

When school days started with nail inspections...

Rolf de Groot, Deputy Headmaster and Year 7 teacher in 1971:

"I arrived in Perth in 1950 from the Netherlands with just £20 (\$40) and worked in various labouring jobs until a chance meeting with a girl on a Swan River cruise prompted me to inquire about teaching. I quit my job with the Railways and as I had dropped out of high school in the Netherlands, had to do the Leaving year before three years at Claremont Teachers' college. After teaching at various remote rural and Perth schools, I came to Rossmoyne as one of about 16 teachers for more than 600 students. It was harmonious and smoothly operating school. But we all had to work hard; we had no teacher aides, nor modern devices like computers and photocopiers. As deputy head I had one hour



'free' each week on a Friday afternoon to attend to administration matters. But on Tuesday afternoons during winter I used to take two classes for dancing in the Central Avenue Community Hall. I was largely responsible for managing stock, arranging the school banking and milk orders, weekly collation of attendance rolls and running the weekly school assemblies in the quadrangle. If there were discipline issues they would usually come to me first. Our part time clerical support was the school secretary, Deidre Russell, who was a very pleasant and competent person with an added skill to play the piano at assemblies.

The school day would start with each class standing in a line outside their room for and a nails inspection; if any were dirty they'd be told; "go and wash them!" After the children had filed into their room, we would all recite the Lord's Prayer. My Year 7 class was great; it was a well-integrated group. I could leave the classroom, being quite confident that they would simply get on with their work.

My approach to teaching was to recognise the different levels of academic ability and to ensure that no one was belittled by anyone else. I divided the class into three groups according to their levels of ability and set out the work on the blackboard in three levels of difficulty. On that blackboard was also written; "He, who has never made a mistake, has never made anything!" Every three weeks the students had tests in mental arithmetic, arithmetic, spelling, dictation, grammar and writing a short story. They were all marked that day and the test papers were sent home with my comments on them for all the 36 kids. During the week the smarter kids were expected to help the weaker ones, but definitely not to give them the answers.

I regarded teaching as a paid hobby, and each day, looked forward to going to school. I liked the kids and I think that by and large they like me too. There were very few discipline problems at Rossmoyne Primary. Out on the playgrounds, my best method of getting everyone's attention was to whistle sharply, just blowing between my fingers, usually when there was an incident of bad behaviour at recess or lunchtime. All the kids knew that when they heard that whistle they had to "Stoop, look and listen". The first time I used it was at Bullfinch Primary when I whistled at our dog. The dog just kept on walking but our two sons turned around to look at me."