

GENERAL INTEREST

50 Years as a Commerce Teacher – Mark Bateup

GEOFF PEEL | VCTA

Fifty years after joining the Education Department, Mark Bateup is retiring from teaching at the end of this year. He has taught all VCE Commerce studies - Accounting, Legal Studies, Economics and Business Management - and a wide range of other subjects across all year levels. Mark has been a VCE examiner in both Accounting and Legal Studies over many years. In this profile article, Mark is asked about his career, the role of the VCTA and the changes that he has seen in Commerce teaching over half a century.

FIFTY YEARS

Australia was a different place when Mark Bateup joined the Education Department exactly 50 years ago. Gough Whitlam was Prime Minister, Medicare did not exist and colour TV was about to be launched in early 1975. Classroom resources were mainly textbooks, with the exception of worksheets copied on the spirit duplicator.

Virtually reality was the stuff of science fiction back then. In 2024, Mark and his colleagues were introduced to VR headsets for classroom use!

Contrasting teaching tools have bookended Mark's half century as a Commerce teacher. "Regardless of all the changes, what hasn't changed and will never change is that teaching is about relationships," says Mark. "Taking an interest in students is the key."

He has seen educational practices come, go and come back again. Matriculation morphed into the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and then VCE. New subjects have been introduced and others have disappeared. As a cricket lover, Mark saw his Accounting student Aaron Finch go on to captain Australia in a winning T20 World Cup.

As he reflects upon his 50 years as a Commerce teacher, it's likely that his memories will spark nostalgia in experienced teachers, while younger colleagues gain a glimpse into the past.

EDUCATION AND INFLUENCES

An early role model for Mark was his Oberon Primary School teacher Ian Giles, a World War 2 pilot who'd won a DFC and played football for Melbourne. Mr Giles was consistent, firm, fair and caring. He engendered respect and created a supportive environment, and this ethos has influenced Mark's own teaching style.

"He was just this personality that had an enormous impact. He would never, ever criticise. But he would say something like: *Oh, well done. You did that well.* And very quietly spoken with a husky voice. It just felt like I didn't want to let him down."

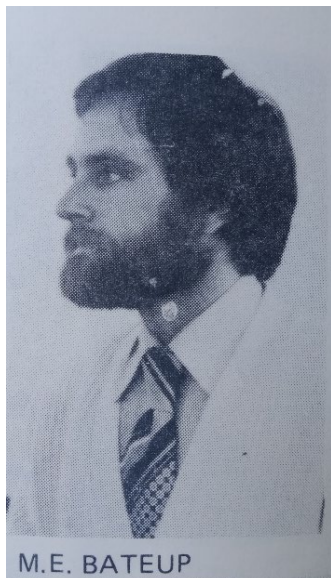
After finishing his matriculation at Belmont High School and a Bachelor of Commerce at Melbourne University, Mark had intended becoming an accountant. A friend encouraged Mark to enrol in a Dip Ed at the former Melbourne State College and he very soon found his calling as a teacher.

He credits methods lecturer Ian Greene as having a significant impact on his career, with his subject expertise and experiential approaches guiding him and many other teachers in the profession. Mark says the VCTA's recognition of Ian Greene through an annual memorial lecture is highly deserved given his contribution.

Another strong influence was educational psychology lecturer Pauline Toner, who later became Education Minister in the Cain Government.

Mark said the innovative MSC stream was just right for him. "They taped us teaching and then critiqued our methods, which was very new back in those days. And instead of telling us about excursions and issues and forms and all that sort of stuff, they took us on a week-long excursion kayaking in the Goulburn River and we had to problem solve the situations that arose."

OFF TO COLAC HIGH SCHOOL



Mark was notified about his first appointment with only a week's notice and he arrived in Colac, expecting to stay for a short stint before moving on as was the norm in the Education Department. One of his former students remembers him creating an immediate impact as the "cool young new teacher". His "short" stay ended up being 40 years of teaching in Colac, before moving to Kardinia International College in Geelong.

In his first year as a teacher, he taught senior classes in Accounting and also Legal Studies - which had just been introduced as an HSC subject, evolving out of the former Social Studies course. Commerce teachers were expected to teach typing on old manual typewriters (often to the tune of the Bee Gees' *Spicks and Specks*), which were maintained by the Victorian Railways. Dacomb Shorthand was also offered by the school.

Consumer Education was emerging as a new subject at this time. "It was always year 10, but then eventually things changed and some commerce went into year eight and nine. And by the time I left Colac, they were doing stuff in year 7."

A young Mark Bateup from the 1977 Colac High School magazine

While cheques have largely disappeared from society and recent study designs, Mark is sure many will remember the "Bank of Education" mock cheques that students loved filling out and writing "not negotiable" across the face.

