



# *in Alliance*

THE ALLIANCE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS, AUSTRALASIA  
38 ROWELL AVENUE, CAMBERWELL, VICTORIA 3124 AUSTRALIA

VOLUME 10  
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...the USA takes a new look**
- **The Changing Shape of the  
Gender Debate**
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## *in Alliance*

*The Alliance of Girls' Schools, Australasia*

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## FROM THE EDITOR...

It was great to meet so many colleagues in Sydney at our Annual Conference, and extend our personal networks. The conference was well-attended, with about 100 members and interested people attending. It was great to see New Zealand members in attendance. Rowena Danziger provided us with a beautifully developed program, which caught, for me, a number of new “angles of view” where girls and technology are concerned. It was a great pleasure to welcome our Patron Katharine Brisbane to the conference. Ascham proved a most hospitable and attractive venue, and it was quite absorbing to tour the school and reflect on its very special style of teaching and learning. We were honoured and ravished by the private showing of the great Paul Mellon Collection of British Painting at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and are deeply grateful to Rowena for arranging it.

On the business side of things, we farewelled three members of the 1998 Executive, who have all been magnificent contributors to the Alliance. June Jones (WA) and Sylvia Walton (Vic) provided great strength and purpose from the Alliance’s inception, while Carolyn Anderson (Qld) leaves us with the gift of her masterpiece, a sensational conference for our student leaders of 1999, “Leadership for Women of the New Millenium” to be held at Ipswich Grammar, 13 - 17 December this year. I urge you all to assist your 1999 leaders to attend this very special opportunity to develop their skills and understanding of leadership: it can only benefit our schools.

The circulation of *In Alliance*, thus far, has been narrow: reserved only to member Heads with a few extra copies added for private distribution by each of us. This seems a rather self-defeating limitation. Who else would benefit from receiving *In Alliance*? You may wish to provide copies for your Board, your Parents’ Association, your waiting rooms, your local MPs, your local government Department for Women’s Affairs. There may well be prominent alumnae who would enjoy reading it. We send copies to our Patrons, to key media people, to the Coalition and others. If you can see wider distribution possibilities, please request further copies from Liz Bishop and she will be happy to increase the number sent to you.

Important events coming up include the launch of our web-site, details still to come, the student leadership conference, our involvement in the national Self-Made Girl project and the special International Women’s Day 1999 Event in Victoria.

The Alliance is growing in strength and purpose - this was clear at our conference. There is a great sense of movement: the basics are in place, let’s see what we can achieve now!

*Ros Otzen Editor*

### *In Alliance*

#### **Editorial Deadlines 1998**

**Volume 11 ..... Friday 31 July**

**Volume 12 ..... Friday 30 October**

*All copy is welcome but must be submitted to Dr Roslyn Otzen by the above dates.*



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Liz Bishop*

It was great to have the opportunity to meet so many of you at the Technology Conference and Annual Meeting at Ascham School recently. I am intending to visit each State and New Zealand before the next Annual Meeting to learn more about what the individual concerns and interests are.

The new website is up and running, thanks to Jenk Ackyalcin at Kilvington and our address is:

**<http://www.kilvington.schnet.edu.au.agsa>**

I will keep you advised as to when we have our own domain name. The site has a guest book and a discussion page that I would encourage you to use.

We anticipate a launch of the website simultaneously in all member States and New Zealand in the near future and I will contact you when the details have been finalised.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE ALLIANCE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS CONFERENCE (AUSTRALASIA), MAY 1998

*Neridah Peirce, Principal,  
Canterbury Girls' Secondary College*

The 1998 Alliance Conference was held at Ascham School in Edgecliff, New South Wales. The conference theme was "Girls and Technology". Delegates from all Australian states and New Zealand were presented with some challenging ideas and the opportunity to share ideas and expertise.

Issues raised included: the development of the virtual education precinct, the challenge to create programs with rigour that interest and encourage creativity, the importance of knowledge of self, the teacher as the navigator. The importance of socialisation and equity issues was highlighted along with that of learners taking control of their learning.

Noel Staunton, Technical Director of Opera Australia, Dr Estelle Lazer, an archaeologist and Diane Grady, a company director and management consultant, all highlighted the changes technology has made in their fields of endeavour and the competencies employers will be seeking in job applicants.

