ORANGES AND LEMONS
Come Budget night, more than $400 million earmarked by the previous Commonwealth government of John Howard for schools programs is likely to be redirected to fund Kevin Rudd’s Education Revolution policies. Likely losers include: summer schools for teachers – around $70 million over the next three years; $50,000 rewards to schools that showed an improvement in student literacy and numeracy results – around $53.1 million over four years; and Teaching Australia – around $7 million for 2008-09. Teaching Australia aims to promote quality teaching and professional standards, work that’s currently being done anyway by existing state teacher accreditation or registration bodies. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has a keen interest in a federalist rather than centralist approach, promoting improved federal-state relations through the Council of Australian Governments by tying Commonwealth government specific purpose payments to states and territories with specific projects and sectors. The school chaplaincy program, now also known as the school pastoral care worker program, will stay, as will the national literacy and numeracy voucher program, which provides $700 worth of tuition per student for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 who fail to meet minimum national standards in literacy and numeracy.

FRIGHTENINGLY USELESS
It’s official, according to Deborah Hill Cone, writing in the New Zealand Herald, ‘A significant number of teachers (are) frighteningly useless.’ She was referring to a New Zealand Ministry of Education report called Becoming a Teacher in the 21st Century. The report ‘is the result of extensive discussion and consultation, which raised a number of issues about the selection of student teachers into initial teacher education programs, the quality of programs offered, the quality of graduates and the support needed for new graduates as they progress towards full registration (by the New Zealand Teachers Council).’ While the words ‘frighteningly useless’ are absent from the report, an analysis of feedback from Becoming a Teacher in the 21st Century makes two points: ‘There remains a significant challenge for all stakeholders to work together in a unified way to improve the quality of initial teacher education’; and ‘There was a strong feeling that stakeholders other than providers, including employers, wanted more input into programs and into decisions about individual graduate quality.’ The problem with teacher quality, according to Hill Cone, is that ‘In this country, being a teacher is not so much joining a profession as joining a political party: the cult of NZEI (the New Zealand Educational Institute – NZ’s largest education union).’ Hill Cone also wrote favourably about charter schools in the United States, forgetting to mention a 2006 study by the US National Centre for Education Statistics and a 2004 evaluation by the US Department of Education, both of which found that charter schools were outperformed by regular public schools, although not frighteningly useless.

FREE CHOICE
Western Australia’s director-general of the Department of Education and Training Sharyn O’Neill has vowed to modernise recruitment practices by, gasp, letting mentors should be appointed to teach immigrants about British customs and traditions: like eating chip butties, black pudding or spotted dick. This month’s Grapevine is by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher.