

Committee Secretariat
The Education of Boys Inquiry
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
Suite R1, 116
Parliament House
Canberra. A.C.T. 2600

8th July, 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing as:

- A teacher of over 25 years' experience in NSW primary and secondary schools, both as a permanent classroom teacher and as a casual relief teacher.
- Co-ordinator of the Blue Mountains Boys' Education Network.
- Author of a book on boys' education, currently being reviewed by a publisher.
- Someone who has surveyed hundreds of teachers, parents and students over the last six years on these issues.

Enclosed are:

- A summary of this submission.
- The submission itself, omitting referencing for the sake of brevity:
 - A. Boys' Socialisation Skills
 - B. Strategies which schools have adopted to improve boys' learning and behaviour in school
 - C. How the successful strategies developed by schools may be made more effective and more broadly implemented
- Appendices: Boys' risk factors, compared with girls'.
Pro-Active Defence – an article submitted recently to The Boys in Schools Bulletin.

I wish you well in what is a most important and urgent matter for inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

Tony Butz

SUMMARY

Attention to Boys' Education issues is long overdue. Despite calls from parents and teachers, the various state governments and education authorities (some more than others) have shown little interest, mostly for political reasons.

Boys are in real trouble – emotionally, socially and educationally – compared with girls; but most attempts to address the problem have focused on older adolescents, instead of where the problems arise – in early school years. A wealth of overseas and Australian writings has largely been ignored by state governments responsible for education, with most of the interest and activity occurring in private schools which, not surprisingly, are increasing in number, to the detriment of public schools, because many of them are all-boys schools.

Boys' images of masculinity have been the focus of most of the work in Australia, and while this is very important, there are many other factors that must be considered, as they directly affect literacy, attitudes to school, hopes for the future, and behaviour problems in school and in society.

Education authorities have not only treated boys and girls as “equal” but also (unfortunately) as “the same”, to the great detriment of boys and their education. The feminisation of education continues to be a major hindrance to boys' advancement, despite the best intentions of teachers, male and female.

Boys are becoming increasingly frustrated within the education system, and it is this that results in poor literacy, poor behaviour, a sense of hopelessness, increased clinical depression, early school leaving, truancy and delinquency.

Unless a Boys' Education Strategy is adopted and made mandatory across Australia, the problem will only get worse and society will pay heavily for it in the near and distant future, because education departments will continue to put their heads in the sand and boys will continue to be frustrated instead of helped in their education.

There are great things happening for boys in individual Australian schools and overseas, but they are not widely published and, indeed, are kept quiet very often, for political reasons. They cannot, of themselves, produce any long-term change, but do at least give boys and teachers a bit of breathing space, interest and success while the system otherwise ignores or oppresses them.

This inquiry has the potential to change all that, or to join the ranks of the tokenistic inquiries that have caused teachers and parents to be very cynical.

**SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE
EDUCATION OF BOYS. JULY 2000. TONY BUTZ**

PREFACE

The Standing Committee is, first, to be congratulated for focusing the Inquiry on the early and middle years of schooling, as so much of what has happened so far has been on the later years, and has missed the formative time for boys' attitudes to education and the development of their behaviour patterns. However, while "the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys" are all vitally important considerations, so are the political factors, which have been omitted from the scope of this inquiry and preceding reports. It must be stated that this is a serious omission and one which has the potential to have this inquiry accused of being yet another tokenistic one.

Second, while state governments and their education departments have largely taken a head-in-the-sand approach to boys' education, there has been a lot happening in this area at the local school level. State departments of education, as a rule, are not interested, for political reasons, in boys' education. It has been their policy for over twenty years to claim that boys' education is covered by "gender equity" policies when, in fact, it is often these very policies that discriminate in practice against boys. This is why this Federal Government Inquiry may well be seen to be copying the states by hiding the problems away instead of addressing their political nature.

Third, there has been a lot said in boys' education for the last decade (with five national conferences in the last three years alone, in NSW) but very little actually done, except at local school level. And a lot of what is being done there, schools do not want to have reported because it goes against the policies of their state education departments or regional offices. In other words, these schools' strategies are succeeding *despite*, not *because of*, education department policies.

