

**Submission to
Parliament of Australia House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace
Relations**

Inquiry into the education of boys

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RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the *Inquiry into the education of boys*:

- 1) Recognise the *National Goals For Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* agreed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs in April 1999 as the appropriate goals for boys' education.
- 2) Acknowledge that boys are not meeting these goals and that existing gender policies and frameworks are not sufficiently developed to adequately address boys' needs.
- 3) Propose a broadening of the policy framework for gender and education by replacing the existing *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* with a *Gender and Schooling* policy which would advance independent and joint strategies to address the educational needs of girls and boys.
- 4) Set out the principles under which a *Gender and Schooling* policy would be developed.
 - a) A positive approach to boys and to meeting boys' needs is essential.
 - b) The aim of strategies addressed to boys should be to develop fine men, not primarily to remove injustices suffered by women although this is a valid social goal and does imply change for males.
 - c) A genuine partnership between teachers, parents and the wider community is required in developing boys into fine men.
 - d) Local (school-based) developments should be supported to develop initiatives to address boys needs.
 - e) Boys' education is an area where close collaboration between male and female staff and between men and women from the community is possible and desirable.
- 5) Provide support for development of the following areas:
 - a) An array of outcome measures, including incarceration, morbidity and mortality rates be developed for assessing gender education strategies.
 - b) School communities be facilitated to identify their values in relation to men as a basis for a positive view of the boys in their school.
 - c) Schools be assisted to develop boys' involvement in negotiating their learning environment.
 - d) Policies and programs be developed to target all boys, as well as the specific needs of particular groups of boys.

e) Professional development be provided for teachers in teaching methods which engage boys in an evaluation of their gendered identity in a positive and respectful context.

f) Schools be assisted to engage fathers and father figures (males from the community) to support school staff by engaging with boys to promote a positive learning culture.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parents and teachers from all areas of Australia have expressed concern at boys' lack of success at school. This concern has led to school-based boys' education initiatives in the classroom, the delivery of the curriculum, and in school management.

The policies in the area of gender and education have not kept pace with these developments. While there has been a genuine attempt to broaden the gender framework from one focussed exclusively on girls to one addressing the needs of both girls and boys, the current policies and supporting research have serious limitations. A number of assumptions developed during two decades of activity in girls' education have been uncritically carried forward into the renamed gender strategies. The assumptions that material rewards are a sufficient basis for evaluating and guiding education policy, and that boys' needs can be deduced from girls' needs or from sociological theories of masculinity have been particularly damaging.

An appropriate gender policy framework for improving boys' education would recognise boys and girls as distinct groups without overlooking within-group differences. It would take the development of fine men as the central task and identify positive strategies for schools to identify and meet boys' needs. Parents and men and women from the community need to be recognised as important resources and invited to contribute to the schools' efforts with boys.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF BOYS' NEEDS

Since 1996, the Men and Boys Program has been conducting seminars under the title *Meeting Boys Needs* with teachers and parent groups throughout Australia. The seminars are initiated by the schools (or occasionally, the community) because of a perceived need. Following initial contact, costs, content and seminar arrangements are negotiated. It is important to note that the University charges a substantial fee for these presentations on top of travel and accommodation costs. Completed presentations represent a considerable effort and expense on the part of the school and therefore reflect substantial levels of concern among staff and/or parents. In many instances the request has come after discussion amongst staff on a school or regional basis, in which boys lack of progress in school is nominated as a priority area.

Female members of staff and mothers are frequently the initiators of the seminars. Many female teachers have previously fought for girls' initiatives and so are attuned to gender issues or are in positions of responsibility (such as Head Teacher Student Welfare) where they see boys' difficulties clearly. Male staff members also may have been led to focus on boys through their efforts with girls' education. At Boort Secondary College in rural Victoria for example the Access and Equity Co-ordinator described the origins of the *Building Blokes* program at the school:

Through the 1980s the major focus was the education of girls. When the school's Equal Opportunity Committee sat down in 1991 to plan a personal development program for boys, boys were not the main focus of our thinking. The school had initiated many gender equity programs for girls and the girls were telling the school, "That's all very well, but you've got to do something about the boys!"

