

Submission To A Parliamentary Committee Inquiry

Inquiry Into The Education Of Boys

Terms of Reference

. social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian Schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialization skills in the early and middle years of schooling

. the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness

MW Training Consultants' Introduction to the Submission

MW Training Consultants is a privately owned and operated small business in the training sector specializing in language, literacy and numeracy skills development for the community in Queensland and Tasmania.

This organisation has already initiated research on a small scale into the literacy and numeracy levels of chronic truants, a large number being boys, and is currently designing a research submission through a doctorate program to identify a criteria of effective approaches to educating people with a range of hostile or inadequate learning strategies.

Our Queensland sites currently provide educational facilities in a program called "Vocational Education" to – at last week's count – 35 young people, 30 of them male, who are independently enrolled in the Brisbane Distance Education Program completing their Yr 8 or 9 or 10 levels of education. We receive requests from parents, schools, correctional agencies, JPET and Family Services, to include new students at least twice weekly, and this is growing. While some requests can be fulfilled under the LANT Program we conduct for DETYA, 70% of young people who are in our "Vocational Education" program are 15 or under- not having attended a school for twelve months to two years – and are ineligible for any funding.

So we have, outside the 16- 65 age bracket accessing educational training in language, literacy and numeracy under the LANT Program, a growing number of school-aged boys, and girls, some already pregnant, who require education.

This group has a number of elements in common:

- . a recognition that "*I can do it, if someone would give me a go*"
- . a reactive sensitivity to teachers/trainers/parents/authority attitude that 'predicts' a certain type of behaviour
- . school/teacher trauma incident that set up barriers at an early age
- . issues of learning problems addressed in a restrictive approach or ignored in the school system
- . an "intelligence" that precludes that these young people have a 'medical learning disability'

Issues that impact significantly on Boys

The following issues have been identified by a range of people who work closely with this group of young people:

- . *adult educators and trainers with lengthy experiences in teaching people, especially 15 to 18 year olds, with 'behavioral problems'*
- . *MW Training Consultants management team that counsels and co-ordinates the access to the "Vocational Education" program*
- . *parents or guardians or mentors*
- . *government agencies*

Issue 1: Role Models

- . lack of male teachers in early years and in 'growth' times
- . insecure or negative role in society – Who are we? ... Where are we going? ..
- . parents/teachers/authority devalue 'maleness" and lack of parental valuing of them as people
- . lack of leadership to encourage a perception that each boy/youth is a valuable individual
- . compliance and conformity is aimed at within the school social system

Issue 2: Communication between young men/boys and others

- . unclear boundaries between 'standing up for yourself' and 'bullying'
- . negative language and aggressive or 'pushy' stance viewed as normal interaction
- . school Counsellors and parents in adult 'listening' mode that makes them 'deaf to young people'
- . school/community/family relationship based on 'what did he do this time?' – negative expectations
- . medical options to suppress inappropriate behaviour rather than deal with the cause

Issue 3: Education Programs

- . generally geared to 'controlled', sedentary, relational subjects
- . do not apply learning or skills in active ways
- . do not include the social, economic or community practice ie reflect national/state curriculum that needs to be customized to local area
- . timetables and curriculum demands disregard natural growth processes ie Yrs 3,4 & 5 or Yrs 8,9 & 10
- . respond to behavioral problems as 'the cause" of low levels of literacy & numeracy skills
- . develop 'expectations' of certain family/cultural groups that is acted out in the teaching approaches
- . devaluing of education by family as a result of a history of the school being seen as an imposition rather than an opportunity
- . provide narrow focus of career options – academic only

Anecdotes These are verbatim comments from this group of young people when asked why they attend the program, if they know of any friends not doing any training or education or work, and why they left or failed at school

"I came here when I left D.Bay high in 1998 Year 9. And I have been going to M.W ever since A lot of my friend left when I did but they either sit at home all day or some do work but most of my old school friends have moved away So I don't really know they do. I come here so I can get my year 10."

"I am here because I didn't like school. The last time I was in school I went to Mable park high school I did all of year 9 and about 3 days of year 10 and I moved here from Kingston because I was getting in to a lot of trouble with the people I hung around with so my mum said that I have to go live with my family over here. I didn't want to go back to school so I was going to go to tafe but I was too young and then we found this place.and I really want to get my year 10. I Don't know of anyone who I thing should come here.

"I was looking for a course because centrelink made me do it because under the youth activity agreement you must do a course of ~~voluntary~~ voluntary work So I went to tafe done a course there for six months and I finished and they handed out sheets of paper telling us about this course and so I came here and I have nearly finished year 10"

"I was sent here by centrelink for an activity agreement. I've been here for at least 18 months, and now I'm trying my hardest to get my grade 10 certificate. And I think I'm doing quiet well. I went to Clontarf High School, and then left school. At the moment I live here there everywhere but hopefully moving into a unit soon. And I don't know of anyone to come here cause I have no friends"

"I enrolled in distance ed to do something with my life instead of sitting at home play computer games and get on education. My mate ~~sfts~~ sits at home and does nothing ~~with~~ himself and I don't want to be a dole bludger all my life instead get a career. " " "

"I never seemed to fit into highschool because the teachers didn't have time to explane anything to me and always said to come back at lunchtime but that's ~~when~~ my time and I didn't want to do it Because the teachers didn't care I started miking up and got suspended 3 times in the first 2 ~~month~~ month and mum pulled me out before I got expelled"

