



Professional Learning
Research
Innovation

Feature
Article

Learning in Practice

Volume 1 Number 1 November 2017



A Coeducational Future

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.

About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

Editors

Dr Brad Merrick
Dr Greg Cunningham
Mrs Amanda Eastman

Editorial Assistant

Susan Layton

Creative Direction

Glenn Quevedo

Printing

Barker Print Room

A Coeducational Future

Melissa Brady
Director of Coeducation Transition

Abstract

In late 2016, Barker announced a move to full coeducation by 2022. Here, the Director of Coeducation Transition, Melissa Brady, examines the research behind coeducation and Barker's plans for the future.

A Barker education is characterised by a focus on preparing our students for life beyond the Mint Gates. Students who commence school in 2018 will be considering retirement around 2080. Planning for an as yet undefined future is difficult. Transferable skills like collaboration, managing differences, problem solving, resilience and an interdisciplinary approach to learning, all help to prepare our students for a world that is rapidly changing. What is not changing is that the work place is for both genders.

The Barker College community values our abiding commitment to a strong academic program and to effective pastoral care delivered in an authentically Christian setting. The School has considerable data to support this claim and countless generations of Barker College students testify to the positive experiences they enjoyed here. This is particularly the case since the introduction of coeducation in the Senior School in 1975. A survey of current and former Barker College parents conducted in 2015 revealed that the top three reasons for choosing Barker for their child were the provision of a balanced education, quality of teaching and a focus on student welfare and well-being. Providing a single-sex education was not in the top 20 reasons.

The vast majority of research into the impact of segregating the sexes at school was conducted prior to 2000 (Bennett, 2015). Much has changed in both a national and global setting in this time and it is therefore prudent to canvass more contemporary research into this field. In the latter part of the 20th Century and the early decades of the 21st Century, there has been a significant global change in the roles and status of women. In the past, segregated education tended to channel young men and women into gender specific careers and this is no longer the case.

There have been studies, for example a 2012 study from the University of Pennsylvania, that analysed data from South Korea which concluded an advantage to single-sex education. However, there are an equal number which draw no such conclusion and the claim that girls achieve higher academic results in a single-sex environment is now only supported by 17% of post 1995 research into the debate (Bennett, 2015).



The research is unable to control variables such as Socio-Economic Scores (SES), family background, individual differences in each learner and school culture. One cannot sustain a research based argument that one system is better or more effective than another whilst being unable to account for a wide range of variables. No two schools or learners are the same; it is difficult to substantiate a claim that a study on this can be definitive. Various studies (Robinson and Smithers, 1999, Mansfield, 2013, Pahlke, Hyde and Allison, 2014, Cherney and Campbell, 2011) state that the difference in academic achievement between single-sex and coeducational schools is negligible once family background, SES factors and school culture are taken into account. Gill (2004, p.118) even goes as far as to state that 'internal qualitative variables may be even more important in their capacity to affect the quality of school experience'. In fact, the differences in the learning styles of one group of students alone are far greater than the differences *between* boys and girls on a vast range of measures.

The most important task for Barker is to provide a well-rounded and balanced education for all our students. Most Independent Schools, including Barker, were established well over 100 years ago and in a very different world and with very different attitudes towards the roles of men and women. Given the changing world we live in and the stereotypes that can develop in single-sex environments, we are not convinced that it is appropriate to expect our children to develop a real understanding of gender equity when from an early age they are separated and told they are different.

At Barker we are of the view that coeducation and a more inclusive and diverse community, can go some way to addressing the challenges facing the Australian community. It is clear that in the 21st Century all social institutions have undergone considerable change and occupational fields that were once dominated by one gender no longer exist. Given this, the demarcation of



schools along gender lines is thoroughly out of date for progressive environments (Gill, 2004, p.118). Barker College is committed to the future and preparing students for a rapidly changing world. Full coeducation is one part of that commitment.

A report into coeducation in the United Kingdom in 2006 stated that there has been a reduction in the number of single-sex schools by over 80% in the last 40 years (Asthana, 2006). The fact that segregation persists in Sydney is curious given global trends. In Sydney, there are very few coeducational Independent schools. Only 4% of Independent school places on the North Shore are for coeducation. Parents are offered very little choice. Independent single-sex schools dominate the Sydney Morning Herald end of year league tables, primarily because of the standard of teaching, school leadership, parent support and higher than average Socio Economic Scores. The fact is that most Independent schools in Sydney are single-sex. Single-sex schools will therefore top the performance tables – there are very few alternatives. However, the number of single-sex schools in Australia is declining and the Australian Bureau of Statistics recently published data which claimed that at the present rate of decline single-sex schools would not exist in Australia by 2035 (ABS, 2017).

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. None of these will be based on gender. Contemporary education is about teaching students how to be flexible with their knowledge and understanding. Today's students are taught to apply knowledge to new situations, look at cross curricular integration through project based learning and most of all the ability to adapt to new situations. We are about sending Barker students into the world equipped with the skills they need to be future ready. A Barker education typifies 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' (Gill, 2004, p.121). This is what will ultimately determine achievement and a great school experience for our young people.

References

Asthana, A. (2006), *Why Single Sex education is not the route to better results*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/jun/25/schools.gender2>

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, *Participation in Education: Government and non-government schools*, <https://tinyurl.com/y7dsrlon>

Bennett, S. (2015). *Gender relations in elite coeducational schools*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Deakin University.

Cherney, I. D., & Campbell, K. L. (2011). "A league of their own: Do single-sex schools increase girls' participation in the physical sciences?" in *Sex roles*, 65 (9-10), 712-724.

Gill, J. (2004), *Beyond the Great Divide*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

Mansfield, K. C. (2013). "The growth of single-sex schools: Federal policy meets local needs and interests" in *Education policy analysis archives*, 21, 87.

Pahlke, E., Hyde, J. S., & Allison, C. M. (2014). "The effects of single-sex compared with coeducational schooling on students' performance and attitudes: A meta-analysis" in *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 10 42.

Robinson, P., & Smithers, A. (1999). "Should the sexes be separated for secondary education-comparisons of single-sex and co-educational schools?" in *Research Papers in Education*, 14(1), 23-49.



 @barkerinstitute

 facebook.com/barkerinstitute

 www.barkerinstitute.com.au