

# in alliance

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GIRLS' SCHOOLS AUSTRALASIA

Vol. 58



# Vol. 58

## Staff wellbeing and professional development



**COVER IMAGE**  
Loretta Wholley, Principal, Merici College  
Canberra, trains like an astronaut during  
the Alliance's combined schools Space  
School program

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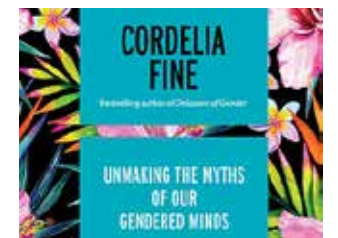
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## ALLIANCE OF GIRLS SCHOOLS AUSTRALASIA

The Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia is a not for profit organisation which advocates for and supports the distinctive work of girls' schools in their provision of unparalleled opportunities for girls.

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## COLLEGIALITY, CONNECTION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the May edition of *In Alliance* where we focus on two areas that are of critical importance to successful schools: staff wellbeing and professional development.



Providing our members with access to high quality opportunities for professional learning has always been one of the Alliance's strategic priorities. Indeed, this has contributed to our members' sense of wellbeing. Why? Because they know that they have an organisation that supports them while they contribute to girls' education, regardless of the sector in which they work. They also enjoy the collegiality, connection and career opportunities that the network brings, whether through local branch events, national conferences or international forums.

Through their seminars, many staff have had their 'leadership spark' ignited and developed the knowledge, skills and confidence to step up to their next leadership role. The new Empowering Leaders course, commencing July 2017, aims to develop this further.

Since our first conference in the 1900s, we have strived to deliver the latest research, trends and information about issues impacting girls' schools. We have been proactive in collaborating with universities to expand our research knowledge base, and the work we are investing in through projects with The University of Queensland, Monash University and other tertiary links helps to give the Alliance, and therefore our members, the leading edge when it comes to all matters related to educating girls.

We have also partnered with like-minded organisations that enable us to deliver some extraordinary professional learning opportunities.

Through our strong partnership with Bond University, we have been able to offer a unique 'Principal in Residence' program on the university campus, allowing principals and tertiary colleagues to share insights and experiences. We have also enabled great learning opportunities to deepen understanding

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultures through the 'Yarning Up' trips to remote communities. An added benefit of these life-changing trips has been the linking of education and corporate staff, presenting some outstanding forums for discussion and understanding.

Our World Challenge partners have opened up the world even further, bringing members together to venture overseas and consider the world through the lens of women's issues. Familiarisation tours to Cambodia and Sri Lanka have opened our eyes to the challenges women face in developing countries, as well as to how professional tour leaders help participants engage in the experience for maximum learning, friendship and fun.

Even further afield, and aligned with our support of STEM initiatives, selected staff in member schools have been able to accompany student groups to NASA. Not only do they get to learn about all that NASA has to offer, but they enjoy a two-day staff development program designed specifically for educators. You can tell that this experience has an impact when staff come home with a space suit!

For those schools interested in fundraising and philanthropy, our AskRIGHT partners have provided discounts on workshops and seminars, supporting member schools in the challenging work of raising financial and community support for projects as well as strengthening alumnae relations. Their Advancement Tours to the UK and the US provide Alliance members with immersive experiences to deep dive into the art and science of philanthropy and to develop important leadership skills in this area.

Importantly, growing the next generation of leaders in girls' schools has been a key imperative. We have had great feedback about the work of our partners, CIRCLE, in the area of leadership development. Through their seminars, many staff have had their 'leadership spark' ignited and developed the knowledge, skills and confidence to step up to their next leadership role. The new Empowering Leaders course, commencing July 2017, aims to develop this further.

**THIS YEAR, WE ARE EMBARKING ON AN EXCITING PROCESS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE ALLIANCE FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS. I ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONTRIBUTE, SO THAT TOGETHER, WE MAY ENSURE THAT WE HAVE THE BEST MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATION TO SUPPORT THE VITAL WORK OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS.**

I hope you enjoy this edition of *In Alliance* and I thank all our contributors for sharing their practical and theoretical perspectives, knowledge and insights. It is this sharing that gives us quality opportunities to continue our professional learning, to reflect on our own practice, and to enhance our wellbeing through the generosity and friendship of our network. ▲

FRAN REDDAN

## PRINCIPAL IN RESIDENCE ST CUTHBERT'S COLLEGE, AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND

Just 15 minutes from Surfers Paradise on the Queensland coast you'll find Australia's only privately funded university — Bond University. I can proudly confirm from personal experience that Bond is unique and easily lives up to its marketing material. As New Zealand's first principal to live in as part of Bond's Principal In Residence Program I could both observe and experience the Bond difference, ably led by Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tim Brailsford.

My In Residence brief was twofold: to observe the value of Bond's collegiate, wrap around student experience and to identify, where possible, business opportunities or challenges. Bond University accelerates students with three full semesters a year, however there is so much more to Bond in addition to completing qualifications in a shorter timeframe. While high quality student academic outcomes are a key staff focus, Bond's CORE Program also targets soft skills development. For over 25 years parents have loved what the Bond CORE program delivers for their children, while employers are also increasingly seeking soft skills as part of the graduate package.

Bond's Pro Vice-Chancellor, Pathways and Partnerships, Catherine O'Sullivan, leads a motivated staff team and says that internal and external relationships are key to a Bond education. Bond's proposition that it's all about the journey and bringing out the best in highly employable graduates, is very obvious when on campus. Students are personally welcomed, strategically mentored, consistently monitored, supported and encouraged to achieve their best results and this can't be claimed by many universities worldwide.

As a corporate partner supporting the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia, Bond successfully hosts

the Alliance's Student Leadership Conference (SLC) annually in January. Over 160 student leaders come together for four days to grow as leaders and several delegates have been so impressed with the campus facilities they've undertaken their tertiary study at Bond. Bond scholarships and the university's commitment to women in leadership are evident and consistently shared via social media.

The benefits of the high touch, collegiate undergraduate experience has also been realised in recent years for indigenous students. Bond's reputation in this space is growing and the bright, young Indigenous students are well supported in an environment that is fostering their academic growth and personal maturity. The intimacy of Bond is a real drawcard for them as shown by the high indigenous student retention rates.



Take home Bond University material illustrates the importance of relationships, connections, mentoring and quality support. Photographs of new friends from multiple backgrounds living and learning in a caring, wrap around environment are typical of what I observed and experienced and I am only sorry I can't return to study full time as a 'Bondy' this year. I totally endorse the Principal In Residence Program to anyone approached to participate. Be prepared to be very impressed. ▲

ROZ MEXTED  
PRINCIPAL AND BOND UNIVERSITY FELLOW FOR 2017

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## HARNESSING 2500 YEARS OF COLLECTIVE TEACHING EXPERIENCE CAMBERWELL GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, VICTORIA

If we hold the most current educational research to be true, that teachers have the biggest impact on student learning, then we simply cannot underestimate how important it is that we create the conditions and opportunities for our educators to thrive.

Critically, thriving is contextual. It's about the ability to succeed within your given environment, and the environment we operate in as educators has and continues to rapidly transform.

Career and life pathways for our students are no longer linear or traditional, and are increasingly self-directed, global and digitally enabled. A student graduating from our school in 2017 will have an estimated 17 careers over the course of their lifetime, be working in a world where 42 per cent of jobs will be automated in the next decade and operating in an economy where 34 per cent of people are freelancing. Their playing field and goalposts have shifted, and therefore so have ours.

If we're expecting our educators to foster creativity, collaboration and a new way of learning that prepares our students for a new way of working then we need to embed that culture in our professional learning philosophy.

Stepping into the newly created role of Director of Professional Learning and Partnerships I worked with our team to undertake a design thinking process. We honed in on the key levers which lead to professional learning and have an impact. Moreover, the process gave us the opportunity to audit the professional learning culture of our school. Through the use of surveys, focus groups and individual meetings we identified and described the current state of play; we trusted our teachers to contribute in an insightful, honest and empowering way.

What we learnt from both our own school and the education sector at large included:

- The need to create porous boundaries between our school and the broader community — building deeper and more meaningful learning connections with industry.
- Adult Learning that is active, experiential and teacher-led leads to greater, sustainable outcomes.
- Investment in intensive, ongoing and small-group development of our leaders can be our school's greatest asset.

So how have we started to transform our approach to professional learning at Camberwell Girls?

### LEVERAGING OUR LEADERS

Immediately we invested in our leadership team. However, rather than bringing in an educational consultant or running teacher workshops, we chose to create a twelve-month partnership with leadership development expert Holly Ransom. Holly has gained international recognition for her work with leaders across all sectors focusing on building their capacity to lead and to execute ambitious change strategies. She provides continuous, bespoke learning opportunities for our senior and emerging leaders.

One of the unique and key benefits of collaborating with Holly is her personalised approach — allowing us to co-design and create a leadership development model specific to the needs and objectives of Camberwell Girls. Complementing this we also partnered with a leading educational consultant Ann Beck, who has gained national recognition for leading school change. Throughout the year, Ann will mentor a number of our aspiring leaders providing one-to-one mentoring that is tailored and reflective to their goals.

Our strategic approach is already having a huge impact. We are finding both our personal and organisational values are more aligned. This values-based focus on our leadership is reframing our mindset which in turn is affecting the way decisions are made at all levels of the school.

### THE INNOVATION SPRINT

When we met with our teaching staff, we discovered that collectively we had 2500 years of teaching experience; we just needed to find the right structure to unlock this collective genius. Again, we looked to industry to learn how to engage with new concepts or ways of working. We learnt of a model known as an innovation sprint, which enables organisations to pilot new ideas without the pressure to fully commit. It is a high energy, collaborative and action-orientated process. We asked ourselves, what would happen if we cancelled all meetings for six weeks and empowered our teachers to use their time flexibly to focus on innovating in the way that they teach?

Teachers were charged with the responsibility to set their own collaborative based goals and driving their own learning. Not surprisingly, the results have been astounding — for learning outcomes, culture and staff morale. We had teams focusing on flipped learning, bringing virtual reality into the classroom and feedback that moves learning forward.

At the end of the sprint, our teachers came together to share and provide evidence of what they focused on during the innovation sprint. It was a fascinating experiment on many fronts and really highlighted that when you intentionally create the space and time, pedagogical innovation can flourish.



(IMAGE) PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WORKSHOP WITH HOLLY RANSOM (RIGHT)

### RE-IMAGINING PARTNERSHIPS

It's often said that 'you can only be what you can see'. We've applied this powerful lens to our approach to partnerships from the learning influences we create for our girls to the way we open up access to industry for our staff.

The world of work is changing, not just in a way that alters the skills and content complement our students need but also in a way that fundamentally demands a different pedagogical approach. We partnered with One Roof, Australia's leading co-working space dedicated to women-led businesses. We created a learning exchange where both our staff and students have the opportunity to learn from entrepreneurs about the tools and mindsets they use to create their business success: lean startup, ideation, design thinking, minimum viable product... the list goes on! And we're not confining this immersive learning to our enterprise teachers and students — our goal is to embed the concepts and ideas garnered from these learning experiences across all year levels and subjects.

### THE NEW LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

If we want to re-think learning, we have to shift our own adult and professional education. Learning,

both student and adult, is increasingly open and socially connected, and in most cases it is not seen for the true revolution that it represents.

Online collaboration, Twitter, TeachMeets, and a shift toward un-conferences 'suggest that educators want more control over not just what they learn but how they learn' says David Price, in his book, *OPEN: How we'll live, work and learn in the future*, 'It is my contention that, if we want to re-engage learning, re-professionalise teachers, and rethink how we prepare students for a globally competitive working life, we need to follow the learners, and develop more open learning systems.'

Price concludes 'While these changes are still nascent trends...it therefore poses a challenge for CEOs and Principals. How do you manage self-determined learning and can staff be trusted to develop new skills by themselves?' It's a valid question and an important one too.

Reflecting on our recent Innovation Sprint and bespoke leadership workshops at Camberwell Girls, our educators have only strengthened our trust in them. They have shown high expectations of themselves and the capacity to learn through transparent and collaborative practice. By applying the same learning principles to our teachers, as we do to our students, we are experiencing a new learning ecosystem at Camberwell Girls. ▲

**KATE GILES**  
DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & PARTNERSHIPS

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## THE ROLE OF MIDDLE LEADERS IN A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

Given the countless number of responsibilities placed on school principals today there is a strong argument that the most important factor in creating a high performance culture centres on distributed leadership. While principals and leadership teams set the agenda and hopefully school culture, Middle leaders are the ones who have the most contact with their staff and ability to influence the culture of the school on a daily basis. In fact, Weller (2001) asserts that middle leaders, have the potential to be the most influential people in a school's organisational structure.

It is suggested, that because middle leaders have the power to dramatically influence the performance within their department or team, they can in turn have a significant impact on whole-school performance (Busher & Harris, 1999). Furthermore, "a stronger focus on distributed leadership is related to a greater sense of purpose within a school, at all educational levels" (OECD, 2016 p.16). However, if schools do acknowledge the importance of middle leaders and wish to focus on distributed leadership as the key to change, there needs to be a far greater investment in their development.

