

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

### SUBMISSION FROM:

- WOMEN'S POLICY DEVELOPMENT OFFICE
- EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### INTRODUCTION

The Education Department of Western Australia is committed to addressing equity issues in schools. It had a role in the development of the national *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* and has argued strongly for the *Western Australian Curriculum Council's Curriculum Framework* to have a central focus of inclusivity and equity of access to learning for all students. The Department supports the 5 strategic directions and 10 principles for action outlined in *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* and urges government when developing pro-active measures to address '*the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools*', that the principles of the Framework provide the context for these measures.

The Department believes that gender differences in educational outcomes need to be analysed with great caution as the issues are extremely complex and not confined solely to the domain of schooling. Given this however, thoughtful and critical attention must be paid to the construction and manifestation of masculinities and femininities within our schools in order to develop just and equitable gender relations.

The Department is committed to promoting outcomes-focused curriculum for all students as outlined in the mandatory requirements of the *WA Curriculum Framework*. The *Curriculum Framework* and the Education Department's *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Policy* and the *Students at Educational Risk Policy and Guidelines* are designed to ensure that the principles of gender equity are incorporated into all aspects of curriculum development and delivery.

One of the key principles of the *Curriculum Framework* is the principle of inclusivity. Schools are required to construct learning programs that begin with the needs of the individual.

While it is acknowledged that schools must work to improve boys' achievements, the programs and strategies implemented must respond to the different needs of different groups and take account of additional factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, sexuality and the influences of peer groups, the media, popular culture and so on. Strategies for addressing the needs of boys are likely to succeed when developed in relation to these additional factors. It should also be acknowledged that to address the educational concerns of groups of boys it is absolutely necessary at the same time that we look at the effect these strategies will have on the education of girls. Kenway (1994) states, 'the best policies and practices have attended to issues of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between them'.

In consultation with local communities, districts and schools have adopted a diverse range of programs and strategies to meet the identified needs of both boys and girls. Some programs

have been specifically designed to address the issues with boys' education in a particular district or school; in others, programs are not gender specific and address broader issues of inclusivity. Where whole school and community links have been established there is some initial qualitative evidence that approaches taken to address the issues have been successful.

There are many approaches being developed within school communities regarding the education of boys and, while this initiative is to be commended, the Education Department would suggest that there is a necessity for governments to specifically fund further teacher education programs regarding the understanding of gender construction. Knowledge of the issues associated with the construction of masculinity and femininity will allow teachers to construct more informed programs whether they are gender specific or gender inclusive.

There are differences in the achievements of boys and girls in Western Australia but it is not the case that boys' academic performance across a range of learning areas is declining while girls' academic performance is improving. There may be a public perception that there has been a massive decline in the performance of boys. While there are gaps in the performance of boys relative to girls, Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) test data from 1992-1999 indicates that there has been no significant decline in the performance of boys in years 3, 7 and 10 in English, Mathematics, The Arts, Health and Physical Education and Society and Environment. (For further details see the discussion in the section on MSE later in this report.)

MSE data indicates a more complex picture than the notion of a generalised improvement in the performance of girls and a decline in the overall performance of boys. Analysis of the data confirms that different performance of groups of girls and boys is evident across different learning areas. Further analysis and investigation of the data and its implications are warranted.

The Education Department welcomes the House of Representatives Inquiry into the Education of Boys and believes it has the potential to determine an understanding of, and a broad based approach to, addressing the needs and concerns of boys in our education system as well as in the wider community. Because of this belief we strongly recommend that while looking at the specific needs of boys, the inquiry must also:

- ◆ address the ongoing needs of girls
- ◆ address the issue of gender relations when considering approaches to masculinity education
- ◆ address the construction of masculinities and femininities outside of the educational setting.

## **GENDER EQUITY: A FRAMEWORK FOR AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS**

### ***Strategic Directions:***

Under *The Plan for Government School Education 1998-2000*, schools have an enhanced capacity to manage their own affairs within the framework of the government school system. A key objective is 'to provide more scope for decision making at a local level.' The Department supports and has developed a diverse range of programs and strategies under the Gender Equity Framework to support the outcomes. In supporting this Framework, the

Department acknowledges that girls and boys should not be seen as homogeneous groups and recognises differences based on socio-economic status, cultural background, disability, sexual preference and urban/rural location.

The Framework for Australian Schools is based on five strategic directions for action in the areas of:

1. **Understanding the Process of Gender Construction.** The concept of gender construction will be acknowledged, examined and understood at all levels of schooling.
2. **Curriculum, Teaching and Learning.** Curriculum reform will acknowledge and address gender equity principles in meeting the needs of both boys and girls.
3. **Violence and School Culture.** Gendered violence and sex-based harassment will be eliminated from schools.
4. **Post-School Pathways.** Post-school pathways for students will be expanded beyond those governed by conventional assumptions based on gender.
5. **Supporting Change.** Gender equity principles will be integral to school and system management.