Therefore, although the Committee's terms state "a particular interest in: boys' literacy needs and their socialisation skills", *the Committee will not get to the root causes of these problems by looking at literacy and socialisation*. These are just symptoms of far deeper causes of boys' problems in schools. Likewise, "the strategies which schools have adopted to improve boys' learning and behaviour in school" will apply only locally as a rule, because the bigger issues make them bandaid solutions that give boys and teachers a bit of temporary relief and success until the reality of the education system overtakes them again. So, discovering "how the successful strategies ... may be made more effective or more broadly implemented" will not occur unless the deeper causes are recognised and addressed. This will determine whether this Committee has a huge impact on the quality of education for our school population, or whether it joins the ranks of state government tokenism.

BOYS' SOCIALISATION SKILLS

INTRODUCTION

Boys are in trouble socially, emotionally and educationally, for reasons well-documented by Biddulph, Pollack, Fletcher, Kindlon & Thompson and many others. They are the most under-fathered generation in history and the most oppressed educationally. The pressures on boys at all levels (home, school, peers) is too much for an increasing number who choose to end their lives rather than put up with the frustrations of our systems and society. Despite a great deal of work by many, both overseas and in Australia, this message is getting through only to teachers and parents, not to educational authorities who are monolithic and dinosaur-like in their refusal to change policies and systems to address boys' needs.

A. BOYS' SOCIALISATION SKILLS ARE HAMPERED AT EVERY TURN

1. THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

There are plenty of statistics that show boys are in great trouble – socially, emotionally and academically. It can be seen in school suspensions, juvenile convictions, accidents, motor vehicle crimes, substance abuse, deaths by risk-taking and suicide, retention rates at school, referrals to specialist learning programs and behaviour units. Boys exceed girls in all these areas. (See Appendix).

Boys suffer from a stereotyped image of what it means to be a male and what it means to be a boy. This image is very restricting and destructive of boys' emotional development, and leaves little room for a boy to be accepted as anything but macho. The image affects the way teachers treat boys and what parents expect of boys; and it causes them immense frustration that leads often to aggression or depression. Education authorities say it's the parents' problem; parents say they are helpless to change it; education authorities don't want any responsibility for it.

Since World War II, the education system has become more and more feminised, in both male/female teacher ratios (currently 1:4 in NSW and estimated to be 1:9 in five years time) and in teaching styles and programs. Boys not only miss out on having a father at home (1 in 3) but also a male teacher at school. *Some never have a male teacher until high school.* More and more evidence shows that boys and girls not only learn very differently, from as young as 3 years of age, but that *both content and methods in teaching increasingly favour girls' learning styles over those of boys.*

While girls quite rightly have gained a lot from the fine work of the mainstream feminist movement in the last two decades, little has been done to recognise that boys also have unique needs and that these are not being addressed by governments or by co-educational school systems. The militant fringe of feminism has actively made life difficult for boys in schools, from the mid-seventies, and is now exerting its influence through its policy and decision makers in departments of education. Male teachers have been pushed out of teaching as a career by political policies that have made it nearly impossible to have genuine equity in schools as a workplace.

More and more biological and neurological research is confirming that boys and girls are wired differently from birth and that treating them the same in feminised education systems favours girls and frustrates boys. *Boys' frustration with not being able to learn in boy-friendly ways leads them to misbehave, rebel and decide that education is for girls.*

Everybody loses in the present state of education: boys by being denied their basic learning rights; girls by their class time being disrupted by angry boys; teachers by their finding teaching more and more difficult; parents by angry children who see themselves as failures in a system that chooses to ignore them; and society by the huge expenses it has to outlay to fix the problems of juvenile crime and mental ill health.

2. A DECADE OF RESEARCH IS IGNORED

Many educators, doctors, psychologists and others have presented evidence for over a decade that boys are in real trouble in society and in schools; but education authorities have chosen to ignore this evidence. Dr William Pollack aptly described in his book, *Real Boys*, that both society and boys, themselves, force boys to adopt and try to live up to a Boy Code of how to appear and how to behave – a code that places impossible demands on boys, adding to their anxiety and rebellion. Kindlon and Thompson, in *Raising Cain*, likewise have shown that we are not nurturing boys in western society, and, by default, are forcing them to adopt a culture of cruelty.