There can be no doubt that there is a fundamental disparity in the development of leadership skills in schools between the senior and middle management in terms of training, resources and time allocated to such tasks.

In recent educational history the emphasis on principals' and deputies' leadership development has become almost "obsessive" (Gold, 1998, p. xi). Despite this fact and a strong push towards "transformational" leadership, it could be argued that the rhetoric surrounding this style of leadership

and all that it entails has not really come to fruition and the "general structure of secondary schools has, on the whole, remained unchanged" (White, 2000 p. 79). While much has been written in terms of leadership for those in senior positions, the reality is, given the time constraints, resources available and responsibilities placed on those in these roles, precious little time is spent in classrooms working with teachers. Couple this with the fact that principals only count for "five to 10 per cent of the variance in student outcomes" (Dinham, 2016 p. 7) and a pertinent question would be: have schools and systems been allocating resources effectively by placing such great emphasis on leadership development for principals?

In the context of the current research one could argue that the middle leader is the most influential in schools with a high performance culture. Busher and Harris (1999) explain that, "he or she is not part of the senior management team, responsible for the overall strategic development of a school, but someone responsible for the operational work of others, namely classroom teachers" (p.309). It is these classroom teachers that set the culture of school in their interaction and expectations of students on a daily basis.

What are the implications for middle leaders today?

There is enough evidence to suggest that leaders can be taught to learn and practise their skills. What then is the key for transforming administrators to leaders and creating middle leaders who will improve school culture? Weller (2001) points out the scope of responsibilities for middle leaders are wide and vary from school to school. The starting point therefore, lies in the role description itself.

Most schools or systems have duty statements for those in positions of leadership. Commonly the role descriptions itemise a long list of administrative tasks to be completed. Thus, long serving middle leaders see themselves as administrators. The "new"

role description should include administrative tasks but it should also explicitly redefine what leadership means for a middle leader. It should specifically contain the following leadership descriptors:

- Providing leadership and support to staff to ensure quality teaching and learning within the Key Learning Area (KLA), by developing the strengths of staff whilst also working on challenges.
- Promoting the professional learning of the members of the KLA, by providing learning opportunities, professional reading, modelling best practice in teaching and providing feedback for staff based on classroom observations.
- Creating a learning community in the KLA by the regular engagement of professional dialogue amongst the staff not just in regard to KLA matters but educational trends in general.
- Participating in the operations of the Curriculum Leadership Team and promoting its decisions.
- Fostering the development of students through developing their KLA team.

Once the role description is complete there are four main areas that need to be fostered by the senior leadership team to further develop leadership skills at the middle leader level. These include:

- Mentoring
- Professional Learning
- Accountability and Performance Review
- Empowerment

The monumental shift in what educational research has revealed over the past 20 years regarding the influence of classroom teachers on students (and thus school culture) has resulted in an avalanche of leadership training and focus on principals and deputies in order for this research to be used for the benefit of students. All too often this focus on the principal and deputy has resulted in these people being seen as the only real "leaders" in schools. If schools are to take advantage of what we now know about education the middle leaders must be provided with as much leadership training and development on educational issues, as the members of executive teams. It is both unrealistic and high impossible for principals to spend enough time in classes to have a real impact on the development of their teachers. Instead, developing middle leaders to lead teams of four to ten staff is however, quite achievable.

To do this schools need to adopt a distributed leadership model. Principals will need to empower, provide mentors to, make accountable and professionally develop their middle leaders in order to achieve this. Busher and Harris (1999) suggest "this middle management role, more than any other, is the real potential of organisational change and improvement. The challenge for schools then, is to fully utilise middle leadership positions" (p. 315). Principals and their middle leaders must recognise



the importance of their leadership and potential to make a real difference to school culture. ▲

### BRETT FOSTER SENIOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONSULTANT, CIRCLE

Brett Foster is a highly experienced educational leader having held Deputy Principal positions in NSW, QLD and the ACT. Brett has worked in government, Catholic and independent schools and in both coeducational schools and single sex (boys and girls). Brett's latest role before starting at CIRCLE was Director of Professional Learning & Pedagogy at Stella Maris College in NSW.

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## PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM CLAYFIELD COLLEGE, QUEENSLAND

Clayfield College has embraced the ACER National School Improvement Tool as the basis for our School Improvement Plan, by focussing on three domains of the tool, one of which is the development of “an expert teaching team”. In this, the college is signalling its commitment to having its teachers working optimally as collaborators in support of excellent learning outcomes.



To this end, the college has devised and implemented a Professional Partnerships Program, which exploits quality professional relationships, in which the responsibility for professional growth and development is collegial and shared. The design of the program is informed by the weight of evidence-based research that identifies the most important factors in improving learning outcomes for students. Dr John Hattie tells us that (after students) teachers are the most important variable affecting learning. Further, ACER researcher, Dr Ken Rowe, claims that the key ingredient in teacher effectiveness is professional development. However, various researchers have found that traditional methods of professional development (most commonly attending a lecture by an expert) result in only a ten per cent implementation rate (Knight, 2009). His research suggests that this is, at least partly, due to the fact that teachers resist change initiatives that are imposed rather than chosen. Finally, the Grattan Institute asserts that open classrooms and collaboration provide the most effective professional development of teachers, and Hattie’s findings (2008) show that students and adults alike learn and grow optimally in an environment in which they

can get and use feedback. In other words, the best way to improve learning outcomes is to provide a mechanism whereby teachers can work together in a professional partnership to observe and provide feedback to improve their practice.

### WHAT DOES THE PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

All teachers select a partner, rather than having a partner assigned. This is a positive initial step, as it allows the teachers to feel comfortable with the teacher who will be observing their classes and providing professional feedback. The partnerships may be within the same teaching area or across faculties. Once partnered, each teacher decides on a classroom based concept, new skill, pedagogical technique or behavioural management initiative to explore and apply. This must be linked in some way to a mandated focus area from the college’s strategic plan. For 2016 and 2017, this focus is Student Engagement. The focus of each teacher’s program must be grounded in current research evidence and teachers are required to keep a record of their professional reading around the topic.

The partners may decide to explore the same concept or explore different concepts. Projects may involve working with a whole class, with small groups of students or may be comparative between classes.

Examples of projects include:

- Comparing the academic improvement in the same small group of students across two subjects, to measure the impact of Growth Mindset principles
- Comparing the effectiveness of the application of Kagan structures to a Year 10 and Year 11 Visual Art class
- Developing Mathematical Mindsets with Year 7 students
- Effectiveness of the Learning Plaza with Year 9 Social Science students
- Effective ways of encouraging risk taking and independent thinking in students
- Differentiation using flipped classroom techniques

The partners explore the concept together, decide how it will be applied and then observe each other in the classroom, before giving feedback. The type of feedback will depend on the nature of the project. Together, in the feedback sessions, the teachers then decide either how to integrate the concept into regular classroom practice or how to refine it to move forward.

In addition to classroom observation by their partner, teachers collect qualitative and quantitative data around their application of the concept. This may take the form of pre and post questionnaires to students, observation notes, notes on discussions with students, monitoring of improvements on assessment tasks, student surveys, maintaining student profiles and comparison of students who did and did not experience the concept.

Each partnership is supervised by the Dean of Teaching and Learning, who meets with the partners at least once a term for updates and progress reports. She assists with the planning of the projects, the refining of methodologies and data collection methods and reviews with the teachers what they have learnt from the project and how they will apply this to their regular classroom practice. In Term 1, teachers establish their project and commence their professional reading. In Term 2, the methodology is defined and the application with students begins. This continues into Term 3 with at least one partner’s observation visit per term. In Term 4, the teachers provide a written evaluation of their project with suggested follow-up for the following year.

The benefits of the program are many and can be summed up in some comments from teachers:

...a focus on one area instead of generally covering a whole range of issues/ areas of development. More depth and exploration, which leads to better outcomes.

...reflective thinking on my teaching.

...getting to know other teachers and some of their strengths

...intentional professional conversations with a colleague

...focus my PD efforts on a topic that I see as very worthwhile. ▲

LOIS KAVANAGH, DEAN OF TEACHING AND LEARNING  
JANE ELLIOTT, DEAN OF PASTORAL CARE  
LAKSHMI MOHAN, HEAD OF SCIENCE

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## LEAD LEARNER: WHO? WHY? HOW?

### WHO IS A LEAD LEARNER?

The notion of ‘leading’ is usually understood as being ‘in front of’ or ‘above’ others. Such notions are unhelpful when we seek to understand the role and attendant dispositions of a *lead learner*. As distinct from a *line manager*, who has clear accountabilities in a vertical supply-and-demand organisational chain, a lead learner’s attention is focused *horizontally* on optimising the opportunities for learning — their own, and that of their colleagues.

The fact that many senior staff in schools find themselves having to fulfil both roles – that of line manager and lead learner – can lead to some confusion and/or conflation when it comes to enacting both roles effectively.

While there is no doubting the importance of ‘leading learning’ in schooling policy documentation, the extent to which this sort of leadership differs from mainstream notions of ‘leading’ is yet to be fully acknowledged. Leadership is almost exclusively seen as involving line management, as encapsulated in role descriptions, key performance indicators and more broadly in ‘leadership theory’. Little wonder, then, that individuals who find themselves asked to ‘lead’ a professional learning community of their peers experience not a little confusion about what the role involves. They may feel that they are not ‘expert’ enough, nor do they have enough ‘seniority’ or ‘experience’ to be invited to take on this responsibility.

Because a lead learner is neither ‘in front of’ or ‘above’ others, it is important to *unlearn* the idea that it is about being an ‘expert’ or of ‘senior’ rank. Similarly, it is important to jettison the idea that such leadership is about the modelling of, and the relentless pursuit of, ‘best practice’. Instead, the lead learner’s role is to build their own capacity and that of their peers to create and exploit collaborative opportunities for professional learning. Where line managers are enrolled in *risk-minimising* through meeting compliance and accountability standards, the lead learner also seeks out opportunities for *risk-taking* in the interests of improving practice.

### WHY LEAD LEARNER NOW?

Why is it so vital that the risk-taking role of *lead learner* is as well understood and affirmed as the risk-minimising role of *line manager*?

No professional educator would need to be convinced that the exponential proliferation and transformation of information generation and flow across the globe is making for massive social

and cultural transformations not just for the next generation, but for everyone. So no-one would need convincing, at least in theory, that classroom practice must change to ensure the learning opportunities they make available are responsive to these monumental cultural shifts. We know from recent research on effective schooling that when teachers pay professional attention to colleagues, there is likely to be *more learning pay-off for their students*.<sup>(1)</sup> In other words, a collaborative learning-oriented culture among teachers has more impact on student outcomes than resource-rich schools where teachers work in isolation – ‘alone together’ – in relation to each other.

Despite the fact that teachers are generally people-oriented and altruistic in their individual dispositions, the matter of building and maintaining a collaborative learning-oriented culture across an entire school is not an easy task. As one long-term observer of schooling puts it, “the entrenched norms that prevail among teachers have always been those of autonomy and privacy, not those of open exchange, cooperation, and growth”.<sup>(2)</sup> In other words, many teachers still retain a sense of themselves as teaching in ‘my’ classroom, with ‘my’ kids, doing ‘my’ subjects ‘my’ way, cut off from what is happening in the classroom next door and across the corridor.

With all the evidence we now have that “team-oriented management practices, focused particularly on continuous improvement of pedagogical practices, have a positive impact on outcomes”,<sup>(3)</sup> and with digital tools opening up virtual learning spaces and new modes of interaction, the lead learner role has never been more important. In other words, the teaching era of Gulliver among the little people has well and truly passed. But this is not always evident in the daily work of schools. Indeed, teacher-as-Gulliver still seems to be the pedagogical norm in many schools and classrooms.

#### HOW TO DO IT?

There are a number of distinctions that need to be made by anyone in a ‘lead learner’ role, apart from distinguishing this role from that of ‘line manager’. The distinction between *comfortable congeniality over collaborative collegiality* is a crucial one, because improved teacher practice is not produced out of warmth and interpersonal friendship alone. Indeed, professionalism can be blocked if there is a congenial consensus that comes to substitute for authentic, professional conversations focused on enhancing learning. Real collegiality demands “a foundation of *shared commitment to appropriate candor in the service of collective growth*”,<sup>(4)</sup> and this is not easy to enact in school communities. Lead learners understand the extent to which teachers are likely to want to affirm each other, but that this imperative may result in the learning priority taking a back seat.

It is also true that ‘time poverty’ can be a valid reason not to take on anything that seems extraneous

to the specific accountabilities that come with line management. It is too easy to feel like a pawn in a very busy game in which most of our professional activity is simply knee-jerking to the latest ‘urgent’ request. And too often, line management accountability is the ‘urgent’ work that drives out the important work of professional learning.

An effective lead learner is a player, not a pawn, in their workplace because they have taken control of their own ‘attentional economy’. They know in broad terms how they allocate their time and they protect their priorities, or adjust them to changing circumstances. Below is an example of the attentional economy of one secondary school principal who wanted to explain to herself why she felt she could not pay enough attention to the things that really mattered to her, i.e., building the learning culture of her school. For four weeks she collected data about how she spent her time using post-it notes to document the nature and duration of each activity. Having made her attentional economy visible to herself, she then consciously made decisions to spend less time on some issues (e.g., she outsourced some work around financial and property matters) and spent more time on staff/student pastoral care and informal community time.

