even from situation to situation.

To quote another great thinking, Aristotle once said that "different men seek after happiness in different ways and by different means and so make for themselves different modes of life..." So instead of asking what the secret to happiness is, ask instead what brings you happiness and how can you build more of it into your life.

And finally, happiness is not something you will "find"; "you" cannot ever really be "lost". If you're not clear about what to do to achieve more happiness it's more likely to do with you not acknowledging or not honestly facing up to that which you probably "know". Happiness is inside you and happiness can only ever be experienced in the "here and now"; so instead of asking where you can find happiness ask instead, how can you create more of it.



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Would You Like Your Boarding School Featured in Lights Out?

We plan to **feature two schools** each edition. All you need to do, is write a brief article and send us some high resolution photos.

For further information, go to page 24 of this newsletter or contact ABSA.

What am I meant to do?

By Dr Tim Hawkes



It is not always easy to define the job undertaken by boarding staff. The very diverse range of responsibilities does not help with a neat articulation of the role. In any one day, a boarding supervisor may have to investigate a missing Ipad, update evacuation procedures, counsel a child whose parents are separating, help with an essay on metaphysical poets, check the leave requests, induct a GAP student, show prospective parents around the house, pick up rubbish, organize the end of term dance, and all this before lunch-time. However, it is worth trying to define what boarding staff to do if we wish to be professional and accountable in the exercise of our duties.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

All staff, including GAP students, tutors, matrons and House co-ordinators, should have a clear job description. If none exists this should be rectified by liaising with superordinates in order to put an appropriate job description in place.

There are many ways job descriptions can be written, but experience has shown that a job description can be made particularly effective if it is drawn up on a consultative basis with the member of staff concerned. Other characteristics of a useful job description include:

- A statement as to who the staff member is responsible to.
- A number of statements relating to **general requirements** such as:
 - being supportive of the boarding institutions' mission statement
 - being supportive of the boarding

institutions' legal obligations in relation to duty of care, child protection, equal opportunity, occupational health and safety guidelines and so on

- commitment to appraisal and professional development
- ability to work in a collegial manner with management and colleagues
- adherence to the institution's policies and practice
- A number of statements relating to **specific requirements** of the staff member's individual role and should be detailed enough to give clear direction. General statements such as "be a presence within the boarding house" may need to be supported by specific directives such as "conduct at least two bed checks each evening".
- A statement of **personal qualities** can also be useful. Some boarding institutions have tried to separate these qualities into essential qualities and desirable qualities.

The sorts of qualities and characteristics that might be listed include being:

- an effective team member
- reliable, punctual
- energetic, proactive and having initiative
- friendly and approachable
- a good model in terms of language, dress, grooming, hygiene and integrity
- mature and thoughtful
- honest, trustworthy and ethical
- proactive in the exercise of their duties.

Very few job descriptions can adequately cover all the tasks likely to be undertaken within a boarding institution. Ultimately, staff will need to rely on professional judgment and common sense.

It is worth noting that some flexibility in one's job can be both professionally rewarding and organisationally useful. Multi-skilling colleagues and training staff in more than one area of responsibility can be most beneficial.



Some of the desirable qualities for general staff In a boarding house



- Good interpersonal skills empathetic and kind, caring, supportive, approachable, and friendly
- Sense of humour
- Models the behaviours expected of students
- Has the gift of firm yet relaxed control
An encourager
- Self disciplined
- Observant
- Proactive
- Has stamina
- Sensitive to the “teaching moments”
Learns from mistakes
- Good team player, shares well with others
- Contributes to the synergy of the boarding house

- Faithful in the exercise of their duties
- Positive and constructive
- Fair and consistent
- Fulfils job description faithfully and well
- Respects the rights of others
- Gives praise and uses criticism constructively
- Capable and “copeable”
- Maintains confidentiality
- Searches for self-improvement
- Patient and flexible
- Ethical and moral
- Loyal
- Has good communication skills

- Aware of legal obligations and fulfils them
- Good counseling skills
- Accessible, visible
- Student-centred
- Safe
- Consistent
- Enthusiastic
- Lifelong learner
- Professional
- Willing to go the extra mile
- Performs duties with confidence
- Committed and involved
- Collaborative, collegial and co-operative
- Supportive of the mission and purpose of the institution

APPRAISAL

Staff appraisal needs to be a feature of a boarding institution and should encompass all staff. The appraisal should focus more on professional development than on accountability. In other words, the process should not just be a “policing initiative” but rather a constructive and continuous process of feedback, review and reflection. Staff appraisal should not just be designed to deal with deficit, ie to bring staff up to a standard. It should also be designed to affirm strengths.

An appraisal system is generally more effective when:

- it is undertaken regularly, eg every year or on a biannual basis
- the process is understood and accepted by staff
- it is not too cumbersome or time consuming
- it is positive and empowering
- it employs feedback from a variety of sources including, super-ordinates and subordinates
- it is based on the staff member's job description.
-

A well written job description lends itself to easy conversion into an appraisal document. For example, a five point scale such as:

1. An area of great strength
2. An area of moderate strength
3. Neither a strength or weakness
4. An area of moderate weakness
5. An area of great weakness

could be put against each item detailed in the job description.

The staff member could be invited to rate how they think they have gone against each item in their job description. A similar assessment of the staff member could be undertaken by their super-ordinate and the results compared at the appraisal meeting.