Parents (usually mothers) are concerned at their son's struggle to succeed at school. Many comment that their daughter's school experience, while not free of difficulty, is significantly smoother than that of their sons.

Seminars have been conducted in the following locations:

New South Wales: Sydney, West Wyalong, Whitbridge, Chatham, Medowie, Dubbo, Kahibah, Booragul, Newcastle, Albury, Finley, Deniliquin, Ingleburn, Nowra, Tocal, Oberon, Erina Heights, Wollongong, Edensor Park, Singleton, Finley, Salamander Bay, Orange, Gosford, Tamworth, Bathurst, Barnsley, Narellan Vale, Wagga Wagga, Nyngan, Dee Why, Corowa, Narellenvale, Carlingford, Kensington, Ryde, Goulburn, Armadale, Cambelltown, Eden, Blackalls Park, Maitland, Shailer Park, Belmont, Kogarah, Parramatta, Penrith, Hornsby, Cardiff, Lake Cargelligo, Linfield, Coffs Harbour, Adamstown, Port Macquarie, Orange, Eveleigh, Nelson Bay, Epping. **Victoria:** Melbourne, Bendigo, Echuca, Hamilton, Boort, Wodonga, Abbotsford, Mornington, Moorabbin. **Queensland:** Brisbane, Indooroopilly, Toowoomba, Cairns, Logan, Biloela, Springwood, Coolangatta, Maryborough, Gold Coast, South Brisbane, Mount Isa, Maroochydore, Wilston, Mudgerraba, Manunda. **Northern Territory:** Alice Springs, Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy, Darwin, Batchelor. **Tasmania:** Launceston, Campbell Town. **Western Australia:** Perth, Fremantle, Bunbury, Albany. **ACT:** Canberra, Deakin, Erindale, Belconnen **South Australia:** Adelaide, Coober Pedy. The seminars have also been presented in The United Kingdom, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

Identifying local concerns

At the staff presentation and at the parent talk the audience (which may be from 20 up to 300) will be asked to identify their own level of concern on a spectrum ranging from "curious about why we are having this seminar" to "very worried about the boys." The discussion then starts from the needs identified by the audience. While these discussions do not comprise a formal research project, they do provide an opportunity to hear the concerns of a wide cross section of educators and community members.

Teachers and parents identify a constellation of attitudes and behaviours that are seen to inhibit boys' achievement at school: lack of motivation, lack of organisational ability, unwillingness to read or to write, disinterest in school, reckless indifference to others' welfare, emotional inexpressiveness, troublesome classroom behaviour, unacceptable attitudes toward women/girls, "yobbo" behaviour, suicide and self harm, risk taking, and unwillingness to take risks in social settings.

Schools often supplement these individual perspectives with an overview or evidence of boy's academic or social outcomes on a school level. For example, a teacher at one high school compared boys' and girls' outcomes on a number of measures. For Year 9 his data revealed a consistent picture of underachievement among boys:

DESCRIPTION	GIRLS	BOYS
First in class	77%	23%
Most consistent student - a teacher nominated award	78%	22%
Blue Slips - good behaviour/consistent achievement	69%	31%
Pink Slips - lunchtime detention	16%	84%
Red Slips - afternoon detention	23%	77%
Yellow Slips - notification to parents of unsatisfactory activity	32 %	68%
CO-RD Awards - received after five Blue Slips	74%	26%
Maths - Advanced class numbers	51%	49%
Standard - Class numbers	53.1%	46.9%
Science Numbers - Top stream	54%	46%
Science Numbers - Bottom stream	54%	46%
Science AV. MKS - Top stream	85	76
Science AV. MKS - Bottom stream	55	52
English Top	75%	25%
English Bottom	17%	83.%

SCHOOL INITIATIVES

Arising from these concerns schools have initiated classroom and school-wide programs to improve boys' education. A number of schools have provided descriptions of their activities in contributions to *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*. These topics suggest the range of approaches taken by schools.