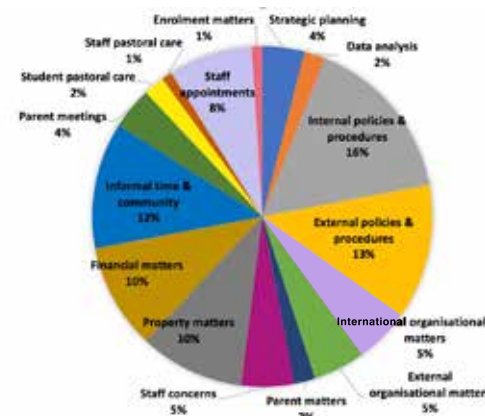


FIGURE 1: A PRINCIPAL'S ATTENTIONAL ECONOMY<sup>(5)</sup>

Lead learners like this principal learn to be astute boundary-riders when it comes to protecting both personal and shared collegial learning time. They protect valuable meeting time by ensuring that ‘flooding’ of learning by management work is a rare occurrence. A way of guarding against ‘flooding’ is to anticipate and pre-empt discussions around accountabilities (e.g., nature and timing of testing, reporting deadlines, etc.) using emails or shared online sites. (Note: Routines need to be established about when and how pre-emptive information is to be accessed.) Meetings are then at less risk of being consumed by bureaucratic demands – instead, it is possible to do a quick check on consensus – ‘Is there anyone who doesn’t agree on the propositions

outlined to you earlier in the week?’ It is important that as little time as possible is spent on hearing a colleague give ‘another reason why I am feeling annoyed/dispirited/fed up’.<sup>(6)</sup> Not only is this likely to be dispiriting for everyone else, but it can easily become a counterproductive routine in itself. It is not a matter of suppressing dissent when it needs to be heard, but well-rehearsed lamentations about why certain things can’t be done can be huge time-wasters as well as convenient excuses for inaction.

An effective lead learner allocates precious time to the pursuit of specific and agreed learning goals focused on improving professional practice. The degree of clarity about precisely what it is that the group is seeking to improve is as important as the idea that no one member of the group is *the* expert in this area. All are learners. If, for example, the group would like to improve its capacity to guide students’ project work, then there needs to be a more specific focus arising out of this, e.g., how might we use Inspiration (or another) software package to optimise student capacity to self-manage project design. In other words, topic areas such as ‘questioning’ or ‘group work’ are not sufficiently focused for exploring in learning teams. The lens needs to be brought in more tightly around a specific aspect of that broad pedagogical area.

Meetings that are set up as learning opportunities become places where ideas and techniques are tested out in ways that have face validity – and later catalytic validity – for everyone in the group. An effective lead learner works towards this end by ‘mining the anthill’ of the group, ensuring that all practitioners involved see themselves in the picture of ‘leading’ and ‘following’, from the newest to the most long-term members of staff. This has to be a small-group rather than a whole-of-staff discussion. So lead learners need to design for this type of peer-with-peer interaction, unlike the more traditional staff meeting format because professional learning is an ‘alongside’ process, not a ‘top down’ one. Of course, effective lead learners are at the same time scanning the horizon for useful ideas – making use of conferences and online networks to inform themselves about new pedagogical possibilities. But the fundamental principle is the horizontal sharing of practice in which everyone is a contributor and a learner.

Effective lead learners ensure that there are protocols for answering the question: ‘How would we know we are improving?’ Evidence of improvement can take many forms, from quantitative data to qualitative reflection. But professional judgement is needed to decide what counts as evidence. As Frederick Hess reminds us, “[t]oday’s enthusiastic embrace of data has waltzed us directly from a petulant resistance to performance measures to a reflexive and unsophisticated reliance on a few simple metrics – namely, graduation rates, expenditures, and reading and math test scores ... The result has been a nifty pirouette from one troubling mind-set to another; with nary a misstep, we have pivoted from the “old stupid” to the “new stupid”.’<sup>(7)</sup> It follows that credible evidence

of improvement is unlikely to be synonymous with an individual teacher’s mere assertion that it is so, just as it is unlikely to be an individual test score or set of scores.

As consultants to schools over many years, both of us have listened to teachers describe what they are about to do in a classroom, and then watched as they proceeded to teach in ways that appeared to us to be far from the expressed intention. Yet those teachers remained convinced that what they said and did were synonymous. We have also seen large-scale investment in gathering and reporting data that appears laudable but contributes very little to enhancing the learning culture of staff or students across the school.

Finally and most importantly, lead learners place themselves squarely in the centre of a *re-professionalising* process<sup>(8)</sup>, one that does not presume that real expertise has to be helicoptered in from a distant place or exists only in senior team members. It is for this reason that terms like ‘best practice’ or ‘showcasing’ are to be avoided, because they connote a fixed and certain end-point which fails to acknowledge the true nature of professional learning for improved practice. Effective teaching a decade ago may not be optimal in 2017. An effective lesson Monday morning may be far less effective on a Friday afternoon, or with a different cohort. The point of leading learning is *improving* practice. And it is most likely to occur when the work of leading learning is valued, understood and acknowledged at all levels of a school-wide community. And that means a school community unambiguously committed to teaching and learning better tomorrow than today. ▲

ERICA MCWILLIAM, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, QUT / DR PETER G. TAYLOR, SENIOR STAFF ADVISOR, BRISBANE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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## TEACHING APPRAISAL IVANHOE GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOL, VICTORIA

Over several years Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School has devised, implemented, embedded and continually enhanced a distinctive teacher appraisal system that is affirming and empowering.

Initially developed in consultation with the school's teaching staff and carefully piloted before its full implementation, the model has been continually refined and adapted to meet the evolving external demands for teacher professional appraisal, while still preserving the key principles of the original vision.

The key purpose of teacher appraisal is to enable structured and disciplined reflection by a teacher to promote next stage growth in professional expertise for the benefit of students' learning.

The Ivanhoe Girls' approach is distinguished by its emphasis on the appraisal serving the professional needs of the teacher, its insistence on the confidentiality of specific appraisal data and its ultimate ownership by the teacher. The key principle is that it is appraisal *for* the teacher rather than *of* the teacher.

The teacher nominates a facilitator from a large panel of trained peer colleagues working under strictly observed principles, procedures and protocols. With assistance from their facilitator, teachers take responsibility for enhancing their own professional practice through a systematic process

of self-reflection and examination of their current teaching approaches.

The peer-assisted program operates as a highly coherent three-phase model, with one phase each year over a three-year cycle.

Phase One: In consultation with the facilitator, the teacher selects two specific focus areas from the Ivanhoe Girls' Professional Standards for Teachers. Data is rigorously collected and analysed but the data itself and discussion about it remain confidential and cannot be accessed by the principal or any other member of staff. The teacher and facilitator submit a Professional Development Statement to the Appraisal Coordinator to enable next professional learning steps. This planning document is available to the school's leadership team and professional development coordinators.

Phase Two: The teacher and facilitator meet formally to review how professional learning goals and specific standards considered in the previous appraisal have been addressed. This process may include some additional observation or 'shadowing'. If necessary, previous objectives are adjusted to reflect the review. A brief summary is submitted to the Appraisal Coordinator as a record of the appraisal and to enable any amended professional development goals to be resourced.

Phase Three: The teacher may undertake either another full appraisal or may apply to participate in an alternative peer observation process where two or more teachers observe one another with a specific and agreed area of focus or "problem of practice".

The Ivanhoe Girls' appraisal model has evolved into a complex and sophisticated program overseen

by a designated Appraisal Coordinator who has a modest time release for this important responsibility. Teachers appreciate the clarity of communication and the extensive support documentation provided by the Appraisal Coordinator.

**"I GAINED A DEEPER INSIGHT INTO HOW I TEACH AND HOW CONTENT CAN BE DELIVERED." – APPRAISEE TEACHER**

Teachers understand that the appraisal model is designed to facilitate their own professional purposes and they can go confidently into each appraisal cycle with the prior assumption of being an accomplished professional practitioner of recognised quality and value. It is common for the peer facilitators to consider that they have learnt just as much from facilitating an appraisal as the teacher. For this reason, while the time commitment of staff members is significant, it is almost universally seen as a positive and beneficial investment of effort rather than an imposed and onerous obligation.

**"IT WAS A REALLY AFFIRMING PROCESS FOR ME AND HAS HELPED ME TO MAP OUT MY FUTURE AREAS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH." – APPRAISEE TEACHER**

The system incorporates a close and detailed consideration of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Professional Standards for Teachers and also ensures that peer observation follows best practice protocols. The school has invested heavily in developing internal expertise on the use of classroom observation procedures that can be deployed for different purposes.

**"IT ENCOURAGED ME TO REFLECT ON MY OWN PRACTICE AND I AM NOW CONSCIOUS OF MY NEED TO COMPLETE SOME PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN THIS AREA." – FACILITATOR**

The Ivanhoe Girls' appraisal process is accepted and positively valued by the school's teachers and is a fully embedded feature of the professional learning culture. It is well and truly established as a substantial foundation of the school's commitment to excellence in teaching and delivering the best possible student learning outcomes. ▲

KERRIE JENKINS, APPRAISAL COORDINATOR  
ALAN HUTCHISON, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

## LIFELONG LEARNING LEADS TO RESEARCH ON POSITIVE BODY IMAGE BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, QUEENSLAND

After graduating from the University of Queensland, I spent a decade working as a psychologist in child and youth mental health services in rural Queensland, Brisbane and the United Kingdom (UK), before taking up my current position at Brisbane Girls Grammar School in 2004.

Holding the privileged position of working as a psychologist in a school espousing exceptional scholarship and lifelong learning, it was not surprising that I found myself drawn to further study. After some deliberation and exploration I enrolled externally in a part-time Masters by Research degree investigating adolescent body image. This degree requires me to conduct a research project and submit a 30,000-60,000 word thesis for examination. I decided to do a Masters by Research as it was the most financially accessible and practical way for me to study while working full-time and raising two children. Given my primary areas of interest, psychology and education, and my own status as a mother of two daughters, a feminist and a passionate advocate for empowering adolescents girls, I have chosen to examine the Dove Confident Me program, which is a five session school-based early intervention/prevention program for positive body image.

I believe that in order to provide the best education for adolescent girls, we must take a holistic approach, becoming experts in both the understanding and promotion of this population. Body image has consistently been identified as one of the top concerns for adolescent girls. Despite having the best educational opportunities and some of the brightest minds, many girls still feel tormented and preoccupied by their appearance. Even with the recent advances in the portrayal of women in mainstream media, the prevailing message offered to girls remains that the most important thing about them is the way they look. Statistics show that close to 50 per cent of pre-adolescent girls worry about their weight and wish to be thinner, which can increase to 70 per cent during adolescence, painting an alarming picture as body dissatisfaction is a significant problem with severe and enduring consequences. In fact, body dissatisfaction has been shown to predict numerous health concerns including low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders. Further, a recent UK report concluded that preoccupation with body image can disrupt a girl's academic performance and intellectual functioning, with studies showing girls who feel dissatisfied with their bodies stay at home from school, lack engagement in class and have poorer school

performance. Hence, there is a pressing need for the continual development and evaluation of effective body image interventions for adolescent girls.

Cognisant of the complexities of conducting research within schools and the call for researchers and corporations to work together to ensure that empirically supported interventions are disseminated carefully, I felt my role afforded me a unique opportunity to contribute to this field. Perhaps more purposely, I was keen to understand how an independent girls school could best respond to body image concerns. With an array of social and emotional programs on offer, and mounting pressure to assume responsibility for the education and prevention of a multitude of mental health issues, schools often grapple with which program to choose. Schools seek brief but effective interventions which fit within timetable limitations and can be delivered by teaching staff. Accordingly, my project aims to determine if one such program, *Dove Confident Me*, is effective in reducing body dissatisfaction, suitable for use in the single-sex environment and appropriate for delivery by teachers.

The program was delivered by teachers to Year 8 students at Brisbane Girls Grammar School in Term IV, 2016. I contacted nine schools within the local Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia network and fortunately, three comparable schools willingly participated in the project and comprised my control group. It is hypothesised that compared to the control group, girls receiving *Dove Confident Me* will have statistically

significant improvements in body image and psychosocial outcomes, alongside reduced severity of known eating disorder risk factors and behaviours. Data was collected at all four schools prior to program delivery, a week after the program and at three month follow-up in February 2017. The data will then be analysed and incorporated into my thesis.

As I have progressed, further research questions have arisen and I am currently applying to convert my degree into a PhD. I am intending to expand the project to incorporate a parent intervention. My intent is to assist schools to understand whether targeting resources to their parent body can enhance the effectiveness of classroom-based body image interventions. It has only been with the support I have received from my school and the collegial generosity the three school principals in my control group have offered me that I have been able to engage in this important research. It heartens me to know that the Alliance networks enable schools to work together with the common purpose of helping our girls to be the very best they can be. ▲

JODY FORBES, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

## LURISTON TEACHERS ARE ALWAYS LEARNING

### LURISTON GIRLS' SCHOOL, VICTORIA

**F**our-wheel driving, yoga instruction, Royal Life Saving bronze medallion, positive education and cultures of thinking. These are some of the skills acquired by Lauriston Girls' School teachers in recent times.

