

SUBMISSION FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE
PARENTS & FRIENDS ASSOCIATION OF
ST JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL
WAUCHOPE NSW 2446

This submission is a culmination of observations, discussions, readings and research by myself, the President of the P&F Association of St Joseph's Primary School, Wauchope, a mother of two young boys and someone who has been extremely interested, concerned and confronted by the topic of "Boys & Education" for many years.

Over a period of time I have spoken frankly and openly with teachers, both male & female, principals and assistant principals and parents regarding this important issue. Their questions, concerns and ideas make up the basis for my submission.

QUESTIONS:

When notice of this much needed inquiry was first brought to the attention of our parent group, the question most asked by parents of boys within our school community and indeed from outside, was WHY?

Why are boys so unsure of themselves, compared to girls?

Why do so many boys struggle & fail at school, work and relationships and are often adrift in life?

Why do so many boys appear to not care, often presenting work that is sloppy and inferior to their female class mates?

Why do so many boys dislike reading, don't wish to join in with concerts or other non-sport activities?

Why do so many boys have the attitude that it is 'cool to be a fool'?

Why is it that boys constitute approx 85+% of a schools' disciplinary actions?

Why are a large percentage of these disciplinary actions against boys, brought about by female teachers?

Why do so many boys appear less happy at school then girls?

Why is there such a large percentage of students who need special education support male students?

Why are so many boys less attentive in class?

Why are so many boys so disillusioned about the meaning of school and the purpose of learning and education?

Why is it that their learning progress slow from approx yr 3 and therefore their levels of achievement slip well below that of their female counterparts?

So many WHY questions and so few real answers!

The answers to these and other very important questions and concerns are I believe very complex. Involving a number of contributing factors, all linked together. Some of these factors that I see as significant are listed below.

TESTOSTERONE!

What an extremely powerful hormone! Steve Biddulph in his book 'Raising Boys', devotes a whole chapter to the topic. Obviously nature and the role of hormones in everyone's bodies plays a major role in who we are. Understanding boys and their hormones, and the effects means that we can understand what is going on and be sympathetic and helpful to the growing boy.

RULES & EMPOWERMENT:

In the book 'Raising a Son' by Don & Jeanne Elyum, the issue of structure in a boys life is covered. They use examples of this and believe that in their experience there are 3 things that boys always need to know:

1. Who's in charge?
2. What are the rules?
3. Will those rules be fairly enforced?

The Elyums feel that boys are somewhat insecure and feel in danger if there isn't enough structure in a situation. If no-one is in charge and boundaries are not set, they begin jostling with each other to establish a pecking order. If structure is provided, they can relax and not feel threatened by each other.

A further need for boys in learning in our schools is to take on more responsibility for their learning discipline, their feelings and other younger students in the school. Peer support programs and the like which we are fortunate enough to have running for some years in our small primary school are certainly beneficial with boys and learning. Having the senior primary students, male and female helping their younger counterparts in reading, writing, craft and other activities. Many teachers say that it is often the younger students who are inadvertently helping the older students in their emotional adjustment. Programs such as this give the older students a sense of responsibility, and achievement and satisfaction that they can actually do something to help the younger students and can somehow achieve success in the school.

TECHNOLOGY:

The technological Revolution that is being undertaken in our society today and indeed over the past few years is also another influence on boys behaviour, attitude and literacy levels. Debate still rages over the extent to which boys literacy levels and their ability to engage in oral rather than text communications, is effected by technology. Certainly in schools today, the computer is no longer an optional extra, it is standard equipment and utilised by children from kindergarten onwards. The games, play stations, nintendos and hand held pocket games all playing a role under the umbrella of technology.

MALE ROLE MODELS:

This I believe is one of the most critical ingredients in helping our boys balance their lives, behaviours and school performances. "The Teacher" and in particular MALE teachers, and male

staff in general, have a very special and vital role to play in the lives of boys in each school. Steve Biddulph in 'Manhood' and 'Raising Boys' speaks of the necessity for a young boy to identify with another older male, whether there is a father or male guardian at home or not. With the breakup of the traditional family and the infusion of many single parents families, this is becoming more and more an issue.

In some cases the “male parent” may not be the best role model for the boy and so by having a male teacher as a role model will certainly enable the boy to speak, spend time with and gain some experiences in 'male pursuits' or discuss issues that are worrying them. I personally believe that a male influence for a boy in infants (yr 1 or 2 ideally) is even more beneficial. Having a role model for a boy in those early years, will instill in the boy that the male teacher or role model is an approachable mentor and not the ‘big bad wolf’ that so many tiny children perceive male teachers to be. This in turn throughout time, may encourage more males towards the profession of teaching, something that according to statistics is gravely lacking, especially in infants/primary schools, as well as other professions seemingly dominated by females, such as nursing etc.

Male teachers also need to be aware of their important role and be given training for skills and knowledge to talk with boys in a non subject or class setting.

PARENTS:

The most vital link in this intricate chain is, I believe, Parents. Both mums and dads. Parents need to ask their sons what they want in life for themselves, and help them to articulate this.

Parents must be clear in what they expect from their son, in regards to behaviour and responsibilities around the home.

Don't think that they should know what you want - spell it out!!

Always encourage your child, from the earliest age. Encourage them to set personal goals. This might be as simple as your year one son getting all his spelling words correct...

In this world we live today, it is important for both parents to touch and show affection towards their son. A hug, a pat on the back, even a wrestle with dad, affirms who they are and says that “You are OK”. I believe it is extremely important to talk to your son and even more important to LISTEN to them!!!!

The close relationship between parent and teacher is also vital. Parents and teachers need to work together in unison to assist in the developmental behavioural outcomes and education of the boys. Fathers (if possible) need to become more involved in their children's learning, homework, etc. Not just in their sporting activities at the weekend, or the odd working bee. Parents need to become involved in and be articulate on behalf of their sons at the policy making and implication level of their sons school. Talking with the teachers on issues that affect your son and discussions of ideas that may assist your son's behaviour or learning are also crucial.

These are just a few of the associated factors that contribute to this topic, and there are I'm sure many many more.

It is so very obvious to all that the issue of Boys and Education is such a complex one and the decline in boys learning and behavioural outcomes over many years will need long term cultural shifts in the way schools operate. It may mean rethinking the curriculum, separate classes for boys and girls at co-ed schools for the basic subjects, teacher, training. professional development, parental involvement and so many more factors.

I believe personally that if the boys and their parents can have a fulfilling and rewarding relationship and the school and teachers are apart of it, it will go along way in helping our MEN OF TOMORROW.....

I look forward to the outcomes of this inquiry. Than you for allowing me to contribute.

Yours sincerely,

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NOTE: In collating my submission, the following books/papers were used:

“Raising Boys” - Steve Biddulph

“Manhood” - Steve Biddulph

“Raising a Son” - Don & Jeanne Eflurn

“Boys Learning” - Resource paper by Ian Lillico

Principal Bullsbrook District High School

“Sharing Parent Matters” - Newsletter published by

Parents Representative Council of Catholic
Schools in the Diocese of Parramatta