

CHAPTER 3 THE STUFF OF LEARNING

For any immigrant from Great Britain during the 1950's, the subjects taught in Australian schools would have had a ring of familiarity about them. Because most migrants who settled in Australia until the Second World War were British, Australian schools had developed an education system based very much on the traditional British model.

The '3 R's', English Grammar, learning by rote in a silent, teacher-directed classroom with at least 40 other children; these were the well-established patterns of education at the time. It is true that some enlightened teachers did teach children to think for themselves and even encouraged children to question the long-held precepts of a fairly conservative society. Generally what were required for success were quiet orderly behaviour and the regurgitation of a learned body of knowledge.

Parents expected their children to be taught to write with a neat hand, to read reasonably fluently, to be able to recite their times tables and do their sums. If they learned a bit about gardening, and perhaps some domestic skills (for girls only of course) so much the better. Physical exercise was seen as desirable and a little time could be spared for singing, reciting poetry and drawing but the 'real' subjects must on no account lose time to these 'frills'.

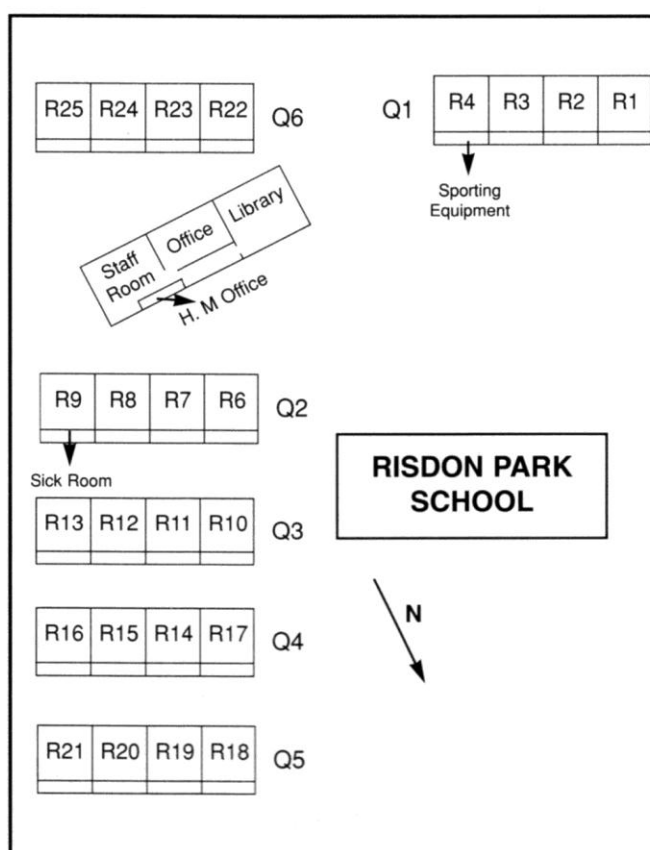
Life was real, life was earnest, even for children and regular homework and weekly tests were seen as appropriate for all children except 'beginners'.

The majority of children left school early (aged 14) and could confidently expect to find a place in the workforce.

It was common for children to spend only one or two years (if any) at secondary school. Only the high achievers and children from reasonably 'well-off' families remained at school for a total of 10 or 11 years (there was no Year 12) and even less went on to tertiary study.

A typical Primary School curriculum in the early years of the school would have been built around the following 'subjects':

Reading	Social Studies
Writing	Arithmetic
Spelling	Nature Study
Grammar	Physical Activity
Written English	(Singing)
Oral English	



THE PORT PIRIE COMBINED PRIMARY SCHOOL SPORTS DAY.

This function will be held on Wednesday, October 14th on the Memorial Oval. The first event will commence at 10.30a.m. and 46 events will follow, the last to be run at 3.10p.m. The official opening ceremony will be performed at 1.45p.m. by Mr. H.B. Welch. Approximately 400 competitors will march onto the arena, and the Welch Shield will be presented at 3.15p.m. Children will be selling comprehensive programme booklets before and during the day for 1/- each.

The Women's clubs of the three schools have combined to provide lunch. Pies, pasties, rolls, sandwiches, little cakes, and cordials will be available. Ice cream, cool drinks and sweets will also be on sale.