Night classes for adults were popular in the 1970s for a generation who had missed out on opportunities for senior secondary education. Mark taught night school for several years. "You would teach until 3:30. And then start again at 7:00 pm till 10. It was an exhausting three hours all in one hit."

"And in the class, you could have a couple of people doing year 12, others doing year 11, somebody just doing bookkeeping. Someone else doing something different, but it was all in together. You didn't get bored because it was just rush from one thing to another."

VCTA

Mark's VCTA connection was strong from the start, with valuable resources for a first-year teacher arriving at the country school in eagerly awaited mail packages.

In the 1970s, the VCTA publication of a board game titled *Let's Go Accounting* provided a revolutionary and welcome new approach to the teaching and learning of Accounting. He recalls: "It was a bingo type game. You'd read out a transaction and students had to answer questions. Is this going to increase assets or not? How's it going to work? And the kids would call out bingo when they won. It was quite fun, and it actually did teach the principles fairly well."

Ian Greene's Accounting texts published by the VCTA were a hit with Mark and fellow teachers around the state - as unlike other textbooks, these ones also included solutions!

Annual conferences allowed country teachers to make valuable connections and ensure they were up to date with professional learning. Comview became an annual feature that was looked forward to, while student lectures required long bus trips in the days before online learning evolved.

"Honestly, if it hadn't been for the VCTA where would you turn to? And I don't just mean going to conferences. That's great. But the materials that they came up with were practical. You know it wasn't ivory tower stuff from university levels or anything like that. They were from other teachers and I think it was really good."

EXAMS AND ASSESSMENTS

HSC exams accounted for 100% of a student's marks early in Mark's career. "You did a three-hour exam at the end of the year and that was it. Whatever you did during the year counted for nothing...And only two-thirds of the cohort could pass. It was heavily weighted in favour of maths and science over commerce and humanities subjects. Not a lot went to Uni at that stage."

In the late 1970s, some internal assessment was incorporated and the alternative STC stream was introduced. A multiple-choice section on the HSC Legal Studies exam was seen as controversial by some. The introduction of the VCE saw a few years of Common Assessment Tasks, which provided alternative learning opportunities but had weaknesses in terms of authentication. "That turned into a bit of a nightmare because the emphasis was on *common*. Everybody could help students with their project work", Mark recalls. "If the system hadn't been abused, I thought they actually were quite good and allowed for a bit more flexibility and creativity."

Problems also emerged in early internal assessments that required software and computer use for Year 12 Accounting. "I had to organise it so that it was done after school so that no one else was on the computers. But if something went wrong, you were cactus! The authorities soon saw that assessment reliant on fledgling technology was not a good idea for statewide assessment, so in the next course they put it in Year 11, which is where they should have put it in the first place."

Mark has been a long-term VBOS/VCAA assessor in both Accounting and Legal Studies, with around 20 years of marking the end-of-year examinations. For most of this time, he co-marked papers with a former Colac High student Darryl Hay, who was teaching at Hoppers Crossing and later became a colleague in Geelong.



The experience of marking exams was an "excellent form of professional development", according to Mark, and this gave confidence in teaching his own classes.

The introduction of VCE Business Management was a major development in Commerce teaching and has allowed many more students to study in this field. Although initially seen as a "threat" to some traditional subjects, Mark says contemporary case studies have helped make it a valuable discipline.

"I organised a number of different electives to encourage kids to be thinking about going into business as an alternative to tertiary study:

I can still run a business even though I may not be one of the top academically, and then a lot of those kids actually went into business."

Mark Bateup at Kardinia International College in 2024

COLLEGIALITY

Mark says he's always appreciated the friendly and sharing nature of Commerce colleagues. "It was always noted by others how collegial the Commerce Department was. At least once a month, we'd be at somebody's place for an Italian night or a Greek night or a whatever night. And it meant you were also sharing ideas and sharing resources."

In more recent times, within a broader Humanities Department, he's found it's been a similar scenario with fellow teachers benefiting from each other's work and experiences. His love of History has also been utilised, with his passion and innovation evident when the principal paid an unexpected visit to find students fully engaged in their noisy roles as aircraft to recreate the Battle of Britain in the classroom.

Over the years, many former students have become teaching colleagues, with one such testimony from Debbie Goodfellow (Bard-Brucker): “Mark was my teacher 47 years ago and more recently I also had the pleasure of us being colleagues. Without a doubt, he was my favourite teacher and was very much loved and totally respected by students and staff throughout his amazing career. Mark made classes fun, he always took a personal interest in us and was happy to go the extra mile with individual help.”

As he completes his “first 50 years” as a Commerce teacher, Mark Bateup can justifiably raise his bat to thousands of appreciative students and colleagues, as he makes his way to the pavilion after an unbeaten half-century.

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