## 1. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF GENDER CONSTRUCTION

‘Understanding of the process of gender construction is crucial if schools and systems are to work for equitable educational experiences for girls and boys.’ *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools, (1997).*

The Department supports the view that gender is socially and actively constructed within institutional and cultural contexts that produce multiple forms of masculinities and femininities. They are dynamic and therefore capable of challenge and change. The Department also recognises that schools, as institutions, are active sites in the formation of gendered behaviours.

In relation to masculinity, Connell (1996), highlights research which has implications for the development of programs for boys. His major conclusions focus on a complex system of masculinity construction. He suggests there is no ‘one’ masculinity but multiple masculinities. These masculinities do not sit side by side but are structured according to hegemonies and hierarchies. The concept of collective masculinities is discussed, as is the nature of masculinity being layered, and its construction as active and dynamic. Though teachers would have a basic grounding in the notions of gender construction, constant research needs to be brought to teachers’ attention to enable school-based decisions regarding gender programs to reflect this research.

‘Any approach taken by schools to work for equitable educational experiences or outcomes for girls or boys needs to be built on an informed understanding of how girls and boys came to understand and position themselves as female and male.’ *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools.*

In understanding the construction of masculinity it is also important that questions surrounding the influence of the peer group within the school setting and its impact on the making of gender be closely addressed. Much anecdotal evidence from within schools suggests that a great deal of negative and positive social change is enacted through the

construction of collective masculinities within the group which is played out in playgrounds and within classrooms.

Questions of masculinity and femininity as socially and culturally constructed attributes also have a significant impact on the ways boys and girls select and respond to particular subjects. This is particularly the case where curriculum organisation establishes and sustains dichotomies between Maths/Science and English/Humanities.

Consideration needs to be given to where the particular subject is situated in the hierarchy of the curriculum. Subject areas such as English and the Humanities are perceived by some boys to be feminine and therefore not important or attractive. As part of some boys' construction of masculinity they define themselves as 'non-feminine.' When academic achievement and literacy is defined as something that girls are good at, these boys will define themselves as not academic and not literate. If subjects such as English and certain Humanities subjects are seen as 'feminised learning practice' and hence the domain of girls, this is likely to have an effect on choice of subject (where choice is available) or under-achievement by some groups of boys.

**OUTCOME:**

**The concept of gender construction will be acknowledged, examined and understood at all levels of schooling.**

The Department believes it is developing and delivering curriculum within compulsory and post-compulsory frameworks which tackle the issues of gender construction through program direction in all learning areas. However, there is need to further and more consciously develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of teachers, managers and parents about gender construction.

**2. CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The Education Department recognises that, 'Curriculum is fundamental to change, and should be continually trialed, examined and adapted to ensure that it is appropriate.' *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*.

***CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK***

Under the *Curriculum Council Act of 1997* all government schools have a mandatory requirement to implement the outcomes of the *Curriculum Framework*. This Framework sets out the common outcomes (the knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to acquire) as a result of programs they undertake in schools from Kindergarten to Year 12. The implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* will ensure that schools direct their attention to common outcomes while having the flexibility to design learning programs that suit their particular circumstances and student population.

The *Curriculum Framework* is underpinned by seven key principles, three of which are of particular relevance to the terms of this enquiry as they are embedded in and underpin the

strategic directions of the Department and the programs that Districts and schools are implementing.

1. **Inclusivity:** This principle requires providing all groups of students, irrespective of educational setting, with access to a wide and empowering range of knowledge, skills and values. It means recognising and accommodating the different starting points, learning rates and previous experience of individual students or groups of students. It means providing opportunities for students to evaluate how concepts and construction such as culture, class and gender are shaped. Achieving this principle requires schools to have an awareness and an understanding of inclusivity and to identifying individuals and groups who, for whatever reason, are not being given equitable opportunities to improve their learning.
2. **A developmental approach:** Students develop and learn at different rates and in different ways, constructing new knowledge and understandings in ways which link their learning to their previous learning.
3. **An explicit acknowledgment of core values:** The core shared values that underpin the Framework are: a commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and achievement of potential; self acceptance and respect of self; respect and concern for others and their rights; social and civic responsibility and environmental responsibility.

The *Outcomes and Standards Framework (Student Outcome Statements)*, the *Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Policy* and the *Students at Educational Risk Policy* require schools to develop and implement learning programs that focus on each student achieving (and those at risk of not achieving) the outcomes that are consistent with the *Curriculum Framework*.

### ***STUDENTS AT EDUCATIONAL RISK***

Local, national and international research has confirmed that the factors impacting on student outcomes occur both within individuals **and** across the social and cultural domains of family, school, peer group and community. That is, student achievement is the function of a whole range of factors.

