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Important Challenges facing the future in Independent Schools  
in Australia.



## **Important Challenges facing the future of Independent Schools in Australia.**

Education is a constant reorganising or reconstructing of experience. Mere growth and development is not enough. Educative experience involves activity and effort on the part of both pupil and teacher in many different theatres of the school. Education Require the blending of new and old in the creation of fresh patterns of meaning. Since much of this experience is the social interaction between student and teacher the process of education inevitably becomes a continuous reconstruction of the tissues of everyday existence. As individuals grow through education, so too does the bond of experience and learning grow between students and teachers.

It is of no surprise that in boarding schools in England hundreds of year ago teachers were paid only a pittance however the school offered staff housing and meals as payment in kind. This environment caused staff to accept the school as their home, place of employment, centre of their sporting and co-curricular interest and sometimes their social outlet. Today many years later some independent boarding schools in the western world still rely on the close attachment of the boarding staff, who are also classroom teachers bringing many rich experiences and rewards to fellow teachers and students.

The general philosophy that independent schools organise co-curricular activities as an important part of their school program does ensure that the teachers become involved in many activities outside the classroom even if they do not reside on campus. Activities after school hours and weekends involve teachers in a variety of Co-curricular activities contributing greatly to the overall education of the student building up relationships and establishing confidence between each other and with the staff.

The idea of staff working with boarders across many different spheres of the school is an enormous bonus to the aims and objectives of the schools. It is also an opportunity for teachers to observe the different individual talents of the students in a more informal working partnership between student and teacher. Staff can also benefit from knowing the boys in more than one setting allowing greater opportunity for student and teachers to work together in a mutually supportive environment.

The close connection between pupil and teacher in independent schools has been a strong and successful feature of the schools for hundreds of years. The 'schoolmaster' has been in place to communicate the ethos, discipline and spirit of the school through activities shared with boys. The boarding environment in independent schools is an obvious example of this philosophy where it has been observed that boarders and campus staff involve themselves more robustly in the activities of the school.

Staff living and working on campus can also provide similar support to each other as they work with their colleagues in many different areas of the school. They can provide each other with support and encouragement when disappointments are experienced.

Many school administrators in Australia and in other western nations have recently been strongly focussed on the academic attainments of their students, especially the academic results in final examinations. This focus has been exaggerated by media coverage, reporting examination results of schools across regional areas and the success that are accepted to universities. Competition between independent schools focussed on academic results closely associated with marketing and enrolment has become in many schools, the single responsibility of the focus of the teacher.

School administrators who have become 'academic result driven' have allowed many teachers to specialise only in the academic program of the school. Teachers have been released from many co-curricular activities and sporting responsibilities and replaced with outsourced part time instructors.

There has been a positive reaction by many staff to the changed responsibilities in schools. It is generally favourably received for an employee to be told that they are allowed to work in fewer areas of the school than in the past with less responsibility. Many administrators and teachers aim to replace the time involved in co-curricular activities with greater research into their subject discipline and devote extra time to classroom preparation. Evaluating how teachers allocate their spare time outside the classroom is a difficult exercise. However, I believe that the reduced connection by the teachers in the activities of the school is not in to the advantage of teacher, student or school.

Teaching is essentially a process of interaction between teacher and student. The teacher must remember the pupils are responding to them, perhaps more significantly than they are to the subject or the game they are playing. For this reason, the personality of the teacher is important and the teacher must use every opportunity to captivate a student's respect enabling the teacher to use that connection when working in many different spheres in the school. It does not take long for the pupils to relay their respect for a teacher to other students. A teacher therefore may enjoy respect from a student in the classroom in appreciation and appreciation for that teacher's energetic and purposeful work in the school. Teachers teach students not subjects!

The discovery and enjoyment of the continuing satisfaction of teaching may be listed as the first element in the good life for the teacher. To participate more actively in the school environment is sometimes easier than becoming remote or disconnected from the students. Children respond to positive reinforcement, encouragement and recognition and sometimes there are more opportunities for a teacher to convey these expressions of support and encouragement.

Students remember long after they leave school the teachers who cared and showed a genuine interest in there journey through the school. A positive remark by a teacher to a boy outside of the classroom, especially to a student that may not receive a great deal of praise or might not achieve academically, can be a great personal boost.

