

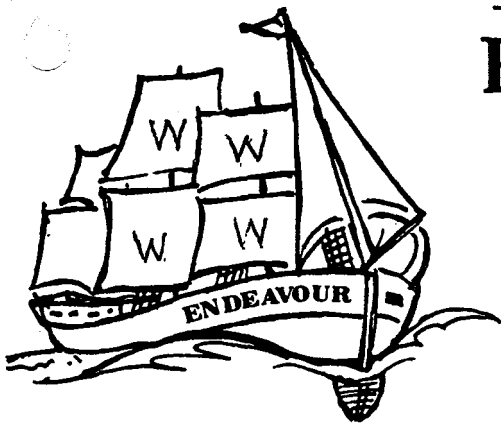
ENDEAVOUR FORUM Inc.

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21 November 2000

The Secretary & Committee,
Inquiry into the Education of Boys,
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Employment, Education & Workplace Relations,
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Dr. Nelson et al,

Thank you for your letter of 17th November. I have also just received the transcript of the proceedings of your Inquiry on the day Alan Barron and I made our submission, and I note Ms. Gillard's comment p. EEWR 155: "Sorry about our banter. It started this morning when we had Babette Francis here, and our behaviour has gone downhill ever since! The quality of submissions has certainly gone up; our behaviour has gone downhill....."

Personally I would not have thought it possible for Ms. Gillard's behaviour to have gone further downhill, not in a public venue anyway, but I guess with a feminist it can be done.

However I would like to deal with some of the substantive issues raised by other witnesses.

1. The assertion that the boys-education problem has only arisen in the past 20 years is not correct. I correctly identified in my Minority Report in 1977 (based on data from previous years) the disadvantages boys faced in regard to retention rates, success in HSC (15% higher success rate for girls) and remedial education (ratio of boys to girls: 4: 1). One feminist teacher who whinged about discrimination against girls admitted that all the children in remedial classes in her school were boys. Dr. Rowlands' tables in my Minority Report provides the data on boys education - the ONLY subject in which boys had a higher success rate was physics.

I also identified the disadvantages experienced by males at all stages of life - infant mortality, life expectancy, suicide, road accidents etc.

2. Boys need their fathers - if you don't do something about enforcing Family Court orders about fathers having access to their children (divorced

mothers often defy Family Court orders as a means of revenge) boys will continue to fail in education. Trinity Grammar, whose program was detailed in the transcript sent to us, seems to have a comprehensive policy of involvement by mentors and old boys, which no doubt supplements fathers' roles or substitutes for them when they are absent through divorce or separation. Incidentally we thought it was delightful the way the Trinity Grammar witness referred several times to the young teacher he was employing as the new "girl". Patriarchy is not dead yet - it is not surprising he is getting good results at his school - and we trust Ms. Gillard did not spit the dummy during his evidence. Recommended reading for your committee is **"Fatherless America: Our most urgent social problem"** by David Blankenhorn and **"Life without Father"** by David Popenoe. Maybe your Committee cannot decrease the incidence of divorce, but you can recommend that wives be required to comply with Family Court access orders. The penalty if they don't comply could be that residence (formerly custody) proceedings would be reopened

3. We are amazed at the deference with which you treated some of the other evidence - these are the very educrats who have presided over the disaster in boys' education - while I who identified the problems 23 years ago, am regarded with frivolity! These educrats are part of the problem, not the solution.

Educrats have been responsible for the dumbing down of the tough subjects such as physics, to make it more accessible to girls. When I studied physics, we had to do difficult experiments with light, sound etc. Now students have to write essays about the life of Newton! This is just one example of how a "boys'" subject has been feminized into a girls' subject.

4. The elimination of high quality technical schools has eliminated a very important pathway to employment for non-academic boys. In Germany there are vocational schools which are just as prestigious as universities.

5. The content of subjects like history and geography have been distorted so that they have lost their attraction for boys. When I was a student I loved history - British history, the Tudors and Stuarts, or Indian history, the stories of the Moghul emperors, are absolutely fascinating. This is evident in the popularity of films on Elizabeth I or Mary Queen of Scots etc. Now history has become "politically correct", i.e. how the white man exploited the noble aborigines. Geography, instead of being a study of the earth has become "how the white man has polluted the environment". Is it any wonder white boys are tuning out?

6. The "look-say" or "whole word" system of teaching reading is a ghastly failure and has contributed to the illiteracy of boys. It is essential that

there is a return to phonetics in primary school - if boys do not attain an adequate standard of literacy in primary school and begin to ENJOY reading, they will not achieve in later life. These are the ones who become alienated from society and prone to suicide.

7. For the record, all my eight children have university degrees, most with multiple or postgraduate qualifications. All are employed (the daughters who have children work part-time). Their qualifications cover a range of disciplines, I mention this to establish my credentials on knowing something about education.

First daughter: **BA Hons in Psychology, (Melbourne)** works part-time in a centre for the disabled.

Second daughter: **B.A. Maths and B.Ed. (Melbourne)** works part-time as Accountant for factory she co-owns with her husband.

Third daughter: **MBBS, B.Med.Sc., FRACP (Melbourne)** works part-time as oncologist at Peter MacCallum and St. Vincents. Hospitals.

First son: **B.A.Hons. Maths, (Melbourne)** works as statistician.

Second Son: **MBBS, FRACR, (Melbourne)** works as radiotherapist at Geelong Hospital.

Third son: **B. Engineerig and MA Economics, (Monash)** works in Treasury, Canberra

Fourth son: **LL.B, and MA Economics, (Monash),** works for Optus, Sydney.

Fourth daughter: **B.A Hons Economics, (Monash),** works for British Telecom, London.

In addition, my husband has degrees in **Law, Arts and Commerce**, and has lectured at Melbourne Uni. I have a **B.Sc. Hons (Microbiology & Chemistry)** and have worked on all five continents, so I have some life experience that should encourage you to take me seriously. I would add the strong recommendation that your Committee should support the concept of **voucher** funding of education, i.e **parents** being given 95% of the cost of educating a child in a government school, so that **all** parents have the choice of sending their children to Trinity Grammar or the kind of schools my children attended. This one single step will do far more to eliminate problems with boys' education than any other initiative.

8. I have just spent two days attending a symposium organised by the Australian Institute of Political Science on "**Education Attainment and Labor Market Outcomes - Factors affecting boys and their status in relation to girls**". There were some useful ideas that came up, but it was mostly waffle with the educrats using the same old code words of "gender equity" etc. However, there was a glimmering of acknowledgement that boys and girls may be different and that we are not about to achieve an androgynous society as envisioned by feminists.

To sum up my recommendations:

- (a) Return to phonetics in teaching reading
- (b) Voucher (**paid to parents**) system of funding schooling
- (c) Status of technical/vocational schools to be enhanced as in Germany
- (d) Subjects to be clearly defined, e.g. history, geography etc. and to have solid content (cf Andrew Bolt's articles on the new Victorian Museum for an example of how education is being distorted to fit the white-guilty/black-victim scenario.
- (e) Enforce Family Court Orders so boys have access to their fathers.

Please regard this as a supplementary submission.

Yours sincerely,



Babette Francis
National & Overseas Co-ordinator