It might also be worth adding three more questions to the appraisal:

1. What have you done professionally since your last appraisal which has encouraged you?
2. What have you found professionally that you would like to work on, in order to improve?

3. How can the boarding institution help you in this area?

In addition to appraising a member of staff against their job description, a super-ordinate can evaluate how a member of staff has progressed against the professional goals established by them at the last appraisal meeting.

In conclusion, the best demonstration of a job well done in a boarding house is the unambiguous evidence of happy students who are realizing their full potential.

Dr Tim Hawkes
Chairman
ABSA

What would *you* do?

by Michael Carr-Gregg



Last year the UK Network Rail, which owns and operates Britain's rail infrastructure, released a video as part of a safety campaign showing a young man playing "chicken" with a train traveling at 80 kph. The footage shows him standing at a level crossing as the train hurtles towards him, before he dives out of the way at the last minute.

As a result of the incident, which took place at Rylands Crossing on the Manchester to Preston line, the man was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Network Rail decided to release the footage to highlight the risks which it says pedestrians and motorists are running on a daily basis.

The British rail company fears hundreds of young people are dicing with death, either by weaving around half barriers or ignoring

"How does one discipline a wayward 13 year old girl?"

lights and sounds warning of the impending arrival of a train. Network Rail said that it had recorded 2,636 incidents of "crossing misuse" during the first nine months of 2009, including 128 near misses.

Given that fact that this footage made its way on to YouTube, perhaps we should not be surprised that last week in the town of Ipswich, Queensland, mobile phone footage of a group of teenage girls risking their lives playing chicken with a train also appeared on our TV screens. But the main story was not the copy cat nature of the act, it was the fact that one of the girls involved, 13 year old Stacie Ralph, had footage of the stunt on her mobile phone. This was discovered by her father Darren, who tried to talk to his daughter about what had occurred but she told him that there was 'nothing he could do about it'.

Darren immediately rang the local police, who came round to the house and promptly arrested his daughter, taking her to the local police station where she spent a few hours in the cells. The police eventually released the 13 year old, issuing her with a caution, but the other girls involved were charged and will face court. The authorities were more lenient towards Stacie as it was her first offence.

The tragedy within this saga is that Darren told Channel 7, he had 'copped a lot of flack' for doing what he did. He told reporters that

'his daughter Stacie now won't trust him, that his other kids hate him, and his family including the other kids' mum felt he was 'disrespectful to them'. Darren is a single dad and has raised his three children on his own from when they were little. Like many dads in this situation he reports he's having trouble disciplining Stacie and as a single father doesn't know what else to do. She has threatened to do it again and Darren's response was that he was through "being a nice guy".

Talkback radio across Australia went into meltdown over this, debating whether or not he did the right thing in contacting the police, what was the appropriate sanction, and how does one discipline a wayward 13 year old girl? There can be no doubt that many GP's will be confronted with question like this from worried, anxious and desperate parents from time to time. So what should one say?

A standard consultation with such parents should include a brief lecture on the neurological development of teenagers, emphasising that their offspring's frontal cortex will only be fully developed in their mid twenties. You may refer them to an excellent summary featured in Time Magazine's May 10, 2004 cover article, Secrets of the Teen Brain which is available in most public libraries. The main pieces of advice are as follows:

First, a unique characteristic of 13 year old brains is that they cannot predict the consequences of their actions.

Therefore it is imperative that parents and legal guardians act as their surrogate 'voice



of reason' and set boundaries and rules around what is and what is not acceptable behaviour. Most psychologists would argue that subjects that relate to the health and welfare of the young person are paramount, such as sex, drugs, alcohol, sleep, exercise and internet use.

Second, having set the rules it is essential that parents or legal guardians be encouraged and empowered to monitor their child's behaviour, so as to ascertain compliance.

Third, having discovered a breach of the agreement, as Darren Ralph did, the parent must be prepared to put in place a negative sanction. This should be short, sharp and proximate to the event. Excessively lengthy punishments are a mistake and can result in the young person forgetting the reason for the punishment in the first place and may encourage revenge fantasies. Appropriate sanctions can involve the removal for a short period of time electronic goodies such as internet privileges, TV and mobile phone. Groundings where young people are forbidden to leave the house for a period of time can be especially effective - as at no other time in one's life, is the desire to be with one's age mates so strong.

Fourth, if the young person displays a repetitive pattern of angry, acting out behaviour then a referral to a specialist adolescent mental health practitioner may be appropriate, as such a pattern may suggest a deeper underlying psychological problem that may require treatment. Parents must be reassured that such a firm stance may incur the adolescent's wrath for a short



period of time, but that taking this position will at least create a better chance that the young person will make it through to young adulthood in one piece.

As for calling the Police, when the law has been broken and a young person has jeopardising their own life as well as others, parents should have faith that the Police will display an appropriate developmental perspective and that often a brief spell in the cells, along with a sternly issued caution can have a profound impact, especially on an early adolescent.

Who knows, if enough parents had been encouraged to grab the reigns of parenting by GP's in the UK, there would be less than half the recorded 2,636 incidents of "crossing misuse" not to mention 128 near misses on the Manchester to Preston line. I, for one, would like to nominate Darren Ralph father of the Year.

Dr Michael Carr-Gregg is an adolescent psychologist and is honorary psychologist to the Australian Boarding Schools Association

Exercise

Not all of us are greatly attracted to exercise. It can hurt, it is time-consuming, it can be boring and it requires you to wash your hair rather more than you would otherwise do.