Nick Thornton, the Director of the Lauriston Institute who manages the professional learning program at the school says Lauriston has a broad view of what constitutes professional learning.

There are four categories of professional development at Lauriston. These are either linked to the strategic direction of the school, building of a critical mass of skills within the school, ensuring teachers keep their content and curriculum skills up-to-date and then finally the personal interest category.

"The personal interest category allows teachers to explore some passion projects. There is always a causal link to their role at the school but we have found this training has stimulated many teachers to develop key programs because the content means so much to them." says Mr Thornton.

A program to have emerged from the personal interest area is FUNcube. Lauriston's physics teacher Paul Butler implemented the educational satellite program to encourage students to learn about radio, space, physics, electronics and technology.

Physical Education teacher Kate Gilchrist completed a Masters in Education specialising in student wellbeing. The major assignment she completed was the genesis of the school's wellbeing program, now called SHINE. Kate also moved into the role of Lauriston's Director of Student Development and Wellbeing as a result of her further education.

In recent years the school has been focusing on training a large proportion of teachers in *Cultures of Thinking* based on the work of Ron Ritchart from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The Lauriston *Cultures of Thinking* project is working to help the school's educators teach for understanding, implement more creative teaching practices and to develop and understand the positive effects of a 'thinking' classroom culture. Lauriston is setting-up classrooms where students are encouraged to share and develop their critical thinking skills to enhance their learning.

*Cultures of Thinking* has been a professional development focus for teachers in the junior and senior schools for the past three years. Lauriston works with teaching colleagues at Wesley College and Melbourne Grammar School to share their classrooms and provide

(IMAGE) KATE GILCHRIST, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING



feedback on how these classroom cultures are playing out. This year teachers from The Mac. Robertson Girls High School joined the program.

Kate Hehir, the Director of Curriculum in the Junior School has been a champion and project leader of the *Cultures of Thinking* roll-out at the school. Kate shares this responsibility with Tim Watson who is Vice Principal-Curriculum and Innovation in the Senior School.

Kate helps train many of the new teachers in 'cultures' and this year Lauriston is funding her study visit to Harvard to take part in a Project Zero Classroom. Kate will explore new ways to deepen student engagement and to make learning and thinking more visible.

"Lauriston has invested in a structured professional development program for teachers for more than fifteen years and teachers and students have directly benefited from this commitment. Lauriston's motto is a School for Life so this relates to the entire community, teachers too, are always learning," says Mr Thornton.

The school's next mission is to create a more formal staff wellbeing and resilience program.

"Even though we cover staff wellbeing requirements through professional development and offer private counselling and physical recreation classes such as Pilates and yoga. I think we can do more," says Mr Thornton.



Teachers play many roles in a day — carer, instructor, mediator, counsellor, entertainer so we are well aware of how increasingly challenging the role has become.

“It is imperative staff wellbeing is a focus just like it is for students and that we dedicate more time to celebrating the achievements of the profession,” says Mr Thornton.

To share professional development ideas at your school or to meet with Mr Thornton you can email him at [thorntoni@lauriston.vic.edu.au](mailto:thorntoni@lauriston.vic.edu.au) ▲

KATRINA WALTER, PR MANAGER

## LEANING IN EMPOWERED WOMEN

There is no greater time than now, in the present political climate, to incite a drive for change. Weekly, we are met with images of millions of women worldwide rallying together in opposition of misogyny, as movements towards gender equality gain traction. We see it in protest marches, at London Fashion week, through celebrity activism and symbols of unity. Women united, strive to climb the rungs of power, but our minority status means we are still experiencing negative stereotyping and face harsh, limiting assessments based on gender. Yet despite the rhetoric of ‘nasty women’ and negative connotations judging women in leadership as bossy, aggressive, ice-queens, masculine, conniving and the list goes on, women continue to rise up in support of each other.

In the struggle to challenge these dangerous stereotypes, there is no better place to start than together. Together, women can do more, be more and change the world. Cue Sheryl Sandberg, the Facebook COO who is addressing the misrepresentation of women in the workforce and how we, as women, are often our own worst enemy. Sandberg’s TED address and subsequent book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* acknowledge the external constraints on women’s success within the professional world, and raise our consciousness to the internal factors that are holding us back — empowering women to take back control of their professional and personal lives.

This proactive approach is echoed through Sandberg’s *LeanIn.org* a not-for-profit organisation ([www.leanin.org](http://www.leanin.org)) and the community of women worldwide that has been established to celebrate women’s accomplishments. It is this leaning in, this stepping up that is now seeing women the world over unite to fight misogyny, and the same needs to be done to encourage each other to achieve success in the workplace. I first came into contact with the concept of the Lean In circle when I was on maternity leave with my second child. It was the opportunity to connect



with a group of likeminded women, who support and encourage and celebrate one another’s successes, that helped me to regain focus and confidence in my role in the workforce and feel supported to take professional risks and move forward.

In a male dominated world, women are often positioned in opposition to each other and conditioned to believe we are in competition. However, women can be powerful allies at work, and in fact, we should all look for opportunities to celebrate each other’s accomplishments. Better yet, get together with a group of women and agree to give each other a leg up, to share experiences and build a safety net of support and encouragement. This is the aim of the Alliance Brisbane Circle started in 2017.

“WHEN A WOMAN HELPS ANOTHER WOMAN, THEY BOTH BENEFIT. AND WHEN WOMEN CELEBRATE ONE ANOTHER’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS, WE’RE ALL LIFTED UP” (LEANIN.ORG).

With over 30000 circles in 154 countries (and growing), the message of *Leanin.org* is clear; women are each other’s allies, and it’s in working to raise each other up, that we can tear the external barriers to gender inequity down. I look forward to working with the Alliance Brisbane Circle this year and supporting each other to accomplish amazing things. ▲

JODIE JURGS, ALLIANCE BRISBANE CIRCLE

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## TESTOSTERONE REX: UNMAKING THE MYTHS OF OUR GENDERED MINDS

CORDELIA FINE

Perhaps because I’m an academic as well as a mother, when my children were very young I read a lot of parenting books. (If there were a book called *The Over-Researched Child*, I would have read it.) In the course of my reading, I came across a number of books claiming that modern science has shown that the brains of boys and girls are ‘hardwired’ in fundamentally different ways — girls to care for people and tend to relationships, boys to understand, conquer and advance the world — with important implications for parenting and education. Yet when I looked up the scientific studies on which those claims were made, I found an alarming disconnection between the scientific evidence and the popular claims.

I set myself the task of testing these confident statements against the scientific evidence from neuroimaging studies of sex differences in brain activation and structure, and studies trying to explore the influence of prenatal testosterone exposure on boys’ and girls’ interests and skills. I found that these much-cited studies simply did not support the kinds of conclusions — and the social inequalities — they were being used to justify. To explain this gap in the science in an accessible way was one of the goals of my previous book, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*.

At the same time, I found that many popular books seemed to suggest that continuing sex inequalities and segregation in the workplace, simply *must* be due to deep-rooted, unchangeable biological differences — because there’s an even playing-field now, so what other explanation could there be? Likewise, girls’ passion for the pink aisle, and boys’ distaste for it, must also be ‘innate’ — because, nowadays, egalitarian parents rear their children in a gender-neutral fashion. I challenged those assumptions too in *Delusions of Gender*. Gender stereotypes of females as “wonderful but weak” and males as “bad but bold” influence perception, judgement, self-concept and behaviour. It’s not an even playing field. Nor are our children passive recipients of gender socialization from parents and caregivers, but active ‘self-socializers’, who learn early in life that gender is a major social division in society, to which side of that divide they belong, and what our gendered culture tells them that means.

In my new book, *Testosterone Rex: Unmaking the Myths of our Gendered Minds*, attention is turned on that familiar idea that risk-taking, competitive masculinity has evolved in males to enhance their reproductive success, and is therefore wired into the male brain and fuelled by testosterone. This is the Testosterone Rex of the book’s title. But as the book explains, this popular set of interconnected beliefs is based on out-dated science. Scientific understandings — of evolutionary biology, of the role of biological sex in brain development, of the relations between testosterone and behaviour, and even of the nature and shape of differences in behaviour of the sexes — have all evolved since the Testosterone Rex story became entrenched in popular imagination. Scientifically, Testosterone Rex is extinct.

## 2017 Speaking Tour with Professor Cordelia Fine

MELBOURNE / 25 July  
Mentone Girls'  
Grammar School

ADELAIDE / 26 July  
St Peter's Girls' School

HOBART / 27 July  
St Michael's Collegiate School

PERTH / 1 August  
Perth College

AUCKLAND / 3 August  
St Cuthbert's College

SYDNEY / 8 August  
Santa Sabina College

BRISBANE / 9 August  
St Margaret's  
Anglican Girls School

➤ Tickets available at: [www.agsa.org.au/events](http://www.agsa.org.au/events)

People who spend a lot of time with children, who watch them grow and develop, inevitably come to wonder how and why children become the individuals they are. We're obviously a long way from solving that mystery. But we are making progress in understanding the role of biological sex in the developmental journey. And while it's certainly relevant, scientific understanding is shifting away from the assumption that it is a fundamental, powerful, diverging force in how we turn out and behave.

Why does it matter? As a psychologist by training, I care about the quality of scientific research and the robustness and validity of conclusions. But also, scientific claims that reinforce gender stereotypes and roles in ways that are not scientifically justified are potentially harmful to both sexes, and arguably especially to girls and women. In the late nineteenth century, it was suggested that higher education was

perilous to young women, as it would drain energy from their reproductive system to the brain. Today, it is suggested that only men have evolved — have enough testosterone — to be willing to take the necessary risks to boldly take on the world. We don't, after all, encourage people who lack courage to "grow some ovaries." The Testosterone Rex story seems to offer an explanation for why it is still the case that, even in our egalitarian, modern, twenty-first societies, men are still more likely to enjoy "Rex"-like roles than are women. It also suggests that such a state of affairs is inevitable. That, in my view, is another very good reason to be as clear as possible on what ideas and assumptions the science does, and doesn't, support. ▲

**CORDELIA FINE IS PROFESSOR OF HISTORY & PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, AND THE RECIPIENT OF THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE AUSTRALIA FELLOWSHIP.**

## VALE REX

Edited extract from Chapter 8 of *Testosterone Rex: Unmasking the myths of our gendered minds* by Cordelia Fine.

A little while ago, buying flowers at a local school market, I overheard a conversation taking place at a nearby stall. The woman there was selling plastic knives for kids that, according to the marketing material on display, were guaranteed to keep little fingers 100 per cent safe. Having secured a two-knife deal with a family, the booth seller asked the daughter if she'd like a pink knife, and then asked her brother if he'd like a red knife or a blue one. "I'd like a pink one too," he said. As I enjoyed the moment, surprisingly, my eldest son ambled into the scene.

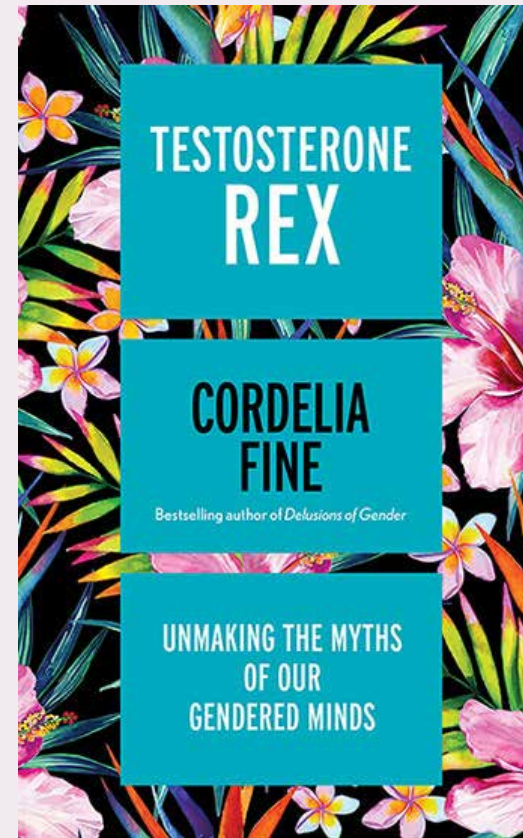


"If I manage to cut off a finger with one of your knives, can I have it for free?" he asked the booth seller. In reply, the woman irritably told him to leave her alone as she had work to do. Yes, indeed, I thought. A busy schedule buttressing the gender divide with your pointless plastic crap.

Anyone who has bought children's toys in the last few decades will not be surprised to learn that it is deemed necessary by some for children's knives to come colour-coded for sex. So are many toys, as apparently there are two kinds of children. Sometimes, the kind of child a toy is for is bluntly stated: particular aisles or

product Web pages are explicitly designated as *for boys* or *for girls*. Other times, there are hints that are no less readable. A toy in bold, dark colours, featuring exclusively male figurines, packaged showing only boys having immense fun with it, surrounded by a wall of similarly masculine-coded products geared towards action, competition, dominance, and construction does not send the inclusive message that this is a toy for anyone, regardless of genitalia. Likewise, the notorious "pink aisle" is not the brainchild of marketing minds at pains to ensure that no child gets the sense that this toy isn't intended for the likes of him.

