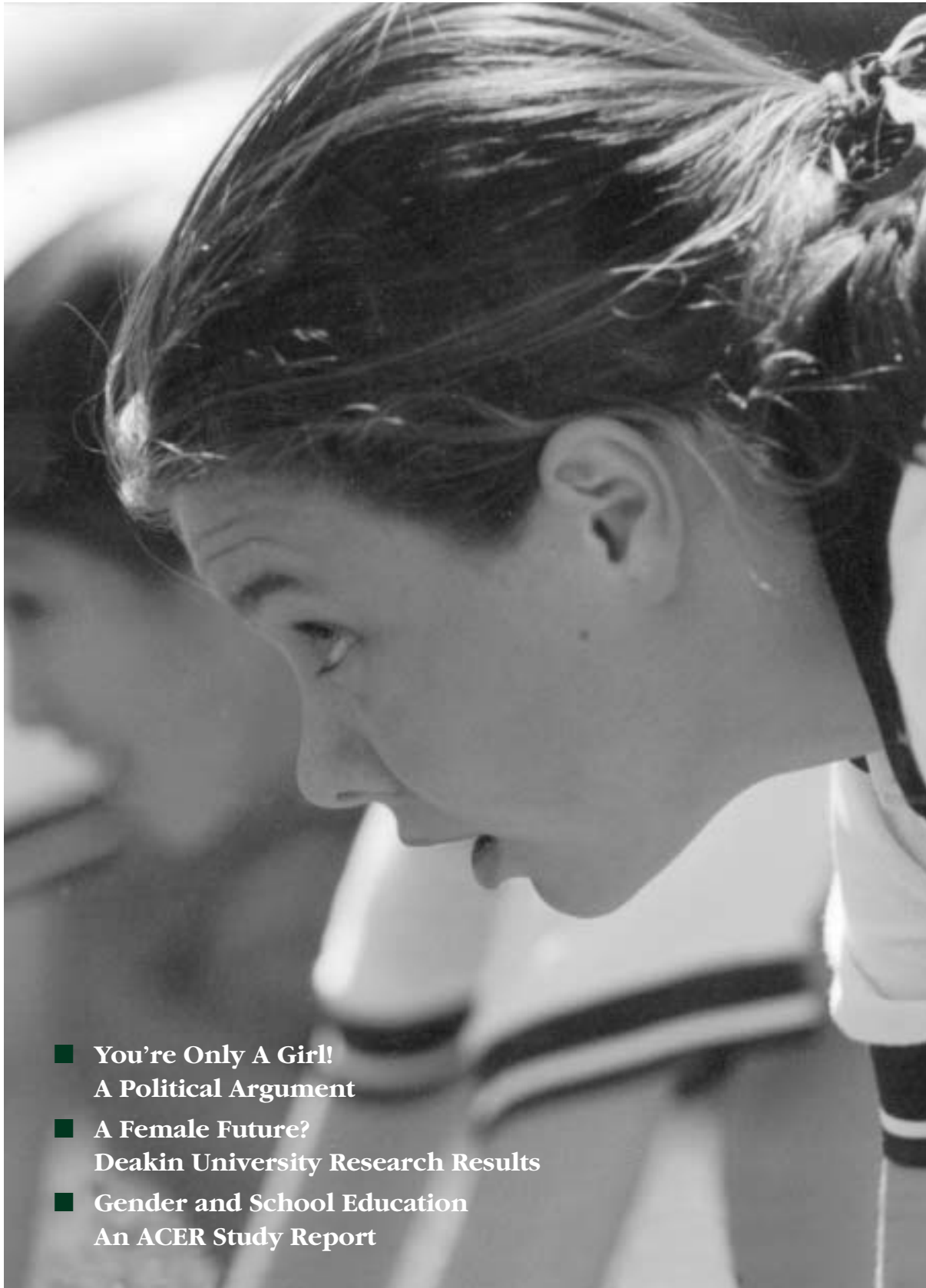




in Alliance

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- **You're Only A Girl!
A Political Argument**
- **A Female Future?
Deakin University Research Results**
- **Gender and School Education
An ACER Study Report**

in Alliance

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organisation linking
professionals and
institutions for
encouraging and
communicating
about the education
of girls.*

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Educating Girls In Girls' Schools

This year is proving an extremely active one for our girls' schools. One activity generating interest, as reflected in the current importance of research in the area, is the investigation into the different ways in which girls and boys learn, particularly in foundation studies and the disciplines of literacy and numeracy. Research is also being undertaken into how both genders deal with transition periods such as that between primary and secondary schooling.