Some risk factors appear more important to school performance than others, and some are more amenable to modification than others.

The TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research undertook comprehensive epidemiological research within the WA community during the 1990s and found that low academic achievement is particularly associated with any one of these three factors: low verbal and non-verbal ability; speech and language difficulties and poor mental health.

It is apparent from this and other research that other single risk factors such as gender and sole parenting are not powerful predictors of poor educational outcomes. Risk factors do not occur in isolation. Rather, they tend to cluster. For example, single parent families tend to have lower incomes than other family types. The research shows that low income is a more critical factor than single parenting. Differences in educational outcomes between students in single parent families and other family types disappear when data are adjusted for family income.

On the basis of this research, preventive initiatives targeting single issues particularly in relation to boys' education are likely to be less effective than those with a broader focus.

In this context, then, interagency planning for and implementation of prevention and early intervention strategies is critical.

The Institute for Child Health Research also found that higher educational outcomes are associated with higher family income; parent education to Year 10 levels or better; school attendance and participation; and positive school experiences.

Research has identified that effective schools tend to display the following characteristics:

- Strong educational leadership
- High expectations of students
- An emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy skills
- A safe and secure environment
- Regular evaluation of student progress

These elements tend to affect student outcomes largely because of the impact they have on teacher effectiveness.

The Department has developed a range of policies and initiatives which reflects and is consistent with the research into effective schools and significant factors impacting on student achievement. The *Students at Educational Risk Strategy* is providing schools with resources and support to develop preventive approaches, engage in early identification, develop appropriate interventions and collaborate with other agencies.

In particular, the Department, through its partnership with the Institute for Child Health Research, is developing a Social-Emotional Developmental Continuum which will identify those factors which impact on student achievement and provide information about the range of effective strategies for modifying these factors. Therefore, this resource will assist schools plan to address the needs of individuals and groups at educational risk.

Further, the Department has developed surveys which have been used to comprehensively profile significant factors within a school community that impact on educational outcomes. This information can then be used to make informed decisions about prevention and intervention strategies and to better target the school's resources.

### ***MONITORING STANDARDS IN EDUCATION (MSE)***

Monitoring Standards in Education data collected from the range of learning areas since 1992 confirms that the performance of boys and girls differs in all aspects of literacy, with the greatest difference being observable in writing. (See Appendix 1.)

The longitudinal data does not, however, indicate declining performance by boys. Although the gap in performance between girls and boys widens from year 3 to year 10, the differential is fairly constant across time.

In mathematics the performance of girls and boys has been very similar since 1992.

Data collection in the Arts learning areas indicates gendered patterns of participation remain entrenched. In all Arts disciplines, girls' enrolments are greater than boys with the difference being most extreme in Visual Arts (65% vs. 35%), Drama (71% vs 29%) and Dance (98.5% vs 1.5%).

The data collection in the Health and Physical Education learning area indicated some interesting and less predictable differences between boys' and girls' performances.

Girls demonstrated better understandings in relation to nutrition and injury prevention and the external influences on the health-related behaviours of young females. Year 10 girls were able to better describe how communication, self esteem and a set of values impact beneficially on stress management.

Interesting gender differences in relation to aspects of self-efficacy were also revealed in the Health and Physical Education data. These differences indicate that girls were more sure than boys that they could manage well in new situations requiring some initiative and resourcefulness. This is not to suggest that boys are not resourceful, rather that they are not as sure of their capacity to manage well in these situations.

Boys were more sure than girls that they would manage well when confronted with new experiences that appear to require some degree of intrepidity and responsibility-taking. These qualities, in particular the ongoing assumption of responsibility for self and actions suggest that 12 and 15 year-old-boys perceive they are ready for adult masculine roles. Boys were also more sure of managing well when fulfilling others' expectations.

There were clear gender and age differences emerging in the results of the physical activity and fitness survey. Boys are more active than girls at recess or lunchtime in both year 3 and year 7. In both years, more boys than girls report that physical activity is important to them. Boys also enjoy physical education lessons more than girls and boys maintained their cardiorespiratory endurance fitness over time better than girls.

The rate of skills development for boys was greater between years 7 and 10 than it was between years 3 and 7. This was reversed for girls whose development was greater between years 3 and 7 than between years 7 and 10.

## **OUTCOME:**

**Curriculum reform will acknowledge and address gender equity principles in meeting the needs of both boys and girls.**

## ***INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY***

In this area it is important to note the under-representation of girls studying the emerging area of IT. The number of women going on to study IT in tertiary education is around 20% with little sign of increasing. The low representation of women studying IT has been noticed in the UK, USA and Australia, but not in Asian and Hispanic countries. There is an implication that the social construction of masculinity/femininity (as it affects educational choices) may have definite cultural biases. The study *Real Time: Computers, Change and Schooling* (Australian Centre for Cultural and Media Policy October 1999) noted that, 'Girls are falling behind boys in the advanced information technology skills, despite showing considerable interest in other applications.' (pp xxix).