Unsurprisingly, sex-segmented toy marketing has incited plenty of campaigns, and harsh criticism from parents, politicians, scientists, marketing professionals, and even children themselves. But some dismiss this as misguided political correctness. For instance, in an *Atlantic* commentary sparked by a toy catalogue with photos of children playing in both traditional and counter-stereotypical ways (like a boy playing with a baby doll), Christina Hoff Sommers writes that "[Boys and girls] are different, and nothing short of radical and sustained behavior modification could significantly change their elemental play preferences." Speaking from a marketer's perspective, Tom Knox, as chairman of DLKW Lowe, argues that "expecting marketers to ignore basic and profound differences in their audience seems ill-conceived and impractical." Knox suggests that "there will always be a place for gender-specific toys, gender-specifically marketed, in a way that celebrates gender diversity without undermining equality." Similarly, in the same article, Helenor Gilmour, then head of consumer insight and brand development at DC Thomson, argues that "by failing to acknowledge these differences as marketers we would fail to understand our audiences effectively and deliver



the services and products they want."

Some academics, meanwhile, bring an evolutionary flavour into the mix, suggesting that marketers are working from an instinctive grasp of our evolutionarily honed differences. In an article titled "Intuitive Evolutionary Perspectives in Marketing Practices," for instance, the authors observe that "some people may want little boys to be less competitive," but then rhetorically ask: But who is going to have more success in the marketplace, firms that appeal to young males' propensity to behave competitively with one another or those that appeal to males as nurturers ... ?

Likewise, in his book *The Evolutionary Bases of Consumption*, Concordia University Evolutionary Psychologist Gad Saad argues that "given their desire to maximize profits, [toy companies] develop products that are successful in exactly the same sex-specific manner across innumerable cultures." This sentiment is echoed in the *Sunday Express* by journalist James Delingpole, who writes that "a toy business's job is to make profit not engage in social engineering." Some thoughtful readers might wonder why the *laissez-faire* philosophy of gender-neutral marketing is "social engineering," while toy aisles that dictate which toys are for whom are considered to be leaving things to take their natural course. But Delingpole has a further complaint.

Gender-neutral marketing is futile, he says, because "those XX and XY chromosomes will out in the end."

The phrases used to defend gendered toy marketing are telling: "elemental play preferences"; "basic and profound differences"; "hard wired"; "those XX and XY chromosomes"; "sex-specific"; "celebrates gender diversity"; "let boys be boys, let girls be girls." The assumption is that boys are naturally, universally, and immutably drawn to "boy toys" because it is their evolved, timeless, biologically rooted nature to be risk taking, competitive, dominant, and to master the world. For the same reasons, girls are inexorably drawn to "girl toys," because it is in *their* nature to nurture others and to want to look attractive. So what is the problem with marketing that simply reflects and responds to those different natures, and what on Earth is the point of politically correct marketing that ignores them? What next? Ads trying to sell hockey sticks to cats?

According to the T-Rex view of "boy toys" and "girl toys", pink and blue categories reflect the preferences of "female brains" and "male brains" made distinctively different, in large part by the hand of testosterone. By way of evidence for this view, defenders of gendered toy marketing often refer to the more masculine preferences of girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH, a condition in which very high levels of androgens are produced *in utero*.) And from here, it's just a few short steps to the conclusion that sex inequality is natural and inevitable. But since Testosterone Rex is extinct, we need another explanation of what's going on.

In the first year of life, baby boys and girls provide little in the way of evidence that their brains are tuned to different radio stations of life. For example, at birth, girls and boys are pretty similar overall in how interesting they find a face versus a mobile. Although a Cambridge University study found a statistically significant difference between the sexes, even if you overlook important flaws in the method of this much-publicized study, the differences are underwhelming. (Boys looked at the face 46 per cent of the time; girls, 49 per cent; boys looked at the mobile for 52 per cent of the time; girls, 41 per cent.) Four to five months later (according to a better controlled study), both boys and girls prefer to look at people than at objects, to the same degree. In the second year of life differences do seem to emerge, but they are still rather subtle. A large recent study of nearly one hundred two-year-old children measured how long they played with a doll and a truck (among other toys), and how often they nurtured or manipulated the toys. About a third of the time a randomly chosen boy would play in a more "girlish" (or non-"boyish") way than a randomly chosen girl, both in terms of what toy they played with, and how they played with it. And sometimes at this age kids play as long, or longer, with counter-stereotypical toys than with those that are supposedly "for them": like the fourteen-month-old boys in one study who played for about twice as long with a tea set as

they did with a truck, a train, and motorcycles, put together (while the girls in this study spent as long with these "boy toys" as they did with dolls).

So how do we get from this to the more markedly stereotypical toy preferences children come to develop? In keeping with the suggestions of cultural evolutionists, developmental psychologists describe young children as "gender detectives." Children see that the category of sex is the primary way that we carve up the social world, and are driven to learn what it means to be male or female. Then once they come to understand their own sex, at about two to three years of age, this information takes on a motivational element: kids begin to "self-socialize" (sometimes to the chagrin of feminist parents). Presumably not coincidentally, this is the time period during which many boys start to shun pink, and many girls become especially drawn to it. By just three years of age, when children are presented with other kids endorsing novel, gender-neutral objects and activities, they show "robust preferences" for those promoted by kids of the same sex.

In fact, a recent study led by Cambridge University psychologist Melissa Hines suggests that at least part of the reason that girls with CAH have more boyish play interests is because they're less influenced by gender labels and gender modelling than are other children. Four- to eleven-year-old matched control girls (and boys with and without CAH) preferred a gender-neutral toy that was presented either explicitly or implicitly as being "for them" (echoing findings from the 1970s and 1980s). By contrast, girls with CAH were impervious to information that particular toys (like a xylophone or balloon) were "for girls," despite remembering that information just as well. This makes sense, given the somewhat weaker female gender identity of this population. In my previous book, *Delusions of Gender*, I pointed out that studies of girls with CAH are done in ways that leave open the possibility that these girls aren't, in fact, drawn to some unidentified quality intrinsic to "boy toys" that appeals to their "masculinized" brains, but simply identify more than do girls without the condition to masculine activities, whatever those might be in a particular time, place, and culture. Along similar lines, Barnard College sociomedical scientist Rebecca Jordan-Young points out that to understand these girls' more masculine preferences, we have to consider the psychosexual effects of the condition: girls are born with atypical or masculinized genitalia, they often undergo intensive medical and psychiatric observation or intervention, and have physical characteristics out of keeping with cultural ideals of feminine attractiveness.

Certainly, as with novel and gender-neutral objects, children's interest in even counter-stereotypical toys can be piqued by seeing a child of the same sex play with it. And more recent evidence points to the influence of the now-ubiquitous colour coding of gender. Psychologist Wang Wong, together with Melissa Hines, compared how long boys and girls played with

a train and a doll, first when they were twenty to forty months old, and then again about half a year later. At both ages, it's worth pointing out, girls played longer with the train than with the doll. (Draw whatever conclusions you will regarding the implications for the "naturalness" of childcare as an occupation for women, compared with the much better remunerated occupation of mechanical engineer.) But the researchers' main interest was in whether children were influenced by the colour of the toys. Lo and behold, sex differences in toy preferences were smaller when children were presented with a pink train and a blue doll than when presented with the same toys in stereotypical colours. In fact, at the slightly older age, the same boys and girls showed moderate to large differences in the amount of time they spent playing with a blue train and a pink doll, but small and statistically indistinguishable amounts of time playing with a pink train and a blue doll. Whatever role, if any, testosterone or other facets of biological sex play in girls' and boys' initial overlapping toy preferences (and there are other possible explanations), all of this is troublesome for the Testosterone Rex perspective. One doesn't expect a deeply biologically rooted, evolved sex-specific nature to be so contradictory and inconsistent in its expression, or to be so easily overridden by a quick paint job.

From birth, children encounter endless gender clues and hints in the real world: gender stereotypes transmitted in advertisements; encouraging or discouraging words, expressions, or body language from others; toy stores and packaging; movies; TV shows; the sex-segregation of adult social roles; and so on. Of course, these many influences don't impose themselves onto a blank slate: every child is different, with their own internal inclinations and under-standings. Some influences will leave particular children untouched while affecting others. (Interestingly, it may be that children who have a stronger "lens of gender" may be especially susceptible to the influence of stereotypical information.) Some gender messages will push in opposite directions, and no single influence is likely to be very large. But they accumulate. And they provide a potential explanation for how robust sex differences in toy preferences develop around the age that children develop a firm understanding of which side of the critical social divide of gender they belong. A gendered culture has achieved what prenatal testosterone can't.

**From *Testosterone Rex*. Published by Icon Books. In stores now. RRP: \$29.99**

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING LORETO NORMANHURST, NSW

The core purpose of professional learning for teachers must be to improve student outcomes, relating to both learning and wellbeing. Any model for professional learning must align with the strategic intentions of the school as well as meeting the needs of the individuals and teams within it. High-quality professional learning comprises a thoughtful mix of school-based and facilitated development experiences with key contributions from external expertise (Timperley et al, 2008; Cordingley et al, 2007). It should be something that is central to the work of teachers, with the aim of generating changes in practice, rather than simply being an afterthought or add-on. Teachers need to identify their Professional Learning goals, in consultation with their managers, so that training and development activities may be selected appropriately. A recent international review concludes that teachers must become 'active agents of their own professional growth' (Schleicher, 2012:73).



(IMAGE) LORETO 5 TEAM WITH DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CAROL OSBORNE

At Loreto Normanhurst, a number of professional learning initiatives are available for teachers to engage in, so that they can choose something that suits their particular needs and interests. A variety of approaches and programs allows each teacher to meet their individual professional goals, team goals or school goals. Some of the programs

on offer are long-term, such as Elevate. This is a two-year program run by AISNSW in conjunction with the UK's Innovation project, with the aim of re-designing learning to improve outcomes for high potential learners. At the other end of the scale are our 'pop-up PD' events. These are one-off sessions with a specific, single purpose goal to meet an immediate need. Examples include preparation for Year 12 Academic Plenary Meetings for those teaching Year 12 for the first time, and a workshop to support teachers conducting one-to-one learning conversations with students (which form an integral part of the Loreto Normanhurst Student Growth Model). Teachers are also invited to meet informally to share their opinions on educational articles – a 'professional book club'. These types of activities enable the school to respond efficiently and effectively to individual or group needs, and have been well received and well attended.

Between these two extremes are a variety of programs, including our popular "Loreto 5" initiative. This is a professional learning program where five teachers are selected annually to undertake an action research project relating to pedagogical change. It allows teachers to research an area of interest in education and use the research outcomes to improve their classroom practice. Teachers are each given release time, which allows them to

work collaboratively with peers, conduct research and engage in professional learning activities. The program is relatively unstructured to give sufficient flexibility and freedom to allow members to experiment with new or creative pedagogies. Potential applicants present their proposal to an interview panel, and projects are selected based on the potential of the candidate to make an impact on teaching and learning in the school. Each year a general theme is identified, which provides for some common threads and

enables the team to work more collaboratively. The intention is that the Loreto 5 team members will also work with other members of their faculties, teams or pastoral groups to improve outcomes for students. This may take the form of team teaching, presenting demonstration lessons, masterclasses or workshops for colleagues, and producing resources. Thus, the program is a professional learning experience for the whole faculty, team, or pastoral group as well as the Loreto 5 member.

Over the years, Loreto 5 themes have included integrating technology into the curriculum, differentiation, flipped classrooms and creative pedagogy. Whilst the themes allow for greater collaboration within the Loreto 5 team, members are encouraged to pursue ideas which reflect their individual interests and professional goals. Regardless of the stated theme, teachers are encouraged to consider how their project can empower student learning; how it will enhance and support student engagement, authentic learning, risk taking, critical thinking and problem solving. Individual projects have often been wide-reaching and long-lasting. They have covered a diverse range of topics including applying knowledge of neuroscience to improve student engagement, using Visible Thinking Strategies to develop student autonomy, using Augmented Reality to provide authentic learning experiences that inspire critical and creative thinking, and using technology to merge theory and practice in PDHPE.

Plans under consideration for professional learning include the development of a formalised mentoring program, including training for mentors and providing opportunities for the mentors to meet with each other regularly to share insights and strategies. The support network for teachers at various stages of accreditation will be expanded, and the teacher evaluation process will be refined to include feedback from students, peers and managers as well as self-reflection. A program of workshops, masterclasses and information sessions will be held as a means of sharing knowledge, expertise and wisdom and to provide greater opportunities for collaboration. Developing professional learning communities both within the school and with external organisations will be a priority.

Professional Learning plays a pivotal role in schools, transcending all sectors and helping the individuals, teams and school as a whole to achieve their goals. Providing a variety of programs allows teachers to engage more readily with those that best meet their needs or suit their circumstances, thus maximising the opportunities for professional growth. ▲

CAROL OSBORNE, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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## PROMOTING A CULTURE OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE LOURDES HILL COLLEGE, QUEENSLAND

Lourdes Hill College in Brisbane is advancing its commitment to teaching excellence through a newly-launched dedicated space for teacher professional development.