However, exercise also has the happy knack of keeping us alive, improving our academic ability and improving our general sense of well-being.

In short, we should all engage in some exercise each week. It need not mean running marathons on the hour and every half hour, it can be the discipline of walking or riding to school rather than driving, walking the dog for half an hour each day or going to the beach for a swim each week.

Exercise is all the more important in an age which is seeing passive computer games taking the place of active back-yard cricket matches. There is a worrying rise in the number of lounge-lizards and couch potatoes whose exercise is limited to pressing the remote control or the key-board.

There are three types of exercise that should be engaged in each week. These are:

1. AEROBIC EXERCISES

which work on the cardiovascular system such as walking, running, cycling and swimming. These exercises enrich the blood with oxygen with the result that it can improve mental functioning as well as physical functioning.

2. ANAEROBIC EXERCISES

which are essentially strength training exercises like lifting and pushing weights and callisthenics like push-ups.

3. FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES

which improve balance, posture and movement and are incorporated into programs like yoga and pilates.

For proper advice as to how much exercise and what type of exercise to engage in, medical opinion should be sought. However, for most teenagers who do not suffer any complicating medical conditions, light exercise such as walking can be engaged in daily, whereas heavy exercise such as running and weight training, is probably better engaged in every other day. This allows the body to recover.

Some suggest that getting the heart rate up to about 70-80% of its maximum for 30 minutes three times a week is to be recommended, but this advice may not be suitable for all people, particularly if they have a medical condition. Professional advice should be sought.

After, and even during exercise, care should be taken to keep the body well hydrated (drink lots of water) and replenish the electrolytes such as salt and potassium. A carefully selected sports drink can achieve both ends...there are lots on the market to choose from. Care should also be taken to avoid over-heating.

It is important that you do not charge into a vigorous exercise routine if you are not used to one. Ease yourself in gently to build up your strength and endurance without injuring

yourself. Try power walks before jogging. Do light weights for a short period before heavy weights for long periods.

The health benefits of exercise should not be underestimated. Exercise can, quite literally be a lifesaver.

The benefits of exercise have been seen to:

- Improve mental performance, brain function and school grades.
- Help prevent depression which is one of the fastest growing illnesses among teens. Exercise releases endorphins which are rather like opiates, and these can give a "hit" of feeling good.
- Prevent heart disease and Type 2 diabetes, two of the greatest killers in the western world.
- Boost the immune system so that you are more resistant to illness.
- Reduce the risk of some cancers like breast and colon cancer.
- Reduce obesity.

Faced with this evidence, there really is an important need to build regular exercise into your life. Failure to do so could prove fatal.

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Meeting the Needs of Today's Teenagers

by Susan Taylor

In January 2008 St Ursula's Boarding College at Yeppoon, Queensland, created the new position of Recreation Coordinator to enhance the lifestyle opportunities available to Boarders.

With a background in personal training and having worked in leisure tourism, I accepted this position with great enthusiasm, and was excited to show the girls just how much fun they could have in a small beach town like Yeppoon.

"One of the biggest challenges I have faced is increasing the girls' participation in fitness and improving their attitude towards their health."

There are increasing numbers of Australian teenagers being classified as obese, which is ringing alarm bells in our community, as this condition can seriously affect their health at present and in the future. The diet of modern western society can be blamed, with high proportions of fat, salt, and sugar, especially in so-called "fast food". Today's teenagers are also spending more leisure-time on sedentary activities rather than physically challenging pursuits.

Diseases that can be associated with obesity include Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, elevated blood cholesterol, some cancers, osteoarthritis, gallbladder disease, and respiratory disease. Other health risks that can develop from the excess weight include joint problems, breathing difficulties, sleep apnea, back pain and also urinary

incontinence. Not only does regular exercise and physical activity help prevent these health issues, it also improves general daily well being!

In our Boarding activities program, the focus is on getting the girls out of the Dorm and trying new things. This has including offering group fitness classes such as dance, aerobics, yoga and gym and experiencing activities such as adventure caving, bowling and beach games.

Our local council is promoting a community health and wellbeing initiative through their Kickstart CQ program. This program is about getting members of our community to commit to becoming healthier. St Ursula's Boarding College stepped out and took the challenge in Term One by pledging to increase their step count. A competition was set up to challenge the Dorms to compete to see who could complete our school walking track the most amount of times. The distance of this walking track was stepped out and this average was used to set a second challenge to the girls. How long as a whole Boarding team, will it take St Ursula's to walk the distance to Cairns? Their progress was tracked weekly on a map advertised in the dorms.

A tight competition was held throughout the weeks both in the Dorm tally competition as

well as the individual prize. The individual 'Top 10' was battled out over the weeks with strong competitors from every floor.

Prizes were given to our top three including first place winner Sharni Smith (Yr 9), a team prize for the winning floor and a "Miss Prediction" prize for the girl who guessed the number of days it would take to reach Cairns.

By creating fun activities and competitions such as this one, we can help solve the obesity crisis. Walking is a safe way to exercise. It is low impact and anyone can do it! No special equipment is needed and it is a great way to get started on the way towards achieving your health and fitness goals. When motivating adolescent girls, it is important to choose fun tasks that everyone can do.