Congratulations to Rowena Danziger, the Principal of Ascham, and her conference team. The range of issues presented challenged us and stimulated discussion.

On a personal note, the collegiality of Alliance members, their willingness to share experiences, explore new ideas and to welcome one into networks has encouraged my school to seek membership.

## THE ALLIANCE OF GIRLS SCHOOL



### *Leadership for Women of the New Millennium*

**BOOK  
NOW!**

*A conference for  
school leaders of 1999*

*13 -17 December 1998*

**Venue:** Ipswich Girls Grammar School, Queensland  
**Keynote Speaker:** Dale Spencer

**Give your 1999 student leaders an opportunity of a lifetime that will help them lead others with confidence and understanding.**

The 5 day conference will promote understanding of leadership and "followship" and provide experiences for developing skills in leadership which can be used in senior school leadership positions.

Conference cost : .....\$300 per student  
Closing date to secure each student place: .....30 June 1998  
Closing Date for Registration of Students: .....2 November 1998

For a conference program and registration form contact:

**Miss Marilyn Russell**  
**Registrar, Ipswich Girls Grammar School**  
**Tel: (07) 3281 4300 or Fax: (07) 3812 2175**



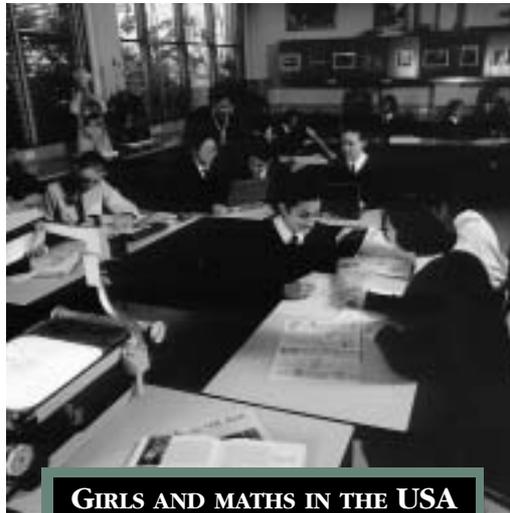
## SINGLE SEX SCHOOLS

...the USA takes a new look.

*The latest information from the States suggests that one of the oldest co-educational school systems in the world is looking with more than a cursory eye at the potential of single sex learning experiences. Ros Otzen reports...*

Recent research findings in the USA on single gender educational programs indicate that:

- they seem to reduce dropouts;
- there is improvement in general academic performance among urban males, and in achievement in maths and science among females;
- single gender educational settings are believed to reduce the distraction boys and girls create for each other, particularly during middle school years;
- the effectiveness of single gender programs may be due more to students' and parents' motivation, commitment, and small class size than to the fact that they enrol only boys or girls.



### GIRLS AND MATHS IN THE USA

#### Average SAT scores in maths

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE
1972	527	489
1987	523	481
1997	530	494

“Academy” is the title given in California to schools which have single gender organisation, whether on separate campuses or within a co-educational school. Partnership Academies have been set up in California, within the Education Code. In other states, some single

gender trials have been suspended for fear of violating gender discrimination laws, as in New Jersey where single sex Maths and Social Studies classes were piloted in 1995. Despite this, all-girl maths classes are being trialled in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia in response to under-achievement of girls in SAT scores for University entrance.

Presque Isle High School in Maine is thought to be the first public high school to offer all-girl maths classes in the USA.

The gap in maths test scores between girls and boys narrowed considerably since all-girls freshman algebra was introduced - from 23 percent to 6 percent. According to the AAUW, in all, 24 public schools

*New York Times 9 October 1997*

SAN FRANCISCO. At the Marina Middle School here, many students who chose single sex-segregated classes said their parents convinced them that they would do better away from the distractions of the opposite sex. But even if the impetus came from their parents, boys and girls alike said the single-sex classes had let them feel safer about voicing their opinions, and their uncertainties.

“It’s more comfortable this way,” said Eloise Ayala, a sixth grader, after her class discussed ancient ideas of female beauty. “Boys are loud, and they get all the attention.”