In Australia, Steve Biddulph has shown that schools reinforce the television and movie stereotypes of masculinity, and feminise education to the point where boys have to choose between succeeding in school or succeeding as a male. Richard Fletcher and The Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle have made submissions to the NSW state government to have a Boys' Education Policy, but it has been refused by both Liberal and Labor governments who have claimed that "gender equity" policies are all that is needed.

David Elkind, in *The Hurried Child*, drew the world's attention to the way we are now rushing children through childhood, causing them to catch the "hurry" sickness we suffer from as adults. Some schools are serious offenders here, pushing children as young as seven from class to class as many as eight times a day, instead of giving them the stability they need with one teacher for their nurturing as human beings. In trying to become the Smart Country, we have embraced the Cognitive Domain of learning (with cries through the last decade of "Back to Basics!"), but at the expense of the Affective Domain, to the point where we neglect children, especially boys, in our schools. *We are raising a nation of clever social misfits.*

Attention Deficit Disorder is now the fastest growing medical disability, with diagnoses doubling from 1990 to 1995 (over 80% of these being boys), and increasing 13-fold from 1992-1999 in Australia. The drugging of these children with Ritalin or dexamphetamines is an easy "out" for some, and it is apparent that children who, in the past, would have been labelled inattentive, impulsive or disobedient are now almost automatically labelled ADHD, despite disagreement in medical circles even

over the criteria to be used. In some places, 20% of *all* boys are medicated to suppress their maleness with which a feminised education system has little patience. *Education systems refuse to allow boys: the expression of their male characteristics; a teaching/learning environment that lets them learn the way they were born to; and male role models in the classrooms – all for political reasons.*

In trying to improve the situation there is no point in having a “boys’ education” versus “girls’ education” contest. Those who want to take from girls to give to boys are missing the point, as are those who think current “gender equity” policies cover it all. We do need genuine gender equity, but current policies deny it, despite their name. *We will only have it when the specific needs of girls continue to be addressed and the specific needs of boys begin to be addressed and continue to be addressed.* We need major changes in schooling for boys just as we needed major changes in job opportunities for girls. At present, boys are still forced into gender and educational straightjackets that only cause the frustration and rebellion we see in the classroom and in society. Many boys have to spend so much energy on their emotions that they have little left for school work.

3. THE MAJOR CAUSE OF BOYS’ SCHOOL PROBLEMS : THE LACK OF ACTION AND INTEREST BY STATE EDUCATION AUTHORITIES

It has rightly been said that if girls were facing the problems that boys are facing in education there would be a Royal Commission into it. *Because the problem is not about girls, it is not politically correct to do anything about it.* There are many official policies in place that actively or passively discriminate against boys’ advancement in education; and official attitudes that range from disinterest to hostility when boys’ needs are mentioned.

There are far more clinically depressed boys than are generally recognised (because the criteria for diagnosing it are based on adult female depression symptoms!), but departments of education refuse to see it as their problem anyway. When boys’ emotional health, depression, frustration and loneliness are brought up, they pass the buck back to parents or onto other departments. This just perpetuates the cycle. *It is imperative that health screening tests for vision, hearing and overall health be re-introduced at primary school level, and a set of criteria appropriate for juvenile male depression be agreed on and used to screen boys at all levels of education.*

Nothing serious has been done by governments or education authorities to stop the increasing teacher burnout problem and with it the exodus of males from the teaching profession. For political reasons, they simply don’t care if male teachers leave, so boys continue to be deprived of role models and mentors in school and quickly decide that education is for girls and women. Authorities don’t and won’t listen to teachers, so it will take an inquiry such as this, if it has any teeth, to force them to look at this problem.

