

**Combined Old Grammarians' Association Meeting
Sunday 29 August 2010, Flockart Hall, MLC**

Panel and discussion:

- MC: "Miss Murray" – Principal Summer Heights High
- Elida Brereton
- Ros Otzen
- Christine Jenkins

What is the benefit of an all-girls school?

- Evidence in the calibre of graduates!
- New research indicates the physiology of the brains of girls vs boys is very different. At a girls school education can be more effective because there is only one group to deal with.
- Boys and girls develop at different stages, with disconnection around the middle school phase.
- Boys need more support and structure just as they are leaving school (around age 18-20), whereas with girls, the additional support and direction is needed in the middle school phase.

What do parents want?

- A well rounded person – academic achievement is a given, want to see participation in co-curricular activities, interests and sports.
- Great for girls to see other girls operate in leadership positions – good role models. Community of women with women leaders.
- Evidence of connectedness with the community in girls schools, which support resilience and overcoming difficulties.

What has been the impact of the Global Financial Crisis?

- Overall parents appear willing to make the investment and let other things go – thinking of the future.
- However, schools need to show they are providing value for money. Girls place a lot of store on the aesthetics of the facilities!

There are more "dysfunctional" families around now. Are there more troubled girls now and how have schools responded?

- Not a new issue but the pressures are different e.g. depression, eating disorders
- Women are having children later (comment about having to provide childcare for a 20 year reunion with toddlers attending!)
- Parent Ed seminars are highly valued. Common themes are cyber-space, Teenagers on the Edge, Blended families.
- Pastoral care has become very important.

Dealing with difficult issues with parents:

- Parents strive for perfection which is not always a good thing. This is the key reason behind the focus on resilience programs; they are not for the students but to manage the parents! Not all life experiences are perfect and parents need to "back off" and let their children learn how to overcome challenges.

- At times, interesting dynamics of parents as well as students in Junior Schools. Girls need to be “free agents” in their own development. Overpowering parents want to make everything right.

Issues in society often seem to point back to the school. Is this the same for Government and non-Government schools?

- No difference. In both cases there is a constant call to add to the education agenda e.g. diet, drugs, drivers ed, swimming and water safety, alcohol, etc

Girls’ participation in Maths and Sciences:

- No issues seen in this regard and don’t know why it is considered that there is an issue! Very high standards are achieved.
- Downturn in the take up of Specialist Maths and Physics as Unis have removed them as a pre-requisite. Girls are playing the “VCE score” game and choosing subjects they know they will do well in to get a higher score.
- Melbourne Model is getting around the prerequisite issue.

Are there too many girls’ schools in Melbourne?

- With so many boys’ schools going co-ed, it appears there are lots of girls schools.
- Very few girls’ schools are going co-ed (Kilvington from next year)
- Boys’ schools have an old-fashioned model of education and the girls are just “tacked on” when they go co-ed. The VCE results may look good at the top end but there is a very long tail in comparison with the girls’ schools, where the tail is much shorter.
- Girls’ schools appear to be based on a best practice model – high results are the proof.
- Hardly any “brother schools” exist any more.

The benchmark always appears to be VCE results. Why do there continue to be so few women in leadership positions in the professional world?

- Women appear over-represented in Local Councils. This is where they seem to have targeted their leadership aspirations due to lack of success in achieving leadership positions in the corporate world.
- Female representation on Boards is often on “soft” Boards, e.g. not-for-profits.
- Old Boys’ Club mentality still exists at the top, with old boys’ schools still over-represented.
- Suggestions to address this – promote networking amongst professional women, mentoring, facebook (e.g. Tintern’s approach) and LinkedIn. Make women more aware of each other in the workplace. This could be a task for Old Grammarians’ Associations.
- Need to be somewhat “in the boys club” to change it (i.e. opposite view to the previous point).
- Girls are too hard on themselves. Example – if they are offered a role, they will assess whether they have the skills and expertise to be effective. Will only put themselves forward if they feel they would be fully competent. Boys, on the other hand, will have, say, 25% of the skills, and figure they will learn the rest “on the job”.

- Observation that old girls from a range of schools are well represented as MPs.
- Women tend not to support other women e.g. Julia Gillard not well supported generally by women. Is this tall poppy syndrome? Insecurity?
- Recognition and attention to female sport is low – GSV is working to address this.

Role of social media:

- Everything has its pros and cons.
- Girls abuse facebook more than boys do.
- It can be used for “good” though e.g. Reunions.

Ideas from other OG Associations:

Camberwell Girls

- mentors for Year 10 students from OG. Usually more mentors than girls!
- Letters of encouragement from OG to year 12 students as they start their year 12 year.

Star of the Sea

- Forum recounting experiences at school
- Open Day and Mass. Students in year 12 have their individual name on a bookmark, Mass attendees choose a bookmark, contact the girl and pray for her during the year.

MLC

- 13 branches of OG
- 1,5 and 10 year reunions off-site – girls don’t want to come back to the school until after then.
- OG Association now includes former school staff.

General discussion:

- some ideas have had mixed results e.g. book clubs, playgroups, young mothers events.