

Celebration Day for Girls
24th February 2013

Last Saturday and Sunday I held my first CDG for the year. It was for a class 5 group from Thornbury Primary School, in Melbourne's inner north. All the girls from the class, 15 of them, and their mums participated and I was pleased they could all share this event. Sometimes in the past when a CDG has been organised for a class one or more mothers have not been comfortable and withheld their daughter. Sometimes they just have something else on.

During the Saturday mothers session several of the mothers told me that their daughter was shy about all this and more likely to just listen than ask questions or offer their own insights. I have to say during the girls-only sessions, while there were a few who were more forthright, all the girls participated fully and enthusiastically and I had no idea who the 'shy' ones were!

We had two mothers who had been to an earlier CDG two years ago and were able to report how the day was for their older girls. Very helpful.

A beautiful preliminary to the CDG was that the male teacher of the class took the boys aside before the weekend and told the boys that the girls were all going to a special 'women's business' weekend, then the girls lined up and the boys filed past shaking each girl's hand, looked her in the eye and wished her well for the weekend. Wow. I hear from the mums that this teacher is pretty special. So, not only did the girls receive all the great messages embedded in the Celebration Day they received the blessing of the masculine, the boys and their teacher in a genuine and respectful way. The girls did say that not all the boys managed to 'look in their eye', but nonetheless the intent and impact was there. Apparently one boy was especially good at it. Several of the dads were keen to have more of a role and were the ones to bring their girls in the morning. It was great to welcome them for that moment and see their care and great wishes for their daughter.

I'm always conscious when it's a large group (for a CDG) of setting up the group at the beginning to respect and listen to each other. As I usually am fine with a more casual conversation I find with a larger group this needs defining a bit more, and these girls managed it beautifully. I also had a conversation about confidentiality so that they would have the freedom to ask or say what they wanted without concern that this would get around the school or be discussed out of context. While I felt this was a 'well-held' group I still think it is helpful to bring their awareness to this discipline and commitment.

Jac Torres-Gomez was able to join me for the morning. I was lovely to have her there sharing her recent experience of pregnancy and other salient bits, as well as another pair of hands as we navigated the activities and morning tea.

I had made two other 'word' signs for 'ovulation' and 'the menstrual cycle' (similar to 'menarche', 'menstruation' and 'menopause') to use during the morning when I come to explain these, to help imbed the words and their meanings. However I couldn't find them

in my carefully packed boxes! Nonetheless I hope to find them and use them at the next CDG. I don't plan to bring them out in the introduction as I think there are enough new words then, but just later on when appropriate.

Having a large group of mothers we had many and varied stories of special women and menarche, so the girls received a wealth of nourishing images. We had some great story tellers too so I was most entertained. During the mother's session, mindful of the size of the group, I did ask the mothers to keep their stories to 3 mins each. I didn't 'police' this on the day, but feel that just by asking there was heightened awareness in this regard.

We held the day in one of the mother's homes as she had a fabulous big family-room leading onto a lovely back garden. I had suggested to the woman who organised the day for her and our hostess to pay a reduced fee. As they were working to a \$1000 total I don't know what they all paid in the end (and have no need to know).

Of the 15 girls there were two with potential health issues. One who sometimes has heart problems and needs immediate parent/ambulance/hospital and another with nut allergies with epipen at the ready. Fortunately none of these issues surfaced, however it was great to be in the know just in case. I always these days ask mothers to write down their contact number during the mother's session. I have never yet needed to call one, but if I did it would be important.

The day went smoothly, rich with delightful mother-daughter sharing and interactions. It was a hot day and our hostess, with all the innate hospitality of a woman of Greek heritage, kept us cool and hydrated with watermelon and drinks.

When it came to the Koala Cards activity this group expressed great positivity about how they felt about their periods coming. Some 'hiding behind trees', 'feeling shy' images but overwhelmingly excited, pleased, happy and proud.

All in all a great day.