Everyone is judgmental even the teachers. The teachers are lousy and only a few rip it up students who bully, tease, etc Teachers say things they don't mean like they'll organise for you to see them, then when you do they are either too busy or not there Teachers and children side on say, one student in the class. Teachers are unreasonable and don't want to see both sides of the story"

"I could not cope with the work and ather students. There are less students at Distance Education and it is eser to work"

you go to school you get in trouble once and then they blame you from everything else that goes on in the school than some one blames you for some thing you didn't do then you have a argument then you get susenderd our expleed

Recommendations

Issue 1: Role Models

- . enable schools to 'train up' tutors/aides that come from trades backgrounds
- . encourage older males to become involved in training through Centrelink
- . promote a role-model of males across cultures, ages, societies and work on a national level in the form of 'humorous' ads or activities or jingles
- . promote the male/the youth/the boy in positive '**can do**' language - not at the expense of the female – but as wonderfully different
- . in the training of teachers – need to provide a focus on the **human developmental process** as impacting on attitude and ability at certain times
- . screening process for inappropriate teachers and teacher behaviour
ie students in this cohort all responded with a critical incident involving significant 'teacher bullying' that was supported by the school system that contributed to their current situation
- . **parents need to be 're-educated'** into education
- . link skills gains to **careers in the real world** – men can do anything!
- . teacher trainers & teachers must be made **accountable** – what are their outcomes?

Issue 2: Communication between young men/boys and others

- . research the **causes** of ADD & ADDH rather than the symptoms – look at alternative medicines
eg kinesiology has identified that certain chemicals found in soft drinks and sweets retards the pituitary gland and, in consequence, affects the attitude of the young person in her/his relations with others
- . train teachers to '**listen**' to the person rather than the 'status' of that person
ie a problem expressed by a young boy is often easily dismissed, the same problem spoken by an adult is listened to
- . maintain open communication that looks beyond the immediate situation to understanding the underlying problems the student may have
- . utilise the **current and future** communicative systems that expand the human possibilities
ie chat rooms, Internet pen pals

Issue 3: Education Programs

- . teach teachers to '**teach to learn**'
- . develop programs or re-evaluate the curriculum to ensure each subject provides both the **knowledge and the application of that knowledge** in demonstration of skills
eg an intense physical activity in co-ordination with a sedentary activity in each subject
- . young people who have been diagnosed dyslexic, ADD & ADDH clients are responding to 'owning their own learning' in a supported environment
- . positive **approaches to learning** that emulate credible teaching & learning approaches
 - . *consciously review the activity*
 - . *actively participate in the activity*
 - . *establish a continuous improvement learning process*

. *transfer skills within and across a range of subjects*

- . ensure programs/subjects are clearly structured but internally flexible
ie not project work but providing alternative activities or approaches that the individual can choose to gain the specific knowledge
- . develop career structures that emulate the real world – what is really out there
- . increase the physical activity and couple this with self-esteem programs
- . make real the rhetoric on the **Key Competencies** by purposefully including these as part of student timetables in all or a range of subject areas
- . expand the careers approach to recognition of the ‘virtual’ classroom or access to supplementary courses/units of competency
- . make sure every student has open access to computer technology so that each can exit the school with at least some units of competency from the Certificate II in **Information Technology**

Research Proposal

Approach this cohort of young people as young adults and utilize the model developed by P. Cross(1981) as a methodology to examine possible realistic educational strategies to address the issues facing “Boys in Education”

Cross (1981) presents the *Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL)* model in the context of her analysis of lifelong learning programs. The model attempts to integrate other theoretical frameworks for adult learning such as andragogy (Knowles), experiential learning (Rogers), and lifespan psychology.

The CAL model consists of two classes of variables: personal characteristics and situational characteristics.

- Personal characteristics include: aging, **life phases**, and developmental stages. These three dimensions have different characteristics as far as lifelong learning is concerned. Aging results in the deterioration of certain sensory-motor abilities (e.g., eyesight, hearing, reaction time) while intelligence abilities (e.g., decision-making skills, reasoning, vocabulary) tend to improve. Life phases and **developmental stages** (e.g., marriage, job changes, retirement) involve a series of plateaus and **transitions which may or may not be directly related to age**.
- Situational characteristics consist of part-time versus full-time learning, and voluntary versus **compulsory learning**. The administration of learning (i.e., schedules, locations, procedures) is strongly affected by the first variable; the second pertains to the self-directed, **problem-centered** nature of most adult learning.

Example:

Consider three adults: a nursing student, a new parent, and a middle-aged social worker about to take a course on child development. Each of these individuals differs in age (20,30,40) and life/developmental phases (adolescent/searching, young/striving, mature/stable). They also differ in terms of situational characteristics: for the nursing student, the course is full-time and compulsory, for the parent, it is part-time and optional; for the social worker it is part-time but required. According to the CAL model, a different learning program might be necessary for these three individuals to accommodate the differences in personal and situational characteristics.

The purpose would be to identify the types of learning strategies that could encourage boys in schools rather than the focus being on the ‘*boys being the problem*’ alone. While the prospect of individualized learning can be appropriate in the LANT program it would be logistically too difficult to implement in school situation. Therefore, one of the outcomes of this research would be to provide teacher training organizations with research to support the use of different strategies to “*teaching boys*” that enables rather than disables their self-value and pride in being male.