

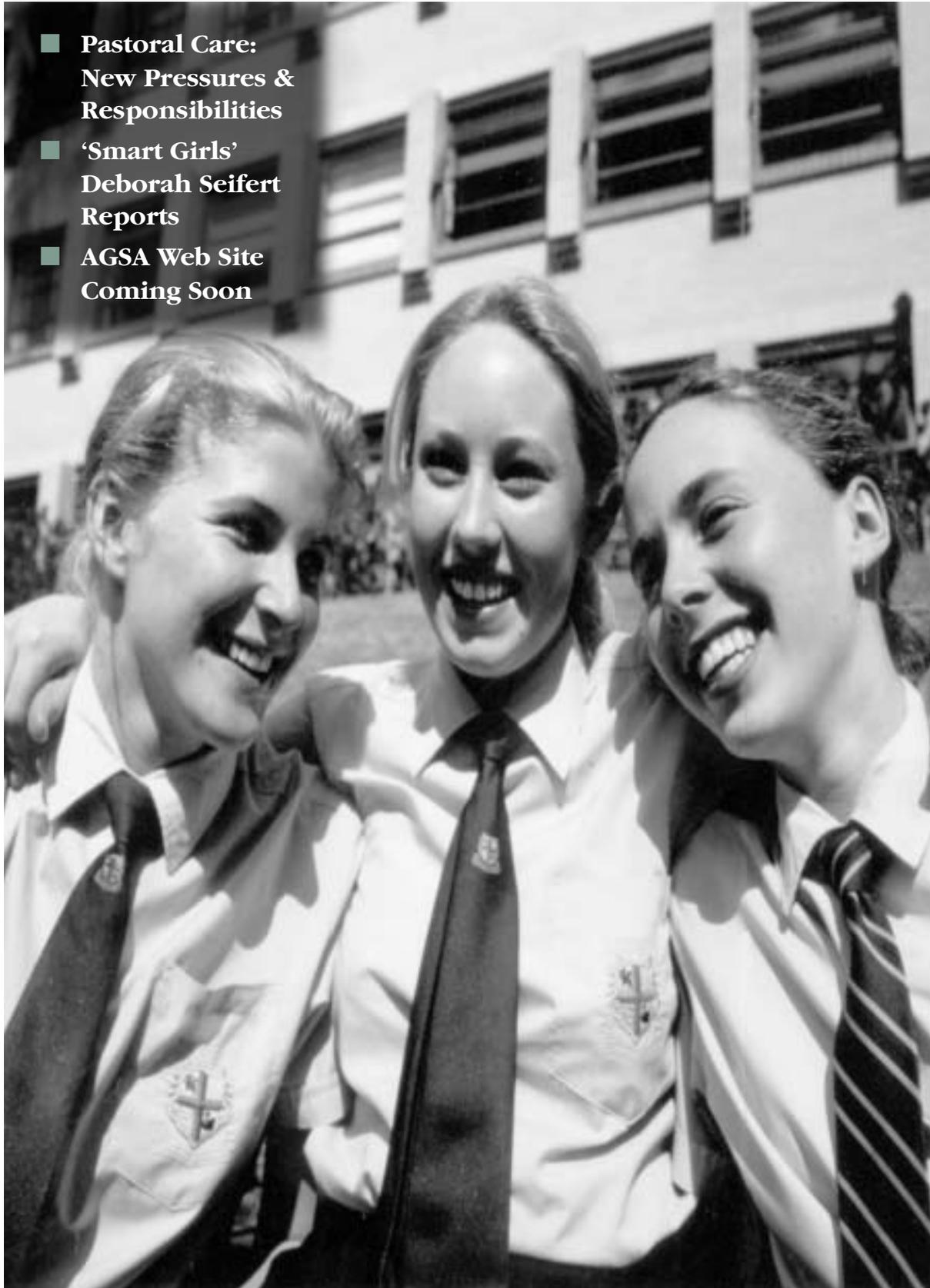


in Alliance

THE ALLIANCE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS, AUSTRALASIA
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- Pastoral Care:
New Pressures &
Responsibilities
- 'Smart Girls'
Deborah Seifert
Reports
- AGSA Web Site
Coming Soon



in Alliance

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(AGSA), a non-profit
organisation linking
professionals and
institutions for
encouraging and
communicating
about the education
of girls.*

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome to the final edition of *In Alliance* for 1997.