NSW has had two tokenistic reports that whitewashed the problem:

- The 1994 “Challenges and Opportunities” (O’Doherty Report) was the first. It arose out of public pressure to parallel the girls’ education strategies with

something for boys. It says much that is laudable but is fundamentally flawed in two key aspects. It recognised the need for: “system-wide solutions” (p.1); dealing “specifically with some of the problems being encountered by boys” (p.3); a “major change in the way the educational community deals with gender issues” (p.3); “fundamental curriculum reform” (p.3); “programs for boys, programs for girls and programs for boys and girls” (p.4); and “more men ... into Primary school teaching” (p.6). *But it denied (p.9) any need for a Boys’ Education Strategy to parallel the existing Girls’ Education Strategy; so the result – five years later – is: **not one** of the report’s findings has been implemented!* Its second major flaw was attributing all of boys’ problems to their “attitudes and values about masculinity” (p.19), thus passing it off once again as somebody else’s problem! Both these flaws allowed the succeeding Labor government to take an easy “out”, which they gladly did.

- The 1996 “Girls and Boys at School – Gender Equity Strategy (1996-2001)” was a kit purporting to cater for both boys and girls. But the three major books of the kit, all written by women, are about giving girls (only) a better deal in school. (The fourth was mostly about Year 12 subject choices and results on gender lines). This is supposed to be “gender equity”! There was not a single strategy for addressing boys’ needs, and this is the current mandatory document on gender equity for NSW schools! Perhaps it is not surprising that this was the outcome; after all, the Labor government consultant for this was Victoria Foster who has publicly criticised attempts to improve boys’ education, stating that this would set girls’ education back twenty years! This is the sort of person that state governments get in as consultants and policy makers.

Since both Liberal and Labor governments in NSW have caved in to pressures from militant feminists to keep boys oppressed, it is obvious that political correctness is the main reason why boys are not improving in education. ***The very departments responsible for their advancement won’t allow it.***

4. BOYS’ EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT IS BEING SUPPRESSED BECAUSE:

- a) There is no popular men’s movement to speak up for boys in the way that the women’s movement achieved so much for girls, so politicians and bureaucrats continue to ignore boys’ problems.
- b) There is no common enemy. Militant feminists viewed men and boys as the enemy; boys’ advocates do not view women and girls this way.
- c) Militant feminists in bureaucratic positions continue to attack men by denying boys their educational rights and refusing to adopt a boys’ education strategy.
- d) Girls’ problems were not behaviour problems. Boys’ problems usually become behaviour problems, so the education authorities say they are parents’ problems.
- e) Boys’ anxiety and depression are greatly underdiagnosed, by recent standards and research, because boys won’t talk about their emotional problems and because there are no agreed-on criteria for boyhood depression.
- f) The Royal Commission into Paedophilia has had enormously detrimental fallout in education for both male teachers and boys. Male teachers have been subjected

to witch hunts and had careers ruined by malicious rumour and false charges, so they are leaving teaching. Those who stay are often not allowed to give first aid, to touch a child, to give a comforting hug to a distressed child, the way females can with impunity, for fear of being accused. *Boys are learning from this that females care and males don't.*

- g) Increased litigation for negligence has caused schools to drop activities that could bring lawsuits, mostly activities that are physically active, those that boys tend to enjoy and are now often denied.
- h) Political correctness over affirmative action for women has kept men from seeing teaching as a career, since women automatically get appointed to more management jobs. Boys are thus deprived further of male teachers.
- i) Militant feminists have caused educational policies to treat boys and girls “equitably”, which, in practice, means *treating boys like girls*. Boys are sick of it and are rebelling, quite understandably.
- j) The rush to put computers in schools may have given boys an easier way of expressing themselves but at quite a cost: they see no need to spell or use grammar correctly any more, and they have become more isolated than they ever were before.
- k) Economic rationalism has caused schools to be treated as businesses and students as clients. Education systems are now bureaucratically top-heavy with a huge middle management that never gets to see what teachers and students actually do, but which just place more and more time and paperwork demands on teachers, despite the findings of the Carrick Report which has been completely ignored.

All of these policies and officially-sanctioned attitudes are preventing the advancement of boys' education. Teacher morale is at an all-time low, especially amongst males who are quickly losing whatever emotional energy they had left to care for their students; but that's what the authorities want. The 1996 ACER “Gender and School Education” report found that boys' frustration with school has led them to “construct a peer culture that negates school values”, particularly as they apply to work and leadership. Schoolwork is seen as being “outside the boundaries of masculinity”. And who could blame them?