The day is a special holiday granted by the Minister of Education. No child is compelled to attend. However we would be pleased to see you and your children there. The ordinary school buses will be cancelled and in their place buses on the circular route will leave the Depot at 9.30a.m. going in opposite directions and arriving at the Oval at 10.00a.m. The same transport will be provided in the afternoon, the buses leaving the Oval at 3.30p.m.

COMBINED SCHOOL SPORTS

RISDON WINS THRILLING SPORTS FINISH

In a thrilling finish Risdon Park Primary School won the 1963 combined schools' sports at Memorial Oval before a large crowd of children and parents.

Risdon won the 48-event programme with a total of 203 points followed by Pirie Primary 189 and Solomontown 172 points.

With the lead see-sawing throughout the afternoon an exciting stage was reached with four events to be decided.

Farlane (S), A. Champion (R).

Girls' Open Broad Jump — C. Ireland (D), N. S.

Port Pirie, Solomontown, Risdon Park.

Boys' Grade 4 Potato race — Risdon Park, Solomontown, Port Pirie.

Girls' Grade 6, Scotch Hand-ball — Port Pirie, Solomontown, Risdon Park.

Catch-Ball — Risdon Park, Solomontown, Port Pirie.

Girls' Grade 6 Goal relay — Port Pirie, Risdon, Solomontown.

Boys' Grade 6 Corner-spry — Port Pirie, Risdon Park, Solomontown.

Girls' Grade 5 Winding relay — Solomontown, Risdon, Port Pirie.

Boys' Grade 7 Scotch Hand-Ball — Risdon, Solomontown, Port Pirie.

Girls' Grade 7 Circle Gap — Port Pirie, Solomontown, Risdon Park.

Girls' Under 11, Circular relay — Risdon Park, Port Pirie, Solomontown.

Boys' Under 11, Circular

The school's curriculum was centrally controlled by the Education Department in Adelaide through its Inspectors of Schools who carried out regular inspections of various aspects of the school's operation, often in quite some detail. The Inspector's report would comment on the children's attainment levels and even such details as the children's bookwork or 'handwork' (which included both writing and drawing) as well as teachers' methodology, preparation and general conscientiousness.

The Inspector's Register for the 1950's and 1960's records many complimentary comments about the manner in which Risdon Primary's curriculum was being taught and the good quality of the children's work.

In arithmetic the inspector comments that:

... it was evident that much stress has been laid on neat work and careful 'setting out'...

In Social Studies, however, the inspector:

Children's choir ¹⁹⁷¹ delights audiences

There is nothing lovelier than the sound of a children's choir and when combined with a host of other talented artists you have an evening of most delightful and refreshing entertainment.

This was the overall comment by the hundreds of people who attended last week's Port Pirie Schools Music Festival, an event which has been sadly missing from this city for some time.

Certainly there was room for a little improvement but for this, the first of what is hoped will be an annual event, the or-

ganisers are to be commended.

The festival was the culmination of an idea put forward only four months ago by the Inspector for Schools in the mid north, Mr Lexley Eckert.

During that time each individual primary school was responsible for training its own choir of pupils from Grades VI and VII.

It was only two weeks before the festival that the choir master, Mr R. Hen-

a joy to both watch and hear.

The percussion group, recorder group and the combined recorders all gave very good performances, whilst the violin solo by Annette Burgan and the piano duet by Susan Green and Pauline Lowe were both well received.

Tribute must be paid to Miss R. Hewton, who conducted the orchestral item.

A number of students

... would like to see more mapping, illustrations and pictures in some notebooks particularly in Grade IV; on the other hand some excellent notebooks were presented.

In Music:

Some sweet and tuneful singing was heard in some rooms

but the inspector

should like to see more emphasis place on monotone (sic) drill, voice exercises and at least some elementary theory.

The final General Comment in the Inspector's Register in 1970 was high praise indeed:

This school functions with its ultimate aim clearly defined. The purpose of education to provide opportunities for each student is

being translated into an efficient operation under pleasant conditions with very effective leadership from the Headmaster and senior staff.

The Education Act 1972 and the Regulations made the Director-General of Education responsible for school curriculum. A legal framework was provided for curriculum to be put into operation in schools. School councils were given a role to advise the Principal of the:

considered view of the local community regarding educational developments within the school.

