

Doug's passion for teaching....



Jenny and Doug

For Doug Tippet, there is nothing more satisfying than seeing a student able to complete a problem by themselves after putting in the effort to learn. He has experienced this sensation many times in his 70 years, more than half of them spent as a teacher in the Wimmera and Ballarat. Mr Tippet grew up on a 1200-acre sheep and cropping farm in Nurrabiell near Horsham and finished his studies at Longerenong Agricultural College in 1969 after starting at Horsham Technical School.

He spent a year as a temporary teacher at the technical school in 1970, when it was a boy's school offering a mix of trade and academic subjects. He then spent two years gaining industrial experience at the Department of Agriculture state research farm in Werribee.

"I did some work with the cereal breeding branch and practical farm work connected with beef cattle, cropping and irrigation while I was there," he said.

"At that time some of the blokes in secondary school teaching had a scholarship, but I didn't: I did it all under my own steam and paid my own way, and because of that the Education Department said to me I needed to do two years out in industry".

"When primary students came to the college and you could see quite a few of them were a bit reluctant and hesitant to take part in the experiments, but to see their confidence build over a year or two was pleasing."

"I think it was good to spend the two years out in the wider world, working with scientists and general farm workers. It gave me a broader cross-section of the workforce."

After graduating from teachers' college, Mr Tippet spent seven years teaching at Sebastopol Technical School. During this time, he endeavoured to set up a Maths curriculum for the school that catered to a wide range of abilities.

"It was for students who came to the Tech that weren't up to coping with Year Seven standards," he said. "For those particular students we tried to catch them up as quickly as we could, with a view of them re-joining normal classes by Year Eight".

"It was perhaps an accelerated basic course to bring them up to where the other students were at, and for quite a few of the students we did."

Mr Tippet moved back to Horsham in 1980 to be closer to his family and that of his wife Jenny, a primary school teacher who he married in 1973.

The following year he and Jenny welcomed daughter Melanie into the world, and Mr Tippet began a 24-year stint as a teacher at Horsham Technical School. During his time there, he taught Mathematics, Science, Agriculture and Computer Studies, and saw the school become Horsham College after merging with Horsham High School.

"Before the merger, the High School was possibly viewed as a more academic school, preparing students for tertiary courses, and the tech school's strength was providing a pathway for students who wanted a trade," he said. "After, the trade pathway wasn't as strong."

Mrs Tippet said TAFE became the predominant avenue for Horsham students to develop their trade skills after the amalgamation.

Mr Tippet said: "Students at Horsham College had the opportunity to complete a high-quality VCE by the end of year 12, perhaps greater numbers now than before the amalgamation go onto university."

He said he thought education in general could be improved by increased emphasis on core subjects. He said he had noticed school curricula had become "crowded", and that there should also be fewer standardised tests.

"I saw the early impact standardised testing was having, in that teachers started focusing on what was required for the NAPLAN tests, whereas personally I think the time could have been better spent focusing on... literacy, numeracy and science," he said.

"Teachers were putting in class time to ready students for the test."

"There are lots of different issues which come up in society from time-to-time, whether it be driver education or drugs, where communities are asking for the education system to address some of these issues. All those areas are important, but you can't include all of them in the curriculum and do justice to them all".

"Just recently it's been reported how literacy and numeracy standards in Australia have dropped compared to other OECD countries, and I think that's partly due to not enough time being put into those core areas."

Mr Tippet counted the shift to technology in the classroom and the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education and Victorian Essential Learning Standards as the most significant changes in his workplace across his career.

After finishing up at the college in 2004, Mr Tippet taught at Murtoa College the following year, before returning to Horsham for another four years at the college from 2006. Mr Tippet said he didn't have a single favourite moment from his life spent in teaching, but many.

"There are a lot of students that stick in my memory, just to see the way they develop and grow," he said.

"And I'd probably say the satisfaction you get when you see them getting on top of their work. Some students might struggle for quite a long time trying to understand concepts and build up their skills, but to see the enjoyment in their faces when they realise that at last they can do the work by themselves, that's wonderful."