Boys and the Expressive Arts

Using the expressive arts to provide boys acceptable avenues to create their own expression through art and to broaden the range of validated boys' arts activities.

The Machismo Project at James Cook Technology High School involves boys through visiting artists. (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 3 1999).

"Power, Oppression, Ritual & Celebration" describes the ceremonial drama work with boys from Christian Brothers College, St Kilda, VIC (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No 3 1998).

Boys Only Classes

Many schools have decided to group boys separately to allow the teachers to focus on the boys without taking attention from the girls, and to allow teaching and learning styles to be adapted to boys' preferences.

The BLOKES program is an 100 Hour Elective for boys in Years 9 and 10 at Crestwood High School, NSW (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No 2 1998).

Case studies of a number of schools introducing single sex classes from England and Wales schools suggest that positive results can be achieved (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 3 No 1 2000).

"Concentrating Better But Not As Much Fun Without Girls" gives a student perspective on an innovative class arrangement at Mooroolbark Heights Secondary College, VIC (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 3 No 1 2000).

Discipline/ Welfare Structures

Schools which have provided alternatives to the traditional punishment regimes have begun to discover that boys can take responsibility if positive and consistent avenues are provided.

"We will deal with this in another way" details the use of community conferencing (with very positive results) with boys at Punchbowl Boys High School, NSW (90% Arabic) (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 3 No 1 2000).

"They Don't Even Run the Military Like That Anymore" describes the shift at Blacktown Boys ' High School in Western Sydney from a culture where the Head Teachers Administration's full time job was handling violent incidents, and over 100 boys were suspended each year, to one where students and staff negotiated a set of school rules with consequences. (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No1 1999).

Boys in Red House at Belmont High School, Victoria were offered a variety of ways to take up responsibility with impressive results. (“ Affirming Boys’ Roles in Red House” *Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol1 No 4 1998).

Involving Fathers

Schools have made good use of men in the community - fathers and father figures - to provide models for boys and to support the schools in showing boys that learning, including reading and taking care of others, is something men enjoy and are good at.

“Lets Have a Story Dad” provides a full account of the dads coming to hear boys read at South Wagga Public School (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No 1 1998).

"Have you got me, Dad?" was a call by boys rock climbing as part of their Dads and Sons day at Rangeville State School, QLD (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 3 No 1 2000).

Mentoring

While recruiting fathers is common, in many schools other males may provide the close attention and interest that boys require to move into manhood. Retired men, older boy students as well as men from the community can play a productive role here.

The Boys In Focus Program turned boys with criminal experience into peer leaders at Camden High School, NSW (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 3 1999).

“Cutting Through Aimlessness” describes the mentoring scheme at Cleveland Street High School in inner Sydney (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 4 1999).

Boys and Books is the name of the scheme where older boys tutor younger, struggling readers at Maryborough State High School, QLD (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No 4 1998).

Middle School Reform

The current interest in making school more relevant and engaging for students over the middle years will assist boys wether the initiative is titled "boys education " or not.

“Making Boys Bloom” refers to the flowers which literally bloomed when the boys were given their own space at Blackfriars Priory School, SA (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No 3 1998).

School/ Work Programs

Work (having a job) remains a central component in boys' transition to manhood. Programs which recognise the possible benefits of developing a "work ethic" have found that potential "troublemakers" are able to make a positive contribution to the community.

“A Dad in the Shed” is not quite necessary, but the experienced male teachers do provide more than technical knowledge at Geraldton Secondary College, WA (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 3 1999)

“It Takes a Village to Raise a Young Man” details the involvement of local businessmen in developing work relationships with young men. Margaret River Senior High School, WA (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 3 No 2, 2000).

Specific-focus Programs

Specific programs can form an important part of the schools' response to boys' needs.