Down the hall, where the boys’ sixth-grade class worked on math problems in small groups, the atmosphere was calm. “This way, without girls, it’s easier to do your work,” Zaid Assaf said. “There aren’t kids pushing you, saying, ‘You like her’ and ‘Look at that.’”

Under legislation passed last year, California offers \$500,000 each to districts that create all-boys and all-girls academies with equal facilities, and arrange for an outside evaluation of their pilot program. Six districts have made formal proposals so far ...

In East Palo Alto...the boys said they learned better. “Boys sit down and talk for a couple of minutes, then pay attention,” said Michael Ardoin, an 11 year-old. “If boys and girls are together, they keep talking and interrupting. Girls get you in trouble and make fun of you if you get the answer wrong.”

nationwide are experimenting with single sex classes.

However, single gender experiments are posing serious legal problems. The Office of Civil Rights at the Education Department has warned New York City that its failure to offer boys a school like the Young Women's Leadership School in East Harlem, violates Title IX, the Federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in schools that receive Federal money. The legal problems may be overcome if equivalent facilities are offered for both boys and girls.

Most research on the effects of gender on learning lacks rigorous controls, but real differences in classroom climate are undeniable. At Marina Public School, California, some see separate gender classes as a stop-gap remedy until we "make a society where you can put girls and boys together and have it work for both," as Heather Stone puts it. Others see the potential for exploring sexual differences in the ways students learn. Anthony Burik, who teaches seventh-grade girls all morning and boys all afternoon, said, "What I see so far is that girls are a little more thoughtful, and the boys need more stuff to be doing, to be busy with a variety of tasks."

In addition to activity in the public school sector, many new single sex private schools are being opened in a burst of activity. Single sex girls schools in the USA had waned during the 1960s and 1970s, when the equal rights movement interpreted "equal" to mean "together". But the pendulum is swinging. Three new girls' schools are opening in the Bay area of San Francisco alone this year. These schools are not the stereotype prim-and-proper girls' schools of yesteryear, but are seeking an edge for girls especially in maths, science and technology. Kathleen Bennett is opening a new Girls' Middle School which she sees as "a



place in Silicon Valley where we can begin to address the dearth of women in high-tech careers."

Since 1991, applications for entry to girls' schools have risen 23%. In California, they are up 44% over the past five years. Palo Alto parent Barbara Hazlett enrolled her sixth-grade daughter in

Castilleja because she is worried about the effects of adolescence in her daughter's educational and social development. "It's that time of life when they are the most myopic and self-centred and your self-esteem can be undermined. The single-sex things adds the extra notch and gives me confidence that she will have an educational experience that will make her an exceptional, well-rounded woman."

*We are very grateful to Meg Moulton of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools for the information in this article.*





## INTRODUCING NEW MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE



**Stan Klan**

*M.A. (Melb.) B.D. (Qld.) M.Ed. (Melb.)*

### PRINCIPAL, FAIRHOLME COLLEGE

Stan is in his fifth year as Principal of Fairholme College in Toowoomba, Queensland's Presbyterian Ladies College.

He has taught at University and in Independent schools in Queensland, the UK and Melbourne.

A European historian, Stan shared HSC marking in Victoria with such luminaries as Ros Otzen and Jan Douglas. Together with his wife Kerrie, he has been leading historical and cultural tours to Europe annually since 1977. An active member of the Uniting Church, Stan is continuing Ph.D. studies in Church History, researching John Wesley's hermeneutical method.

Of Fairholme College's 750 girls, 275 are boarders, overwhelmingly from rural families. Fairholme hosted the AHISA Boarding Schools' conference in 1997.

After teaching in all boys and co-educational day schools, Stan was principal at a provincial co-educational boarding school after experiencing all types of schools. "I have now arrived in academic heaven, the all girls' school", Stan said. "There is no doubt in my experience that girls achieve best in all girls' schools."



**Suzanne McChesney**

*Diploma of Teaching Primary, Bachelor of Arts, Monash, Bachelor of Educational Studies, Monash*

### PRINCIPAL, SEYMOUR COLLEGE

Suzanne was born in New Zealand and spent the first twenty years of her life there before moving to Australia. Her foray into education began after some years in the commercial world working in a variety of positions including radio and television and as a personnel consultant. Teacher training was initially done at Burwood, Melbourne, Victoria and then a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Educational Studies completed part-time at Monash University.