To increase our understanding of how best to educate young people we must take into account the acknowledged differences between the specific learning requirements of boys and girls, given that their levels of maturity at similar ages do not progress equally. This is particularly important in the context of rapid changes in the current educational climate. The mass of knowledge is accumulating at ever-faster rates, and knowledge is changing in terms of its selection for and application to schooling.

We have been fortunate that society has sustained an awareness of the particular needs of girls and women over the last ten to fifteen years. This emphasis has demanded an increased understanding of the important role of learning styles in girls' schools and has prompted further developments in the management of the social and educational needs of young women in Western democracies.

The Economist of 29 March 1997 featured an editorial headed 'Education and The Wealth of Nations' which opined, "The politics of education are in a confused and peculiar state. All over the world it is taken for granted that educational achievement and economic issues are closely linked." This statement is most relevant here in Australia, where we hear constantly from both state and federal governments of the need to ensure that what is being taught in schools, particularly in the post-compulsory years, reflects the economic needs of our nation.

Some ideas put forward by the article are worthy of further consideration:

- the new intensity of global economic rivalry among nations carries an associated international competition between schools and their methods, systems and results

- education is now included as a yardstick in assessing a country's performance against its world competitors
- education is now reflecting the move away from manufacturing towards a service and information job mix, encompassing the notion of information technology as today's primary knowledge-based industry
- education has been redefined to require all students leaving the compulsory years of schooling to be literate, numerate, adaptable and trainable.

The editorial then attempts to look further into this definition as best practice: "When teachers and educational policy makers start to seek out best practice by looking around the world, what will they find? The first thing is a surprisingly large variation in performance. The next is that this variation has little to do with things you might suppose would explain it; class size, hours of study per subject and spending per pupil".

Research is quoted; the most interesting suggestion revealed by research is that those who spend most generously on education do not necessarily achieve the highest results. Overall, evidence suggests that teaching methods are the key. For instance, in the teaching of mathematics, those countries which spend time on basic and mental arithmetic in whole class settings (rather than money on the latest calculators) have as good a chance of achieving a successful output. These studies, while not conclusive, do give us some clues as to the learning methods and styles applicable to today's students.

We have a unique opportunity within our girls' schools to develop teaching methodologies in response to society's constantly evolving demands on education. Many of us are already engaged in quite advanced work. Part of our function as an alliance of girls' schools is to consider and put into practice strategies which expand these efforts, in order to ensure that the young women in our care take their place in society well equipped for its many challenges.

Sylvia Walton, Acting Editor

REPORTS FROM GIRLS' SCHOOLS AROUND AUSTRALIA

South Australia

Within South Australia there are girls' schools in all three sectors – Catholic, Independent and the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS). While the three sectors co-operate quite closely on a number of shared issues, there is little interaction between the girls' schools apart from special events such as the centenary of women's suffrage in 1994. Therefore it seems more appropriate to address the issues and developments in individual schools rather than to attempt a statewide summary. In this edition we focus on an Alliance member, St Mary's College, and its technology program.

St Mary's College is a Reception to Year 12 Catholic girls' school in the inner city, with an enrolment of 750 students. It is the oldest school for girls in South Australia, being founded by the Dominican Sisters in 1869. As the philosophy statement of the College asserts, "The College provides an environment which fosters the growth of the whole person and which prepares her to take her place as a vital participant in a changing world". It is with this in mind that we look for a challenging curriculum to support the needs of girls as they enter the 21st century.

Over the past three years a successful technology course has been developed for Reception to Year 7 students, with an

emphasis on the programs Intellecta and Robotic. Students as young as Year 1 design their own models with Legotechnic, then motorise and operate them using Intellecta.

Intellecta is a computer interface program in the Windows environment. This easy software system is based around an icon control interface where the user selects and links icons to collect data or to control a system. The Intellecta system also uses an external interface panel to connect sensors, lights and motors. Use of Intellecta is now continuing into the middle school years, where students are able to program multiple commands on the computer to instruct their models.