“Assisting the Transition from Boyhood to Manhood” describes an encounter/ retreat for senior boys at Aquinas College, WA (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol3 No 3, 2000)

“Intervening In Adolescent Depression” encourages school staff and counsellors to reconsider the standard pattern referrals where boys attract the “conduct disorder” label while girls are identified with depression. (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 4 1999).

“Self Defence for Boys: Learning How to Deal With Violence and How to Prevent Violence” explains the style of self-defence course being successfully used in Holland (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 4 1999, also Vol 1 No 2 1998).). This program is now offered in Australia as The Rock & Water Program

“Using Games to Adjust Behaviour” is a step beyond using games for amusement or exercise. Games can teach boys valuable social skills. (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No 4 1999).

Developing social skills in boys is possible. They are doing just that at Roseville Public School, NSW (*Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No 4 1998).

IMPROVING BOYS' EDUCATION

In addition to the seminars described above and the production of *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, the Men and Boys Program has held discussions with schools and communities through the staging of three national conferences, a national training program and the production and distribution of resources including books, posters, kits and manuals. In 2001 a Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Specialising in Educating Boys) will be offered by the Men and Boys Program through the Faculty of Education at the University of Newcastle (the first in Australia).

From the perspective of the ongoing discussion with teachers, parents, and boys in schools, the following strategies would improve the education of boys and girls and contribute to a more educated, just, and open society.

The Commonwealth has a leadership role in the area of education policy. The *National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* drawn up by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs details goals in student learning and capabilities, curriculum delivery and social justice. These goals provide a framework for assessing the education provided to boys. State-level measures of academic outcomes, national literacy scores and large scale research studies point to significant shortcomings in boys' academic achievement. Equally important, morbidity, mortality and criminal justice statistics reveal appalling outcomes for boys and young men. The evidence that boys are not meeting the goals set out in the Adelaide Declaration is unambiguous. However, it is important to note that the discrepancies revealed when boys' results are compared with those of girls are only indicators of achievable standards. It is not suggested that girls results be pared back until the two groups are equivalent. While comparisons with girls are instructive, the objective is to provide an excellent education for boys and girls.

To assist boys to meet the goals identified in the Adelaide Declaration, a policy framework is required which acknowledges the efforts of those who developed girls' education policies and the need for continuing strategies for girls. At the same time, the current efforts of teachers and parents to move towards consistent strategies and policies that meet the needs of boys require recognition and support.

It is recommended that the Inquiry into the Education of Boys should:

- 1) Recognise the *National Goals For Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* agreed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs in April 1999 as the appropriate goals for boys' education. .
- 2) Acknowledge that boys are not meeting these goals and that existing gender policies and frameworks are not sufficiently developed to adequately address boys' needs.
- 3) Propose a broadening of the policy framework for gender and education by replacing the existing *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* with a *Gender and Schooling* policy which would advance independent and joint strategies to address the educational needs of girls and boys.

4) Set out the principles under which a *Gender and Schooling* policy would be developed.

The following principles are suggested as suitable for guiding the development of a *Gender and Schooling* policy.

1. A positive approach to boys and to meeting boys' needs is essential.
2. The aim of strategies addressed to boys should be to develop fine men, not primarily to remove injustices suffered by women although this is a valid social goal and does imply change for males.¹
3. A genuine partnership between teachers, parents and the wider community is required in developing boys into fine men.
4. Local (school-based) developments should be supported to develop initiatives to address boys needs.
5. Boys' education is an area where close collaboration between male and female staff and between men and women from the community is possible and desirable.

¹ It may seem a daunting task to gain community agreement on the precise definition of a "fine man" but existing policies contain many such terms (for example, the National Goals seek citizens who have "a productive and rewarding life", who can "accept responsibility" and "maintain a healthy lifestyle").