Overseas, a lot of radical changes have been made at national or state level in many countries, to address the problem of boys' education. It has become the top priority in the U.K. where the problems are recognised and the responsibility accepted. Not so here.

5. WE NEED A MANDATORY BOYS' EDUCATION POLICY & STRATEGY

Parents and teachers have been calling for boys' school needs to be addressed for well over a decade, but nothing has eventuated from education authorities, for the political reasons outlined earlier. Until there is a mandatory policy that addresses boys' needs, changes will only be tokenistic and at a local level, missing the vast majority of boys who are also calling for help with their behaviour and their suicide rates. It needs to be nationally enforced, because states have shown that it is easy to ignore, circumvent or conveniently reinterpret their own policies .

The policy must provide:

- a) Teacher training, inservice and preservice, on boys' issues (educational, social and emotional needs and their learning styles). University of Newcastle is already working on a Certificate in Boys' Education.
- b) A choice for parents, students and teachers of single-sex classes or co-educational classes, at least in Years 5-8 of school.
- c) More male teachers, especially in primary years.
- d) Teaching methods that properly cater for boys' very different learning styles.
- e) Quality boy-friendly programs for all boys, not just those deemed "at risk".
- f) Mentors for the increasing number of under-fathered boys.
- g) A radical change to school timetabling, organisation, administration and curriculum that gives boys materials and choices that allow them to see that education and masculinity are not mutually exclusive.

Comments by teachers I have surveyed on boys' education reveal a whole range of attitudes. Many of the responses are perceptive, most indicate frustration with boys or with the bureaucracy or both.

6. WE NEED TO ABOLISH OR DRAMATICALLY CHANGE POLICIES THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST BOYS

These include:

- a) Gender Equity which, in practice, is another name for Girls' Education and which forces boys to behave like girls if they want to succeed educationally.
- b) Bans on adventure activities, which disempower boys. Instead, there needs to be in every primary school a male teacher trained and prepared to take boys on adventurous activities and meaningful sports.
- c) Economic rationalism which causes boys to see unemployment as the only certainty in their future before death.
- d) Homework policies which serve little educational purpose but make life hell for parents and boys, and which turn boys off education.
- e) The crowded curriculum which in NSW primary schools now has over 40 mandatory subjects, with more being added each year. All these do is increase teachers' paperwork and frustration, and take time away from caring for their students.
- f) Child Protection Policy, the outfall of the Royal Commission, which makes it almost a crime to be a male teacher, especially if a militant feminist is on staff.
- g) Bullying by principals, and other teachers of students and teachers, mostly by female principals, of male teachers and boys.

7. THE BIGGEST NEED IN EDUCATION TODAY IS TO ADDRESS BOYS' MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS.

Boys need to be taught Emotional Intelligence, by caring male role models, so they can develop the resilience needed to meet life's challenges and disappointments in appropriate ways. When the Affective Domain was important in education, this used to happen as there was time for it. Not so any more. Boys need to learn:

- how to be aware of their own feelings and how to use them and good thinking to make wise choices and decisions.
- how to be able to control and manage moods and impulses.
- how to be self-motivated.
- how to handle conflict with other people (students, teachers, parents, siblings).
- how to overcome adversity and obstacles in working towards one's goals.

(Whenever I have taken boys through programs for these skills I have always found them wanting to learn about it all. It is simply not true, as some suggest, that they don't want to change or don't want to learn. What they don't want is to be turned into "snags". They do want to be able to handle life and school better.)

The President of the Children's Court of Queensland sees the current education overemphasis on commercial values and academic achievement as contributing to the moral bankruptcy of young people. Most of the predictors of delinquency are evident in the school context. While schools should be one of the best weapons against delinquency, too often they can, by this lack of balance, contribute to it instead.

Boys' problems will not be able to be addressed while the current exodus of male teachers continues. Education authorities care little for the male teachers leaving the system. They regard these teachers as whingers and are happy to see them go. It will create a crisis in teaching within five years. With a Minister for Education in NSW who regarded teachers as only working a 30-hour week, teachers over 40 as taking up valuable space, and casual teachers as "the prostitutes of the education system", it is no wonder that teachers are cynical of politicians and bureaucrats. These authorities, as well as the unions (including the NSW Teachers Federation) have actively discouraged teachers from writing on their resignation forms the real reasons for their resigning.