The Centre for Innovation, Teaching Excellence and Leadership (CiTEL), provides state-of-the-art spaces with leading edge technology where staff can collaborate, research and share practice on campus.

Not limited to college staff, the centre provides a physical and virtual presence where educators from all over the world can meet and collaborate towards advancing teaching excellence.

Principal, Ms Robyn Anderson said that CiTEL represented Lourdes Hill College's investment in, and commitment to, a high quality staff.



"The weight of research tells us that it is through the competence and professionalism of their staff that schools have the greatest impact on student learning," she said.

"This centre will challenge staff to keep up to date with developments in education, to collaborate effectively so as to increase the College's collective understanding of best practice and to experiment with new and exciting ways of doing their jobs."

#### THE FACILITY:

The technology-enhanced, flexible design of the centre supports collaborative professional learning, seminars, lectures and social functions. In its elevated position overlooking the Brisbane River, CiTEL is accessible independently of the school for out-of-hours and community functions.

The centre includes a range of different spaces suitable for varying needs.

The main Caritas Room is a large dividable space seating up to 100 people at group tables, or 120 people for lecture-style presentations. Both halves of the room



are fully enabled with cutting-edge technology suitable for seminars and other collaborative activities.

The smaller, Veritas Room is a 32-seater 'experimental' teaching space designed as a collaborative learning and work area.

The centre is also home to its own studio, a quiet space equipped with high end computer and recording equipment available to staff for the creation of their own digital learning resources, including short lessons by screen casting, preparing professional presentations and recording and editing video and/or audio. The studio is also fully equipped to a professional standard with lights, backdrop, video camera and tripod for capturing and creating video.

Kitchen facilities and a large outdoor deck, with spectacular views of the Brisbane River and beyond make CiTEL an idyllic location for seminars, conferences and training workshops.

#### THE PROJECTS:

Under the leadership of CiTEL Director, Dr Janet Buchan, the centre is responsible for a number of projects which aim to change the shape of teaching and learning into the future.

CiTEL's first major project, the LHC Learning Futures Project, commenced in 2016, and researched the big question: "What will/should/can learning and teaching look like in Lourdes Hill classrooms and the broader learning environment in the future?"

To achieve this, CiTEL undertook an extensive research project, engaging widely with the college

community and beyond. The project methodology included interviews with external learning leaders and focus groups with staff, parents, LHC student leaders and university students. All staff, parents and students also had the opportunity to share their vision for the future of learning and teaching at Lourdes Hill College via online surveys.

The findings from this ground-breaking study are being used to inform college directions and the development of a new Learning Framework for Lourdes Hill College.

#### THE PROGRAM:

As well as hosting external conferences such as BeNet Queensland, a gathering in April of educational leaders from Queensland schools with a Benedictine heritage, CiTEL has a weekly program of professional learning for Lourdes Hill College staff. In Term 1, there was a focus on personal pedagogy and emotional intelligence, with guest presenter, Bill Cropper, engaging teachers to examine their individual gifts and talents.

Each term, Dr Buchan will work with senior and middle leaders to devise a program of staff collaboration and development that reflects faculty and College needs and responds to innovation.

For more information about CiTEL and Lourdes Hill College, visit [citel.com.au](http://citel.com.au) and [lhc.qld.edu.au](http://lhc.qld.edu.au). ▲

JOHN CLARKE, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL – MISSION

**A**ward-winning journalist Madonna King has just authored a book titled *Being 14*. In it, she gives a voice to the nation's 14-year-old girls and how parents and schools can support them. She has provided this edited extract from *In Alliance*.

Livy is 14, gets off the school bus, just up from her home. But she falters, the anxiety building with each step. She stops short of her front gate, scared to tell her parents about an episode that unfolded at school. She knows her father will be angry, and her mother disappointed. So Livy takes out her mobile phone and dials 1800 55 1800.

The Kids Helpline counsellor has had this call before: a teen girl asking for advice on how to explain to her parents that they missed out on an A in science, or entry into an extension class. They guide Livy through how she might handle it, before she holds her breath, and walks through the front door of her home.

Kids Helpline has had 22,000 contacts with 14-year-old girls over the past four years, and calls centring around anxiety and pressure to excel are now commonplace. But what has it come to that, instead of bursting through the front door and telling their parents, our girls are now calling a counselling service?

This one story, amongst dozens, stood out to me, while researching *Being 14*, because it shows the importance of that partnership between schools, parents and our teen girls.

Bringing a fresh set of eyes to the relationship, I interviewed almost 200 14-year-old girls, in states across Australia, along with dozens of school

principals, counsellors, police officers, school nurses, psychologists and parenting experts.

As parents, we are strongly involved in our daughter's school lives. We front up to tuck shop, buy raffle tickets, and support the annual school fundraiser. But involvement doesn't always translate into engagement, and that's the challenge for schools wanting to grow awesome young women.

These girls know the challenges and the contradictions they face. Life is perfect one minute, and pathetic the next. School is pure torment or ace. One moment they fit with their friends like a hand in a glove; and the next moment they feel utterly alone.

And they admit being confused, wanting to beat the all-male debating team, and following the lead of women who have made strong steps forward in their generation. But then they find themselves bending to the demands of bullies, or boys who want to go one step further.

Respected social researcher Mark McCrindle refers to this cohort as the up-agers, because they are older, younger. Technology gives them an educational boost, but can also send them into a world of bullying and social exclusion, where the power of celebrity reigns, and where 24-hour connectivity can rule their lives, dominating their sleep patterns and academic results, determining their friendships, and how they see themselves.

I asked the girls to nominate their challenges, and their genuine and passionate answers are what a school's parent body needs to hear. Schools too stand to benefit by understanding more that relationship between the girls, and their families. The biggest request these girls made was that their parents hear them; not just listen, but hear what they are saying.

So as a parent, these are five points I learnt from our 14-year-old girls, and the experts that envelop them.

Firstly, they are too busy, and it is creating an epidemic in sleeplessness. It's not only technology keeping our girls awake; it's the plethora of activities and opportunities on hand, and their inability to provide balance in that schedule. The effects are startling, and here's just one: the average 14-year-old with 30 minutes of missed sleep records a measurable IQ difference of up to 10 points.

Secondly, the rules around the use of social media at home are not encouraging proper use. Jon Rouse, the head of Task Force Argos which tracks down online sex offenders, says the technology and the apps available are not dangerous; it's how they are used. He points the finger at parents, saying we need to become more engaged in what our children are doing. We need to learn the same technology, so we understand our children's use. Too often, he says, he is now meeting with teen girls and their parents, telling them he cannot remove their daughter's image from a website on the other side of the world.

Thirdly, and my biggest surprise, is the angst behind Livy's call to Kids Helpline. Extension class should not be the single barometer of success. But Expectation Inflation, as economists now term it, is driving a new anxiety: parents who are the first generation of university graduates automatically expecting their daughter to travel the same road into tertiary education. That might be important for many families, but it is weighing on the girls who fear disappointing their parents.

My fourth learning relates to boys, who are learning about sex and how to treat girls from pornographic sites. Often, they speak to girls in a derogatory way, and the girls are accepting it. Perhaps we need to teach boys that respect is not an old-fashioned virtue? Certainly, we need to ensure our girls value respect more than a date to the next dance.

Finally, the pull of a friendship group is making our girls turn into people they admit they dislike. We had a refuge from friend fallouts, as teenagers. It was called home. But now our teen girls go home and into their room where the argument continues online. Some of them admit sending more than 100 texts each night, and despite being more connected than ever, they say they feel absolutely alone.

Involvement in our daughters' lives means turning up. Our girls are saying that's not enough. They need us to engage more with them, but don't always know how to tell us. That's the start of a valuable conversation between schools and parent bodies, that could grow that relationship, along with the potential of our teen girls. ▲

BEING 14, BY MADONNA KING, IS PUBLISHED BY HACHETTE AUSTRALIA

## ONGOING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL JOURNEYS


**P**rofessional Development has both professional and personal implications. It has involved making time, taking and looking for opportunities, fortuitous circumstances, seeking funding, and using support. Single-sex girls' education at secondary level is the area in which I have had most experience. I have been an English teacher for over thirty years, also a Head of Department, Deputy Principal and Gifted and Talented Coordinator. My state and integrated schools have included a single-sex boys' school, a co-educational high school, four single-sex girls' secondary schools, including one which was a member of the Australasian Alliance of Girls Schools. I completed my Doctor of Education (EdD) in 2016 and I am currently teaching.

My reasons for embarking on my doctoral journey investigating gifted girls and acceleration stemmed from earlier Masters studies. Thirty years after a Masters in English, I completed a Masters in Educational Administration at Massey University. One paper, 'Education and Development of Talent', led to a research project on gifted girls in small schools.

Further fortuitous circumstances on my professional journey included being awarded a Woolf Fisher Fellowship a year later for Excellence in Teaching English. The Fellowship provided funding and time for professional development in gifted education. I attended two gifted conferences in Australia, including the Annual Conference of the Alliance of Girls Schools in Sydney, and visited member schools in Melbourne and Adelaide (see *In Alliance*, Volume 30, 2004).

A growth in national awareness of the needs of gifted students resulted in an important change in the National Administration Guidelines in New Zealand in 2005 and schools were required to identify and provide for their gifted students. Additional Ministry of Education funding became available. My school was part of a Ministry of Education EHSAS (Extending High Standards Across Schools) contract which provided funding for whole school professional development in gifted education and as the gifted and talented coordinator I attended conferences including a gifted conference in Tasmania. The combination of educational stimulation through involvement in the EHSAS programme and the new acceleration programme for Year 10 in core subjects at my school and the divergent views expressed by teachers, parents or caregivers, led to further study in gifted education through a doctorate in education.

I wanted to investigate current provisions and research for gifted girls and, in particular, acceleration as an intervention. This part-time degree, which



Girls have to believe they can be a leader. It's not just providing them role models and developing the skills. They've got to have that internal belief that they belong there, they can fit there and that they have the capacity to do those things.

*Dr Nicole Archard, principal of Loreto College, Adelaide*

**BEING 14**  
MADONNA KING

included writing four papers and a 65,000 word thesis, enabled me to both teach, and study as a distance student. My thesis title was Acceleration and Gifted Girls and focussed on gifted girls in single-sex secondary education in New Zealand schools in Years 9-13 (Australia Years 8-12). The papers set up the methodology, the literature review and the research proposal for the thesis. I was also fortunate, with time and funding, to be awarded two TeachNZ awards: a study award for release time (one less class for one year); and later a Secondary Teachers Study Leave grant (32 weeks) to work full-time on the thesis. Professional and personal support was provided by my university supervisors, my schools and my family.

The research methods included a National Survey to gain an overview and three detailed Case Studies using surveys and interviews to provide perceptions of teachers, parents or caregivers, and students. Few participants in the case study schools disagreed that acceleration was not effective academically, socially, emotionally and culturally.

My research findings included:

- Multiple methods were used for identification and evaluation of gifted girls;
- Gifted girls were challenged and supported within their school cultures of supportive school systems and personnel;
- Acceleration was part of multi-level learning provisions;
- Programmes were personalised to student need. For example, not all students who were accelerated were gifted and not all gifted students were accelerated;

- Academic acceleration was offered regardless of school size, decile (economic background), or school type;
- Acceleration with enrichment was provided in a range of forms, to individuals, groups or classes.

My recommendations for practice included ongoing professional development; flexibility of systems and personnel; ongoing and sustainable provisions; and enhanced communication between teachers, parents or caregivers and students.

Professionally I have been able to examine practice, theory, research and literature while also being an educational practitioner whose assumptions have been both challenged and reinforced with regard to acceleration and gifted girls. I have shared my research summary nationally with all girls' schools and the thesis is available online for the research community. In addition the study has benefitted my school communities through my role as the gifted and talented coordinator. I have also presented my findings to the Taranaki Conference of School Senior Managers and am scheduled to speak at the Auckland giftEDnz RoadShow 2017. My submission to present at the World Gifted Conference 2017 has also been accepted and my doctoral examiners have recommended publication.

In conclusion, the gifted girls in my study emphasised the enjoyment and challenge of their journey with support provided. My journey, still ongoing, in gifted education has been the same. ▲

MARGARET CRAWFORD, ASSISTANT TEACHER, SACRED HEART GIRLS' COLLEGE, NEW PLYMOUTH, NEW ZEALAND

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## 2017 Alliance Conference Schedule



### Making a Difference: Girls for Change Leadership 2017

- › Sydney 3-4 July
- › Melbourne 29-30 July
- › Dunedin 2-4 October
- › Brisbane 7-8 October

The Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia is offering a unique Leadership Summit for Years 9-11 students. This holiday program will give young change makers and entrepreneurs the confidence, skills and ideas to step up and make a difference in their own lives, their school communities and the world.