FROM GIRLS' EDUCATION TO GENDER EDUCATION

Three recent documents mark the shift in education policy from one focussed exclusively on girls to one which seeks to include boys under the heading of "gender". The *Gender and School Education* report was published in June 1996. The project was commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs to assess progress in the implementation of the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls*. The brief included a request to collect data on boys as well as girls. The study therefore sought information on victims of harassment of both sexes, surveyed boys for their views of teaching about gender and queried schools' attempts to address "the constricting limits of masculinity"(Collins *at al*, 1996:3). The subsequent *Gender Equity: A Frameworks for Australian Schools*, prepared by the Gender Equity Taskforce for MCEETYA in 1997 was intended to operate in tandem with the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls*. The name Gender Equity reflected the recognition that "to address inequalities experienced by girls it is necessary to look at the same time at the education of boys" (GET, 1997:7). Most recently, the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs commissioned a report on *Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and Their Initial Destinations after Leaving School* (hereafter, the *Factors Report*). The report, which was published in July 2000, set out to address the "widespread concern in Australia over gender patterns in educational performance.... the perception that girls are now 'doing better' than boys in a number of key areas" (Collins *at al*, 2000 :1)

While these policies and reports reflect a genuine attempt to move beyond an exclusive focus on girls, they do not acknowledge the extent to which including boys requires re-evaluating fundamental assumptions of the work. Propositions which have become accepted as self evident over the years of developmental work in girls' education have been applied uncritically to boys' education. As a result, when boys are included, their needs are assumed, and initiatives designed on the basis that removing girls' disadvantage is the primary goal of educating boys.

It has become axiomatic that the fundamental purpose of policies in the gender arena is to facilitate the redistribution of economic rewards of society more equally - toward women and away from men. The evidence that girls and women are economically disadvantaged is clear. However, while fairer distribution of income is a laudable project, and one which should inform gender education, it is insufficient as a basis for setting educational policies. Access to material rewards should only form one of the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of education. on when assessing the effectiveness of education.

During the period 1975 to 1997, while the focus of gender discussion in education was unambiguously on girls' achievement in schools, the limitations of this approach were not readily apparent. Strategies during this period did seek to value traditionally female areas of endeavour, such as raising families, however the underlying logic of these programs was that women were disadvantaged in income and status as identified by an analysis of power. This analysis is not an adequate basis for a boys' education policy. In moving to embrace boys' education under the umbrella of gender the narrowness in the policies has become more evident.

Broadening work education to value family and "the inclusive curriculum" are two areas of development which illustrate the need for rethinking the accepted basis of girls' strategies to address both boys' and girls' needs.

Valuing unpaid family work

The Gender Equity framework document aims to broaden work education to challenge the notion that paid work is essential while unpaid family work is peripheral. However, the authors continually revert to analyses of winners and losers, using income levels and occupational status as markers. For example, the report argues that the under-representation of boys in the humanities is not of equal importance to girls' under-representation in mathematics and science. The report states:

This overlooks the fact that science and mathematics are at the top of the academic hierarchy of subjects and can provide bright students with the highest tertiary entrance scores and thus privileged access to the University courses that bring the highest economic and status rewards. In other words, success in Mathematics can bring with it individual economic rewards.

The report reinforces this assessment of the truly important markers for measuring school progress by adding:

... success in the humanities does not, in general, lead to high paying, high status jobs, but can increase students' capacity for understanding people, society and the pressing social issues, which those who get the high status jobs will have to solve (GET, 1997:27).

In the Factors Report, the reason boys opt for "high status subjects" of maths and science is assumed to be because they seek a vocational payoff, because these subjects provide power and status resources (Collins *at al*, 2000 : 88, 89)

The inclusive curriculum

A key strategy of *The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97* was to reform the curriculum to make it relevant to girls' interests. The training and resources which were offered in this area had a clear logic: girls' needs had been excluded and should be included. *Moving On, the Facilitators' Guide to the Use of Gender Inclusive Units* was published in 1995 as part of the Gender Equity Curriculum Reform Project. It offers the following points in answer to the question "Why is gender inclusive curriculum important?"