We have interesting and challenging articles on pastoral care and "Smart Girls", which emphasise the on-going task we have to look after the whole person, not just provide for one aspect of a student's education. Penrhos College in Perth has the pastoral challenge of looking after over a thousand girls from K-12, including many boarders, and they tell us how they do this. Deborah Seifert from Fintona (Victoria) reports on the 12th World Congress on Gifted Children's Education. I offer some reflections on the latest government report on gender and education, *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*. I found it an absorbing document, and one which certainly shakes any complacency one might be feeling about gender issues in schools.

More and more, we are finding that girls have particular styles and needs, and that boys have particular styles and needs. As fast as we are addressing imbalances in provision for various of

these needs, we find that new dissonances spring up. Raise the consciousness and self esteem of girls and the world for boys is therefore changed. Schools are the critical ground on which these massive changes are being played out, and single-sex schools, in particular, can no longer be characterised as anachronistic and valueless in our modern gender-conscious world. It is becoming increasingly evident that they have renewed and distinctive purposes in developing confident and competent young women and men through their ability to address the very particular needs of their young people in the changing phases of their personal growth. Single sex schools can provide a very focused nurture for their students which truly fits them for a dramatically changing society.

I and your Executive Committee wish you a happy conclusion to your school year and a blessed and renewing Christmas. We look forward to seeing you at AGSA events in 1998.

Ros Otzen, Editor

CHALLENGE THEM!

#2

Assemblies boring? Girls not singing?

Give Assembly to the girls. Let them design and be responsible for running specific Assemblies. Each Form group, each House, the Girls' Representative Council, the Debaters, the Hockey team - any group of girls can do it!

**HAVE YOU A CHALLENGING SUGGESTION?
SEND IT TO *IN ALLIANCE*!**

SMART GIRLS...

12th World Congress on Gifted Children's Education

This Conference was held in Seattle, Washington, from 29th July to 2nd August this year. Although the Conference included many aspects of gifted education, of particular interest were the sessions related to highly able girls.

Many subscribers of *In Alliance* will have read Barbara Kerr's book "Smart Girls". The revised edition, including reflection of the twentieth reunion of her class of gifted girls, is certainly interesting. Barbara Kerr presented at the World Conference and also at the Australian Conference for Gifted Education at the Hilton in Melbourne in August, expanding on some of the points she made in her book. She discussed what she refers to as the Cinderella Complex describing the situation when smart girls often expect a fairy-godmother like situation of opportunities simply being presented to them rather than working at planning their future, needs and pathway that will aim them towards where they want to go in life. Barbara Kerr also referred to the fact that smart girls tend to use their intellectual powers largely to work out how to get on with other people and not offend them. Thus many highly able girls compromise their potential and their dreams due to the concentration of effort of trying to please others and maintain relationships.

Barbara reflected on her observation from research that it is often highly able girls who have had a difficult, or troubled or isolated childhood that rise to be women of eminence. A larger than average proportion of eminent women have had a parent die during their childhood, and many eminent women were seen as gifted but at risk as children.



Barbara gave an overview of the profile of types of gifted girls according to multiple intelligence theory:

- verbally gifted girls tend to be rebellious, wear black, grunge and miss class!
- mathematically gifted girls are more conventional, but the door needs to be opened to them to be encouraged to go on with mathematics.
- spatially gifted girls wear black, purple, are rebellious but often introverted and very lonely. They believe that no-one understands them.
- musically gifted girls don't display a lot of gender differences. They are analytical and often feel despair.

Barbara Kerr's book "Smart Girls", Revised Edition, is certainly one worth reading and passing around the staffroom as well as to highly-able senior students.

Corinne Alfred-Liro from the University of Michigan presented a paper on issues relating to gifted girls in science. Corinne and her colleagues are researching why are women under-represented in technology, physics and applied maths and why gifted girls do not make the choice to go into Science at research level. Motivational and social factors and allocation of effort all seem to affect girls choosing a career in science. Their research has found that decisions are made in complex social reality: expectation of success and utility value play important parts in career choice. Their research has found that gifted boys consistently show



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higher levels of Maths self-concept of ability in middle school but this levels out by upper High School. Also a significant gender difference in the psychological profile of gifted boys and girls was found. Gifted girls have a high level of depression and low self-esteem while gifted boys are the complete reverse, and thus gifted girls are at risk at University if their results start to drop, due to low self-esteem and high propensity to depression.