The Act made school compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15 (although children could be accepted after their fifth birthday.) Therefore schools would be expected to cater students under compulsion within a certain age



Risdon Gold, winners of the C Grade Hockey Championships held at Port Pirie were from left, Jacqueline Hayter, Janice Diggins, Jan Edwards, Paula Bairstow, Debra Edwards, Rosemary Heitman and Jane Mdigan.



Watched by classmates, Jacqueline Hayter and Michael Footner competed in the Risdon School's chess competitions. They are pictured playing for third and fourth positions.

range and also for students who were attending school voluntarily.

The 1970's saw some massive upheavals in the breadth and depth of the curricula offered in schools.

In 1970, the Freedom and Authority Memorandum, the Director-General of Education delegated to school principals considerable freedom:

... to vary courses, to alter the

timetable, to decide the organisation of the school and government within the school.

Of course this 'new freedom' had to be exercised within the framework of the Education Act, Regulations and Departmental Policies, after consultation with parents and with the support of staff.

There was an atmosphere of excitement in schools as creative teachers began to re-think their curriculum offerings - and as a result their methodology. The 70's saw some schools radically re-organised while others made cautious amendments to existing programmes and gradually changed the face of classroom learning.

These were the years of the Whitlam government in Canberra and Commonwealth funds were made available for grants for educational projects in all sorts of guises. Education Department advisers and consultants started to make their appearance. In-

Dirty water did in Hurtle the Turtle

Hurtle the Turtle lived happily in the crystal clear waters of his bowl, which sat in the sunlight in the grade four and five classroom at Risdon Park primary school.

Came the day when the children in the classroom decided to clean his pond.

They re-filled it with water from the tap and before long, Hurtle got listless and sick. Finally he died.

A family of tadpoles met the same fate when their river water was topped up from the tap.

The water became so murky the children couldn't even see the tadpoles.

For the class of 29, the sad death of their pets meant something had to be done about Port Pirie's water supply.

With their teacher, Mrs Margaret Johns, they compiled a letter to send to The Recorder.

Anthony Hall, 8, was elected to write the letter because his handwriting had improved.



RISDON PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL
Kingsland Road,
Port Pirie, S.A., 3800
Phone: Port Pirie 121171

Dear Sir,
We the grade 4 and 5 children at Risdon Park Primary School would like to complain about our water in Port Pirie.
It is so bad that our turtle and tadpoles died when we put them in tap water in the pond.
Not only did they die, we could not see them in the murky water.
The water has so much mud in it that we think it should be filtered.
The horrible colour and the smell of the chlorine must disgust visitors to Port Pirie as much as it disgusts us.
Yours faithfully,
Grade 4 and 5.

"We shouldn't have to use dirty water", said nine-year-old Peter Scarman.

"It looks awful tastes

clean", said Hugh Avey, 8.

"When mum does the washing she says it goes

trouble", said Kym Williams, 9.

"I took Paddywack the budgie home for the weekend and his drinking water went off", said Marty Tattoli, 9.

"Mr McKee should hear about it so he can take it to Parliament and they can do something", said Warren Lane 8.

With the deaths of Hurtle and the tadpole family, the class are taking extra special care of Paddywack (who manages to survive on tap water), and Fish and Chips the two goldfish and Fat and Skinny the two frogs.

The latter live in tank water which the children bring from home.

"We would never have put the others in tap water if we had known what would happen", Mrs Johns said.



Mrs John's class bury their dead pets.

service conferences for teachers provided frequent opportunities for teachers to develop their skills in curriculum development and accompanying methodology. Everyone was eager to find out more and observation visits for teachers to share each others expertise became more common. Education had a high priority on both the national and state agenda.

The Education Department document The Purposes of Schools was issued in 1971 and together with the Freedom and Authority Memorandum provided the basis for developments in schools in the 1970's.

An interesting feature of the curriculum of RPPS in the early 70's was the weekly 'Cultural Activities' which included clubs like Red Cross, Malay, Music, Shorthand, Ballet, Dance and Drama. The offering varied from term to term and depended on the expertise of the teachers and the interests of the children. It was great fun.

