

Trevor Jennings

Past Teacher

My arrival at Centenary Heights High in 1972 coincided with the first Senior classes to pass through the school. Bob Dansie was the founding Principal and Ray Mullins his Deputy. The Administration was located in our present A Block, the library was in B6-B8, and parades were held a few days per week where the car park is now located between B and C Blocks.

These were exciting times in education. External examinations were being phased out (1972 was probably the final year for the Senior Public examination); curricula changes were being implemented across the board; teachers were being empowered through developing course structures and assessment; student retention rates were increasing; school facilities were expanding and more staff were needed to accommodate these situations.

There was a vibrancy and “youthfulness” within the teaching staff and this suited the developing nature of the school. Many of the staff were active in their studies and professional associations and were involved in the co-curricular activities of the students. As a young staff with young families, we enjoyed a comraderie within our ranks which, I would like to believe, spread to our students. It certainly spread to the wives of staff members who regularly met for morning teas and lunches.

The foundations for Centenary’s present standing in the community were laid during these early times. A strong cultural and social focus was initiated through musicals and Interact; academic excellence was at the forefront of our education; and sporting teams were generally competitive but suffered from a lack of depth with numbers, especially when competing against larger, well established schools.

As I observe today’s school, I see an almost professional approach to choirs, musical groups and musicals; strong sporting performances with many representatives at Regional, State and National levels; and a progressive cultural and multicultural community with strong social bonds.

When the school opened in 1968, Toowoomba’s population was about 50 000, the land south of Alderley Street was mainly farmland and undeveloped timbered land. Rangeville S.S., an emerging Gabbinbar S.S., a small Middle Ridge S.S. and a declining South Boys’ and South Girls’ S.S. were our major feeder schools. Toowoomba’s population has now trebled, some of the schools have closed (both South schools) and our student population comes from far and wide.

There are obvious changes to the school of today versus the one from the earlier days. Buildings abound, student and staff numbers have increased, the facilities necessary for student performances both indoor and outdoor have been improved and extended. Technology is now the driving force whereas previously, access to technology was restrictive because of costs and limited technological development.

I taught here for 14 years in the Science and Mathematics Departments. These were great years for me as they were major influences on my growth as a teacher and as a person. During my time here, the Principals included Bob Dansie and Bob Walker, the Deputy Principals were Ray Mullins, Terry Goan, Bevan Brennan and Del Campbell (initially Senior Mistress). As the number of staff and

students within the departments grew the middle management areas of Subject Masters and Co-ordinators also expanded. Maurie Nolan, our inaugural mathematics subject master, was a strong influence on my mathematics. Computers and calculators were starting to make their presence felt but it would be many years before we used these as teaching aids, instead we were empowered with using the Overhead Projector as a teaching aid.

Thousands of students have passed through the gates at Centenary over the years and teachers like myself have had the chance to have contact with many. I find it interesting to come across previous students and have a chat and reminisce about our school days. They are not necessarily the high flyers. The students have been successful in many careers and professions and, more often than not, are the no-nonsense type – get on with it and get the job done; no fuss, no bother. There are business leaders, medical and health workers, teachers, “tradies”, - you name it there will be an ex-Centenary student there.

After retiring a number of times, I have returned to casual teaching and have taken on a few contracts at Centenary during the past few years. Some of the teachers from 1985 are still here; some of my past students are teaching with me; and there are students of past students as well. The students present themselves well, are well behaved, and have technological skills in keeping with the requirements of a modern society. So much more learning pleasure can be found by combining the technology with some good, old fashioned basic skills such as the 3 R's.

During the course of returning to teach at Centenary, writing these few words, and looking at the familiar names on the honour boards, I am flooded with those wonderful memories of past students, past teaching and ancillary staff, past experiences both good and sometimes not so good, and I look forward to the many opportunities occurring in 2018 where I can share these memories.