In recent months I have met with the highly respected 'gender' expert from the United States of America-Dr Leonard Sax. He agreed that boys responded to recognition and involvement with teachers across many co-curricular activities however he was interested to hear my thoughts about the teacher being automatically respected by the student if they recognised the classroom teacher's wide involvement in the activities of the School.

A teacher who is closely connected with the co-curricular program of the school will also have an opportunity to recognise the achievements of students at other times throughout the school week. The follow up of participation and achievement by staff is an important motivational tool for many boys. If co-curricular staff is outsourced by the school on a part time basis such opportunities do not present themselves during the school week.

A school employing many outsourced specialist to conduct co-curricular programs may not provide an all-round consistent and balanced approach to the educational experience. Boys tend to expect their teachers, in the performance of their duties, to provide a model of the kind of behaviour which they are endeavouring to inculcate. Teachers mixing with students in all activities of the school are expected to be temperate in their habits, understanding of the ethos of the school and maintaining the policy of discipline expected at all times. The same cannot be guaranteed from staff who have not been teacher trained professionally or orientated over some period of time to understand the aims and objectives of the school.

The playing of games is an example of my concern. Sport is one of many learning experiences in independent schools. It is an activity by which a student can learn a great deal about himself and the team that he is a member. It is a place where the delight of promotion to a higher team draws a fine line with the disappointment if relegated to a lower team. Both become important learning experiences.

Sport, debating, plays and orchestra provide the opportunity to promote growth in pupils so that they can cope with developmental tasks that face them in the process of living. This means providing experiences outside the classroom that will foster such things as a healthy body, getting along with others, civic responsibilities, basic knowledge and skills. All these attributes lead to personal contentment. Students need good mentors to in these circumstances for seeing and assisting that they conduct themselves in an approved manner. The mentor who is professionally trained and who is familiar with the ethos of the school will be the best teacher for a student to deal with day by day.

In conclusion teachers that care and know the students will have the most rewarding experience and they will be the most effective and appreciated. If staff does not fully connect with the students the school schools will not be educated in places of excitement, sharing or effective learning. The 'master' teacher must remain the heart and soul of the school.

What is the good life for the teacher? The diversity of gifts and backgrounds which different teachers bring to their vocation means that each one will work out his own pattern of life in terms of his own nature and the school community within which he finds himself. Within the riches of such diversity, however, certain common strands will be apparent. The teacher who enjoys a good life will find enduring personal satisfaction in the process of teaching and be fully involved in the life of the school. The teacher will continue to learn and constantly renew and update his pedagogical resources. The teacher will also aspire to a position of leadership to ensure these characteristics of the profession will be maintained. It is the teacher to whom the inculcations of values are entrusted in a diversity of experiences for young people.

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## **GAMES IN BOYS SCHOOLS**

### **THE PURPOSE OF GAMES**

**Games are for the boys! Games are for the boys! Games are for the boys!** We need to repeat this and understand it again and again; Would that more parents understood this. We see so much nonsense on the sidelines where the loudest are invariably those who achieved the least in their playing days. We must resist inappropriate degrees of vicarious pursuits by parents who seek to live through their sons their own lack of personal glory or hoped-for glory.

If we are mindful of this motto, it also puts into perspective the place of the coach. All our coaching is educationally based. We want boys to learn how to win and how to lose, and how to accept being let down by others or by apparently inappropriate decisions by umpires / referees. They need to be taught how to cope with disappointment if they are dropped from a team or lose an event. They need to be taught that as part of life, they should give of their best in all that they do.

Games are part of our curriculum. We invest substantial resources in them both physical and personal. We do this because we firmly believe that lessons of life can be learnt in games which are an area of course that a majority of boys readily want to participate and learn in. Yet at the same time we need to understand that games must be kept in perspective. Even if boys find it easier to perform on the sports field, they still have an obligation in the classroom and elsewhere. For this reason, it is vital that coaches themselves keep the whole matter in perspective, and this is readily conveyed in their own behaviour, their performance, and attitude. The coach who is tense and uptight will create tension in the team. The Coach whose voice is well modulated more readily evokes an inner calm in his team.

