

Gordon Wood
4 Azalea Place
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650

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Re Media Release How are we educating boys...?

As a primary school teacher of over twenty years, a father of adolescent children (one girl one boy) a sporting coach and administrator I wish to express concerns about how we are educating boys and the roles of males in society. These concerns include:

- boys literacy
- current societal roles of men, youth and boys
- societies expectation of men, youths and boys
- Degradation of traditional male roles.
- socialisation of children, boys in particular
- employment

Boys Literacy

Boys literacy is a major concern, many boys lag behind in development of literacy skills. There are several identifiable areas that can be addressed, including;

- Between the ages 8-10 students pass from **leaning to read** to **reading to learn** many students, especially boys, with a disinterest in printed matter do not make this step. Their peer groups learning then accelerates away from them leaving them frustrated and disenchanting. Many eventually giving up and resorting to disruptive behaviour.
- Predominance of female teachers in K-6 denies boys of positive role models in the school, demonstrating that literacy is not a preferred activity for boys. This is compounded by the lack of positive and/or resident males in many family groups. We are becoming a matriarchal society.
- Reading materials especially in this 8-10 age bracket holds insufficient interest for many boys. This lack of "boy" appropriate materials redirects boys toward technology based materials, TV video and computer games which have little or no literary basis.
- Single parent matriarchal families frequently undervalue the significance of positive masculine models in the development of all children especially boys. Many of the most difficult children, especially boys that I have taught, belong in this category. These families are also frequently economically depressed.

Possible actions to alleviate literacy predicament:

- Subscribing of all children's TV. including the removal language sound tracks and replacement of symbolic instruction in children's computer games with written instructions This is especially so for material directed at the 8-10 age group. Language sound tracks could be selectively removed for other age groups. This would make these technologies work in favour of the learning agenda rather than distract from it. As is often in the present case.
- Provide real support in the schools by lowering teacher student ratios especially in year 4 and 6 (in NSW following basic skills tests in year 3 and 5), especially in those schools identified as having a problem. Many of these schools are DSP (disadvantaged schools) schools and many children enter these schools with a school readiness age of three to four years rather than five years. These students are already behind many never really catch up and the gap widens at about age 8-10

years. The problem is not of the school's or teacher's making, however too frequently blame is aimed at these targets.

- Reverse discrimination, to encourage young men to teach especially in the K –6 years. Cadetships or scholarships including employment contracts to be offered to very able male year 12 graduates to enter university teacher education courses.
- Encourage publishers of traditional masculine literature eg football magazines, cars & motor bikes publications, and technology magazines to publish more material targeted at the primary age level.
- Encourage low income, single parent, and social welfare dependent families to break the depressing socio-economic cycle. This could be assisted by making social welfare a second chance not a way of life. For example;
 - Full supporting welfare to be paid to these families only until the youngest child is of school age, then progressively reduced over a period of time.
 - unemployment benefits to be available for only six months in a five year period

These actions would encourage people to become self-starters and responsible for themselves, improving self worth and self esteem and proved positive role models for all those caught in this cycle.

Current societal roles of men, youth and boys.

Current Australian society appears to be at a loss to define what is the role of a male. Events and issues that suggest this include:

- The traditional role of “bread winner” ceased some where in the last 30 years.
- The welfare support for single parent patriarchal multi-father families. The role and value of “father” in these families has been devalued to “sperm donor”.
- Current legislation before parliaments in Australia in relation to the use of “donor sperm” for other than medically infertile, heterosexual couples not socially infertile couples. This situation further devalues the role of the male especially that of “father”. Men that I know feel so strongly on this issue that they have requested that their sperm donations be destroyed and are no longer willing to donate. Extrapolated to the extreme scenario men could end up being “kept for breeding purposes (nonsexual sperm donation)” in an amazonian society, a bit like snakes on a venom farm.
- Too many of today's younger men and youths see the role of “the male” as being laughable as in “what role” and subsequently treat life and the remainder of society with contempt and as a bad joke, note the young male suicides.

Possible actions to alleviate male role predicaments:

- Revaluing the role of “father” by the family law courts.
- Providing for income splitting for taxation purposes for young families so that one spouse (not necessarily mum) can remain at home until the youngest child is of school age. Parents could take it the role of “domestic engineer” in turn with employer co-operation and both enjoy the delights and rewards of child rearing.
- Tying of “dole” for the young to meaningful employment through apprentice and cadetship schemes. It should be a “learning for employment allowance” rather than an “unemployment allowance.” This would raise self-esteem and self-reliance of the young and provide a pool of skilled workers for when all the baby boomers move on to retirement.

Society's expectation of men, youths and boys

Society at this point in time appears to not have a defined role for males. The consistent lack of an answer to the questions;-

- What is a male's role in society?
- What is valued by society about males?

- What is good about being male?
- What does it mean to male?

These unanswered questions lead the ultimate question asked either on an individual or gender basis:

- What do I(we) have to offer society?
- What does society wish me(us) to contribute?

All these unanswered questions compound the learning difficulties and lack of esteem and worth felt by the male gender as a group.

Answers

The answers lie in providing a “social value” of being male and providing true equity in terms of opportunity in employment, education, parenting and most importantly a future. Remove males and what makes men men from the list of things to be modified or eradicated.

Socialisation of children, boys in particular

With the increase of disconnection with their roles in society and what is expected of them by society, males are with drawing or being force to withdraw by societies structural changes, from parenting, mentoring, and child development roles and responsibilities they have fulfilled in previous times, especially in relation to boys and young men.

A commonly held societal belief is that a daughter needs a mother, or maternal mentor, however another belief held today implies that a boy does not need a father, or paternal mentor. Here lies a double standard that is contributing to the lowering of self worth, self-belief and self-esteem of the male gender as a group.

Mentoring is mentioned because with the watering down of the apprentice and cadetship systems many young men miss the opportunity to experience a mentoring relationship with and older experienced **businessman**, **tradesman** or **craftsman**. In a tribal sense a positive and constructive initiation or rites of passage to **manhood** is missing in our current social structure. The need for it is also not understood or appreciated by large a portion of the population. The important role that men have in providing positive role models for boys and youths is of paramount importance and needs to be rebuilt. This concerns all men, not just fathers or indeed fathers of sons.

Employment

Unemployment and lack of employment opportunities remains a problem for all Australia’s youth, however for the group identified as not being able to pass, or slow to pass from **learning to read to reading to learn**, provide a special social and educational challenge. Unfortunately this group comprises mostly boys.

There is no apparent easy fix. It has taken society a couple of decades to create this predicament, however we must find a solution in a shorter period or nearly a whole generation of males and their contributions will be lost to society.

In this letter I have expressed my beliefs and opinions that have been developed over time by reading listening, observation and experience as a teacher, father, sports coach, sports administrator and man.

I would value the opportunity to participate in formal study, forums, conferences and meetings that would assist in finding answers to the masculine dilemma.