



Principal's Address at 2017 Presentation Night

Chair of the College Board, Mr John Durow and Ms Susan Madex, current and past members of the College Board, distinguished guests, parents, friends and most particularly my staff and students, it is a pleasure to be with you all tonight once again in the Plenary Building.

I am sure that you would join me in congratulating our student emcees for the terrific job they are doing in hosting our Presentation Night. In particular, my thanks to Kade for introducing me. When I asked him about taking on this role for tonight we did discuss whether he would have enough time to change in between his dance and College musical items. When he understood that it was my speech that he was introducing, there was a chuckle and a realisation that he might have more time than he needed!

Although there are still more performances to come this evening, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our musicians, dancers and performing arts staff for their hours of rehearsals and the skills and enjoyment that they share with us this evening.

I have been a late adopter of Facebook, having only become a serious user in the last couple of years and love the way it connects me to my family and friends both here and overseas.

Also, I am an avid reader of The Age on line.....and refresh their page on a fairly regular basis over the course of a day in case there is something new that is happening around the world.

One of the things that I have recently noticed on The Age site is that there are ads appearing that are potentially of interest to me, often related to shopping sites or other information sites that I have visited.

At the moment, my wife Bev and daughters Sarah, Lucy and I are thinking about selling up our home, downsizing and moving into a smaller place. What I have discovered now is that every time I go into The Age there are pictures of properties coming up in the advert sections that meet the search criteria I placed on the domain website. It took me a little while to realise that these advertisements weren't just happy coincidences but were actually set up through the cookies saved on my computer.

It occurred to me as well that I have somehow had this link into my Facebook page because, having looked at apartment living as a possibility, every day, I receive new adverts for apartment buildings from across Melbourne.

But, it is not just houses and apartments that keep appearing on the various sites that I visit. Having liked certain pages on Facebook, I keep receiving similar pages or stories on my page too.

It is always affirming to open Facebook and to read articles that continue to support my views on things such as climate change, the Adani Cole Mine, marriage equality, my beloved Melbourne Football Club and even Donald Trump.

It is easy to think that everybody thinks like I do because everything I read on my Facebook page supports what I think already and, in fact strengthens my convictions. I must confess that there have been a couple of times when I have been in conversations with people who do not hold the same opinions as me and been surprised that they didn't. More importantly, when they make valid points in opposition to my thoughts about marriage equality for instance I am not well prepared to discuss these because my views have not been previously challenged in what comes to me each day. It is the opposing opinions that would enable me to think more deeply and either affirm or at least moderate what I think.

Principal, Mr James Laussen, M. Ed. Admin., B. Ed. Env. Sci., MACE, FACEL.

When I first came to Overnewton in 1996 as a trained teacher of Biology and General Science, I loved using texts like *The Web of Life* or *The Nature of Biology*. As teachers, we used these texts religiously with our students and trusted everything that was contained within them. They provided well researched, edited and scientifically 'proven' information. If we wanted students to extend their learning, we sent them to the library to search encyclopaedias or journals such as *Scientific American*.

At that time, we were raised, by and large, to trust what we read because of the rigour of the research that had gone into the writing. And of course, our significant access to the news was through daily newspapers which were static documents that had a day's news in them with exactly the same advertisements. The editors of *The Age* did not have real and immediate knowledge of which articles I read or which shopping sites I may have used. Today we know that a journalist can very quickly know how many people have read their opinion pieces and know which opinions to keep writing about if they are to increase their readership and maintain their employment. The potential to influence and direct an individual's thinking is enormous.

In this way, as on my Facebook page, popular opinions become perpetuated and repeated because of the diagnostics that go on behind the web pages.

You might ask why I chose this theme for my address at our thirtieth birthday Presentation Night. Why not talk about the wonderful achievements and progress of the College over its history? Hopefully these are things that you know already and live each day.

I chose it because this is the one time that I am in a position to address the largest group of parents and therefore talk about the role we ask of you as members of our community of learners and how we need your support in embracing the future with us. A future that I think is incredibly exciting with some extraordinary possibilities.

You will all be aware that during the year I wrote several articles in *Whispers* and ran a parent forum about why Overnewton was a proud member of the Safe Schools Coalition. I am not going to go over these reasons again tonight. However, I think what I was reminded about during the conversations I had with parents at that time was how, as adults, we were raised at a time when we believed what we read in print or heard someone say on a news broadcast.

In the case of the Safe Schools Coalition, a single video caused enormous and justifiable confusion for many adults. A single adult who we did not know, who provided no evidence of the source of the facts she presented nor provided any information about any political, religious or medical affiliations she might have had created a story that went viral. I must say that even though I was alarmed by the misinformation and harm that video caused, I was impressed nevertheless by its reach and impact.

I can understand why, as adults who were brought up in a time when we generally trusted what we read and heard, that we don't automatically think about how genuine or accurate information may be. However, as adults it is important for us to model the learning behaviours that we want for our children whereby we ask questions, we seek clarification and we test the sources of the information ourselves.

My staff will tell you that our access to the World Wide Web has significantly enhanced the learning that our students are able to achieve. Accessing world events as they occur, being able to access the latest scientific research, having the ability to search through a number of different opinion pieces about an issue being discussed in a religious studies or English class are wonderful moves forward for our students.....and I believe that our students are actually very good at using their critical thinking skills in an academic context.

Outside of that context, it is up to us as adults to model the behaviours that will become more and more important for our young people as more and more single opinions will be repeated and confirmed rather than stopping and asking questions and seeking alternative perspectives.

Although accessing information is very different today to how it was when the College first opened in 1987, one thing that has not changed are the values that underpin our living and learning together as a community.

These values are lived out every day in the ways we relate to each other, whether face to face or on line, and the ways in which we make sense of what we see and hear.

My faith in our students' ability to embrace the digital present and future was affirmed when attending Middle School assembly this week.

Jordana Morton Scordo and Genevieve Falzon were addressing the students about the College value of learning. It was terrific to hear Genevieve say the following, and I quote her with her permission:

My moral values are the backbone to the way I conduct my life. With my moral foundations firmly embedded, whatever I learn, I can extract, adapt and use in my everyday life, without compromising my values. Valuable learning and my moral values are complementary to each other and I am able to handpick how I apply what I have learned to the way I live.

It is incredibly impressive that a Year 8 student could share such wisdom with her peers.

Who knows what Overnewton and the world will be like in the next thirty years of its history. However, I do know, as I see our values brought to life within our student body and in our classroom practice, that there is an exciting future ahead for us.

My thanks go to all of the people assembled here tonight, board members, parents, wider family members, old collegians, our bankers and other supporters, my wonderful staff and, especially, our students, all of you have played your part in our thirty-year history.

In particular, this year, we farewell 104 families who leave us with the graduation of their last child from the College. This is two thirds of the Year 12 cohort and the largest proportion of families leaving we have ever had. 60% of Year 12 students this year have been at the College for the 13 years of their formal schooling. These are significant statistics. I would like to thank all of you in particular for the legacy that you have established as members of this community.

Year 12s, as you move on from us, and to the rest of the student body as you grow with us, my encouragement to all of you is that you continue to build on the strong foundations that you have been given primarily through your parents and families but also through the partnerships that you and your families share with your school.

May the strength of our community and the importance of faith and family be things that you take with you so that you leave the world a better place than when you entered it and you continue to serve as empowered, thoughtful, community-minded citizens.