If properly coached and administered, the games programme can fulfil admirably the educational aims of the School. There is scope however for it to achieve the opposite. This can result from hero worship, or focussing too much on individual talent and success, or giving improper support for example when referees / umpires make errors which affect a result. The good coach ensures that the learning experience is profound.

It is because of our view that games are for the boys that we require coaches to leave it to the boys on the field of play (although it is accepted that some games require coach-directed decision-making in terms of stoppages and/or player replacements). The coach has his opportunity to prepare his boys during the week, and with brief comments before a match or at half time, and following a match. Otherwise on the field of play the boys must perform as best they can with the guidance previously given. It is also for the major reason that games are for the boys that we discourage parental comments on the sidelines and in our schools, will not be involved in televising games on public television.

In brief, if we take the time to understand the nature of games and that they are a wonderful access to educating a boy, then we shall always get full value from our games programme.

## THE IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF COACHES

The intention of this section on the role of the coach is to provide encouragement to coaches, and it is definitely not intended that it be seen in a negative light trying to highlight any perceived deficiencies. At many levels, the enthusiasm for the task of coaching and the commitment to the job is as high as it ever has been. The document is aimed primarily at those who are engaged in coaching team activities and who take their coaching as more than a task to be done as part of their terms of appointment to a School.

It is hoped that by reading this, coaches will enhance their own enjoyment and performance. We all know of the often quoted adage that if a team does well you congratulate the boys, and if it does poorly, you blame the coach! Whatever the truth of this, the rewards of coaching must essentially lie in the contact with the boys rather than with the results, however depressing or uplifting the latter might be.

### What makes a successful coach?

Jack Gibson, arguably the best Australian Rugby League coach was once asked this question. He replied “good players”. It is as well to keep the matter in perspective, but there is more to it – for good coaching does lift the performance both individually and of the team.

The good, successful coach of schoolboy teams needs the following attributes:

- 1 He must be mentally tough.** Obviously he must be able to carry out the task of dropping a player and informing him of the fact. These days regrettably, he may even be confronted by an upset parent and he must have the integrity, diplomacy, and self assurance to be able to handle this situation. More importantly the coach must be objective, truthful and honest about players. He must be satisfied that at all times he acts with complete integrity. Fellow coaches, as well as players within and outside that team must be aware that the coach acts with integrity.
- 2 He must be conscious of the place which games play in the life of the school, and essentially that he is teaching boys.** In other words, it might become necessary for the team to lose a match if the most important thing is for the boys to learn valuable lessons. How many coaches are prepared to drop one of their top players as a matter of discipline, knowing that in terms of results or performance, the whole team might suffer in consequence? In team sessions or at practice the coach is not only speaking to a collective group, but he is speaking to individual players and each boy must feel that he is being addressed. To this extent it is important when there is a team talk and the discussion hinges on some area of activity outside the particular function or expertise of another player, that the latter understand that he is nevertheless fully involved.
- 3 Successful identification of talent and selection.** This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult tasks. Errors are inevitably made, but can be kept to a minimum if coaches do not become inflexible and are prepared to listen and to watch. The ability to recognise a mistake and to make amends is important. Equally, it is important to avoid trying to be seen as a wizard who plucks talent out of obscurity. Such events do occur from time to time, and when they do perhaps they reflect the failure of others to observe talent (either latent or apparent). Nevertheless coaches who set about making this a regular practice arguably are more concerned about their ego and reputation than the true construction of an effective team. Accepting the fact that errors can be made, especially given the nature of adolescence and their capacity to develop substantially between seasons, it becomes important for a coach to be able to make changes when a mistaken selection is evident.