## ***MIDDLE SCHOOLING***

The Education Department's commitment to the concept of Middle Schooling (see additional explanatory comments in Appendix 2) can also be partly based in its awareness of the need to look more closely at the needs of specific age groups and their interaction with the active construction of gender. Research that supports the use of teaching teams and student-centred planning intersects with research into the construction of masculinity, which suggests that these two aspects of Middle Schooling present teachers with effective means of interrupting and challenging negative expressions of masculinity.

The Department believes it is providing broad statements within its curriculum design in all learning areas which incorporate fundamental principles and understandings of gender equity. The focus on inclusivity and the necessity for educators to have an understanding of individual and group experience when preparing curriculum enables those educators to present equitable opportunities to improve students' learning.

It is acknowledged that data collected through system wide testing (MSE) needs to provide more specific feedback concerning additional factors that crucially intersect with and influence the construction and manifestation of gender. Data which comments on socio-economic status, ethnicity, Aboriginality, geographic location, religion, class, and sexuality, and their interaction with gender, would enable teachers to more completely understand the effects of masculinity and femininity on learning and thereby create more specific and targeted curriculum, delivery and learning environments.

MSE testing would suggest that there is a need to differentiate between boys' performance within a particular subject as opposed to the initial notion of their gendered participation.

The Department believes there is a need to respond to the premise that 'all students have individual learning styles' and that there is a need to continue to present teachers with opportunities to develop learning environments where a variety of teaching and learning styles, assessments, recording and reporting methods, can take place that will address the individual need of students or groups of students.

The Department also acknowledges the necessity of exploring at school and system level the need for a more broad based approach to understanding and responding to gender construction. This can take two forms; one being research into gender differentiated fields in schools where boys and girls at very early ages are identifying knowledge areas which are tagged as 'masculine' or 'feminine' (research by Martino 1995, and Alloway 1995). The second is the need to identify and put into place strategies which encourage the critical discussion of gender construction and its impact on student behaviour outside the traditional areas within Humanities education or in other fields which are tagged by students as 'feminine'.

The Department would also strongly suggest that in looking at gender-differentiated learning, that the inquiry look at learning styles in response to gender and its interaction with other factors (previously mentioned) which may have equal (or greater) impact on boys' and girls' access to and interface with education:

- ◆ are some groups of boys doing worse or better than others?
- ◆ are some groups of boys doing better than some groups of girls?



‘...not all girls are doing well at literacy related tasks, and not all boys are doing equally poorly as one another.’ (Alloway and Gilbert, 1997.)

### 3.0 VIOLENCE AND SCHOOL CULTURE

In the Education Department’s *Behaviour Management in Schools Policy (1998)*, schools are provided with relevant information on *Gender and Power Relationships* to assist them to respond more effectively to stereotypical behaviour often referred to and identified as masculine or feminine.

The *Behaviour Management in Schools Implementation Package* was developed to support district student services teams engaged in professional development with schools. The Package includes an examination of how stereotypical gender behaviours are perpetuated within the community, leading to expectations that male and female students will act in distinct ways. It focuses on strategies that schools can develop and implement to address gender-based violence.

#### OUTCOME:

**Gendered violence and sex-based harassment will be eliminated from schools**

The Education Department through its *Behaviour Management in Schools Policy* urges schools to build into policies pro-active, educative components that look at ways of preventing gender related violence and modifying negative school culture in support of components which effectively deal with both passive and active elements of gender violence.

Closer attention is being paid to boy/boy violence and harassment as well as boy/girl and girl/boy violence and harassment. This has implications for education systems, policy directors, managers, schools and teachers when paying close attention to:

- ◆ the construction of masculinity and its intimate link to notions and manifestations of power. ‘Examining the construction of gender leads to a recognition of differences in power and worth that are assigned to being masculine and feminine and which contributes to inequitable outcomes for (groups of) boys and girls (*Challenge and Change*, 1996)
- ◆ whether school structures (both educationally and contextually) either intentionally, or more probably unintentionally, create environments which foster a dominant, culturally stylised and honoured masculinity
- ◆ the powerfully negative and intimate impact of homophobia on masculinity construction
- ◆ the impact of harmful risk-taking behaviours in masculinity

The Department supports the notion that to develop the most effective violence prevention strategies, interventions need to involve family and community in partnership with staff and students within schools.

State School suspension statistics which generally concur with results in the wider Australian education sphere, imply in the short term the need to seek alternate responses to behaviour management systems within schools and the need to research the interaction of masculinity constructions and behaviour management techniques in the long term.