B. STRATEGIES WHICH SCHOOLS HAVE ADOPTED TO IMPROVE BOYS' LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL

I have information on over one hundred such strategies, so space will permit detailing only a few, and then only in outline. Some of them I have seen for myself, others I have noted from my research for my book on boys' education, from here and overseas. All of these need to be seen in the context of what I have said previously, as some of these get to the root of the problem, not just the symptoms of poor literacy and bad behaviour that we see on the surface, yet all of them are, at best, bandaids.

COUNTERING BULLYING AND MACHO BEHAVIOUR

1. (W.A.): Enlisting the support, of perpetrators, for the victim, changing the culture of the bystanders, teaching anger-management techniques and using the Changing Tracks program.
2. (Netherlands): "Action-Reaction" – teaching adolescents alternatives to violence through self-defence and drama activities. Now mandatory in Amsterdam.
3. (Aust.): Weekly games sessions, some competitive, some co-operative, involving parents and community, over a 2-year period. The number of offences dropped by 50% as did the number of offenders.
4. (NSW): High school welfare team surveyed staff, students and parents and found that the school's discipline system did not address student welfare. Used a Glasser-style model of responsibility and consequences. Over 5 years, fights, etc., dropped by half, absenteeism dropped 30%, the need for final stage of disciplinary action dropped by 90%.
5. (S.A.): Through 8 activity-based lessons of games and discussion on heroes, roles, feelings, etc, boys in Years 5-7 are challenged to rethink choices and consequences.
6. (NSW): Working with emotionally damaged boys, rough and tumble games and wrestling were introduced in place of traditional team competition sports. The result has been an increase in boys' self-esteem, acknowledgment of differences and of strengths and weaknesses, and respect for self and others.
7. (NSW): Years 3-12 involved in drama, circus, dance, art and music activities to challenge boys' understanding of masculinity. 50 boys performed and 1150 others helped behind the scenes. 83% had never been in a performance before. It reduced truancy and anti-social behaviour in the playground.
8. (NSW) Year 8 "at risk" boys were taken from their weekly sports session for a year to engage instead in team building, camping, outdoor recreation skills and workshops on social skills. The result has been less harassment of both boys and girls, older boys helping younger children, academic improvement and improved moral values.
9. (N. Z.): Seven 15-year old boys were taken on a 4-day camping trip which involved: jokes and stories around a campfire, telling a legend of a wise old man, visualisation, internalising and recounting of the legend, 2 hours of silent reflection about the transition from boyhood to manhood and a presentation to the group of their discoveries.

10. (NSW): Pro-Active Defence – one of the few programs for primary school boys (Years 5 & 6), it is a series of activities based on: the culture of the martial arts of Sumo, Judo and Tai chi; a set of simulated playground conflict situations; and discussions on heroes, roles, rights, responsibilities and relationships. (As this is my own program, I have supplied more detail in the Appendix).

IMPROVING THE LEARNING CLIMATE FOR BOYS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

The following are some examples of what I have seen in, or have used in, NSW co-educational primary classrooms:

1. Instead of setting spelling and maths for homework, the content and skills taught during the week are practised in 8 different games before being tested on Friday. Results are: improved attitudes to these subjects, a desire to do well and improved academic performances.
2. Spelling, reading and general knowledge are given a review twice a term by playing a game similar to Wheel of Fortune in two teams. The winning team chooses the outside activity for a double P.E. session. The result is: more capable students encouraging less capable ones to be involved for the sake of the team.
3. Snail of the Century – modelled on a similar-sounding TV game show – has 4 teams who send one individual at a time to compete in Spelling, Maths, HSIE, Science, General Knowledge and other questions. The team with the highest score gets a prize, and each team is made up of a range of academic abilities. More capable children encourage others, boys at last think they can do as well as girls, and the fun element takes pressure off the less academically capable.
4. For group work, students are given the choice of what size group to work in, from 2 to 6, with output expectations dependant on the size of the group. The result is that boys choose smaller groups to work in, contribute more individually and produce better quality results.
5. Within each term, every child chooses his or her own novel for reading, studying and recounting, over a five-week period. Followed by a non-fiction book for reading, studying and reporting on to the class. Boys value the right to choose books of interest and many enjoy explaining their interests to the class.