► Schools and/or parents may register girls for the summit at [www.agsa.org.au/events](http://www.agsa.org.au/events)

## 2018 Alliance Conference Schedule



### Student Leadership Conference

3-6 January, 2018  
Bond University,  
Gold Coast QLD  
Australia



### Fearless Girls. Strong Women Biennial Educators Conference

5-7 May, 2018  
Adelaide SA  
Australia

► For further details visit [agsa.org.au](http://agsa.org.au)

## LEADERS OF LEARNING MITCHAM GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**M**itcham Girls High School is an educational institution which prides itself on its success and achievements, seeking to keep developing its leaders and teachers in order to best support its learners. It is first and foremost an educational context, rich with a co-constructed vision, principles and goals for students, which is reflected in the recently revised vision statement:

*Mitcham Girls High School is an inclusive learning community committed to providing outstanding educational opportunities for girls.*

*Through focus on inquiry, research, innovation and student leadership, Mitcham Girls High School aspires to develop independent, resilient and globally responsive young women.*

The work of leaders is complex and demanding. The Australian Curriculum has provided the opportunity to think deeply about what students in schools need to learn and how we can teach them based on needs and understandings about deep engaged learning. Recognising that great leaders, are not always born, and that there was a great deal of potential in the curriculum leadership team, which could be developed with appropriate coaching or mentoring, the school employed educational coach and consultant Marilyn Willis. Marilyn has an extensive background in working with schools and helping organisations to bring about positive change through The GROWTH Coaching International model. She was "absolutely delighted to be working with a group of people who were recognizably dedicated and who were already doing great things".

Marilyn's approach to leading leaders, is multi-faceted; taking key messages from *South Australian Teaching for Effective Learning Framework* (page 9), but firmly embedded in the 4MAT system of learning and leadership as described by Dr Bernice McCarthy which acts as a tool for self-reflection and appreciating diversity. Thus, whilst the group identified their own goals, individuals looked to their strengths on which to build greater understanding of personal goals such as: sharing of expertise and sharing with each other; exploring how their work as leaders can be the best that it can be; increasing confidence with staff; and being more intentional in leadership. All conversations follow an agreed path re learning, collaboration and co-construction.

The first workshop was held in January, where conversations about goals and learning and leading within their school context led to the development of a shared language and understandings. The group was well familiar with the learning needs of girls and

articulated clearly their ideals about learning and teaching. They described what great leaders need to know, to do, who they need to be and how they need to work/live with each other to ensure they are living their ideals, focusing on the things that would benefit self, the team and the whole school.

(IMAGE) COLLEEN TOMLIAN WITH A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF HOW LEADERS, LEARNERS AND LEARNING ARE INTRINSICALLY CONNECTED



Leaders were empowered to: envision their futures, identify their goals, examine current realities in terms of those goals, explore options and what actions they will take by when. These group discussions encouraged reflection, debate, analysis as well as an opportunity to create a visual

representation of how leaders, learners and learning are intrinsically connected.

The leaders' conversations have revolved around topics such as emotional intelligence, meeting structures and processes and leading curriculum development. It is an ongoing journey, which has only just begun. They have talked about have difficult conversations, data and decision making, and problem solving and have already brought about positive change in a range of areas.

The leaders have relished the opportunity to: *"know" the people doing a similar role in other faculties; to re-ignited my interest in areas which are new ... (and) specifically, tools to understand what type of skills one has and those which require development; (be in) a forum for organic discussion and unpicking emergent ideas.*

We are aiming to establish and sustain an effective professional learning community where this group of leaders continues to develop their agenda for learning and growth and to effectively/confidently lead learning at Mitcham Girls High School. ▲

ZINTA OZOLINS, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

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## ENHANCING TEACHER PRACTICE THROUGH A SCHOOL DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL MOUNT ALVERNIA COLLEGE, QUEENSLAND

In the educational context today, there is a "growing focus on, and investment in, teacher development" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014, p4). Given the most significant source of variance that can make a difference in student learning is the teacher (Hattie, 2012), schools are looking to create structures that empower teachers to develop their capacity to enhance student learning outcomes. In line with these developments, Mount Alvernia College saw the opportunity to refocus the intent of professional learning to create a school developmental model to enhance teacher practice.

The desire for the college was to create a bespoke model for professional learning that:

- was in-house
- developed a growth mindset for all
- supported teachers to build their capacity based on data from the classroom
- encouraged positive working relationships with staff across the school
- recognised and developed leadership capacity
- aligned with the College Learning & Teaching Framework, and
- linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

The intention was to maximise the ways in which adults learn, and consider how best to support the continual journey of renewal for teachers to aid a shift in student learning. It was also important to challenge the traditional paradigms of professional learning that would see a staff member go to a one-off conference or workshop and simply report

back with limited influence on classroom practice. Informed by this, the Enhancing Teacher Practice (ETP) Framework, a school-wide developmental model, was developed.

The Mount Alvernia College ETP Framework was modelled on the teacher inquiry and knowledge building cycle to promote valued student outcomes (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007), and forms part of the College Performance Development Framework. It was important this model not be seen as a formal appraisal, but for strength development. To aid this, teachers are paired with a trained mentor who guides them through the process. The role of the mentor is to not only support, but also challenge the thinking of the teacher through robust professional conversations around practice.

The ETP Framework sees teachers cycle through the following five phases:

- identification
- review
- goal setting
- development, and
- reflection.

To assist teachers to identify areas for strength development, it was important to link the process to specific data. The identification phase allowed teachers to gather data through three main avenues (a) self-reflection; (b) student feedback; and (c) collegial observation. Specific tools were developed to assist teachers in gathering the different forms of feedback and were linked directly to the College Learning and Teaching Framework and the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers.

The collegial observation was of particular note. Based on the Charlotte Danielson (2013) model for observation, the collegial observation enriched the learning for staff through the inclusion of pre- and post-observation conferences. These conferences were an opportunity for the teacher to be guided (through targeted questions from the observer) to uncover their own areas of strength development. This process has aided considerably in opening classrooms and the sharing of practice across

departments within the school.

Armed with the data gathered through the identification phase, teachers had the opportunity to review this data with their mentors and work to establish clear, actionable, and measurable goals. It became clear, due to the way the feedback was targeted, teachers' subsequent Learning Plans and identified goals were directly related to the strategic direction of the college.

Throughout the development phase, teachers actioned their goals and worked towards strengthening practice in their chosen areas. During the final term of the year, teachers met in Professional Learning Teams to share their goals and, most importantly, the strategies they used to work towards their goals. It became evident through this process that many shared similarities across areas for strength development, and from a whole school perspective this has been able to inform future professional learning for staff.

The final phase of the ETP Framework was a reflection interview with a member of the College Leadership Team. This was not a formal appraisal, but was seen as an opportunity for staff to discuss their learning with a member of the executive. This was an important part of the process as it was seen as a vehicle to affirm and value staff, their learning, and contribution to the college direction.

While the process is continually evolving, the first initial trial demonstrated promise. In 2017 the ETP has been refined to align with the Touchstone program produced by Circle. This will enable the online facilitation of gathering data, setting goals and electronic mentor communication. It is hoped, through this process, professional learning will become more targeted and continually reflect the strategic direction of the college.

The in-house professional learning of the ETP identified the need to have a designated space for adult learning on campus. As a result, the Professional Learning Centre was developed and is a welcoming space for staff to engage in learning to support their practice. This space is used for teams to collaborate and share practice internally, for them to meet for mentoring conversations, and is also used to bring in facilitators to work with staff. In addition, it is fully equipped with cameras and allows staff to film their practice as a tool for reflection. It is anticipated that the function of the onsite Professional Learning Centre will continue to enhance the professional practice of staff that in turn directly impacts student learning outcomes. ▲

**DANIEL CRUMP**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: STAFF LEARNING

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## HAVE A GIANT GOAL AND BELIEVE IN IT MERICI COLLEGE, ACT

**W**hether you are mature enough to have watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon or followed the Shuttle Missions during the 1980s and 1990s, you probably at one stage of your childhood, dreamed of being an astronaut and going into space. In December 2016, I was fortunate to be the recipient of the 2016 HASSE Junior Space School program subsidised by the Alliance. Merici College joined with Canberra Girls Grammar School and St Clare's College to create a Junior and Senior group. We did this to provide our ACT students a chance to be involved in a program with a definite STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) focus. Along with other Schools across Australia, we have been promoting the study of STEM subjects and the career paths for students interested and passionate about this area. This united approach demonstrated the commitment all-girls schools place on STEM, Leadership and Personal Development.

The program allowed students to relate the content they learn in their classrooms to real life situations, projects and exciting simulations. What they also discovered, surprisingly, is that having a career in this industry cannot be confined to the four STEM subjects, but requires a knowledge and balance of history, geography, the creative arts, health and physical ability and the power of knowing two or three languages.

The program partnered with elite organisations, such as the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas and the United States Space and Rocket Center with adjoining Space Camp and Academy in Huntsville, Alabama. With the support of the Alliance and the guidance and support of the experienced iVicon and HASSE staff, I was able to live out my childhood dream of learning just what it would be like to work at NASA and go into space.

Whilst my role, as an accompanying teacher was focused on the pastoral care of students, I was not needed to deliver activities or organise logistics, which was refreshing in many ways. However, it was impossible not to use every opportunity as a teachable moment. The teachers involved used every chance to either enrich student learning or assist students to delve deeper.

(IMAGE) LORETTA WHOLLY LIVING THE DREAM AS AN ASTRONAUT



*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey provided students with principles to enhance their leadership and management skills. The personal development and group challenges encouraged students to be brave, take risks and put forward their talents and skills. It also required them to work in collaboration, ensuring communication and teamwork were at the forefront of their decision-making and paramount to achieving their set goals. It has been wonderful, upon return, to share my experiences with staff and students. The focus on the development of the whole person and all areas of studies revealed to staff and students alike that to have a passion for the wonders of earth and space, one must be able to be masters in their subject field and continually practice their emotion intelligence and personal development skills. The opportunity to listen to experts: ask questions and delve deeper, inspired students to think about the future careers they could pursue in the STEM field. Advice from the experts was consistent — dream big, set goals, make a plan and remember that in order to grow and learn we sometimes fail and need to show resilience and perseverance to bounce back and continue moving forward.

On the Junior tour the accompanying teachers were fortunate to leave our students for two days in the care of the iVicon and Space Camp staff and experience our own two day Space Academy training. As a group of experienced, committed science and maths teachers (apart from myself — technology and theology are my area of expertise) we were an outstanding team (literally — we won an award on graduation night). History, physics, engineering, creative arts, simulated mission control, robotics, balance, rocket launching, financial budgeting and negotiations, collaboration, adventure, shark dissections, crime scene investigations, specialised tours, hacking spaces and creativity were just a few words that describe the many and varied activities we were involved in. Teachers spent evenings busily writing up new lessons, incorporating their experiences into future classes, most importantly we made connections

with new colleagues and freely shared ideas and resources. It was a perfect combination of a professional learning network — NASA style. We valued the opportunity to engage with each other and enrich the educational context for our students.

I would like to thank the Alliance, the iVicon USA and Australia crew and whole HASSE team, including our amazing and dedicated Group Manager and Tour Assistants and Space Camp USA for their thorough and innovative program. It developed a keen interest for students and staff in space science through engaging activities. I look forward to our partnership into the future and have no hesitation in recommending this program to our Australian schools. ▲

LORETTA WHOLLY, PRINCIPAL

## HOW TO ACCESS POTENTIAL IN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ST CATHERINE'S SCHOOL WAVERLEY, NSW

It's educationally 'on-trend' to talk about the importance of both formative assessment and quality feedback in helping our students to achieve their full potential. Current research supports that learning is incremental and that every student has the potential to develop. What we don't often think about as educational leaders, is the fact that our teachers need exactly the same measure of care if they are to be effective. The question is whether we focus as leaders on developing teacher quality or do we leave it to the teachers themselves?

For many years, I have advised my students to change their defeatist language when describing a vexing academic experience from "I can't" or "I'm no good at" to "I'm challenged by" or "I'm having difficulty with" and even "I don't have a natural flair for..." in order to develop a positive mindset and render improvement a genuine possibility for them. The difference this has made to my own students has been significant and those who conquered their mindsets went on to meet and even surpass their own expectations. As educators, every teacher must believe in their students' capacity to grow their knowledge and expertise — after all, teachers are living proof that learning is a life-long pursuit. In turn, this is why we must believe in our teachers' capacity, encourage them to avoid the defeatist approach and embrace the fact that only reflection and revision improve practice. They are in an exacting profession with a high level of 'burnout' which is defined as "lost energy, enthusiasm and confidence." (Leiter & Maslach, 2005) Whether a master, practitioner, apprentice or novice teacher, our job is to help

teachers along the path to mastery which is a times a battle between skill and will. (Jackson, 2013)

While positive thinking is effectively explored in Carol Dweck's work, Albert Bandura, also a Stanford psychology professor began similar work in the 1970s. Bandura was exploring how we learn as human beings and how we learn best. His social cognitive theory demonstrated that by developing



particular mindsets, we influence the behaviour and mindsets of others — these had both positive and negative outcomes depending on the mindsets themselves. Bandura (Mar 1977) proved that we learn best by reflecting on past experience, observing others as they model best practice, responding to verbal persuasion by someone whose views we respect and by controlling our habitual intellectual and physiological reactions to new situations. Teachers need time to reflect and perfect and if we are to create a workplace that allows for and expects ongoing development then there is a better chance of building mastery that integrates deliberate practice, challenge and growth oriented feedback. (Jackson, 2013)

The old adage to “feel the fear and do it anyway” is not just a mantra for extreme sports enthusiasts. It's good to have a little hesitation when approaching new and complex tasks, while preventing anxiety from paralysing us in the attempt is the true challenge. Students are learning new and complex tasks all the time. Teachers are on a mission to negotiate the path to improvement for their students and to deconstruct complex tasks to facilitate their progress. It is so vital then for knowledge growth, that children experience positive mindsets, examples and encouragement from those they respect and the belief that they can get there. Increased self-efficacy — the genuine belief that one is capable of achieving a goal despite an overwhelming challenge — is key to applying Bandura's theory. (Bandura, 1997) If we can teach our children ways to increase their self-efficacy levels, they will naturally make incremental and continuous improvement.