All schools are required to have in place policies to respond to bullying and harassment.

The Department encourages schools to develop policies in partnership with parents and the wider community, and in particular, students. Research by Connell (1996) strongly suggests boys are empowered by effective and active involvement in policy and decision making. Analysis of Department MSE data (1998) in the Health and Physical Education Learning Area (perceived self-efficacy, self-reliance) concludes that ‘boys were more sure than girls that they would manage well when confronted with new experiences that appear to require some degree of intrepidity and responsibility taking... The results suggest that 12 and 15 year old boys perceive they are ready for adult masculine roles.’

#### 4.0 POST-SCHOOL PATHWAYS

The expansion of VET in Schools programs has not been as a marginalised activity for those destined to be semi-skilled or unskilled, but rather as part of mainstream education. The new curriculum emphasises sophisticated technology-based pathways leading to university, training and employment or self-employment.

One of the major successes of schools in implementing VET in Schools programs has been the ways in which the needs of particular equity target groups have been addressed. Similarly, there is an ongoing commitment to the broader ethos of schools in which vocational education is seen as one part of the commitment to life skills, excellence and lifelong learning.

Regarding participation in VET in Schools programs, a pattern of 55% - 56% of males in the total cohort is beginning to emerge. However, the successful completion rate for females is marginally better than for males.

#### **Student Participation by Gender 1998-2000 (projected)**

	1998		1999 February		1999 August		2000 Projected	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Males</b>	2241	59	4094	57	2865	55	4957	56
<b>Females</b>	1587	41	3074	43	2322	45	3897	44
<b>Totals</b>	3828	100	7168	100	5187	100	8854	100

#### **OUTCOME:**

**Post-school pathways for all students will be expanded beyond those governed by conventional assumptions based on gender**

The Department believes that research regarding undergraduate and post-graduate subject choice needs to be analysed and compared to subject choice data available from schools.

Is the broadening of subject choice for girls in secondary schools being reflected in later career and educational choices? Is the perceived poorer performance of boys in a range of subject choices in secondary schools affecting later career and educational choices?

## 5. SUPPORTING CHANGE

The Department acknowledges that wherever possible: ‘The most powerful partnership is between schools and parents’ and that ‘change is also supported by the ongoing collection of data, and by reporting and accountability processes to track progress and inform future planning and decision making.’ *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*.

### ***CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM***

The first of four major objectives in *The Plan for Government School Education in Western Australia* is about curriculum, and in particular the establishment of an outcomes approach to curriculum with clearly defined standards. The strategy to be used to achieve this objective is the Curriculum Improvement Plan. The strategy will be progressively implemented in schools over the next five years, being fully operational by 2005. The program will involve schools implementing the *Curriculum Framework*, the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* and the *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines*. Both the needs of individuals (whether boys or girls) and different groups are acknowledged in this flexible approach to curriculum design and implementation.

The *Curriculum Framework* will be used as the basis for the development of the school’s curriculum and all learning and teaching programs. It has an outcome focus in that it describes the common major learning outcomes of schools. It gives schools the flexibility to develop the most appropriate curriculum to suit the needs of their students and the individual communities.

The Department’s *Outcomes and Standards Framework* will be used to help implement the *Curriculum Framework*. These will assist teachers to monitor, assess and report to parents the achievement of individual students in relation to the major learning outcomes set out in the *Curriculum Framework*. An approach to curriculum design and delivery focused on the needs of individual students will assist in the implementation of an inclusive curriculum by focusing on the individual needs of students whether girls or boys. Western Australian government schools are being asked to embrace a change over the next five years that will make a difference in improving the learning outcomes for all students. Using an outcomes-focused approach means a closer focus on the particular needs of students by recognising and building on students’ prior learning experiences. This gives schools the flexibility to adapt teaching and learning styles to meet the needs of boys and girls where appropriate.

In Districts, as part the implementation of the Curriculum Improvement Program, identified staff work with parents and the community focussing on the needs of individual and small groups of students to identify and implement a range of strategies that promote inclusivity.

In reporting outcomes to parents on the achievement of individual students a wide range of strategies are being trialed and progressively implemented over the five years. These are not exclusive to boys. For example, student outcomes are recorded in a portfolio format and include parent conferencing and shared discussion in the reporting of outcomes.

Changes in pedagogy for curriculum delivery and classroom management is part of the Department's Curriculum Improvement Program. Strategies for boys in a number of schools are different and based on the specific socio economic group being targeted and also the dominant masculine structure that exists in the community of the school.

The Department acknowledges the broad benefits of increasing the representation of male teachers in the primary education sector. It acknowledges the benefits of broadening the male/female representation of teachers in traditionally non-male or non-female areas of expertise in the secondary education sector. However, it does not support the specific notion that these changes will have a dramatic effect on the construction and manifestation of masculinity or femininity within these areas.

