

SUBMISSION BOYS EDUCATION

Strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies that have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.

The West Education Centre, established 26 years ago and located in the western suburbs of Melbourne, is managed by a committed group of teachers and community leaders.

Expert educators staff the Centre with extensive experience in providing high quality curriculum resources and training programs and all programs and publications are developed through wide consultation from practicing teachers.

West Education Centre is devoted to encouraging and supporting quality outcomes in both the formal and informal education settings. We serve the needs of students, schools, parents and the wider community.

We are committed to eroding social divisions, which limit individual and group achievement through education processes that develop positive personal and social relationships. The Centre has an enviable reputation Australia wide for the quality of its publications that support these programs.

We are concerned with broad social inclusiveness issues such as access and equity. We deal with matters related to gender, violence and difference through exploring issues of power and relationships. Last year, for example, the Centre offered 2,321 contact hours of professional development, (anti violence 626 hours, boys education 1238 hours with the remaining hours on literacy and numeracy)

The West Education Centre is a member of the former Australian Council of Education Centres now known as Learning Network Australia Ltd, which has a membership consisting of 21 Education Centres around Australia. The Council ensures that a national approach can be made on education issues whilst ensuring that there is room to encompass regional specificities.

What we know about boys in schools

- Across age groups, socio-economic classes and ethnic groups, boys are underachieving in comparison with girls.
- There is increasing evidence of boys disengagement from school and involvement in an anti-learning youth culture. An attitude of disengagement can develop in Years 5-8 (or longer).
- Boys are over-represented in learning support programs.
- There are increasing rates of suicide, substance use and extreme risk taking amongst boys.
- Disruptive and aggressive behaviours by boys are shown in school discipline figures. These behaviours peak at around Year 9.
- Boys are under represented in leadership roles.
- Boys continue to select from a narrow range of traditional boys subjects and post school options.
- Boys usually have positive attitudes to schooling until around Year 5.
- In Years 10-12, distinct groups can appear ñ those with positive or negative attitudes to schooling.

Two Strategies, which have worked:

The West Education Centre, in consultation with its clients and members moved two years ago to develop a series of stand-alone teacher professional development modules to address this emerging need.

The Motivating Boys program is aimed at supporting teachers and schools to meet the needs of boys aged from 10 to 15 years and is in line with the concepts outlined in the 'Gender Equity ñ A National Framework for Australian Schools (1997) and is underpinned by the five strategic directions outlined in the framework.

These include:

- Understanding gender construction
- Curriculum reform for gender equity
- Combating of gendered violence and sex-based harassment
- Expanding post school options
- Supporting change

The Content

The program material translates this policy framework and theoretical information into a practical approach useful for teachers and school

communities. Each module provides a theoretical framework supported by practical examples and activities, which support self-learning. Time for interaction with others and time for reflection is also included at various points.

The material draws on the successful experiences of a number of schools in addressing their concerns, while leading to the conclusion that whole school community approaches are required if significant improvement is to be made.

How Motivating Boys is presented.

The teacher professional development programs consist of information, sample materials and activities that require a total of six hours presentation time.

It is divided into three main modules, each requiring approximately two hours of presentation time. These can be delivered consecutively in one day, combined to provide a four-hour or half-day program, or sequenced separately over a number of days. Alternatively, each module can stand-alone.

The program has been licensed for delivering throughout the Learning Network Australia; formerly the Australian Council of Education Council and currently the following Education Centres are delivering the program.

- Mackay and District Education Centre (QLD)
- Global Institute for Learning and Development (Brisbane-QLD)
- O'Connor Education Centre (Canberra ñ ACT)
- Southern Highlands Education Centre (Goulburn ñ NSW)
- Wagga Wagga Education Centre (NSW)
- Fremantle Education Centre (WA)

The West Education Centre has published a guide for parents ñ Supporting Our Sons in School (attachment 3) and this underpins the Parent Education Programs.

Strategy 2

What is of outstanding importance for the Centre has been the establishment of the Boys Education Network. The Network consisting of practicing teachers and youth workers provides the Centre with

- a real life probe into the problems facing teachers (e.g. the teacher as a welfare worker)
- access to a diverse range of strategies identified by schools across sectors and socio-economic profiles
- the identification of common influences
 - e.g. increasing role of teacher as a welfare worker
 - longer working hours for parents carers
- single parent families and roles/expectations of boys in those settings

The Centre has acted as the facilitator and discriminator of best practice strategies and tactics throughout the network. The information/ value adding/ revision to the Motivating Boys program is then fed to members of the Learning Australia Network Centres who are offering our Motivating Boys program.

What became obvious at the beginning of 2000 was the need to establish network clusters to initially workshop regionally specific issues and then to develop and nurture these clusters across Victoria to ensure a consistent and rapid exchange of information. The clusters, piloted in Bacchus Marsh and Craigieburn, are of a fixed duration, as we found in the metropolitan Network that the ground was being recovered because of teacher transfer and inability to attend.

The network requires high maintenance to become rigorous and self-perpetuating. Nominated cluster conveners becoming a member of the West Education Centre Management Committee with the secretariat providing facilitator training and continually updated research and resource materials can maintain this. Specific funding will need to be sourced to develop and maintain this network as the ongoing input from practicing teachers can be used as a validator for further enhancement of The Cluster Resource.

The involvement of the parent cohort is critically important to any government, school or cluster initiative. Parenting skills and traditions are largely replicated from ones childhood experience. Intervention to highlight the need to move from traditional stereotypical expectations and parenting of boys is threatening to the parent cohort and where there is no in-house father, the need to identify and include male role models into the family can be problematic.

It is suggested that community parenting skills program guidelines be accessed to work with the Boys Education Network clusters. The wide community focus of the parent support groups should cover:

- gender construction the parent role and the schools role of men in family care is changing which underpins the notion that gender construction is also subject to change
- attitudes to violence males hurt the ones they love and this must shift to the men use of violence to achieve legitimate received needs
- positive human relationship communication skills
- work attitudes choices and performance

The collaboration between the two clusters is vital to achieve the level playing field necessary for the development of a whole school approach to this matter.

The current wide allocation of funding for Parenting Skills through the Department of Health and Community Services inhibits the development of this synergy and needs to be addressed to avoid the unnecessary duplication of materials and resources.

Recommendation

The development of regional Network Clusters, which include state, religious and independent schools.

The development of Cluster Resource books and Programs which will provide the basic for nationally consistent and up to date research resources and strategies.

That funding requirements across Commonwealth and State/Territory Education and Family Community Health Services agencies be synchronised to allow parenting and community education programs to be run in parallel to the education networks.

Modules

Module 1: Understanding Boys

Aims:

- To clarify our concerns about boys at school
- To understand why boys behave as they do

Module 2: Boys in the Classroom

Aims:

- To consider boys attitudes to learning
- To explore successful approaches to working with boys in the Classroom

Module 3: Whole School Approaches

Aims:

- To outline a process for whole school change in boys education
- To investigate a range of programs to support to support boys in school
- To develop an action plan for a whole school initiative to improve outcomes for boys

Module 4: Working with Boys

(This module is a condensed version of modules 1 & 2)

Aims:

- To clarify our concerns about boys at school
- To understand why boys behave as they do
- To consider boys attitudes to learning
- To explore successful approaches to working with boys in the classroom

Module 5: Supporting Our Sons in Schools

(This module is a parent workshop, which helps parents to understand the pressures facing their sons and how to effectively support their performance at school)

Module 6: Boys and Literacy