With the intended introduction of Electronics at Year 10 and Year 11, and a unit of Engineering Mathematics at Year 10, the girls will be able to follow a pathway to career opportunities in this expanding industry.

The annual Year 9 Engineering Day for 1997 will have a strong emphasis on Electronics and Electronic Engineering and invited engineers on that day will be experienced in these disciplines.

*Carolyn Grantskalns
Wilderness School, SA*



*St Mary's
College students
Stephanie Calipari
and Celeste Hill at
work on their Year
4/5 technology
projects.*

WHY CREATE A GIRLS' SCHOOL?

My school is Melbourne Girls' College, "where girls lead and achieve". It is a wonderful, exhausting, frustrating, demanding and energetic environment, where we are constantly doing things for the first time, because we are only three years old. This secondary girls college has a brief but powerful mission statement. Quite simply, Melbourne Girls' College is:

- a science and technology college
- a provider of leadership programs
- a statewide and overseas provider.

Like any girls' school we have a few special features in which we take great pride. Our site on the banks of the Yarra is stunning. Having access to a waterway makes rowing a 'must' and the river is treated as a valuable curriculum resource. We are the only girls' college in Victoria to be part of the Air Training Corps and to have Air Cadets.

The women whose names – Chisholm, Lyons, Maris and Melba – have been chosen to identify our Houses influence our lives on a daily basis. Significantly, it was a male parent on our first school council who advocated that we should wear the colours of the women's movement on our blazers, and we are the only girls' school in Australia to do so.

We started with less than 300 girls, but now have a school population of 900, soon expected to grow to 1200.

Who are our clients? Who are the girls who make every day worthwhile?

They are an amazing group of gutsy, assertive, demanding girls, culturally representing most corners of the globe and originating from 86 Melbourne suburbs as well as overseas.

So what do girls' schools really mean?

Probably all of us reading this article are already convinced of the value and significance of educating girls in a single sex environment in the 1990s. I wonder how much we take for granted sometimes? I went to a girls' school. My daughter went to a girls' school. I am the principal of a girls' school. What are the differences in a girls-only secondary school compared to girls in a co-educational environment? Let me share some experiences...

On my second day at Melbourne Girls' College the three members of the Fish Pond Committee asked for my permission to clean out the pond on the next Friday afternoon. As a new principal I was cautious in my approach, and expressed some doubt as to how this task could be achieved in longer style summer dresses. I was told it was alright because the girls simply tucked their dresses into their boxer shorts! The girls noticed my slightly puzzled expression, and one said, "Oh, Mrs Parkes, it's fine to tuck your dress into your shorts here – you've come from a co-educational school." True, I had come from a co-educational school and couldn't ever imagine such an event happening there!

One day at lunchtime I clutched a teacher by the arm in disbelief when I realised that the girls were actually playing

sport. At my previous school I had had to fight for yard space for the girls. The teacher obviously doubted my sanity; to her it was perfectly normal to see girls playing sport in their breaks.

My first swimming sports were a revelation. I could not believe the high participation rate, or that girls were prepared to swim in bathers without tee shirts covering them from neck to knee. It was great to see girls experiencing the joy of swimming without being concerned about body image.

As I move around the school I marvel at girls confidently using computers in the classrooms morning, noon and night. Not for them being pushed out of the way; not for them having to sit back while boys play endless games. Not for them being told, "No girls allowed!"

I looked last year at Year 11 with its two Physics classes, two Chemistry classes, two Biology classes and two Psychology classes. I asked myself what co-educational school has the equivalent number of girls studying Physics at this level? None of which I am aware!

Some teachers wrongly imagine that teaching in a girls' secondary school means the students are nice and quiet, well behaved, and will put up with a lot of blackboard work. What a terribly outdated concept! Nothing gives me more pleasure than to roam the corridors of my school and see interactive classrooms, girls busy and asking questions, girls engaging in their work, girls involved in group co-operative learning and girls hopefully getting a little dirt under their fingernails.

As principals we all have wishes and plans for the girls in our care. Most of us would be able to define these and I imagine there would be similarities. For my girls at Melbourne Girls' College, the future is bright and full of opportunities. The leadership programs in which they participate prepare them well to take an active role in determining their choices and creating their own future. These girls of the nineties are positive, assertive, politically aware, gutsy and determined. They will be well read, very comfortable in controlling technology, well prepared to lead and have the confidence to risk a variety of career paths. They will be vocal and will make sure they are heard. For them there will be no limits to their accomplishments in life other than those which are self-imposed.