'More male teachers, it is argued, will mean better literacy outcomes for boys...However, it must be acknowledged that male and female teachers alike draw on available knowledge and current thinking about literacy learning. They are educated at the same tertiary institutions. They draw from the same banks of philosophical and pedagogical orientations to children. They are guided by the same curriculum requirements. They set out to achieve the same ends with the children they serve.'

'Being a man does not provide automatic access to the social constructions of literacy – nor to understandings of masculinity, class and culture.' (Alloway and Gilbert, 1998)

The Department recognises that systems and schools need to attempt to understand the concerns and stories of boys themselves when developing programs focusing on masculinity education. 'Educational work with boys must *start* with the boys' own interests, experiences and opinions.' (Connell, 1996)

The Department acknowledges that there needs to be ongoing support for professional development regarding:

- ◆ the construction of masculinity/femininity and the role of schools and systems in actively making and remaking gender
- ◆ the delivery of curriculum and alternate pedagogies which may be suited to different groups of girls and boys

The importance of funding is acknowledged when considering the need to:

- ◆ aid teachers with the development and implementation of gender specific and gender relevant programs
- ◆ look closely at the use of Curriculum (Gender Equity) Officers at District level who would be able to deliver professional development and assist in the development and implementation of both specific gender awareness programs and whole-of-school gender programs
- ◆ aid schools in analysing the interface of gender with their system and curriculum structures

There is also a need for systems to work closely with peak parent bodies.

Research would suggest further investigation of the following areas as effective means of interacting with boys:

- ◆ mentoring, either within schools or through connections with groups and individuals in the wider community
- ◆ use of structured volunteer programs linking to parents and retirees in the immediate community
- ◆ peer mediation programs
- ◆ student-centred learning pedagogies
- ◆ collaborative teaching
- ◆ student/teacher negotiated curriculum

**OUTCOME:**

**Gender equity principles will be integral to school and system management**

***SCHOOL/DISTRICT PROGRAMS***

There are a number of initiatives, strategies and programs that address the needs of boys at the district and school level. They focus on the diverse needs identified in the school or district community. The strategies reflect the diverse and multi-faceted nature of the approaches taken in responding to these different needs. No detailed analysis has taken place of the effectiveness of the programs and further research is warranted on whether they require broader implementation.

***PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT***

Key features of professional development in schools and districts include seminars, workshops and guest speakers to raise awareness of inclusivity issues, literacy and behaviour management. For example, Applecross Senior High School's Guest Specialist program is typical of the guest speaker program operating in a number of schools and districts. These programs are intended to raise staff awareness of issues pertaining to boys' and girls' education and give practical strategies on the management of these issues.

In the Swan Education District, staff worked with the Principal Consultant, Ian Lillico, in facilitating a Boys in School Interest Action Learning Group, and is organising a Boys in Education Conference for 15-17 year olds in November 2000 jointly with the Swan Education District and the Fremantle Education Centre.

***MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR***

A range of diverse programs are being trialed at school level:

- The establishment of 'Buddy Classes' which encourage boys to interact positively with others of differing ages and sex
- Mentoring programs such as in the Midlands District where a male principal spends considerable time counselling boys. This has made a noticeable difference to identified boys (see comment note in Appendix 3). Students are helped to develop social, conflict

resolution, and communication skills through workshops and out-of-school activities aimed at increasing self-esteem

- Peer Support Training programs for older students to mentor younger students is a key initiative in many schools and districts. Appendix 4 outlines a brief case study of one school's approach to mentoring by focusing particularly on the needs of a particular group of boys
- School camps
- Managing aggressive behaviour programs Appendix 4 also includes the Midvale Primary School Case Study.
- Small-group tutoring programs
- In extreme cases of truancy/school avoidance the Retention and Participation Program is utilised to improve retention and participation of boys.

The individual academic, physical, social and emotional needs of students are considered by a multidisciplinary team in many schools, which may include some or all of the following where appropriate: parents, caregivers, educators, school psychologist, chaplain, community health, Disability Services Commission Local Area Coordinator or paediatrician.

## CONCLUSION

Principles of gender equity underpin the *Curriculum Framework, the Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Policy* and the *Students at Educational Risk Policy and Guidelines*. *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* outlines a number of strategic directions to support schools and systems in their efforts to achieve equitable educational experiences and outcomes for boys and girls. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the issues related to boys need to be given special consideration. Through the Department's commitment to the principle of inclusivity and equity of access to all learning areas it is believed that it is well placed to respond to the outcomes of the House of Representatives Inquiry into the Education of Boys.

The Department supports a multi-faceted/whole school approach to issues of gender. This approach acknowledges that the school is a social institution and that its practices reflect social divisions based on class gender and culture. It also acknowledges that students' lives outside the school strongly impact the development of their gender identities.

