

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

My name is Glenn Marchant. I have taught in Victorian secondary schools for over 17 years. I have taught in a remote school, schools with severe socio-economic problems and an academic, high achieving school. My positions of responsibility have included: Outdoor Education, Multiculturalism, Sub-School Student Welfare, Head of English and Assistant Head of Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE). I have undertaken extensive professional development in both Boys and Literacy and Boys and Learning. I currently teach English, History and Political Studies at The University High School in Parkville, Victoria and am responsible for the implementation of the Civics and Citizenship Program.

Terms of Reference

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

Boys need positive male role models. I believe that with the increasing break up of families many boys do not get positive nurturing from a male role model. Boys need a male figure to read and take an interest in literature from the earliest possible age; this needs to be ongoing.

Many boys in Australia take their role models from sport. Unfortunately, an explosion of flawed sporting heroes has had prominence in the media; especially Rugby League, Australian Rules and Cricket. High profile sporting stars who are aggressive, violent and anti-authority with little or no regard to intellectual pursuits have a detrimental impact on the learning of boys.

Many boys continually turn to their peers for guidance. In an academic school more boys will see the value of reading and literature because it is deemed acceptable by their peers to pursue these interests. In a less academic environment, reading may be deemed as relatively worthless if peer pressure is anti-intellectual. This may be compounded if many of the boys do not have English as the first language in the home, or if the family is experiencing severe socio-economic problems or if the father is absent.

When boys go to school they will be taught mainly by women. It is not unusual for a boy to go through primary school with only limited access to a male teacher. Even in secondary schools a boy may only have one or two male English teachers. This is highly undesirable for a number of reasons : boys need men to help them understand what it means to be a man, to deal with aggression and violence in a positive way, to see reading, writing and intellectual pursuits as something 'masculine', to show emotion, care for others and to develop a host of other positive male characteristics. Unfortunately, many boys see women in schools and define themselves as men by being anti-female. This can lead to the rejection of reading and intellectual pursuits as 'girly' or 'sissy'. Many boys are reluctant to discuss emotional issues in front of girls and women. They do not want to be seen as weak in front of women and their peers.

The problem with an overwhelmingly female teaching force is that many boys, particularly those with limited or no male role models in the family, are less likely to reap the benefits of reading and literature and more likely to define themselves as men through the influence of peers, sporting heroes and the media. This is undesirable for women as well as men. These boys are not reaching their full potential.

*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.

I fully endorse the Terms of Reference focus on the early years of schooling. The earliest intervention is paramount. Boys need assistance at a very early age to learn about masculinity

and the worth of reading. However, these strategies need to continue through secondary schooling.

Schools should analyse their Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) results to acknowledge that there is a problem. Some members of the school community may still not see that boys are falling behind. Local evidence is needed. Most schools will find that boys are most 'at risk' in the areas of reading, writing and speaking and listening. The same analysis of CSF results needs to be undertaken across the curriculum.

One strategy that has been successful is the provision of books for boys chosen by their peers and male teachers. A broad range of materials should be provided : magazines, novels, sporting material, newspaper articles and cartoons. This material should be about, or aimed at, boys and men. Where possible men should be encouraged to read to boys and follow this strategy up through a boy's education.

Any strategy must be a whole school or community based strategy; this approach must not be seen as the sole responsibility of, for example, the English faculty in a school. Evidence would suggest that boys like to learn with a 'hands on' and team approach to learning. Programs which encourage this approach include: model making in a science, history or geography class, debating teams (especially all boys of mixed abilities), the researching of topics specifically related to boys, such as sporting biographies and the use of male peers as role models within a school, for example, cross age tutoring. It is important that a male member of the boy's family maintain contact with the school environment, especially parent-teacher interviews.

There is a vital role to play in the implementation of the Civics and Citizenship Program in schools for the improvement of boy's learning and literacy. Suitable sporting role models should be used in schools to encourage boys to read ; to help break the stereotype that 'real men' don't need to take an interest in literature and the arts. Given the strong interest in sport in Australia, I see this as a priority and would encourage federal funding in this area.

I also believe very strongly that a long term strategy is needed to encourage more men into the teaching profession. The benefits are for all members of the community to enjoy, but obviously this strategy will take time to implement. I would urge the Committee to further explore this issue.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit this paper.

Sincerely yours,

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23-6-2000