These are just a few of the reasons why the continuing existence of girls' schools is so important.

Jan Parkes, Melbourne Girls' College



YOU'RE ONLY A GIRL!

During late March, most Melbourne newspapers reported some unfortunate comments made in the Victorian State Parliament. The Premier and the Leader of the Opposition had exchanged comments accusing each other of exhibiting girlish characteristics. The Premier referred to members of the opposition as 'two girls from Melbourne Grammar School' and the Leader of the Opposition called the Premier as 'a skirt-wearing person from Scotch'.

These remarks were no doubt made in the heat of the moment and were not the product of deep thought or analysis. Nonetheless, they highlight some of society's enduring misconceptions about girls and femininity.

Young women from a variety of schools, asked to respond to this unfortunate parliamentary episode, generally condemned both the Premier and the Opposition Leader. As students from Methodist Ladies' College in Melbourne pointed out, if equality was really given the prominence it deserves, then politicians would choose to disparage one another using remarks other than those which belittle girls and women.

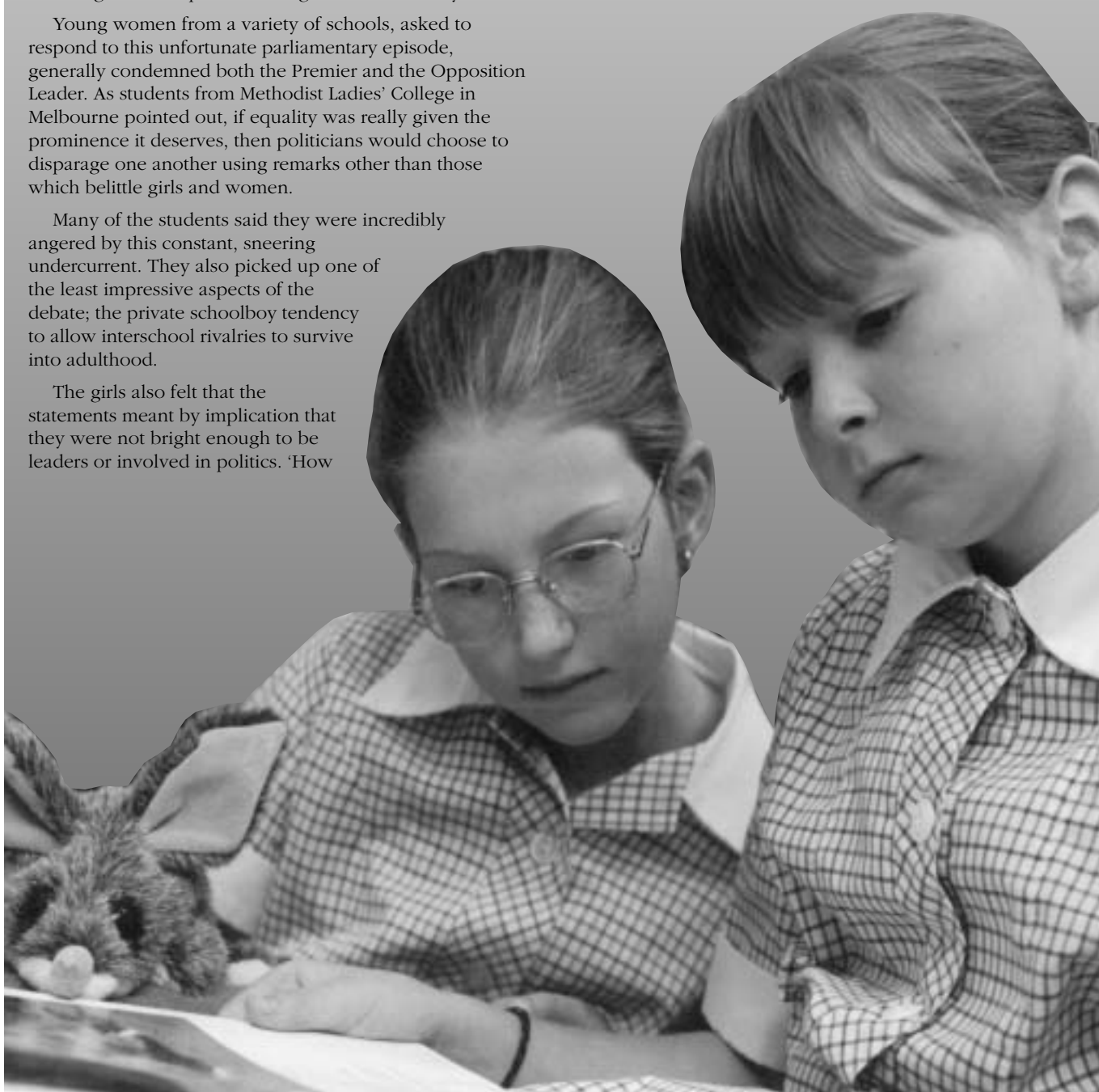
Many of the students said they were incredibly angered by this constant, sneering undercurrent. They also picked up one of the least impressive aspects of the debate; the private schoolboy tendency to allow interschool rivalries to survive into adulthood.