The educational issues relating to boys and girls are complex. Research would suggest that programs which look at the construction of masculinity/femininity as an aspect of gender relations/dynamics are best placed to see the advancement of educational outcomes for both boys and girls. Positive social change for boys and girls must also be linked to perceptions of femininity and masculinity within the wider society.

The Education Department of Western Australia believes that attention to the issue of boys and education **must** look closely at the construction of masculinities and their intersection with other major factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, Aboriginality, class, sexuality and geographic location.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Education Department recommends that:

1. specific research be conducted and made available to systems and schools regarding the influence of peer groups and their impact on the construction of positive and negative masculinities in schools;
2. means be developed where best practice examples regarding the education of boys be made widely available to Australian schools;
3. more specific analysis of data (gender interaction with additional factors mentioned previously) be conducted and made available to systems and schools;
4. there be a focus on understanding boys' responses and attitudes to subjects 'tagged' as masculine or feminine and the effect this has on subject availability, student choice, and teacher/student approach to these subjects;
5. gender equity initiatives be encouraged for both boys and girls;
6. the House of Representatives Inquiry consciously aim to limit any possibility that boys and girls are presented as 'competing victims';
7. pro-active gender education underpins the development of literacy programs;
8. professional development focusing on variety in curriculum delivery methods be made more widely available to system staff and teachers;
9. it be recommended to the Commonwealth Government that the funding of curriculum officers with expertise in gender education be assigned at District system level to encourage and assist in the development of gender aware programs within schools;
10. education on the construction of masculinities and femininities and their impact be offered at school and district level to parents and families;
11. the Inquiry initially focus on looking at the knowledge and skills which would allow all teachers to access broader strategies in the delivery of curriculum to boys rather than focusing on increasing male staff in the education sector
12. all schools develop, with student and parent involvement, policies to both pro-actively and re-actively respond to bullying and harassment;
13. more specific research be conducted into the interaction between masculinity construction, adolescence and the concepts which support Middle Schooling;
14. research regarding undergraduate and post-graduate subject and career choice be conducted to understand more completely the interaction between school curriculum choice (by gender/socio-economic status etc) and career and later study choice; and

15. the issue of power, and its impact on masculinity and femininity construction be closely examined in order to understand its influence within school systems and structures.



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **MIDDLE SCHOOLING**

Middle Schooling is the term used to describe a phase of schooling that bridges the traditional primary/secondary divide with a view to responding more effectively to the specific developmental needs of students in the upper primary and lower secondary years. Middle Schooling identifies and responds to educational needs and social demands that are unique to this age group (roughly ages 11 – 14, or school years 6 – 10). There is the recognition that what students in this age group needs is not a more enriched primary program for upper-primary students or an abridged version of the post-compulsory program for lower-secondary students, which is what we conventionally deliver, but a program that is tailored to the specific characteristics of the age group and responsive to its unique needs. Middle Schooling reform is well advanced in Australia and overseas and is impacting on the way we are developing and delivering curriculum in the lower secondary school in Western Australia.

#### **Why Middle Schooling?**

Extensive research and development on middle schooling has taken place in Australia and other countries, especially during the past 10 to 15 years. It is increasingly evident that successful middle school reform will result in gains for all students. It has proven to increase the educational outcomes and life chances for alienated students who are at risk of leaving school at the end of the compulsory years as well as to enhance the social and academic achievement of those students who are likely to experience academic success in the post-compulsory years. Some of the findings include:

- literacy gains in achievement across a range of students
- students spend more time on academic work
- significant drops in truancy rates
- increased social skills in dealing with conflict
- increased capacities for cooperation and team work
- increased efforts by students to use libraries and technologies in complex ways.

#### **What is Middle Schooling?**

There is no particular way ‘to do’ middle-schooling. Instead, there are a set of values and principles which underpin middle-schooling practices. Schools pursuing a middle-schooling approach to the planning and delivery of curriculum will consider and apply these in ways that suit their own particular structures, communities, teachers and – most importantly – their students. A middle-schooling approach is generally characterised by:

##### *Teaming of students and teachers*

Groups of teachers (usually about 5 or 6) form a cross-curricular team to cooperate in teaching a particular group of students. This results in the student having a reduced number of teachers with whom interactions occur. Teachers, too, find that having fewer students results in a greater knowledge and association with individual students.

##### *Curriculum integration and relevance*

The relevance of curriculum to students is at the centre of middle-schooling strategies. For curriculum to be relevant it should involve or link to aspects of the students’ world. Proponents of middle-schooling argue that integrated learning is fundamental to effective

learning, where the emphasis is integration in the mind of the student, not just the subject matter. Planning and teaching undertaken by cross-curricular teaching teams enhances opportunity for integrated learning experiences.