- 4 He must give **attention to detail of individual technique and to team performance**. The task becomes more and more demanding as coaches are expected to know more and more about different elements of the game. A coach should have sufficient humility therefore to invite others to give him assistance where he knows they have expertise to complement his own. If a boy is dropping a football, are his hands in the correct position? Is he watching the ball all the way? In cricket, are the wicket keepers fingers pointing downwards in taking the deliveries and is he rising too early? The grip of the bat or the grip on the ball can make a substantial difference. In Rifle Shooting the slightest flaw will impact upon the accuracy of the rifleman. Conversely a correction can produce quite a different outcome. The effective coach will be watching a host of things whilst the games are in progress or at practice sessions and will be thinking deeply about the various possibilities and indeed consulting wherever he can.
- 5 Coaches must **create and consider situations where players must think**. One of the most successful cricket coaches at Sydney Grammar School, PG Young, instilled in most players in his teams a new approach to thinking about the game. Most of the activities in our sports are the result of logical development – eg. In cricket the vertical bat hit in an arc between the stumps has a better chance of hitting the ball than does a crossbat shot. A rugby ball will be kicked more accurately if the ball is dropped closer to the foot than if it is first thrown in the air. These are simple processes, but they are logical and when players are encouraged to think about different elements of the game, they can only improve significantly.
- 6 **Discipline**. This is one of the most important elements and applies both to the individual and to the team. It can be said that a great deal of the natural talent that exists between competing teams is much the same – the isolated player being an acknowledged exception. Therefore what makes the difference so often is the personal or self discipline of the individuals, and the discipline of the team which derives from the requirements of the coach, breaches of discipline, whether they are of the more extreme behavioural type, or to do with lack of concentration on the part of the player need to be addressed in the appropriate way by the coach. Some potentially good coaches fail to get the disciplinary side right.
- 7 **Knowledge**. It is clearly an advantage to have played a sport to a senior level. Nevertheless some excellent coaches at schoolboy or international level have never been highly skilled players and they have acquired the skills through careful studying of the game and through their capacity to relate to other people. In either case it is important to go on learning about the game by reading, observing, and by listening.
- 8 **Infectious enthusiasm**. No matter what the personality of the coach, it is vital that the boys become infected by the coach's own enthusiasm. Unless he can display an enthusiasm, even when things are not going well for the team, the boys will quickly lose interest. This can be harder when the team is performing poorly, or at times with low level teams. Nevertheless it remains a key ingredient.
- 9 **A sense of humour**. Coaching is a serious business and no one knows that more than the coach who has sat on the edge of his seat wondering whether his team could survive the last minutes for victory, or resist an onslaught by an opposing team and thereby hold out to win the match or the premiership. Yet the importance of personal contact with boys underlines the need to be able to offset the serious elements and demanding elements by the use of humour. If it is not within the coach's normal

personality to inject humour, he should be able to allow it to be released through the team “clown” provided it is under control.

### **Some difficult issues for coaches!**

- 1 **Loyalty.** It has been said by some coaches that having made a selection they should retain their loyalty to a particular player for a period of time. This might be commendable. On the other hand there are other loyalties which a coach has and the major one is to the team as a whole. If the presence of a particular player is detrimental for whatever reason, then loyalty to the team should take precedence.
- 2 **Who makes the decisions?** It is imperative that the man who accepts the final responsibility, the coach, should take the decisions. In other words it is wrong to have the captain and vice captain aided perhaps by a committee man taking decisions which the coach does not agree with. This is not to say that they shouldn't be listened to – far from it. However the coach must be able to exert his personality, and use his experience and authority to ensure that what he wants to do in terms of team selections and policies do in fact prevail. The achievement of this is often a function of his own personality.

The coach should never forget that he has much greater experience in the particular activity than do any of his charges and he has been placed in that position of responsibility to ensure that in as short a time as possible the boys carry out his wishes. Particularly with the most senior teams, a coach cannot afford the luxury of waiting for boys to learn the lessons through their own errors. The coach is there to reduce these errors and to give strong leadership.

This issue relates also to the matter of captaincy. On the one hand the coach has a responsibility to teach a captain how to lead and to allow him to learn by experience what this entails. To this end he does not want a mere rubber stamp. On the other hand school boy captains are by definition inexperienced and it is incumbent upon the coach to ensure that captain gives the coach his full loyalty and carries out the coach's wishes even when he privately disagrees.

- 3 **Sensitivity.** The top school boy coach will be sensitive to each individual in his team. He will know when there is a player who feels on the outer and will take the necessary steps by his own action and through others in the team to ensure that this player is incorporated. He will get to know his players sufficiently well to know what technique is most appropriate for each one in order to get the best out of him.
- 4 **Language.** The requirements of dignified behaviour by the school master are just as important on the sporting field as in the classroom. Whilst the coach may run or play with the boys, he must always retain their respect and a certain dignity. Boys feel ill at ease if coaches indulge in bad language because they recognise that this is not their role and indeed some would see the hypocrisy of the situation if a dichotomy of behaviour was suggested between the classroom and the sporting field.