It will not only help the girls as individuals, it will make for a happier dorm environment and happier supervisors. Exercise has been show to releases endorphins to help feel relaxed, de-stressed and happier after working out. It aids in the quality of sleep, in turn improving concentration and productivity. It also opens people up to new experiences, friendships and skills you might never know you had!

St Ursula's Boarding will be continuing their 'Get Active' program by challenging other schools in the local area to a 10,000 steps competition later in the year.

Susan Taylor is Head of Boarding at St Ursula's College, Yeppoon

Is the war already *over*?

by David Pyman



Make no mistake, your Boarding House is under attack. If you haven't realised it yet, then you have probably already lost the battle. The good news though, is that the War can still be won.

Technology, in its many wide and varied forms, has already invaded your Boarding House. For some it has been a terrific addition to both the running of the House and to the lives of the students.

Never before has co-ordination and communication with home been so quickly and easily established. An email here, a mobile phone call there and instant communication between the Boarding House and parents is available.

This has led to parents becoming an ever increasing part of the discipline and counselling process within the Boarding House. In most cases this has led to a strengthening of the ties between the staff of the House and the parent community. It has allowed the responsible adults in a student's life to present a united and clear front on what is acceptable, what is not and the consequences of the student's actions.

Unfortunately, technology is also now at a point where it is allowing the students to circumvent many of the Protective Policies that have been put in place to protect them. In many cases this is occurring without the knowledge of the parents who are naively purchasing the very technology that is causing the problems!

There will be very few Boarding Houses that allow students full and unfiltered access to the internet. Most will allow access to the internet through the school network



system. This system is usually set up with heavy censorship filters that are designed to block access to offensive sites, such as pornographic, violent, racist and extremist teachings and a myriad of other less than desirable ideals.

Many Boarding Houses will also block access to 'time-wasting' sites such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube during study periods to ensure the students are 'on task' and are able to learn effectively.

Until recently, both boarding staff and parents have generally been happy to accept that these filters are doing their job in protecting students from the many negative influences on the internet and allowing the students to concentrate on more appropriate tasks.

In recent times however, there has been rapid development in technology that allows the students full and unfiltered access to the internet without any of the safeguards we have taken for granted.

3G phone technology has become one of the most readily accessible and easily misused pieces of technology in a student's kit bag. Many students now have mobile phones with this ability and while many of the 'older' Boarding staff may have trouble deciphering the capabilities of these phones, the students do not!

3G technology can allow the students to access the internet via their mobile phone. This gives the students 24 hour access to all the internet has to offer without any monitoring, filtering or safeguards against inappropriate content.

Likewise, many phone companies now offer wireless broadband deals. In this instance, the students are given a USB size device, which when connected to their computer, allows the student to access the internet on their computer and through their phone account. Again this provides unfettered access to the internet and completely



bypasses our carefully devised Protection Policies.

Access to the internet is but one of the issues technologies now present. For instance, did you know that students can send messages and even drawings between rooms via their Nintendo DS? If that's the case (and it is) have you ever wondered what a Sony PSP can do? This is of course without even mentioning the more concerning practices of 'sexting', 'video calls' and 'cyberbullying'!

Technology moves at a rate that is almost impossible to comprehend. At the very instance we are getting our heads around one of these attacks on our Protection Policies, the students are often already using some new technology that we are yet to hear about!

So, can we stop it? Do we want to?

Should we attempt to win a war that in many respects is almost un-winnable?

One possible solution is to ensure your Boarding House has staff working in it that are completely tech-savvy. Perhaps in the form of an IT specialist or young Old Scholar who is up to date with current technologies? Whilst this might offer some insight into what the students are doing, it's hardly a fool-proof plan and relies heavily on a single individual.

Rather, I believe that the best way to approach this attack on your Boarding House, is two fold.

Firstly, we must ensure that the parents themselves, the very people purchasing the technology, fully understand what it is they are providing their children with. Many will have little to no idea how their recent purchases can be used and even fewer would understand the threat this poses to the protection of the students in our care. Educating the parents, via information evenings, letters and emails is vital.

Secondly, it is time to take back control of what we allow to enter our Boarding Houses. We do not allow students to enter our care with boxes of pornographic films, so why allow the students to have such technology when access to thousands of pornographic films is but a click away?

Perhaps we need to ensure our policies include a list of technologies we will and won't allow. The internet may be impossible to monitor and keeping pace with all of the newest technologies a never-ending task, but we do have control of what we allow into 'our' houses.

Whilst the battle may have been started and won by this clandestine attack, the war is not over. ***It's time for us to fight back!***

David Pyman
Assistant Housemaster
School & Allen Boarding House
St. Peter's College South Australia

How does a Boarding School affect *Student Outcomes*

By Andrew Martin (University of Sydney), Paul Ginns (University of Sydney)
& Brad Papworth (ABSA)

In this article we look at different perspectives that can explain 'how' boarding school affects students' academic and non-academic outcomes.

An important part of research is to identify key factors that lead to key outcomes. In the case of boarding school research, this entails identifying what aspects of boarding school lead to various academic (eg. motivation, learning, achievement) and non-academic (eg. self-esteem, life satisfaction) outcomes. Research such as this answers the 'WHAT' question: what factors predict what outcomes?

Another important question to answer is the 'HOW' question: how does boarding school have its effects?

When we better understand the 'how' of boarding school effects we are in a very strong position to sustain the processes that are working well, address processes that can be further improved, and minimise processes that are not so effective.

