The Gender Summit:
What are adolescent boys and girls thinking?

Lessons learned from the Churchie Gender Summits 2008 – 2012
David Bell - Deputy Head Middle School

Churchie

- Anglican Church Grammar School – Brisbane, Australia, 50ha campus 5km from CBD
- 100 years old – Independent GPS school.
- 3 sub Schools – Prep – Middle – Senior comprising 300 staff and 1795 boys.
- Fees $18Kpa day boy, $36Kpa boarder.
- 160 boarders – mostly from western Queensland

Environmental Scan

- There are many websites dealing with adolescent gender differences but virtually all exist to analyse the different ways fe/males approach: substance and sexual abuse, depression, anxiety, workplace inequality, educational approaches and the like.
- I have sourced the research after beginning the presentations as opposed to the other way around.

Some Research

**What is a Gender Summit?**

- An opportunity for adolescent boys and girls to take an authentic and age appropriate leadership role within their communities.
- A chance to exchange the ‘secrets’ of what the other side thinks in a supportive environment to promote better understanding, tolerance and relationships for the benefit of all, including peers, parents, siblings and teachers.

**Philosophy of the Exercise**

- Both sexes are quite shy and self-conscious at this age and therefore nothing can be achieved until the ‘ice has been broken.’
- The relative maturity of the girls assists them to work through the initial awkwardness of the experience, and the relative comfort felt by the boys in familiar surroundings assists them to participate. *This would not work as well if hosted at a Girls school.*
- For the best traction, change the messenger, not the message.

**Assumptions re: All Participants**

- Mid – High socio-economic backgrounds
- Parents – professional roles/tertiary education
- High levels of attendance, engagement and association with their school
- Above average academic achievers

**Why a Gender Summit?**

This concept was born from a question posed by our School Council to the Head of Middle School in late 2008 –

‘What does the Middle School do to teach boys about girls and how to behave around them?’

**To sum up the day...**

- Betcher and Pollack (1993)
- Empathy in inter-gender relationships
  
  ‘...is a capacity to be attuned to the thoughts and feelings of others, to be able to put oneself in another person’s shoes yet still be in one’s own shoes as well...’

**‘What Women Want’**

*Meyers (2000)*
Gender Summit — How?

• 16 x Churchie Middle School Leaders
• 4 x Year 9 girls from each of St Margaret’s, St Aidan’s, Somerville House and Moreton Bay College (local independent girls’ schools)
• 32 x 14 year old students in total for 6 hours at ACGS.

Inside the Chapel - pre movement

Icebreaker 1 - Trivia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012 Gender Summit</th>
<th>20 Trivia Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the movies who plays the role of Harry Potter?</td>
<td>Name 3 famous British figures not one-word titles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name 3 famous British figures not one-word titles?</td>
<td>What colour does a muffin turn when baked?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the largest fruit you’ve ever eaten?</td>
<td>What is Mickey Mouse’s original name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Mickey Mouse’s original name?</td>
<td>Which animal produces the biggest baby?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which animal produces the biggest baby?</td>
<td>Where was Leonardo da Vinci born?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where was Leonardo da Vinci born?</td>
<td>Which chemical element has the shortest name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which chemical element has the shortest name?</td>
<td>How many hoops are there in a standard basketball?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many hoops are there in a standard basketball?</td>
<td>Can butter that’s called ‘raps’ oil be found in the diet of a kid who’s called ‘the shrew’?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Icebreaker 2 - Bridge Build

Icebreaker 3 - Fashion Parade

An Outline of the Day

• Meet and Greet — orange juice and fruit
• Chapel service then escorted walk to Brenan Pavilion on Main Oval — 5 minutes walk
• Icebreaker 1 – Trivia
• Icebreaker 2 – Bridge Building
• Icebreaker 3 – Fashion Parade
• Stimulus activity and discussion
• Forum activity (Mystery Box)
• Close
Group response to Stimuli

- Groups are provoked to have an opinion with a variety of images or articles.
- Each group receives a small bundle of images and questions and must respond to the rest.
- Time is provided to unpack any issues which present, or to develop debate if there is scope to. Some issues are added to the forum activity which follows.
- Requires a good facilitator.
Brief Group Activity – 5-10 mins

Form a group with those around you – groups of 3 – 4! Male and female – Please!!