- 5 **Parents.** Coaches inevitably and desirably get closer to the boys in their teams, and it follows also with a number of their parents. There are some parents who keep their distance and who might never be encountered in a whole season, whilst there are others whose intrusiveness might be unwelcome. There are parents who will be critical behind the coach's back and others who will be critical to his face. The coach will deal with each of these situations with maturity and if his integrity is unassailable he will have no worries. The coach does need however to be very cognisant of not having favourites as a result of parental knowledge and friendship. To this end coaches need to be warned about developing close friendship with some parents because it can lead to embarrassment if a boy needs to be disciplined or dropped. The motives of a minority of parents are not always pure and some will carry the friendship of the coach in the interests of their own children.
- 6 **Cliques.** Coaches need great sensitivity to the development of cliques in teams. There is nothing worse for a player than for being on the outer because for some reason in other activities he is not involved with the boys. Cliques develop through contact in earlier years in the preparatory school; through travel on transport together; through playing sport together in the alternative season; through being in the same Year group; through being boarders together and so on. Subtly and for the coach at times unknowingly, boys who are not part of the inner group can be given a bad time, or deprived opportunity to perform. The coach who is sensitive to this situation will ensure that cliques have no power or influence within a team.
- 7 **Harmony.** A major ingredient for on-going success is that there is team harmony. It is surprising how often coaches are unaware that some boys are very critical of others (either from jealousy, or a despising of their abilities, or for other reasons). There is no place in a happy team for boys who nastily tease other members or who loudly and continuously criticise or ridicule them. The harmonious team will always defeat the one which lacks harmony. Indeed the harmonious team performs above its abilities because each player is encouraged by his team mates to give of his best.

## CONCLUSION

It is absolutely clear that from many years of teaching and coaching, the two roles enhance each other and clearly enhance the education and welfare of the boys.

Similarly, those boys who are active in games, almost always perform better in their academic studies for the reasons that we all know. At Shore School, many of our top scholars have also been top sportsmen and the participation rate in games at a senior level, where that participation is voluntary, is at the highest rate ever, a clear sign that both boys and their parents recognize the benefits of a continued involvement in the School's games programme.

Our School's philosophy that teachers in the classroom are also coaches on the games field has become harder to keep in reality but to a large extent it has been managed and this has positively separated us from other schools where outside coaches separate the games programme from all other elements of a boy's education. The great beneficiaries of this philosophy however, are the boys, who know their teachers and coaches well and receive the value from and all round education delivered by enthusiastic and dedicated teachers and coaches.

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(This paper with due credit to Mr Robert Grant, former Headmaster of Shore, whose ideas and philosophy make up the bulk of this paper).

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## **The Role Of Sport in Boys' Schools**

**Adapted from a keynote address by Dr Dirk Wellham, Deputy Headmaster Anglican Grammar School (Churchie) at the IBSC Regional Conference at Shore School, North Sydney in March 2011.**

### **Some Findings:**

# Students who participate widely in school activities tend to have higher levels of self-confidence, are prepared to organise their time well, and are self managing and commit more fully to the areas they take up.

# Students with a broad involvement are also those who in the long term demonstrate greater service commitment to their communities.

# That 'games playing' is a specific preparation for leadership roles

# The expectations of parents is growing substantially as is their need to participate and be involved with the games their children play.

# Students in the highest performing academic classes averaged in Queensland Independent Schools spend an average of six hours and twenty minutes of co-curricular involvement each school week.

# Activities where boys achieved less successful academic results tended to be in sports such as basketball, rugby, rowing and cadets. Activities associated with above average results included chess, cricket, cross-country, soccer, community service, debating and music.

# Physical sports allow some boys to be emotionally engaged, but without too much personal effort to be noticed in the team supportive environment.

# Students who related well with others and enjoyed their company in a variety of school activities felt better about their place in school, and achieved better academic outcomes.

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