In our first column in Lights Out, we introduced a collaborative project between ABSA and the University of Sydney. This project seeks to understand the effects of boarding school on academic and non-academic outcomes. In our series of articles we have been considering the student and contextual factors which form part of the boarding experience. In this article we look at different perspectives that can explain 'how' boarding school affects students' academic and non-academic outcomes.

When we better understand the 'how' of boarding school effects we are in a very strong position to sustain the processes that are working well, address processes that can be further improved, and minimise processes that are not so effective.

In reviewing the possible ways in which boarding school might affect students' academic and non-academic outcomes, we have been struck by the numerous competing positions. Here we briefly look at four different perspectives on boarding school:

- the co- and extra-curricular activity perspective
- the attachment perspective
- the tradition and stereotype reinforcement perspective
- the educational access perspective

THE CO- AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY PERSPECTIVE

Co- and extra-curricular activity has been defined as any out-of-class involvement that absorbs students' time, attention, and energy. Well recognised forms of co- and extra-curricular activity include sport, music, drama, art, debating, and the like. Less recognised forms of co- and extra-curricular activity include sleep, homework, television, computer games, social networking platforms (eg. Facebook), friends, and hobbies. When we view co- and extra-curricular activity along this broad continuum, it is evident that boarding can be seen as a form of co- and extra-curricular activity – it is typically out-of-class and absorbs students' time, attention, and energy.

Research suggests that some forms of co- and extra-curricular activity can have a positive link to academic and non-academic outcomes. For example, in relation to academic outcomes, it seems that co- and extra-curricular activity can have a positive impact if it (a) is related to skills needed for academic tasks, (b) increases a student's sense of belonging and identification with the school, (c) promotes values aligned with the school's values, and (d) provides opportunities for students to receive formal or informal assistance and guidance. Clearly, the boarding experience offers all these opportunities to students. Hence, on the basis of the co- and extra-curricular activity perspective, it would be predicted that boarding school can have positive effects on students and that this occurs largely through increased alignment with school and schoolwork (in contrast to television, for example, that typically entails none of these positive dimensions).

THE ATTACHMENT PERSPECTIVE

Alongside predictions based on co- and extra-curricular perspectives are ideas informed by attachment theory. This perspective might centrally position the role of the parent and home-based care in young



people's academic and non-academic development. That is, students who are under the regular (eg. daily) care of parent and home during out-of-class time are in the best position to form the attachments needed for healthy development. From this perspective, boarding school may distance young people from these important influences and affect development in similar fashion.

Against this prediction, however, is research demonstrating substantial teacher influence on students' academic and non-academic development that is over and above the influence of the home. Also counter-acting the traditional attachment theory perspective is the possibility that boarding school may distance some students from potentially negative parenting or difficult home environments and neighbourhoods. Furthermore, boarders spend significant periods of time at home and are in regular contact with parents and other family members – thus the equation is not 'either-or' but really a mix of both boarding school and home, which may be an effective mix and associated with positive academic and non-academic outcomes.

THE TRADITION AND STEREOTYPE REINFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps the most challenging perspective on boarding school is that which suggests boarding school effects occur through reinforcing traditional and stereotypical constructions of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and the like. That is, they are geared towards cultivating development along traditional and stereotypic lines. For example, they reinforce a particular way

of being a boy or girl or they reinforce a particular station in life (eg. one of privilege). To the extent that this is the case, effects will be positive for those students who are able to fit the tradition or stereotype but not so positive for those who do not or cannot fit.

Arguments against this perspective would point to the great diversity of boarding schools and boarding students that would indicate there is no longer as much of a stereotype as there might have been in years past. For example, there are government and non-government boarding schools, there are boarding schools in urban and rural areas, there are boarding schools accommodating high percentages of Indigenous students, and there are boarding schools in upper and lower SES areas. With such diversity in the sector and within schools, it might be argued that there is not such a predominant stereotype to reinforce.

THE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS PERSPECTIVE

The educational access view would look at the role of boarding school in addressing students' capacity to access education through the course of their development. The nature of Australian geography poses significant educational access issues for many students and their families. Particularly for rural and remote children and young people, schools can be a long way from home; to the extent this is the case, these children and young people have a major educational barrier to overcome. National inquiries into educational access for Indigenous, rural, and remote students have identified boarding school as one

means they can access education and further opportunity. From an educational access perspective and for such students, boarding school provides an opportunity to overcome the tyranny of distance and on this basis would be predicted to yield generally positive academic effects.

WHICH PERSPECTIVE?

It is clear there are competing perspectives regarding the academic and non-academic effects and role of boarding school. Which perspective is right? At this stage, we don't really know. We suspect for different outcomes and for different students, each perspective will have different levels of relevance. When we identify these outcomes and students we are in a good position to enhance the boarding experience – because we will have identified HOW boarding is affecting outcomes, for which students, and in what ways. To uncover this is the vital role of research. We are about to commence a large-scale, systematic, and longitudinal research program that seeks to bring clarity to this issue and the sector.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Expressions of interest are sought from schools (comprising boarding students) who wish to be part of this research project. For further information, to view a video about the project, or to register your interest, please visit: www.boarding.org.au (click on 'Research Project Information' under Latest News). Alternatively, contact Brad Papworth for further details: b.papworth@edfac.usyd.edu.au or (02) 9683 8490.

