

KAREN MOORE: PRINCIPAL, ST ALBANS SECONDARY COLLEGE 2002-2006



Introduction

I arrived in Australia in 1975 specifically to take up teaching responsibilities and have been teaching here ever since. Because of the local shortage of teaching staff, in the 'seventies the Australian government recruited internationally and offered “free transport” and tax-free salary for two years to entice overseas teachers to come to Australia to work. It sounded like a good working holiday to me. I arrived on one of the new Boeing 747s with over 300 other teachers from USA. (I now believe that another SASC staff member, Jon Kortuem, was on that same flight.)

Growing up in Idaho, USA

I was raised in a farming community in the state of Idaho, USA. The high school I attended had about 700 students. When I was in Year 10, my father who was country veterinarian accepted a position at a University and we moved to Oregon where I finished senior high school in a school of over 1800 students in years 10, 11 and 12.

After high school, I attended several universities including University of Pennsylvania, Oregon College of Education, and Oregon State University before graduating in education. (Later I did further study at University of Melbourne and Monash University.) However, I didn't start teaching immediately, but accepted a managerial position with retail chain which I thoroughly enjoyed for two years before being offered a promotion outside of Oregon. I resigned and accepted a job at a mid-high school teaching physical education and health.

Teaching at High Schools

Those first few years of teaching 400 students in Years 7 and 8 were certainly a challenge. For each semester, I taught the same five classes every day of each week. One had 69 students in it and another 11. All of the students were in either Year 8 or 9. I was the first teacher at the school to teach the new “Health and Human Relations” course - also known as “sex ed”. The kids loved the course, but I required to teach the same subject to their parents at night. This was part of the agreement that was made between the school board and the superintendent.

Teaching in Australia

When I read the advertisement for teachers to work in Australia, I jumped at the chance to work here. In grade 5, I had done a school project on Australia and always wanted to travel there. My geography wasn't very good, however. In the States, the warm water and warm weather is in the south, so when asked, I said I wanted to work in southern Australia. (I was a qualified scuba diver and wanted to dive the Barrier Reef which I knew was in warm water.) Obviously, I got the geography wrong, but I loved Australia from the start.

I first taught at MacRobertsons Girls High School in South Melbourne where I shared one desk with two other staff members and organised eight basketball teams competitions at lunchtime. I transferred to Maribyrnong High School in 1977 where I stayed for 11 years. The school's

student body was diverse and it had a rich culture. I held several positions at Maribyrnong including faculty coordinator, Senior Mistress, Camps Coordinator, Year Level Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator and Student Welfare Coordinator.

I was promoted to Senior Teacher in 1988 at a new school, Craigieburn Post Primary. It was the first new school I had worked in and it was fun developing new policies and curriculum. Craigieburn South Primary School was located on the same site and we started a middle school, Years 5-8. I was appointed Head of the Middle School. It was an interesting job and had several political aspects as there were three teacher unions with whom to negotiate - the Secondary Teachers Association, the Primary Teachers Association and the Technical Teachers Association. I was appointed Vice Principal Craigieburn in 1990.

The Meyer competencies were published at this time and as a school, we attempted to write a curriculum that addressed these generic competencies. To me, education really started to change at this time both in the classroom and out.

The state government became more active in schools and schooling. The Kirner Government introduced district provision. Several schools just to the south of Craigieburn merged to form Box Forrest Secondary College. Schools were required to introduce descriptive reporting and many initiatives associated with the Green Paper implemented in schools including the Curriculum Standards Framework.

Appointed as Principal

In late 1992 I was appointed foundation Principal at Werribee Grange Secondary College (WGSC) which was being constructed. By the time the school opened in 1993, the new Government had implemented Quality Provision and forcibly closed 300 schools across the state. Most of the teachers at WGSC were excess staff from closed schools. However, one staff member, Cheryl Baulch came from St Albans Secondary College.

We had staff, but no school as the builders construction was not completed. We started the 1993 school year with no tables, no chairs and no students for the first week! Also, the state government somehow forgot to purchase the school site, so the property developers would not construct a road to the school until the court case with the compulsory acquisition of the land was finished. There was no road in front of the school for the first year and no direct access for cars to the school. (We rented a vacant residential property at the back of the school and put in a temporary road.)

A new school is very exciting and challenging, but I suspect it is a job you can only do once in a lifetime. I left The Grange to become Regional Principal Consultant, then to Project Director with the Australian Principals Centre for three years before returning to the Department of Education as Manager of the Community, Networks and Link Unit in 2001.

Starting at St Albans

I came to St Albans Secondary College in 2002 as principal. In my role as Regional Principal, I really enjoyed my work with Stewart Homer and Andy Kratsis. St Albans had a very experienced and skilled staff, a wonderful School Council and an excellent reputation. It has been a delight working in this environment.

There have been many challenges which is to be expected with an old building with a failing infrastructure. But it always amazes me, how teachers continue to work so well with kids regardless of the environment or how much rain is in the corridor.

I would just like to see a much nicer environment for both students and teachers. But I wouldn't change to a new school and new furniture and equipment if it meant we lost the good will and



Kerrie Dowsley, Gael Meadowcroft
Assistant Principals

good relationship that exists between teachers and students.

Schools seem to take more and more of my time as I get older. When I first started teaching in the States, I taught 5 periods a day, coached a sports team for one term, went to one staff meeting a term and other than that, pursued my own interests. I had a couple of hours a day to train for the marathon and prepare dinner.

I still run but only twice a week and I get to the gym at six in the morning three or four mornings a week. But to have time every day for two hours of physical activity is impossible! (Of course, at my age, it is probably best for my body that I don't have the time.)

Son's Education

My son, who attended state schools from Prep to Year 12, is completing his university course this year. He intends to be a teacher as well in the state system. Recently when we talked about a concern he had for one of his students, it reminded me of why I returned to and stayed in teaching. Some days are challenging, some students can be difficult during adolescence. But it is the opportunity to make a difference in a student's life that is the hook for me.

In Conclusion

Students, parents and teachers have made my life so rich. The complexity of working with people and through issues is very rewarding. But perhaps the most reward is the telephone call out of the blue from a past student who rings to say thank you. I feel very fortunate and humble that I may have made a difference to them ... for truly, being a teacher has made a difference in my life.



Front centre: Kerrie Dowsley, Karen Moore, Gael Meadowcroft with teaching staff, 2003.

Karen Moore, 2006

2014 Update

After serving several years at St Albans Secondary College, Principal Karen Moore retired during 2006. The Assistant Principals Kerrie Dowsley, Ian Crocker and Gael Meadowcroft continued in their roles. Kerrie Dowsley was later appointed Principal of the college. The Assistant Principals in 2014 were Mr. Ian Crocker, Ms. Losh Pillay and Mr. Craig Jennings.



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