The girls also felt that the statements meant by implication that they were not bright enough to be leaders or involved in politics. 'How

are women supposed to be comfortable in Parliament if senior politicians are capable of talking like that?'

Such an apparently trivial exchange may not deserve a lot of attention, but it is important as an indicator of the subconscious attitudes which still pervade large areas of our society. Regardless of who makes such statements, they are deplorable; they need to be identified as such and responded to. The attitudes they portray do nothing for the all-important self-concept of girls and women.

*Sylvia Walton
Tintern AGGS, Melbourne*



A FEMALE FUTURE?

Deakin University Research Results

Jane Kenway from the Deakin University Centre for Education and Change in Geelong, Victoria, is doing research into the future and the role of women. She asks, 'Is the future of education female?' The question is put in relation to interest in learning about the outcome of research into gender reform in schools. The following four assertions, based on the data collected, are worthy of more research and reflection:

ASSERTION 1

In general, the achievements of rising interest in female students in schools are overstated. While consciousness has been heightened in most schools, there is still a prevalence for action on gender issues to be a long way behind factual knowledge.

ASSERTION 2

Many girls feel that gender reform policies have affirmed them and offered them a new and stronger sense of themselves. As a result, some are finding boys of the same age immature and annoying and sometimes unpleasant. They want boys to change and they want teachers to help them with this change.

ASSERTION 3

Non-dominant boys admit in private that many of their problems are caused by dominant boys and by the dominant, demanding masculine codes that exist. This is an area of grave concern and needs far more research and understanding.

ASSERTION 4

Most problems that dominant and non-dominant boys have at school (eg low literacy levels; a tendency to violence; low achievement) can be attributed at least partly to the dominant masculine codes of behaviour in society. Generally, boys react negatively to gender reform programs, particularly when they see that such programs set out to favour girls. They cannot understand the argument that the status quo favours boys. They do not see programs for girls as necessary. Too often girls are made to feel guilty as a result of boys making these claims.

ASSERTION 5

When gender reform programs are addressed to girls and boys or to boys alone, many (not all) boys still reject them. Boys often, but not always, turn these discussions into opportunities for joking and bravado and turn these jokes



against girls. The most common response of boys to any form of gender program is to become defensive and to reassert their masculinity through negative behaviour and performance.

ASSERTION 6

Several things about gender reform in schools are now clear:

- What works for girls does not necessarily work for boys.
- What works for some boys doesn't work for all groups of boys.
- What works in single sex communities does not translate into co-educational areas.
- What works on the side-stream of the school does not translate into the main stream of the school.

The clearest fact which emerges, however, is that the largest group within a school (teachers, girls and non-dominant boys) have a strong vested interest in changing the prevailing culture away from the current behavioural norms of most boys.

The question that is occupying today's research is, 'On the basis of what we know about gender reform and in the interest of girls, teachers and boys themselves, how can we best help boys to change?' Jan Kenway and her team are continuing their investigation. A summary of results to hand was published in *Change Education*, a journal for teachers and administrators, Vol 3 No 2 June 1996 (obtainable through Deakin University).

GENDER AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

An ACER Study Report

Extracts from the executive summary of this report introduce some interesting issues for our schools:

Disruptions of the learning process – through ‘mucking around’, through ridiculing answers given by others in class, through deriding those who want to work – were each reported by most students as happening in their school. ‘Mucking around’ was reported as something boys did often by around 60 percent of students. Boys were reported two to three times as often as girls as the perpetrators of all three of these disruptive behaviours.