A presentation was also given on research in retraining attribution of Year 8 and 9 girls towards their results in Science, undertaken by Albert Ziegler, University of Munich. The research consisted of teacher training followed by the first three months of Year 8 and 9 girls being positively reinforced in attribution of reasons for success and failure. The teachers were instructed to directly emphasise ability or talent, emphasise effort, provide the student with consistency information "You did that well again", and provide the student with consensus information and thus really emphasise the success. If the student was not successful, the teacher was instructed to point out lack of effort and provide consensus information "Most students really have trouble with this". The teacher was also asked to give written positive attributional feedback, for example: "You once again solved this problem absolutely correctly - you seem well suited to this topic". The teacher was asked to give constructive

feedback to an incorrect answer, such as: "Like some others you did not choose the correct formula (consensus information). Look at the examples in the textbook/notes again and you will see how to do this".

By the end of Year 8 and 9 there was a clear advantage for the 'treatment' group in attribution, grades and intention to proceed with Science. The treatment group showed very much less expectation of failure, and after one year there was a decrease in the feeling of helplessness in Science.

The research also found that female teachers can also model positive personal attributions verbally. For example, they were asked to say things like: "In high school I sometimes got poor marks and I noticed this happened to some other people, but when I put in more effort my marks improved", or: "I was used to being good at Science and at University started finding it difficult but I got through and I think that everyone who sets their mind to it can do a Science degree".

Albert Ziegler's research is significant in that it showed that girls' attributions to success and failure in Science can be changed. This is particularly relevant as girls tend to internalise failure and externalise success in science (and mathematics and technology). This research showed that positive retraining can improve girls' attributions to their result in Science.

Deborah Seifert, Principal, Fintona Girls' School

AGSA WEB SITE COMING SOON...

Karen Choong and Rachelle Rose, Year 10 students from Kilvington Baptist Girls' Grammar, are currently involved in the design and production of the Alliance of Girls' Schools (Australasia) Web site. They have been working diligently on the project and hope to complete it by the end of the semester.

The girls have decided that the project will constitute their major assignment as part of the Superhighway and Multimedia elective units. They have reprocessed the Membership Directory, designed a generic screen layout using the Alliance of Girls' Schools colour scheme and have been transferring relevant information onto the Web pages.

Their project is an excellent example of students working on a "real life" problem with tangible outcomes. Their production will have lasting influence and can be modified and updated on a regular

basis. They are gaining technical experience in the area of digital imaging and expertise in HTML authoring. They are learning how to manage a large-scale project and work in a collaborative manner.

In the near future, we envisage the Web site will provide up-to-date information, links to membership schools and links to relevant on-line resources. If you have any suggestions about the design and implementation of the Web site, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Jenk Akyalcin at Kilvington Baptist Girls' Grammar School.



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PASTORAL CARE

New Pressures and Responsibilities

Discipline, stability and a caring, protective environment are becoming critical issues for parents in their selection process of a single-sex education for their daughters. Academic rigour and co-curricular opportunities, while expected benefits of the independent system, appear to be assuming almost secondary importance for some families.

Parents, in conversation amongst themselves and at interviews with principals, are vocal in expressing strong preferences for a school environment where ethics and sound values underpin all school activities - and are clearly and regularly articulated to students. The reality is that for a growing number of parents, their child's school is now expected to provide much of the character-building and guidance once emanating chiefly from the home.

The responsibilities can be onerous for teachers and other staff entrusted with the day-to-day care of girls who are often victims of the social and spiritual climate of the 90s.

Marital breakdown, extended working hours, employment insecurity, materialism and self-centred pleasure seeking by both young and old are without doubt providing new challenges for schools. A meticulously structured and pro-active school pastoral care system has, as a result, become paramount.

At Penrhos College in Perth, a K-12 Uniting Church girls' day and boarding school of 1,150 students, pastoral care provides an organised framework of guidance, supervision and counselling to assist students in their personal development and academic studies.

With students welcomed from many different cultures, religions and backgrounds, the aim is to create an environment where the welfare of each girl is the common objective.

Penrhos Principal Graham Rixon acknowledges that many parents seem bewildered by the prevailing social conditions. He says he is observing an increasing dependence on - and occasionally outright demand for - school intervention, leadership and support in matters formerly dealt with at home.