HELPING BOYS WITH BEHAVIOUR DIFFICULTIES (PRIMARY)

1. Boys are given the afternoon (usually the time of the worst behaviour) to do jobs in the school – some help the principal/ deputy with messages, stores, etc.; others help the groundsman with maintenance; others have a gardening job, library job, etc. (some even read to infants children). They enjoy the time out (so does the class) and get self-esteem from being recognised as helpful instead of troublesome. I have seen several boys, who had been expelled from a number of schools, come good through this approach, used by a caring male principal.

2. As an experienced male relief teacher, I was hired each Friday (sport day) in a job-share arrangement for the morning sessions and for specialised sport in the afternoon sessions, consisting of Judo. The class contained about 8 boys “removed” from school sport for bad behaviour and about 14 students from the rest of Years 5 & 6. They had to commit themselves to it or continue with in-school suspension during sport time. The result was all but one lasted the six months, received a certificate of achievement and wanted to do more of this activity.
3. Boys who lose their self-control in class are sent to a male teacher, in another classroom, who has volunteered for the role of mentor to these boys. While the class works on, a one-to-one discussion is held intermittently on previously discussed “You’ve got choices” arrangements. The result, over time, has often been the revealing of deep-seated worries that were unknown to the school and were the cause of the problem behaviour. The boy, his teacher and the class all get time out, too.

C. HOW THE SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES DEVELOPED BY SCHOOLS MAY BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE OR MORE BROADLY IMPLEMENTED.

There are literally hundreds of successful strategies occurring at local school level, but, as mentioned earlier, these are often in opposition to departmental policy and so have been kept quiet. I have not even included them in this submission because I was asked not to; but some of them are making dramatic changes to boys' attitudes to school.

Therefore, the first things that must be done to make them more effective are: to insist that education authorities be forced to get serious about boys' education; to remove the policies and attitudes that are, either deliberately or by default, keeping boys behind; and to enable schools that are using successful strategies to share them openly, without fear of censure from above.

Second, insist that funding be provided for these strategies: to continue them, to share them with other schools, to free people with the expertise to run the programs in other schools. Especially, male teachers running programs for primary school boys need to be shared with schools which have no, or few, male teachers.

Third, get away from the overemphasis on the Cognitive Domain that is a product of faulty economic rationalist thinking. Reinstate funding and programs for the Affective Domain, particularly for programs targeting boys' mental health. Teachers and principals constantly complain to me that they would like to do something for their boys but that the authorities insist the money be spent on other things like girls' education and "back to basics". Until the emotional health of students at all levels becomes the Number 1 priority in education, as it now has in the U.K., attempted solutions will only be birdshot fired at elephants.

The various conferences held in the last five years on Boys' Education have largely been attended by people from private schools and non-government systems. In NSW, especially, teachers have great difficulty getting permission and/or funding to attend. The NSW Department of School Education does not see Boys' Education as important, let alone a priority. At the recent (June, 2000) Boys' Education conference in Sydney there were also twice as many *speakers* from private schools as from state schools.

Once this inquiry has dealt with all the submissions, it should recommend that people with successful programs be funded to share them with others, both directly in schools (demonstrating the programs) and in conferences and seminars. They should then be funded to train other teachers to continue them. *Just as girls have had a massive injection of funding to have their educational needs met, so boys need the same to overcome the inertia caused by years of neglect.*

CONCLUSION

All of the strategies listed in Parts B and C are just bandaids on what is a serious wound – the educational problems of boys. They are bandaids even for the schools that make them work, and as such won't solve the problems boys face in education or even come close to doing so. All they can do is make boys and teachers a little happier for a while, and, as a result, girls and parents, too. But, under the bandaids, the wound will keep festering. I am hopeful that this Parliamentary Inquiry will first apply a liberal dose of antiseptic to state education departments and then use radical surgery to remove the causes of the problem.

Anything less will be a continuing disservice to half of our school population.

Tony Butz
July, 2000