Skype Alright, but the Devil's in the Bandwidth

by Lindsay Close (Housemaster of Rogers House)

Rogers House is the Prep School Boarding House at The Southport School (TSS), on the Gold Coast, Queensland. TSS is a day and boarding school for boys. Rogers House caters for boarders from Years 5 to 7. It has a capacity for 24 boys but at the moment we have 18 boys in House. They are a mixture of both full-time and weekly boarders, the ratio is approximately 50 – 50. The House has six resident staff (A Housemaster, an Assistant Housemaster, three single teaching staff members and a GAP student.) There is also a House Matron who works week days.)

I was delighted to read Jack Goodman's article, "To Skype or Not to Skype?" in the last edition of **Lights Out**. It reinforced many of the ideas that we in our boarding house have been working to develop. However, as Jack Goodman alluded to, the potential of a VoIP system is far greater than the mere communication between parents and child.

Since parents first sent their children off to boarding schools, seeking a quality of education they could not receive in their local community, parents have been plagued by what Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey referred to as the 'tyranny of distance.' Schools have likewise been challenged to find effective methods to keep the parents of boarders up to date and make them feel as if they are part of their child's progress. Parents of day students have always had a fundamental advantage over boarding parents and much of this comes down to their ease of access to teachers, House staff, coaches and the School's Administration.

During my five years of tenure as a Housemaster of Rogers House I have endeavoured to mitigate this inequity. I have tried to achieve this through detailed boarders reports, a three weekly academic update; a weekly boarders' newsletter; an end of term publication; revamping the House website with, picture galleries, videos and information and finally through periodic phone conversations with parents. However, the gap remained and one of the biggest hurdles was 'parent / teacher interviews'. No matter how conveniently schools try to schedule such occasions, to enable boarding parents to attend, the vast majority tend to miss out or the interview is limited to one parent.

A VoIP system such as 'Skype' for the first time gives boarding parents the opportunity to sit down face to face with their child's teacher(s) to discuss issues related to the child. It is an important tool that if properly utilised really does break down that tyranny of distance.

Rogers House trialled the use of skype, as part of our parent / teacher interviews earlier this year. The parents who were involved in the trial were located in Vietnam and the Northern Territory. The feedback from both sets of parents about the experience was extremely positive. As a result of the trial, we have signed nearly 50% of our full-time boarder parent population for the next set of parent / teacher interviews at the end of Third Term.

Like most good things it is not easy keeping it confined one sector of the School's community. I discovered this during my own

class parent / teacher interviews. Some of my day parents had heard about what we were trialling and one parent in particular, whose husband was in South America on business, wanted to know if the facility would be open to day parents as well. Thus, as a result of this discussion, we will be looking to developing a 'hybrid interview', where one parent is on skype and the other parent having the interview in person with the teacher.

Skype also comes with a myriad of additional advantages to the parents of boarders, who are located long distances from their child's school,

Once parents have purchased the headset, microphone and web camera, (assuming their computer doesn't already come with these features.) the rest is free.

Down loading the program is free

Calls skype to skype are cost free

There are no time restrictions on the length of the call.

For those parents who live in isolated areas of Australia, the Federal Government has promised broadband, high speed internet access at minimal cost.

Parents can Skype in from the same location or different locations.

The visual medium enables work samples or graphical information which can be demonstrated or explained first hand.

The technology is improving all the time.

According to the research of the father of modern communication and its effect on



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society, Professor Marshall McLuhan, “a medium that engages two or more senses gives the participant a greater sense of understanding and continuity.” Thus Skype is a more effective method than the printed word or telephoning.

With any new innovation there will, however, be a down side and Skype is not immune to this. As Jack Goodman pointed out in his article, the problem for schools is ‘bandwidth’. Most schools at the moment can cope quite easily with the level of traffic that skype imposes upon its bandwidth. (Bandwidth is the ability of a system to handle the volume of information that is moving in and out of the system at any given moment. The larger the bandwidth the greater quantity and quality of the communication that are possible.) The problem arises when the popularity of a VoIP system grows within the school’s population to a point where it overwhelms the School’s network.

The long term solution to this problem is to develop a school network that has the bandwidth that will cater for the volume a VoIP system will bring with it. This naturally will come with a hefty price tag and will take time to adequately plan and implement.

In the short term, schools might restrict access to specific personnel or occasions, parent / teacher interviews are a perfect example. Schools can control the volume within their own network by planning VoIP interview times between the two or three parties, and spacing them appropriately, thus avoiding an overload of the system.

The other alternative is to run the VoIP system outside the school’s network on the local wireless network. This is in fact exactly what we did for our trial interviews. This is not ideal and comes with inherent problems but it is a short term solution.

The Rogers House trial has provided information about the benefits of this form of communication and as a result The Southport School has been proactive in developing a plan of action. Through the guidance of the School’s ITC advisory group a structured plan has been implemented to improve the bandwidth to enable the productive use of a VoIP system within the School’s network. The plan will take time to implement but it will inevitably be for the benefit of all.

A VoIP system is not a panacea for all that ails the communication between parents and the school or between parents and their boarding children, but it does go a long way toward reducing the frustration and isolation experienced by boarding parents in remote areas or overseas.

Lindsay Close, Dip Teach (BKTC); B. Ed (QUT); B. Bus (QUT); Masters Ed (USQ)
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Towards the **Light**

by Daniel Kuhn

September Question Boarding Families: Friend or Foe? What does your school do well to promote a family-friendly environment within your boarding community?