Curriculum usually excludes females from its content, language and methods;
Girls receive less time and attention from their teachers;
Girls are often harassed and denigrated by boys at school;
Boys dominate playground space;
Girls generally receive less acclaim and recognition for their activities; and,
Girls more often than boys, end up in employment that is both low status and low paying within a narrow range of pathways. (Macklin, 1995:13)

At issue is not the correctness of these statements. They furnish a useful rationale for recognising girls' needs. However, the Gender Equity framework, which claims to address "the differing concerns and educational experiences of boys and girls" (GET, 1997:6) advocates an "inclusive curriculum" be adopted so that "the effects of femininity and masculinity, as currently constructed, do not impact on individuals in ways which would disadvantage them in terms of access to all learning areas." (GET 1997:35) It seems clear that the Gender Equity framework considers the approach of the *Moving On* guide adequate for addressing boys needs without serious modification. Their needs are recognised only as the need to stop harassing girls and to share the rewards available in the school and workplace.

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR BOYS' EDUCATION

There is much of value in the existing gender equity framework. But a number of aspects require careful rethinking. In the section below, limitations of the current framework are identified and proposals made for appropriate developments.

Selecting outcomes

The exclusive focus on the disadvantages suffered by girls in gaining material rewards has established a narrow range of outcomes as the only appropriate measures. The *Factors Report* sets out to provide a rational assessment of the school success of girls and boys. It provides no justification, however, for the narrow range of outcome measures used. Post-school outcomes are limited to enrolments in higher education, Technical and Further Education or employment. Other "destinations" such as hospitals, prisons or morgues are not considered. Labour market outcomes of income levels and occupational prestige have become the only yardstick for measuring progress.

Recommendation:

An array of outcome measures, including incarceration, morbidity and mortality rates be developed for assessing gender education strategies.

Valuing boys and men in the school context

If strategies are framed with equity as the prime goal then values are reduced to the value of fair distribution. The Gender Equity Report, for example, offers itself as simply liberating students from constraints. Throughout the document freedom from stereotypes or from gender-based constraint is advocated to make students "more fully human" (GET, 1997:33).

Education, it suggests, can be value free. "The media, the church, community organisations, and so on - *promulgate* what ever set of values they choose. However, it is the school's responsibility to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary in making informed, considered decisions and judgements about these values." (emphasis in the original GET, 1997:32)

The goal of equity leads to 'removal of difference' as the ultimate measure of success. This is problematic because it entails the removal of gender identity. Any noticeable difference in boys' and girls' preferences, learning styles, or activity would constitute a constraint, and so require more intervention to remedy the difference. However the report also recognises that "gender is central to one's definition of self," and that "both the formal and informal curriculum are extremely important to the formation of gender identity" (GET, 1997:28).

Earlier in this submission, under the heading "The Identification of Boys' Needs", the school seminars and parent meetings held with the Men and Boys Program were outlined. A key component of these events was the discussion of the value that the school placed on men. to described. , the issue of the value of men. Those attending were asked to complete the following sentence: "In our school we aim to develop men who ...". The task provoked enthusiastic debate. Some examples of the completed sentences from workshops:

In our school we aim to develop men who are respectful to women, do not use violence to solve a problem and are literate and communicative.

In our school we aim to develop men who are not afraid to take personal risks, are proud of being men, have a good knowledge of themselves, have clear goals.

In our school we aim to develop men who know their duties, obligations, responsibilities, rights and especially the rights that others have over them, such as: their parents, their wives, their children and the community.

