



Professional Learning  
Research  
Innovation

Feature  
Article

## Learning in **Practice**

Volume 3 Number 1 December 2019



## Teaching in a **Coeducational Classroom**

Melissa Brady  
*Director of Coeducation Transition*

# About the Author



**Melissa Brady** is the Director of Coeducation Transition. She has a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and is a Nationally Accredited Highly Accomplished Teacher. She has been a member of the ISTAA Experienced Teacher Assessment Panel and she assisted in writing the Experienced Teacher Evidence Guide for NSWIT. Melissa is a member of the College of Teachers and in 2016 she completed the National Emerging Leaders' Program through the AIS Leadership Centre with a focus on coeducation and emerging trends in educational research and practice. Currently Melissa is overseeing Barker's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan which has coeducation and the long term future of Barker as its focus.

## Editors

Dr Matthew Hill  
Mrs Amanda Eastman  
Dr Greg Cunningham

## Printing

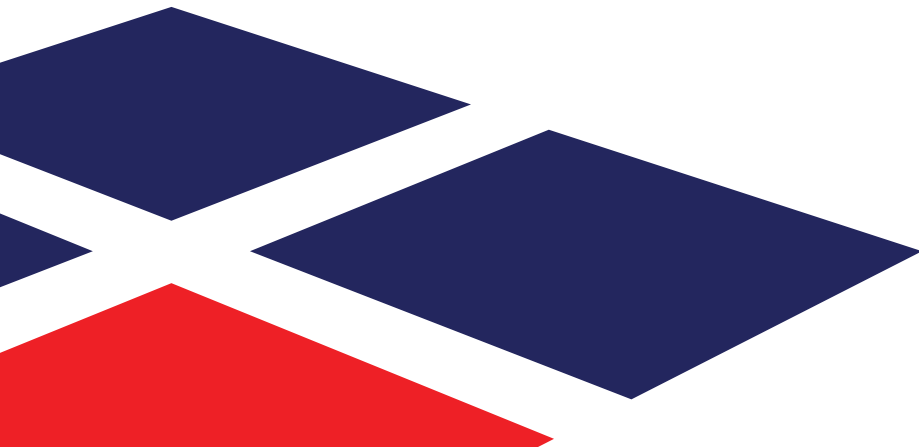
Barker Print Room  
JTP Graphic Design & Custom Print

## Editorial Assistant

Susan Layton

## Creative

Barker Communications



# Teaching in a Coeducational Classroom



Learning in Practice  
2019 Vol. 3 (1)  
© Barker Institute 2019

Melissa Brady

*Director of Coeducation Transition*

## Abstract

Greek philosopher Plato in his *Republic* wrote that educating men and women together would foster a feeling of equality, based on their ability to learn rather than gender. Yet more than 2000 years later debates about coeducation persist. As classroom teachers we know that there is no definitive 'boy' or 'girl' way of learning, there are only generalisations. Good classroom teachers tailor their lessons to meet the learning needs of the individual students in the class, not their gender. Schools and teachers should challenge gender stereotypes, not reinforce them by insisting that boys are girls are not capable of learning together. Doing so woefully underestimates the capabilities of our young people.

The educational landscape has changed immeasurably in the last decade to the point where what was considered cutting edge in 2000 is now old news. The students who are now sent out the school gates at the end of their tenure will have on average 17 different jobs and 5 different careers throughout their professional lifetime (FYA 2015). None of these will be based on gender. Today's students are taught to apply knowledge to new situations, look at cross curricular integration through project-based learning and most of all need to develop the ability to adapt to new situations. Problem solving, collaboration, time management, higher order thinking and digital literacy are some of the skills needed for the future. We are about sending Barker students into the world equipped with the skills they need to be future ready. Coeducational classrooms within a fully coeducational school will help us to do that.

Much has been written about the efficacy of single sex vs coeducation and one does not have to look too far to find research to support a claim that one is 'better' than the other. Polemical arguments on the topic are rarely instructive or helpful and do nothing more than disparage the 'other' side. But what of the students and teachers in this debate? A student in a single sex classroom is not asked of their experience in a coeducational one and if they are, the variables are immense. Similarly, a student in a coeducational room.