Attempting to dominate classroom resources, whether teacher attention or valued equipment, is a behaviour which earlier reports associated with boys and which was addressed in policies during the 1980s. Boys are still reported by students as indulging in this behaviour more often than girls, but, in this study, girls are quite frequently reported by both sexes to exhibit this behaviour. For example, 32 percent of primary school students reported that boys frequently attempted to corner a classroom computer, but 21 percent of them reported that girls frequently did the same.

THE EXPERIENCE OF GENDER AT SCHOOL

Sex-based Harassment

- 50 percent of Year 6 students and 30 percent of Year 10 students reported that students were hassled at their school for ‘talking to or caring about kids of the opposite sex’.
- Sex-based harassment (called sexual harassment in some states) – behaviour which embarrasses, hurts or frightens others in ways related to their sex – happens frequently in schools.
- Sex-based name-calling (verbal sex-based harassment) was reported as a known part of school life by 90 per cent of students and as happening often by over 30 percent of primary and over 40 percent of secondary students. Both sexes are equally likely to be victims. Labelling boys as gay is a standard aspect of this verbal harassment at secondary level. Labelling girls as lesbian is widespread but less commonplace.
- Physical sex-based harassment (embarrassing touching, pinching or interference with clothes) is reported as happening in their school by 50 percent of students at both levels of schooling with around 10 percent saying it happened often.
- Boys are the usual perpetrators of sex-based harassment of their own and of the other sex, although some girls also harass both sexes.
- Verbal ostracising behaviour by cliques of one’s own sex was a standard part of school life (reported by 80 percent of Year 6 and 90 percent of Year 10 students) for both sexes.
- Physical bullying by one’s own sex was reported as a known part of school life for boys by 80 percent of Year 6 and over 90 percent of Year 10 boys, with 40 percent of Year 10 boys

reporting that it happened often at their school. Figures were somewhat lower for girls.

- More work on the whole pattern of sex-based harassment is urgently needed. It seems to be part of a process of establishing dominance relationships among males as well as of putting girls, as a group, ‘in their place’ in a gender system.

Equal access by girls to school resources

Equal access to school resources such as team coaching and lunchtime computer use is another area of earlier research and policy effort. This effort has been successful in most schools, though not all. Access to play equipment and space at lunchtime is the major access area which is still an issue, with over 40 percent of primary and over 30 percent of secondary girls reporting that such access was unequal.

Gender and subject choice

In co-educational schools, 60 percent of secondary boys reported that boys at their school would not take subjects that were traditionally taken by girls, and 45 percent of secondary girls reported that girls would not take subjects that were traditionally seen as boys’ territory. In other words, significantly more boys than girls would not cross gender boundaries. Consistent with this co-educational pattern, in single-sex schools nearly 80 per cent of boys, compared with 50 per cent of girls, reported that they were not offered subjects traditional to the other sex.

Gender and extra-curricular activities

At secondary level, a larger proportion of girls than boys have taken part in non-competitive fitness activities, in arts performances and displays, and, markedly, in social service and caring activities through their school. A larger proportion of boys than girls take part in competitive sport. Out of school, a similar gender pattern is reflected in leisure activities. Television watching is by far the most popular recreational activity for both sexes (although boys and girls prefer different types of programs). Sport is the next most popular activity for boys and secondary girls, while reading holds this position for primary girls. More girls at both levels put time into reading, the arts, and music than boys. They also appear to put more time into household chores, and at Year 10 into paid work. The data gives the impression that many boys confine their out-of-school activities to TV, sport and, for about half, playing with a home computer.

Developing high quality interpersonal relations

Six of the eight government systems, seven of the eighteen Catholic systems, and four independent school authorities have behaviour management policies. Ten of these address sex-based harassment specifically.

Two-thirds of principals, teachers and female student respondents agreed that there were clear policies and procedures for dealing with sex-based harassment in their schools. However,

...continued overleaf



40 percent of Year 6 and 45 percent of Year 10 students of both sexes reported that 'nothing happens' when students complain about sex-based harassment.