Using the handouts as a stimulus, suggest a top 5 list of adolescent issues your group sees as relevant within your current school experience.

There are no right or wrong answers – it is more so a way to hear from colleagues and possibly see that some things are universal.

Mystery Box Discussion

• Culmination of the day.
• All day all delegates have been asked to put questions about their queries and concerns about the other gender (or their own) into a covered box.
• These are augmented by questions from previous summits.
• These questions are directed to a semi circular forum and then facilitated toward a ‘solution.’
• Most useful part of the day.

Abuse fears spark neck-to-knee code

Post Summit Follow Up

The messages passed by both sexes are collated and sent on to the opposite gender schools for dissemination to the masses. Churchie does this via the MS Leaders reporting to the Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9 Cohort Assemblies. In this case the demographic of the messenger is crucial to the traction of the message with the audience.

Short Activity 2 (5-10 mins)

Re-form as a group.

Consider the advice by boys for girls and vice versa given as a handout.

Discuss this in your group:

• What stood out as enduring?
• What stood out as profound?
• Did anything surprise you?
Advice to Boys 1

- Girls prefer it for boys to just be confident in who they are and not try to show off when you are trying to get their attention. They would prefer you just came up and introduced yourself without having your mates pushing, kicking, shouting and remarking next to you or in the background.
- Girls like boys to have manners and use them – open doors, pull chairs out, speak pleasantly, do the small things.
- Boys need to make an effort to understand and respect the pressure girls are under regarding diets and weight loss/gain from the popular media as well as their friends and family. Girls have this a lot harder than boys.
- Girls prefer to be asked out face to face or over the phone, not via text.
- Girls expect the following hygiene basics from boys – have a shower daily, clean your teeth, brush your hair, wear clean clothes.
- Swearing is poor form.
- Girls will gravitate towards a social ‘player’ to use them as much as the boy is ‘using’ the girl.

Advice to Girls 1

- Boys agree that swearing in your form is bad but also admit they will sometimes make a choice to do it because they think it makes them cool.
- Boys think public displays of affection should be kept discreet.
- Heavy make up is a universal turn off and if you wear it you risk being seen by boys as too high maintenance.
- Boys also admitted that makeup is sometimes as much or more so for other girls than for boys anyway, in the sense that they feel pressure to conform to social expectations about presentation. Boys actually prefer the natural look.
- Boys say the hardest thing about being a teenage boy is finding the balance between schoolwork/school sports and activities and a meaningful social life.

Advice to Boys 2

- Boys will push and shove and act foolishly in social settings because they are nervous and lacking in confidence and want to appear cool when really they are unsure about your opinion of them.
- Boys do not like girls playing ‘hard to get’ – be honest and up front and bond with boys and they will get the message a lot quicker rather than playing hide and seek.
- Boys like girls to be interested in the things they are interested in, or at least show an attitude which lets them try things before they dismiss them – eg football, fishing, camping etc.
- Boys would prefer that they were asked out in private rather than have to face you on the phone even when by text.
- Underarm hair was seen as a definite no-go for girls!
- Boys are happy for girls to attend GPS events as long as their intentions are to support them. Boys are not happy to see girls attend just to walk around showing off.

Advice to Girls 2

- Boys will push and shove and act foolishly in social settings because they are nervous and lacking in confidence and want to appear cool when really they are unsure about your opinion of them.
- Boys do not like girls playing ‘hard to get’ – be honest and up front and bond with boys and they will get the message a lot quicker rather than playing hide and seek.
- Boys like girls to be interested in the things they are interested in, or at least show an attitude which lets them try things before they dismiss them – eg football, fishing, camping etc.
- Boys would prefer that they were asked out in private rather than have to face you on the phone even when by text.
- Underarm hair was seen as a definite no-go for girls!
- Boys are happy for girls to attend GPS events as long as their intentions are to support them. Boys are not happy to see girls attend just to walk around showing off.

Perception

- It is human nature to perceive and judge according to our prior experiences.
- Gender Summits encourage students to open their minds and to remember that being judgemental can cause problems.

I hope I have achieved that today with you.

Thank you for your attendance

David Bell
Deputy Head - Middle School, Churchie
David.Bell@churchie.com.au