#### *Student-centred planning*

Curriculum planning stems from analysis of individual student needs as opposed to being derived from syllabus specifications. The student is given opportunity to negotiate aspects of the proposed curriculum and enter into discussions where the needs of the teacher, the school and the system are balanced with the needs of the student. Negotiated curriculum involves student participation in the choice of content, ways of undertaking learning, forms in which the work is presented or completed and methods of assessment within parameters set by the teacher.

#### *Flexible use of time and space*

The traditional timetable dominated by the requirements of subjects, room and teachers runs counter to the learning needs of middle years students. These students learn best in environments where time restrictions and physical movements from one area to another are minimised so that individual learning and integrated project completion can proceed unimpeded by the fragmented time-slots of a timetable.

### **WA Schools Currently Involved in Middle-Schooling Delivery**

Warnbro Community High School  
Clarkson Community High School  
Ballajura Community College  
Geraldton Secondary College  
Bridgetown High School

### **WA Schools in the Process of Adopting Middle-Schooling Strategies**

Schools across the system are taking up middle-schooling at an increasingly frequent rate. Secondary schools restructuring in response to Local Area Planning initiatives are using the opportunity to develop middle-schooling delivery practices in a comprehensive way. They include:

Cannington Senior High School  
Belmont Community College  
Coodanup Senior High School  
City Beach Senior High School  
The new Halls Head High School in Mandurah

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **GENERAL COMMENTS FROM AN EDUCATOR IN MIDLANDS DISTRICT:**

“I deal constantly with the fear and failure in boys, as a principal, a parent and as an AIRTC Officer with 13-18 year olds. I spend countless hours counselling young people and am constantly fearful of the breadth of boys’ uncertainty and anxiety, which they have usually not revealed to others. In the past 12 months, I have directly prevented 2 suicide attempts and have intensively counselled 8 others on this issue. **In every case** these boys had no means of initiating real communication with significant adults and were too embarrassed to approach friends and/or others. Most of them gave little outward indication of a problem to family and friends.

I sincerely hope that this ministerial submission is an indication of proper and effective actions in the near future.”

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **CASE STUDY EXAMPLES:**

#### **Bullsbrook District High School.**

There is recognition at Bullsbrook District High School that solving problems of adolescent boys must embrace the opportunities for boys to grow from their problems and to ensure that punitive measures are not employed as disciplinary means. We acknowledge that some teachers and boys relate in a more empathetic and positive manner with each other. Therefore, teachers agree to case manage particular boys and act as mentors and liaison contacts for them. We have found that this system has worked extremely well and each boy knows that there is a special person available to meet his particular needs and with whom he can share his “wins and woes”. The success of the case approach has been most dramatically demonstrated through the drop in suspensions to almost nil. The Swan Education District Office has given the Middle School funding to legitimise this process and provide teachers with additional professional development in this area.

Our Middle School offers our adolescent boys teachers who know them well, a curriculum that means something to them in a community where they feel they belong – and the rewards have been great. Our intake of boys particularly has increased and the success of our Middle School has spread. Parents report of day-by-day successes for their boys.

The Middle School at Bullsbrook District High School adopted the NEST program, which is sponsored jointly by the P & C Association and the Bullsbrook Neighbourhood Centre. This program involves students parenting virtual babies for a week. There is an extensive program of child care, which is an integral part of the NEST program. This section is supported by our local G.P. who speaks with the “virtual parents”. The success of this program is demonstrated by overwhelming support from our boys, and for the past two years we have had an 80% participation rate from the total population of boys. It is certainly rewarding to see boys provided with a legitimate opportunity to exercise their nurturing and caring side. One parent reported her son sharing his sense of grief in returning the virtual baby. This program will continue in the school by popular demand.

#### **Midvale Primary School.**

The two Deputy Principals and the staff are fully engaged dealing with social problems emanating from home but exploding into conflict in the school playground, particularly at the end of the lunch break. The affected group is mainly boys aged 10-12 years, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. A program aimed at developing strategies for the boys to use when other boys antagonise them has been devised in conjunction with the Swan City Youth Service for 12 of the boys most in need.

The outcomes to be achieved are:

1. Self discipline
2. Teamwork
3. Conflict management
4. Recreational training
5. Personal limits
6. Mateship

7. Physical fitness and well-being
8. Emotional well-being
9. Cultural understanding
10. Societal demands
11. Eating for health

One outcome noticed is that parents and schools are communicating more, and anecdotal evidence suggests that small, but significant, positive behavioural changes are taking place.

### **Narrogin Primary School**

A project at Narrogin Primary School involving the ELAN teacher and AIEO has commenced which uses drama as a medium for working with boys to address self-esteem/behavioural issues. The boys work in groups of four and as the initial group are all Nyoongar students, there has been a strong Aboriginal cultural influence on the content and teaching style adapted.

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