Ask any classroom teacher about their experience in a coeducational or single sex classroom and their views will often differ wildly. One thing they will tell you is that teaching in a coeducational classroom is different to teaching in a single sex classroom, just like teaching Year 7 is different to teaching Year 10. The age and developmental stage of the students is different, as well as the relationship between the teacher and the class.

We know that there is no uniquely 'boy' or 'girl' way of teaching and learning and good classroom practitioners adapt their teaching to suit the needs of the individual children in their class. Claims that boys and girls learn differently are only generalisations. Longitudinal studies confirm that the differences in the learning styles within one gender or one group of students alone are far greater than a perceived learning difference between boys and girls. Classroom teachers can tell you that based on experience alone. But what of the actual academic studies? There is a plethora of them. Sue Bennett in her 2015 PhD study on gender relations in elite schools stated that only 17% of 21<sup>st</sup> Century research supported the claim that single sex education is better for girls. Just 17%. The remaining studies found either no or





negligible difference in achievement levels for girls in single sex or coeducation environments. It is the 'presence of a supportive community of teachers...and the whole school community (being) committed to the principles of gender equity and the fulfilment of individual potential' which will ultimately determine achievement (Gill 2004 p.121). Messages that tell girls that they can only lead when amongst other girls or that they can only excel in Mathematics or Science when with other girls, underestimate the capabilities of young women. Telling boys that they are too loud or disruptive or are not good at humanities is similarly inaccurate and unhelpful. All students learn in different ways and we should acknowledge that. As educators we should be very concerned about the gender stereotyping of students as learners. We are in the business of challenging stereotypes, not reinforcing them.

It is important that our classrooms provide opportunities for all students to draw on their individual talents and interests, whilst helping them to improve in areas in which they might have difficulty. A coeducational setting allows boys and girls to do this together, without gender discrimination, challenging them to work together to problem solve and learn. Effective teaching engages students and gets them excited about their learning and a one size fits all model does not suit boys or girls. 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning pedagogies and methodologies challenge the notion of gender-based limitations.

We must ask questions like *What is education for? What is its purpose? What do we teach children about, for and to do?* In previous years young men and women were educated with a predetermined future in mind; men and women entered 'traditional' fields and movement between these was not fluid. Now that future is wildly different to the ones that educational leaders imagined a century ago. How are we preparing them for their futures now? Social skills, emotional intelligence, problem solving, teamwork and the lively exchange of ideas are the skills we want our young men and women to leave our schools with, skills that will prepare them for a life that involves a work place with both men and women in it.

At Barker we are committed to our stated aims; to inspire every learner, every experience, every day. Our values of respect, integrity, courage, compassion and commitment underpin all that we do. The aim and purpose of a Barker education is to enable students to be inclusive and participate in a rapidly evolving and technological society, one which is vastly different to the last generation of learners. Students at Barker are encouraged to work together, to celebrate difference and champion inclusion, both inside and outside the classroom.

Plato espoused the idea of coeducation as it creates a feeling of comradeship noting an equality in men and women based on their academic capabilities not their gender. He comments that 'If women are to have the same duties as men, they must have the same nurture and education...' (Book V). He argued that educating boys and girls together was the only way that they could both become useful members of society. Who are we to argue with Plato?

## References

Foundation for Young Australians, 2015, *The New Work Order*, [www.fya.org.au/report/new-work-order/](http://www.fya.org.au/report/new-work-order/)

Gill, J, (2004), *Beyond the Great Divide*, UNSW Press, Sydney. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/153084054?q&versionId=217748731>.

Murphy, M., (2015), *Plato's Philosophy of Education and the Common Core debate*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED559997.pdf>.

Plato, (updated 2002) *The role of women in the ideal state*, [https://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Plato/plato\\_republic\\_bk5\\_women.html](https://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Plato/plato_republic_bk5_women.html).

## Notes



 @barkerinstitute

 facebook.com/barkerinstitute

 www.barkerinstitute.com.au