Mr Stewart Ross

“Education is dynamic - not static.”

Schools are learning environments and in today’s society, we promulgate the concept that students will be involved with lifelong learning. It is not only students that face this prospect. Teachers too, are constantly learning new ways to improve their pedagogy. Education is dynamic - not static. Educational administrators, like myself, need to constantly reflect upon how we approach our role. Consequently, I was involved in the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Programme this year with the Head of Senior School at Bishop Druitt College, Coffs Harbour.

The programme was organised by Denise Thomas AM and Robert Grant AM, former Heads of Meriden and Shore schools respectively. It was based on the Peer Assisted Leadership (PAL) Programme developed in the 1980s from a research project exploring the instructional role of principals (IMP). The IMP project sought to understand how Principals lead and influence their schools. Two key research activities focused upon were “shadowing” and “reflective interviewing”. The major findings were, not surprisingly, that Principals are isolated in their roles. The project concluded there is NO one right way to lead. It also found that successful Principals connect their daily routines to a “bigger picture” and that the process of observation and reflection promoted professional growth and learning.

The PAL Programme has been expanded now to encompass other school leaders, like myself, as well as Principals. The goals of the current programme are to: enable educators to gain insight and support from colleagues, help educators develop skills for analysing leadership behaviour, provide educators with an opportunity to learn how others lead and integrate a general framework into their own setting. The outcomes reported by most participants are that there is more than one way to be a successful leader. Feedback identifies that observing and being observed are powerful ways to learn and that a non-judgmental approach supports one’s professional growth.

The actual process of this valuable experience involved travelling to my “shadow partner’s” school on two occasions, to observe him and to ask reflective questions on why he did what he did. Tim Eagan, from Bishop Druitt College, came to watch me on two occasions as well. A final meeting was held with all the groups to present our findings. In fact, this entailed being a mirror for our partner. The things that I found valuable were that: I was not alone in the myriad of challenges and experiences I encounter in my role, that I was able to share ideas with a colleague, I had increased awareness of my behaviour/style and that it highlighted the importance of self-reflection.

And just what did Tim Eagan present as my style, what was dear to me, how I operate, what my focus is as an educational leader? Most of you know me pretty well and could guess, I am sure……the fairest of them all!