At the same time, we give teachers tasks of ever increasing complexity and too frequently neglect to allow for the possible blow to their self-efficacy and the very real possibility of resistance. According to the research, engagement in positive relationships, the opportunity to reflect on their learning in the process and frequent embedded formative assessment (Wiliam, 2011) and quality feedback (Loughran, 2010) throughout their learning journey is an effective combination with the power to lift each student's performance and enhance their learning experience. If we can integrate this approach effectively in our teacher development and performance review programs, we should be well underway with lifting and consolidating each teacher's professional practice and building their capacity while augmenting the professional capital of our schools. ▲

BERNARDINE KNORR, HEAD OF TEACHER EXCELLENCE

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## WORKPLACE WELLBEING AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

### ST HILDA'S ANGLICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, WA

**R**esearch indicates that Positive Education is reinforcing how essential it is for schools to have an understanding of students' wellbeing. The flow on effect is that school leaders must now see the value in having an understanding of staff wellbeing. There are significant advantages for schools that are able to enhance the wellbeing of their employees, which ultimately works to improve staff and student outcomes from a holistic perspective.

A holistic approach to workplace wellbeing is aligned with the corporate sector where leading businesses encompass all aspects of a person's health from a physical, social, mental and environmental perspective. The reality is that employers today have legal and ethical responsibilities to provide safe and healthy workplaces, and schools are no exception.



(IMAGE) PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND WELLBEING SESSIONS

At St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls we foster a culture of staff wellbeing which aligns with our strategic focus. Our aim is to integrate a staff wellbeing framework which will constantly evolve and integrate seamlessly into the fabric of the school's culture. We approached staff wellbeing as multi-faceted and determined that a successful Framework needed to have a long term commitment with many components.

According to recent research in staff wellbeing conducted by Forbes, “Engagement, motivation, support and strategy are the keys to a successful program. If employees are not involved in the solution, it's difficult to succeed” (Love, 2013). Our initial step at St Hilda's was to ‘engage’ our staff by conducting a wellbeing survey to obtain people analytics about their general sense of wellbeing.

From this survey, our first wellbeing initiative, was introduced on professional learnings days where part of the program was dedicated to running optional wellbeing sessions for staff to ‘opt in’. These sessions operated with the assistance of the Outdoor Education Department including: river kayaking, meditation, stand-up paddle boarding, yoga, and laughing yoga.

The Business Manager, Lorica Storey, also organised Master Chef ‘Invention Test’ cooking classes to socially connect support staff and school leaders. Staff formed teams and were provided with ingredients to create a dish of their choice. There was an overwhelming and extremely positive response from staff to the benefits of these sessions.

These sessions led to the next phase of the framework relating to the professional and social engagement of staff members. Our aim is to provide all staff with further opportunities for professional

growth, and to develop strong connections between staff by sharing areas of expertise. This initiative is designed to create opportunities for staff to present optional professional learning sessions from JK to Year 12 relating to wellbeing and innovative educational practices including: Stress Management and Resilience, a Case Study on Flipped and Flexible Learning, and a practical workshop on STEAM in our Makerspace area. Workshops were well attended with more than 60 per cent of staff ‘opting in’.

Other initiatives of the framework extend into the social domain of wellbeing by showing further appreciation for staff. Surprise morning teas, communal barbeque lunches and ‘kindness cards’ were introduced which involve delivering a small token of kindness to staff. Principal, Mrs Kim Kiepe, also consistently acknowledges the contribution of staff with personalised cards of appreciation.

From an environmental and physical wellbeing perspective, initiatives have been adopted to cater to the needs of staff who require reasonable adjustments such as stand up desks and the introduction of walking meetings.

There are a number of other services St Hilda's provides from a wellbeing perspective including access to: on-site doctor, annual flu injections, fitness centre programs, community swimming club, weekly yoga and meditation sessions, EAP counselling for staff and family, on-site CPR training, and 24/7 injury and accident cover. Moving forward we are looking to make available a private health package with a corporate partner to offer further health services and support.

A vision of the ‘future office’ in relation to wellbeing is epitomised by Bernard Salt at KPMG who states, “As wearables embedded with GPS, heartrate monitors, WiFi, Bluetooth and other types of technologies continue to advance, it is likely that organisations will be able to track levels of health and stress within their workforce ... Such devices will be able to tell if an entire department is stressed, for instance, offering the organisation the opportunity to find and fix an issue before it becomes a bigger problem.” (Sheedy, 2017). Activities such as step-up challenges, wellbeing apps, Fit Bits, nutritional services, family days, campus grants for wellbeing initiatives and further

medical assistance for employees are all part of corporate initiatives to address wellbeing. This holistic approach is what most businesses at the forefront of wellbeing have in common by offering a range of activities to appeal to a diverse workforce.

Ultimately, we still have much to 'learn' about the place and importance of staff wellbeing in a 21st century context. The good news for schools is that we are already adopting a range of wellbeing strategies to enable all members of the school community to flourish and thrive in a safe and supportive space. ▲

KATHRYN PAUL, DEAN OF STAFF



(IMAGE) STEAM PRACTICAL WORKSHOP HELD IN MAKERSPACE

## MAKING STAFF DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS OPTIONAL: AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO MOTIVATE EDUCATORS

### ST STITHIAN'S GIRLS' COLLEGE, SOUTH AFRICA

**A**n educational strategy that I often use to focus and direct the attention of my learners at the beginning of a class is to ask them an interesting question. One of this year's questions was, "What, do you think, is the most commonly-used noun in the English language?"

My learners guessed various nouns, such as "person", "family", "money" and "boyfriend". The correct answer, according to a 2006 study

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conducted by Oxford University Press and included in the Oxford English Dictionary, is the word "time". At first glance this appears quite surprising: do we really refer to time far more often than to our families, to money or even to our significant others?

On second thought, however, we can see how this might be true. We are forever saying phrases such as "next time", "I don't have time", "lunch time" and "what's the time?" As educators, the most valuable commodity we have is time — like everyone else in the service industry, we actually sell our time. Unfortunately, no matter how skilled and inspirational we are as educators, we can only sell 24 units of time per day, as opposed to a manufacturer of a product, who can theoretically sell unlimited units of their merchandise. We regularly complain that we don't have time to do the things we want to do. We always want to have extra time and extra lessons to get through the

syllabus. Our teaching subjects always compete with others for more time, and trying to organise a school outing inevitably meets with complaints from those who lose time with their classes as a result. Time is the one thing that always passes, even if our learners don't; and, according to McKinsey, people worldwide suffer from a "perennial time-scarcity problem". It is a small wonder, then, that time (or the lack thereof) takes priority over finances and family in our daily conversations.

Managers in the 21st century therefore inevitably need to recognise the importance of time and to develop strategies to prevent burn-out. In schools, we are fortunate to have some downtime every holiday period and, let's be honest: this is a major drawback of this profession. Despite the holidays, however, most of us often feel run-down and tired when there are simply not enough hours in the day. In our pastoral role as educators, we also worry about those learners who are over-committed and who try to do too much, and we advise them accordingly. Nevertheless, it is a major challenge for schools to find ways in which we can manage the time of the staff and the students more efficiently and effectively.

because staff are simply too tired after a long day of teaching to gain the maximum benefit from them.

To solve this problem, St Stithians has scheduled two separate staff meetings in the week. One is the nuts-and-bolts staff briefing, essential for the continued operations of the school, where the events and expectations of the week ahead and the week behind are discussed. These briefings are timetabled for a Friday morning, while the learners run their own "pupil assembly", and form part of the school day. They run quickly, efficiently and effectively, and everyone is required to attend them — their purpose is merely to inform staff about what is happening at the school, and they are short, sharp and to the point.

The Monday staff meetings, on the other hand, are now no longer compulsory. They are reserved for professional development and staff are required to attend only 80 per cent of these meetings per term. Furthermore, a roster of the topics to be presented appears in the staffroom prior to the meeting, and staff are requested to sign up for the meetings that they wish to attend. Our educators are also encouraged to book a slot in order to present these meetings and to share their expertise on any educationally-relevant issue of their choice.

This term, the meetings have been on a wide range of topics. We have had, among others, presentations by our educational psychologists about the solutions-based approach to meetings; workshops by a team of Pencil Box experts on how to unlock hidden features in this school management software; and an enlightening and interesting explanation of how discipline is implemented in the Boys' and Girls' Town institutions. Next year, we will undoubtedly have further presentations on topics of interest to educators. These sessions have, so far, all been run by staff at our school, but the potential exists to invite outside educators or

professionals to these meetings.

Logically, one would expect attendance to decline if a meeting is no longer compulsory, but our school has experienced remarkable attendance rates at these meetings. Oddly, even though attendance is expected at only 80 per cent of the meetings, our staff's attendance has been significantly higher than this, with many staff members choosing to attend all of the sessions. Staff see the value in these meetings and, because they have the option of attending only the sessions that interest them most, they are able to choose. Their attendance is now no longer compulsory



(IMAGE) MARTIN PEROLD AND HIS TUTOR GROUP

St Stithians Girls' College has recently implemented one such initiative: we have restructured our staff meeting time. Traditionally, these meetings are held every week on Monday afternoons from 3pm to 4pm; at that time of the day when concentration is low and when enthusiasm levels are not always at their peak. While these meetings provide valuable opportunities for staff to connect and to talk to each other, and while they are an essential fixture in ongoing training and development, their efficacy is sometimes lost

but voluntary and they feel far more positive because they have made a decision to be there of their own volition. If a particular staff member happens to be an expert in Pencil Box, he or she can choose to skip the session and run errands without a guilty conscience. If a staff member knows that a particular week will be a crunch period, with many assessments coming in or with Grade 12 portfolios due, he or she can choose to prioritise and miss the meeting. Thus it is important to draw up the roster at the start of the term so that the staff members can plan their attendance based on their schedules and interests.

Furthermore, the atmosphere within the meetings has also changed quite dramatically. Staff are energised and positive about the sessions, because they recognise that they are learning something worthwhile, and they participate more eagerly in the discussions and activities on offer. This is not unlike the experience that we have, as educators, when a learner organises an extra lesson

outside school hours: typically, these learners are more engaged, interested and enthusiastic than when they are in the regular class, because they have made the choice to be there.

In conclusion, our school's experience with optional staff meetings has been exceptionally positive and well-received. While this strategy cannot solve the problem of too few hours in the day, it can alleviate some pressure at stressful times of the year. It also appears to have a motivating effect on staff, and these meeting times provide our educators with an opportunity to showcase their talents and skills, while developing the skills of other staff members in the process. It is certainly a policy that school leaders and managers should consider. ▲

**MARTIN PEROLD**  
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: ACCOUNTING

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- > **8 MAY / AUCKLAND** St Cuthbert's College  
Adolescents, digital technology and mental health:  
A prescription for the future?

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- > **16 MAY / QUEENSLAND** All Hallows' School, Brisbane  
Game Changer! Women's Sport and Leadership

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- > **26–27 MAY / QUEENSLAND** Bond University, Gold Coast  
Empowering Leaders Masterclass

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- > **20 JUNE / WESTERN AUSTRALIA** Iona Presentation College, Mosman Park  
Years 9 & 10 Student Breakfast

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- > **MAKING A DIFFERENCE:  
LEADERSHIP SUMMIT  
GIRLS FOR CHANGE** Workshop for girls in Years 9–11  
Sydney: 3–4 July  
Melbourne: 29–30 July  
Dunedin: 2–4 October  
Brisbane: 7–8 October

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- > **UNMAKING THE MYTHS OF OUR  
GENDERED MINDS** Speaking Tour with Prof Cordelia Fine  
Melbourne: 25 July  
Adelaide: 26 July  
Hobart: 27 July  
Perth: 1 August  
Auckland: 3 August  
Sydney: 8 August  
Brisbane: 9 August

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- > **YARNING UP,  
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS** 27 July – 1 August  
Hosted by Bond University

All information correct at time of printing. Please visit [www.agsa.org.au/events](http://www.agsa.org.au/events) for any updates.

# ALLIANCE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS AUSTRALASIA

The Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia is a not for profit organisation which advocates for and supports the distinctive work of girls' schools in their provision of unparalleled opportunities for girls.

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