Jeremy Holt
Head of Boarding
Assumption College, Kilmore

At Assumption College in Kilmore, North of Melbourne, both boarder and day students alike are encouraged to connect with the broader community and to give of themselves in selfless service. The College requires each student to undertake thirty hours of community service each year and those hours are largely student driven. Obviously the students learn much from their experiences but one benefit that is particularly noteworthy is the connection with their community which goes beyond the walls of their boarding house and, indeed, their school. From the soup kitchens of Melbourne to the small acts of kindness that go unnoticed, this community service is a valuable instrument in strengthening the Assumption College family.



Tim Hodgetts
Assistant Housemaster
The Rockhampton Grammar School

At The Rockhampton Grammar School in Central Queensland, structured weekend activities for Year 8 students aim to help them settle quickly into boarding life. Year 12 students often help with the activities, which have, this year, included dance, circus skills, movie nights, canoeing and an 'Amazing Race' challenge. The activities have been wonderful to help settle the new students and get them to know boarding staff and older students in a relaxed setting.

Continuing with the relaxed setting is the dining hall, where boarding staff and their children share mealtime with the extended boarding family - high chairs and all! I have been surprised at the boarder's interaction with the younger children; they really enjoy having them around. With many students leaving siblings and nieces/nephews behind to board, having young children on campus goes some way towards creating a family-oriented home away from home.

Another aspect of home that many students miss are their pets and animals - particularly those from properties. Several boarding staff have dogs, which are again much loved by the students and also serve create a link back to the student's home life.

Daniel Kuhn
Toowoomba Grammar School

Toowoomba Grammar School promotes a family friendly environment in a number of ways with House family evenings and the annual Toowoomba Grammar School, Sony Children's Holiday Camp being just two examples. Each House hosts a family night once a year where the boys are able to showcase some of their talents and parents mingle in an informal setting. There is generally some entertainment provided, along with finger-food and drinks. These nights are an ideal occasion for parents to meet other parents from the same House and they are usually held the night before or the night of a home GPS fixture to limit the travel inconvenience for parents.

The School also holds an annual Toowoomba Grammar School, Sony Children's Holiday Camp, where up to thirty children with disabilities are hosted in Groom House, one of the School's five senior boarding houses. These children are cared for by the students and they are treated to a myriad of activities during their three day stay. The highlight of each camp is the closing Monday which sees a number of carnival rides, a petting zoo and pony rides available to all and sundry. It is a great sight to see families of staff and guests mingling throughout the day and enjoying the rides and friendship.



***Next edition:
Social networking sites, mobile phones and other digital distractions are inhibiting the ability of the digital natives to communicate person-to-person.***

I may be on the younger side of the age ledger; however, I raise my voice in unison with those concerned at the lasting legacy of a life no longer lived in reality as a result of a devastating digital addiction. I fear, and I take the liberty of gross generalisations in a column such as this, that all too often we, as parents and caregivers, throw our hands in the air and complain about the overuse of technology by teens but we do very little to modify the behaviour or to educate them regarding the risks of such use. Call me young and old-fashioned in the same breath but I am not willing to sit idly by as more digital natives undergo quadruple empathy bypasses as they text and twitter through their teens and beyond. Parents and caregivers must give clear directions to teens regarding the discerning use of technology. One of the difficulties with this, though, is the ignorance in which many of us, so-called educators of the next generation, continue to wallow regarding technology.

In early August I engaged in healthy debate with my colleagues along the lines of how much is too much when it comes to teens and social networking sites. I was pleased

that I didn't feel in the minority when I voiced my opinion that today's teens, whilst perhaps being the most socially connected in the history of teens (if you rationalise a 700 friend facebook network as being connected), are in fact somewhat stunted in their ability to emotionally connect, person-to-person. To support this somewhat alarmist view I have read, just in the past fortnight, two articles from national papers outlining the crippling social effects that are the result of too much digital dependency. Add to this the never-ending media stream of cyber-bullying cases and the teen-technology mix is rapidly becoming fast-food news. My question to you this month is: **how do we as a boarding community handle this rapidly evolving technological era?**

I love my iPhone; I am in awe of its capabilities: I can, in moderation of course, send and receive emails, listen to my tunes, do my banking, check my facebook account and twitter during staff professional development evenings. I am also deeply concerned that such a marvellous device allows students unlimited, unmonitored access to the net. Michael Carr-Gregg, in his address to the 2008 ABSA Conference, stated, and I paraphrase, **'allowing our teenagers unmonitored access to cyberspace is akin to dropping them off in the red-light-district of Amsterdam and waving goodbye.'** What are we doing in our schools to ensure that our boarding houses do not glow a deep red after dark?

And, just as importantly, what are we doing in our boarding communities to educate teens about these wonderful technologies which, if not used wisely, can determine a decidedly different, even addicted path through life? I step down from my soap box and the floor is now yours. Thank you to those who responded to the September question and I look forward to hearing from more of you this time around.

Please send all responses to **drk@twgs.qld.edu.au** before the 20th October.

Positive Pastoral Education

By Mathew White



What tools are we providing these students? What measurable methods are we equipping these young women and men with, so that when they are faced with adversity they can draw on greater levels of resiliency and focus on specific skills that could help.

In order to create schools as enabling institutions that help students to be better equipped to meet life's challenges, a unifying framework is needed that creates a deeper level of rigour in residential academic settings.