Initially Suzanne worked in the State system, at primary schools and some secondary colleges before moving to the Independent sector in 1988 where she took up a position at Billanook College in Mooroolbark, Melbourne. From her position there as Head of Junior/Middle School she moved to the Principalship of Seymour College in 1995 and remains very happily there at this time.

Seymour College was her first experience of single sex education and has simply confirmed and affirmed for her everything that she has ever believed about the positive effects of single sex education for girls.

She sees the overriding importance of girls' schools is to provide strategies for young women to go out into what is an uncertain and highly competitive world, strategies which will enable them to be independent, confident young women who are able to take control of their lives. She also sees that there is enormous importance in helping young women to affirm their femininity, to retain the essential, positive qualities of being a woman, but at the same time being able to compete strongly in what is very much a masculine dominated world.

Suzanne has a keen interest in theatre and music, enjoys reading, skiing and bush walking. Skiing holds quite a passion for her, an interest which she shares with her son Ben, who skis with her regularly during the winter season.

Suzanne and her husband, Peter, enjoy the life in Adelaide and are both very involved with the various activities associated with the College.

## THE CHANGING SHAPE OF THE GENDER DEBATE

*The Gender Debate, like everything else, is an evolving area of discourse.*

It is fascinating to trace the changes in understanding and conceptualisation which characterise the debate. As research has moved into different areas, so the discussion has relocated its focus.

Certainly, we have moved through a time when fairly crude arguments were adduced to prove or disprove the worth of particular ways of organising schooling. Charles Fisher, speaking for Victoria's Wesley College when it ceased to be a boys' school and began taking in girls, talked of the "deliberate abnormality" of segregating the sexes for their schooling. "Normal" is a tricky word in that it is a value-assessment, and as values change, so does society's definition of normality. Whatever that definition, "abnormality" is by definition always bad.

The same faulty argument is that certain school organisations are "unnatural". All social arrangements can be viewed as "unnatural", since all are social constructs, ways in which society arranges itself. It would be impossible to establish what was "natural" since we always live within social constructs. Another problematic argument is to claim that a particular form of schooling is anachronistic, has outlived its time. This is often a "straw man" argument, a rhetorical device which throws up stereotypes which no longer have relevance. For some commentators, the level of "debate" has not moved beyond these sorts of arguments. But for others, it has, and thinking has become much more sophisticated.

Professor Pam Gilbert, in her discussion of terminology used in the Education of Girls policy area, traces three phases or periods of focus which have changed our thinking in Australia:

- an initial struggle to achieve equity and access to

*...continued overleaf*



*Continued from previous page...*

orders of power and privilege: “to make it possible for girls to participate in school life as fully as boys do; to achieve equity with boys”;

- a concerted effort to value women’s knowledge and experiences, and to integrate them into the curriculum; “acknowledging that schooling had predominantly been about “malestream” knowledge, masculinist ways of being, knowing and doing, and male patterns of competition, aggression and autonomy”;
- a recognition of the construction of “gender”, and a commitment to challenge and critique gendered social practices and stereotypes: “policies advocating “gender equity” acknowledged the social construction of femininity and masculinity within Australian culture [which] contributed to specific “gendered” forms of educational inequality.”.

They are broadly chronological, the later phases building upon the earlier.

*It was... only after forms of inequality between women and men had been documented in the seventies, that it was possible to critically reassess those forms, and*

*to look towards alternative (more women-centred) ways of operating in the eighties. Similarly, it was only after inequality was documented, and alternative modes of practice were constructed, that it became easier to see how relations between women and men in the nineties needed changing.*



School leaders who have been part of this debate, and whose thinking has developed through attention to the research, much of it through the work done to create the National Policy for the Education of Girls, are the best equipped to make a real difference for their students, female or male. Those who haven’t bothered will only be left with empty rhetoric.

*Ros Otzen*

*Professor Pam Gilbert “Talking About Gender: Terminology used in the Education of Girls Policy Area and Implications for Policy Priorities and Programs” 1996, A Women’s Employment, Education and Training Advisory Group Project, Chapter 3.*