After the many and varied developments in curriculum in the hectic 1970's, the Education Department saw a need to review, update and expand its earlier Statements. It was felt that clear educational policies needed to be developed. The document Our Schools and Their Purposes. Into the 80's was presented as:

... an extensive co-operative and consultative venture.

It went on to say:

This document contains not only general statements of aims and purposes but also guidelines for the

development of school programmes. It contains policy statements which clearly indicate the educational framework within which government schools will operate in the coming years. The intention ... is to provide an appropriate balance between central direction and local needs.

(J R Steinle
Director-General of Education
June 1981)

Our Schools and their Purposes
organised the curriculum into eight Curriculum Areas:

- Environmental Studies
- Health and Personal Development
- Human Society
- Language Studies
- Mathematical Studies
- Science and Technology
- The Arts
- Transitional Education

*This curriculum document now becomes the guide 11/4/84
for South Australian government schools. It supersedes
all previous Departmental publications on handwriting*

AN example of modern cursive.

Out goes the old — in comes the modern

Friday Feature

PARENTS of South Australian primary school children should see a change in the standard of their children's handwriting over the next few years.

Parents of Risdon Park Primary School students might have already noted such a change.

In an attempt to increase the legibility of students' cursive writing the Education Department has introduced a loopless cursive called South Australian Modern Cursive into schools throughout the State.

Risdon Park Primary School has been teaching the loopless cursive for three years since becoming one of 40 pilot schools which tested the new style.

Principal, Mr Barry Irgang, said teachers had already found the new handwriting style had made students' cursive more legible.

"With the new policy across the State, schools will be phasing out the loop cursive and phasing in the modern cursive.

"This is essentially a method designed to write legibly at a much quicker pace," he said.

"One of the things that the new system does allow for is that it allows left-handers to slope it back to the left.

"It is a style of writing suitable for all students, both left and right handed."

A new handwriting style was looked at in 1976 after parents expressed concern over the standard of their children's writing.

A handwriting committee was formed in 1978 to research handwriting styles and trends world wide.

Over six years the committee drew up and tried alternative handwriting styles with the assistance of the 40 pilot schools.

Although each state is involved in making

changes to handwriting taught in schools, South Australia is the only state to have formed a complete policy.

The policy is a guide on the aims, benefits and method of teaching the new style.

Mr Irgang said the teaching process had not changed dramatically for the new style.

He said students were taught in three stages.

First, students learn the beginner's alphabet which is clearly written as separate letters.

Second, the students are taught the development of the cursive alphabet and third, they are shown how to link the letters.

The new style is aimed at simplicity and is intended to encourage a smooth flow of writing.

Mr Irgang said the new system was introduced to all primary students but those

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It was expected that all students under compulsion would have learning experiences in each of these areas, each year. It gave a broad view of education with more and more being demanded of school programmes.

Departmental policy stressed the value of planning curricula as a sequential development from Reception to year 12. Thus it became important for schools to become familiar with the work done at other levels of schooling.

It was made quite clear that school-based curricula must be approved by the Education Department since under the Education Act, the Director-General was responsible for curriculum in schools. Curriculum approval procedures were set up and teachers set about reviewing the school's curriculum under the new framework.

The process was time-consuming and not all teachers were comfortable with what was required of them. However, this was an opportunity for teachers to take a good hard look at their teaching programmes and to ask themselves about their beliefs and aims in the eight curriculum areas. In addition teachers

spelt out their methods and their evaluation processes.

Risdon Park Primary worked hard and eventually developed curriculum documents which have provided the basis for teaching in the school for the past ten years. Within the guidelines, individual teachers still have the freedom to pursue particular themes and to use whatever materials they deem appropriate. Individualism has always been the hallmark of an imaginative teacher. Materials can be adapted to meet the need of each child so that it is possible for the school to achieve its aim of "Every Student a Success".

The document Educating for the 21st Century A Charter for Public Schooling in South Australia was published in 1992. It is

a statement of the ideals and aims that we hold today for children who will leave school in the 21st Century. It also looks at the national interest.

This policy states nine 'essential skills' around which it states all teachers need to plan students' learning programmes:

Port Pirie & District Primary Schools Swimming Carnival.

Champion Primary School Team

Awarded to

RISDON PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Promoted by the Port Pirie Amateur Swimming Club.