"Penrhos is a caring school and for many families this is obviously a point of stability which is highly valued. With upheaval in society, the caring pastoral care aspect is very important," he says.

"It may be that we have a keener awareness of our responsibility to the younger generation, or perhaps the social and spiritual climate of the times in which we live is having an adverse influence on our homes and school. But whatever the reason, our work in this area has increased."

Mr Rixon believes the fundamental role of the school is to nurture and care for students and ultimately produce young women with a highly

developed sense of social justice based on sound Christian values and principles.

PENRHOS FOCUS

Pastoral care at Penrhos focuses on the physical, emotional, moral, academic and spiritual well-being of students. The program also extends to the welfare of staff and pastoral support for families. In its broadest sense, pastoral care embraces every member of the school community, including the maintenance of close bonds with former students.

Concern for the individual begins prior to entry, when in the months leading up to admission girls take part in a staged orientation program introducing them to future classmates and teachers and to the structure



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and organisation of the college. This program eases the transition for both students and their parents into what can be perceived as a large and somewhat overwhelming institution. An even more comprehensive program exists for boarders, to help them cope with the dual challenge of moving into a residential school environment.

Pastoral care continues throughout a girl's time at school by means of a supervisory network involving the principal, the heads of junior, middle and senior schools, year level coordinators, form teachers, counsellors, the chaplain, the school nurse, the head of boarding, the careers adviser and teachers. This team works in partnership with parents to ensure that individual needs and problems are carefully monitored.

Christian worship plays an important part in the program, with regular chapel services, assemblies and college Sundays.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

A committee of nine key staff oversee the management of the Kindergarten to Year 12 pastoral care program. The committee meets three times a term to formulate prevention programs and policies on such issues as bullying, discipline, conflict resolution, contagious diseases and substance abuse.

Its terms of reference cover a multitude of concerns such as health, safety and security, crisis management,



self-esteem, relationships, peer support programs and the identification of students at risk. The committee is also charged with the task of developing and reviewing crisis management and emergency evacuation plans and the pastoral care program for teaching and non-teaching staff. Recommendations are also made on student and staff professional development matters.

EDUCATING PARENTS

Evening and weekend seminars and presentations for parents are arranged periodically on topics such as drug awareness and understanding teenagers. Several well-attended parent effectiveness courses have been conducted by Junior School Head, Mary Deschamp, a qualified PET trainer, and a five-week course, *Happy Medium*, has been run for the parents of four to eight-year-olds. A Year 5 mother and daughter workshop on menstruation was held recently and there are plans for a course on pre-adolescence.

In a large community of more than 1,000 girls and their families, occasions invariably arise where the one-to-one support of the school is required. Counsellors, the chaplain and other staff are always available to provide professional, confidential support for families coping with illness, death, marriage breakdown, financial difficulties or student behavioural problems. In fact, any situation where the well-being of a student is affected.

*Vanessa Coates
Director of Development, Penrhos College*



REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION...

...Girls and Boys.

The waters of understanding about the effect of gender on education are still muddy.

I am surrounded by research reports, reports on research, and comment on reports on research about the education of boys, of girls, and of boys and girls together. Some of the comments bear little resemblance to the research reports they claim to be discussing. It seems that reading a report on gender and education is a bit like reading the Bible: anyone can find the definitive verse to support her/his preconceptions.

The media assumes, too, that single sex schools and co-educational schools are at war, a war which can only be won by the total obliteration of the other. In a drummed-up story in Melbourne's *Age* on 11 October, David Loader, now Principal of Wesley College after 18 years at MLC, was pitted against Rosa Storelli, MLC's new Head, with the tired question, "Which is better - co-ed or single-sex?" "Oddly," writes the reporter, both Mr Loader and Ms Storelli feel passionately that gender doesn't matter - it's the school quality that counts." "Oddly"? What is odd about two educationalists defining a quality school, not in terms of gender? (Actually, they were not really saying gender "doesn't matter"; rather, that in a quality school, gender should not be a disadvantage to a student.)

All the same, assuming we in AGSA are all in quality schools, why the insistence by the media that one type of school must be the "best"? Is there no room for variety? For choice? For accepting that in education as in all things, some schools are better suited to some students than others?