Geelong Grammar School has a strong tradition of pastoral care and seeking to challenge its students' traditional school experience, as demonstrated by the foundation of its world famous Timbertop campus in 1953. We have long recognised that parents want schools to teach more than academic achievement. They also want us to cultivate creativity, resilience, optimism, character strengths, and wellbeing in their children.

Issues of adolescent mental health are critical for boarding staff. Given that 20% of adolescents in Australia will be diagnosed with an anxiety depressive disorder during their formative years, boarding schools in particular need to ask the question – what are we doing to reduce this figure and to help the remaining 80% of our student population who are 'okay' to flourish?

Over the past three years Geelong Grammar School has worked to build and broaden its approach to pastoral care for its students, teaching and non-teaching staff. In 2008 Geelong Grammar School launched its collaborative project with Professor Martin Seligman from the Positive Psychology Centre of the University of Pennsylvania. This project has been recognised as one of the pioneering pillars of what has come to be defined as Positive Education. Geelong Grammar School's Positive Education is a theoretical framework that unifies the core principles from the science of positive psychology with the practices of education, in its broadest sense.

Christopher Peterson, best summarises Positive Psychology as 'the scientific study of what goes right in life, from birth right through to death and all the stops in between.' Peterson along with key researchers in the area – including Lopez, Lyubomirsky, Csikszentmihalyi, Seligman and others have help define a psychological movement that is now over 10 years old and is starting to have a significant impact on educational debate in the UK and the USA. What

positive psychology recognises and seeks to measure from a scientific perspective is what makes people lead more engaged and fulfilled lives.

In 2008 and 2009 over 160 Geelong Grammar School staff were trained in the principles and practices of Positive Psychology – the single largest whole school professional development strategy in the School's 150 year history. Seligman and his team of over 20 facilitators from the University of Pennsylvania introduced staff to the core concepts and skills of Positive Psychology in intensive residential training programs at the School.

Geelong Grammar School's Positive Education has three aims;

- To increase the experience of positive emotions in our students;
- To encourage students to engage their signature strengths for personal and community goals;
- To engage students to live meaningful lives to find purpose and make a difference to our communities at large.

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Coming Events

Australia

Tuesday 6 October

Cybersafety Workshop Hobart
with Michael Carr-Gregg

Monday 19 October

Queensland State Division Conference
Anglican Church Grammar School

UK

02 January 2010 - 04 January 2010

Annual Conference For
Housemasters' & Housemistress'

17 January 2010 - 18 January 2010

State Boarding Schools' Association
Annual Conference 2010

28 January 2010 - 30 January 2010

Annual Conference For Deputy Heads

04 May 2010 - 06 May 2010

Annual Conference For Headteachers

12 July 2010 - 14 July 2010

Annual Conference For Matrons
and Medical Staff

USA

3 - 5 December 2009

TABS Annual Conference
Chicago, Illinois

Would You Like Your Boarding School Featured in Lights Out?

We plan to feature two schools each edition. All you need to do, is write a brief article (400 to 500 words) and send us some high resolution photos.

Send all files to; lightsout@boarding.org.au by the first week in October.



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These are achieved through our approach to pastoral care and the co-curriculum, the explicit delivery of Positive Psychology curriculum at Years 7 and 10 and the development of a Positive Education teaching methodology in subjects across all year levels at each of our campuses.

In Year 7 and 10 students undertake specifically written Positive Psychology curriculum that have been developed through scientific study and which provide the theoretical foundation to the Positive Education approach at Geelong Grammar School. The School has chosen to deliver two curriculum's written by the world's leading research psychologists and developed in collaboration with experienced classroom teachers: the Penn Resiliency Programme to Year 7 students and the Strath Haven Positive Psychology Curriculum in Year 10. In addition to this theory and skilled-based program, Year 10 students experience a hybrid course developed by the Geelong Grammar School Positive Education Department that introduces students to Yoga, mindfulness, meditation and other practices focused on developing students understanding of what influences their individual levels of personal and social wellbeing.

However what makes the Geelong Grammar School approach unique, is that it combines the two scientifically measured curriculums with a systematic approach to whole school change through the development of a

Positive Education teaching methodology that can be implemented across all subject areas at all year levels.

A significant development for the School in the implementation of Positive Education has been that we have started to see evidence of a consistency of language as a whole school community that permits us to engage with students in discussions about Signature Strengths that in the past could have been ad hoc or based on intuition. In particular the tools from Seligman's work that are freely available at www.authentichappiness.org such as the VIA Character Strengths test, have provided the catalyst for ongoing discussion about how we seek to engage and unlock the potential of each student.

Geelong Grammar School is committed to further developing Positive Education on the sports field, in the orchestra, or in our boarding houses. A strengths based approach founded in the science of positive psychology provides the significant rigour that builds on good teaching, learning and pastoral care.

Research tells us that increases in overall student wellbeing are likely to produce increases in learning. Through approaches to pastoral and co-curricular, an implicit teaching methodology across all campuses and year levels and the delivery of explicit Positive Psychology curriculum at targeted year levels, Geelong Grammar School is starting to redefine society's traditional understanding of student achievement.

For more information about Positive Education at Geelong Grammar School please contact Dr Mathew White (Head of Positive Education) at positivepsychology@ggs.vic.edu.au or Elaine Pearson on elainep@ggs.vic.edu.au or visit the Geelong Grammar School website at www.ggs.vic.edu.au

Mathew White,
Head of Positive Education
Geelong Grammar School