Dated, 16.12.91

*President, Huon Picken
Secretary, M. Matthews*

Positive reaction to revamped school year

The imminent introduction of the four-term school year has been greeted positively by most of Port Pirie's school principals.

It is planned that all schools will convert to the four-term system in 1987 with the first term lasting 11 weeks from February 2 until April 16.

After a 10-day break, the 10-week second term will commence on April 27 and finish on July 3.

A break of 16 days will precede the start of the third term on July 20.

Term three will be followed by a 17-day break with school recommencing for a final term of 10 weeks on October 13.

School holidays will then start on December 19 and finish on January 31.

Father Moate of St Marks, said he would have preferred more opportunity to discuss the matter before the final decision was made.

"I can see shortcomings in the idea, such as the extra gearing up and winding down in the school year," he said.

"Students, particularly those in the senior school, need a longer period of time to develop a spirit of study and application."

"It is hot enough as it is, but with school

starting even earlier we won't avoid the hottest part of the summer.

"I'm surprised that there hasn't been much reaction to it, and I think the timing of the announcement, late last year, didn't give much opportunity for people to question it," he said.

Principal of Airdale Primary School, Mr Ross Argent, agreed with Fr Moate's comment on the hot weather and the increased number of interruptions to the school year but said the dissolution of the 14-week winter term would relieve a considerable burden on both teachers and students.

"I think the decision was made more to keep in line with the eastern states and I don't really have any strong feelings on it one way or another," he said.

"The staff haven't discussed it very much. I think they thought, 'Oh hell, we've got a four-term year in 1987, but we've got to get through 1985 and 1986 first.'"

"I think it will be accepted as the norm once it has been implemented," he said.

Port Pirie West Primary School principal, Mr Trevor Greaves, said the new system would be a more logical approach to making full use of the holidays.

"Because schools are better organised than they used to be, the increased number

of breaks will not disrupt classes.

"There's still exactly the same number of teaching days," he said.

Principal of Risdon Park Primary School, Mr Barry Irrgang, said he could see no disadvantages in the idea at this stage.

One of the most enthusiastic advocates of the four-term year was Solomontown Primary School principal, Mr Chris Pearce.

"I'm very much in favor of it, as it's better for the kids and better for teachers' organisation."

"It's a jolly good idea and will help to get educational programs underway and out of the way," he said.

According to the principal of Airdale Primary School, Miss Josie Newlyn, "the idea is terrific and educationally sound."

"At the moment, the kids are starting to tire by week 10 or 11 so I think a 10-week term will be more productive than the present 12-week term."

"It will help to relieve teacher stress and there will hopefully be less teacher illness in the middle term," she said.

Miss Newlyn said the new arrangement might cause some problems in the tourism industry as the holidays had become more fragmented, "but it gives the kids the best

possible opportunities which is the most important thing."

"The 10 weeks will be 10 working weeks and the teachers will still have the energy to put in and get the maximum potential out of the kids."

"The fact that the kids will be able to handle working solidly for those 10 weeks is paramount," she said.

Principal of Port Pirie High School, Mr Tony Sexton, said the breaks in the four terms would coincide very well with the school's half semesters and end of semesters.

"With the reasonably stressful nature of schools these days it is better to have shorter terms and more breaks."

"I think most of my staff are fairly neutral about it and the only disadvantage that I can see is that if the holidays are the same as those in the eastern states then the roads and the tourist resorts will be crowded up."

Risdon Park High School principal, Mr Graham Steele, said he was quite happy to see the introduction of four terms and how they would work out.

"I think it's a very positive move but there hasn't been a lot of reaction to it," he said.

- Communication Skills
- Social Skills
- Planning and Design Skills
- Information Skills
- Environmental Skills
- Mathematical Skills
- Health and Safety Skills
- Technological Skills
- Work Skills

The required areas of study remain very similar to those in *Into the 80's*.

Children currently in Grade 1 at RPPS

will enter secondary school in the year 2001. Those who go on to tertiary study may not enter the workforce until 2010 or later. It is essential that these children are prepared for an ever-changing world. Curriculum decisions taken today can have very far-reaching effects.

Learning is mostly fun these days and children love creating, doing, and - most importantly - knowing things! Risdon Park Primary School provides a happy and relaxed atmosphere in which to cater for every child.