We are warned by Jones, that

The very act of writing or talking



about 'girls' can have the unintended effect of making invisible crucial differences among girls. (1993)

One of the glories of our girls' schools is that they **do** only have girls as pupils, and that to maintain our quality as excellent schools, we must and do pay attention to the different needs of the individual girls within our schools.

Jones is quoted in a large government report, ***Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*** prepared by the Gender Equity Taskforce for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, 1996. It is a modern document, in that it does not look at girls as "the problem", as such studies have tended to do in the past, but tries to see how gender is of significance in the educational experiences of both girls and boys. It picks up modern anxieties about violence and masculinity. It examines how boys have reacted to the bringing forward of girls through special provisions and encouragement given to them over the last decade. These programs, which saw the girls as having the problem, provided remedies that usually required changes in girls, but not in boys. So there was a "Girls can do Maths" program, but no corresponding "Boys can cook and write poetry" program. And why should they? Cooking doesn't get you into Law/Medicine at University. Girls have done better in maths, have gained in confidence and assertiveness, and indeed, girls from girls' schools now dominate the Year 12 results and university entry in Australia and Great Britain. Girls are increasingly taking leadership roles in all types of schools.

Gender Equity examines the responses of boys to the rise of girl-power. The scene is not happy. If anything, many boys have become



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more, not less “macho”, as girls are perceived to be invading what was previously their territory.

In the case of boys, the key aspects of dominant masculinity are clearly in evidence in any classroom in which there are boys. It is based on being strong and rough, on learning to take it, on being first or the best, on disassociating from girls or boys whose identity does not ‘pass the test’ of macho maleness, on not showing affection, and on defying authority, especially female authority. All these things serve to prove acceptable masculinity. Boys create and preserve this masculinity through fear of whatever might be constructed as female, since whatever masculinity is constructed is better than femininity. This creates problems for both boys and girls. (p.28)

It would seem, then, that the attempt to make things better for girls, without anticipating the consequences in thus changing the world boys too live in, may be aggravating the “painful process of developing and proving masculinity, at the expense of femininity” (p.28) in our schools. How to make the process of growing up easier for our boys, without our girls suffering or being set back?

The Report looks at the tendency of many boys to prove masculinity by placing it as an extreme opposite and superior of femininity. This position limits girls in two ways: it places them always as second best and completely “other”, and the aggressiveness of such boys “limits the ways girls can behave and understand themselves.”

Efforts to challenge the effects of narrow definitions of gender in schools have often ignored the reality that the school itself is a reinforcing ground for such limited definitions. “They ignore the ways boys and girls actively develop their own concept of what it means to be masculine or feminine...” (p.12), and, one might add, the way teachers are also involved in the defining process. Girls comment:

Girls are supposed to be the smart ones whose job it is to do the work. ...Teachers think like this too...

There is always more praise for the boys’ achievements in sport than there is for the girls’ achievements in school work. Teachers don’t see girls’ sport as important as boys’ sport either; so if girls won the netball final, that would not receive as much attention in the school, as if the boys won the football grand final.

...the teachers say they have our interests at heart, but their actions don’t demonstrate this!

...you often feel embarrassed about talking in front of boys [about gender issues]

...they laugh and tease you. When you are talking about something for the first time, it would be better if girls could work with a woman and boys could work with a man, because ...it would give you a chance to get your feelings sorted out. After...you could talk about the things you had just learnt with the boys...in partners with a boy you picked yourself. (pp.93-4)



The Report concludes,

By working with both girls and boys, separately and together, we can assist them to identify spaces and possibilities in their daily lives where gender relations can be disrupted and transformed. (p.29)

It is hard to see why single sex schools cannot take this task up; why the attempt to enact it has to be in a co-educational school setting, as many say. It doesn’t, of course.

Single sex schools are not convents or monasteries. The girls’ schools I know have frequent and regular interaction with boys’ schools at many levels. (Conversely, many co-ed schools separate their boys and girls at certain times and for certain activities.) What schools of all sorts must do at all levels, says the Report, is to acknowledge, examine and understand how ideas about gender are socially constructed, and “develop skills, behaviours, attitudes and understandings that will enable [students] to construct equal and respectful relationships.” (p.12) This is just as possible in a single sex school as in a co-ed school; indeed, it may be a less threatening and thus a more acceptable and fruitful process, since the pain and hurt which often accompanies relations between girls and boys in close proximity to each other, may be less, where each sex has “time out” from the other.

Ros Otzen, Principal, Korowa AGS, Victoria

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