Over 70 percent of primary and 80 percent of secondary students have been taught to recognise and name sex-based harassment. 75 percent have been taught that it is fine not to conform to stereotypes: specifically that 'there were many ways to be an OK girl or OK boy, not just one right way'. Over 60 percent had been taught some skills in handling the pressure to conform to stereotypes.

Only 40 percent of students reported getting time in class to develop mutual (and self) understanding through discussing what it is like to be a boy or a girl.

Working towards a construction of gender which lays the foundation for a more just adult society

Schools have followed through in response to community concerns about career education by ensuring that nearly all students of both sexes think about paid work and careers in adult life. They have paid less attention to the need for both sexes to think about 'their fair share of unpaid work at home or in the community'. Only 60 percent of students reported that they had been taught anything in this area. More concretely, only

50 percent of secondary girls and 35 percent of secondary boys have been taught anything about parenting. Only one in three teachers had been involved in 'teaching which helps students become members of a society in which gender roles have changed'.

Only a third of school systems have a gender-inclusive language policy and only a quarter of schools have adopted such a policy. However, teachers have gone beyond their systems and administrations: two-thirds of secondary students reported having been taught to use 'non-sexist' language.

Schools which focus only on a future in paid work do not face the realities of a society which requires much unpaid, skilled work from adults in parenting, consuming, tax-paying, community tasks and citizenship, and which offers a less continuous employment future to many of both sexes. In particular, and in relation to the central concerns of this study, such schools present a simplistic, career-orientated future for girls which is unrealistic and unhelpful, especially in the light of the schools' own lack of attention to helping boys to consider their share of unpaid work.

These are only a few features of this excellent survey. Hopefully they will stimulate further interest in obtaining and working through the report in its entirety.

LESSONS FROM A STRUGGLING SCHOOL

The Times Education Supplement 'School Management Update' of 14 February 1997 included an excellent article entitled 'From Sink School to Success Story'. The substance of the article looked at a case study in which a school was in a deplorable state both physically and in terms of its morale. The principal was given two years: if the school was not turned around it was to be closed.

That principal is an Englishman named Jim Bleakley. His philosophy and vision are simple: children must come first, and in putting children first, a philosophy of trust must underpin every aspect of the school's ethos. Jim's interest has been in combining that philosophy with the work of people in the business world such as Tom Peters, an advocate of empowering personnel, setting targets and establishing a climate of trust.

In order to develop the school, Jim Bleakley has set extremely high expectations for staff and students. While some of these are specific to each group, a number of them are shared. For him this is really adding value to peoples' lives and work. One of the main spinoff benefits has been a growing sense of self-esteem amongst pupils and high morale amongst staff, although neither of these was necessarily the first priority goal of the exercise.

Jim says, "If you trust the young people and don't just pretend to trust them, then you will really begin to make strides. If you set in place structures that are firm but fair and then move with them through those structures you will gain their respect and they in turn will begin to learn really well". He has also made a point of treating his staff well. He set up proper staff facilities and even moved his own desk to the staffroom in an effort to convince the staff that he was prepared to work with them to fulfil the same expectations as those he set for other employees.

His self-discipline and leadership are apparent to all. Whenever a crisis occurs he insists on tackling it then and there in a systemic and compassionate manner, even if harsh reality has to come into play and sanctions need to be imposed. He tries always to motivate people and to allow them to manage themselves within his framework.

To boost the academic standing of the school, he concentrated on the upper levels and all exam grades. Students who had difficulties were given personal mentors, and the staff supervised student and mentor each day. Each student's photograph was on the wall in some part of the school to reinforce that each was known and valued as an individual.

Jim believes that a strong work ethic in the classroom and the staffroom is vital. Everyone should be in no doubt about what is to be done and how they are going to achieve it. Personal student action plans setting out achievements and goals help his pupils to see the worth in what they were doing.

The school is now turned around and well on the way to making real progress. The students are beginning to feel comfortable, "We're respected and not treated like children, it's a school for real students. The staff make you feel that they want you to do well for yourself and not just for some outside position". There is much to be learned from this example. The underlying ideal is a crucial blend of respect, co-operation, schools being for students, courtesy, high expectations, and close links between principal, staff, and students.

The one thing that really counts in our schools is that each student feels worthwhile, achieves well and as a result relates well both at school and elsewhere. This, of course, is the measure of our ultimate success as educators.