There are no right answers here. This task is appropriately undertaken by each school in discussion with the community (the third example comes from teachers in an Islamic school in Western Australia). For a fuller account of parents and teachers identifying their values see Fletcher 1998 and 1999a)

Recommendation:

School communities be encouraged to identify their values in relation to men as a basis for a positive view of the boys in their school

Identifying boys' needs

An influential theory construct in the gender equity area has been the sociological notion of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995). While the exact nature of the concept is difficult to define (no measures of hegemonic masculinity have yet been published) it is thought relatively straightforward to demonstrate that males have, and seek, power over women and other men. From this theoretical standpoint it is irrelevant to seek information from boys since their motivations and needs can simply be deduced. For example, while it was thought necessary to commission the *Listening to Girls* research project, interviewing girls in 73 schools to ascertain their view on a range of topics and then to request further funding to place the evidence on a "sound statistical basis", there has been no equivalent effort to ask boys for their views. (Milligan & Thomson 1992, Collins *at al*, 1996: 2)

Some research into boys' views is in progress and may provide useful information for policies seeking to address boys' needs. (The DETYA funded project "Are they all the same? A

project to examine the success rates of adolescent males in education in secondary and tertiary settings” (1999-2000), will include focus group discussion with boys) And many schools are surveying boys to provide guidance in adjusting the curriculum and teaching styles to take account of boys’ preferences.

Boys’ disengagement from school, however, is commonly identified by parents and teachers as a central concern. In response, the Men and Boys Program has been piloting methods of identifying boys’ needs which engage boys in the task of improving the learning environment of the school. The disadvantage of teacher-led, and researcher-led, investigations is that the boys’ role is reduced to answering questions or filling out questionnaires. Although the boys may well appreciate being asked for their views, their agency is severely curtailed once their views become “data.”

In preparation for the recent *Teaching Boys Developing Fine Men* conference (2000), sponsored by the Men and Boys Program, boys from three schools were supported to conduct their own investigations of male students’ views. Trinity Bay High School boys prepared a video of male students’ views on success, the future, and improvements to the school. Students in the video suggested more equipment and teachers who could speak indigenous languages.

Three boys from Abergowrie College in Queensland, a college with 60% indigenous students, presented a summary of boys’ views from their area. The boy speaking in the segment below was from Bougainville (PNG):

In the past weeks we have been collecting boys’ ideas about ‘What can make schools better places for them?’. We are here to present our report to you. The data that we give to you are not just ours alone. We thought we needed more if we were going to be able to tell you what boys are saying. We had no trouble getting boys’ opinions. They had plenty to say. We’ve spoken with boys. We’ve met them individually, in groups, in classes and in other schools in our district. I think they spoke up so well because they were glad to be listened to. The boys we are talking for include boys from the bush, town boys, Aboriginal boys and Torres Strait Islander boys. And a few from above the border like myself. Though Abergowrie is a boarding school for 250 boys we ensured that we included boys from day schools in our research. The part of our presentation that I am going to share with you today is where and how boys learn best. What are boys saying?

1. *According to the opinions of the boys we’ve met, they said there is a general idea that teachers go to school to teach and kids go to learn. What we found is that yes, that’s the teacher’s idea. But the boys seem to hope for something different from school. They are more interested in who they want to be than what they want to learn. Now that is a big difference that someone has got to sort out.*
2. *Boys spoke a lot about the atmosphere of the school. Kids don’t learn best in an atmosphere that ignores bullying nor where they are afraid of other boys or staff. Some other things the boys talked about in connection with the atmosphere of their school were:*
 - *The school (teachers, principals and other students etc) need to be encouraging boys to do well, praising them, and showing great concern about every boy’s education.*

- *They asked for their lessons to be interesting. The boys talked about sitting in class and copying notes off the board and listening to teachers talking.*
 - *Boys talked about needing a suitable daily routine (esp. boarding schools) allowing for more free time to refresh one's mind or do extra work. The boys say they learn best when one class does not come right on top of another.*
 - *They talked about how good it is to have someone conducting tutorial classes so that kids catch up with work.*
 - *Now here's an interesting one - boys want their classrooms to be interesting places - lots of posters and displays of work and information to be interested in on the walls. Boys said primary schools are good at this.*
 - *A caring community is important to boys. You know we asked one of toughest boys in our school. We asked him what can be better. His answer was very simple and a surprise to me. He said "I know what's kept me here and what's the best thing about this school - it's that boys here support each other in school, they want you to learn and that's different from a lot of places."*
3. *So why do lots of boys hate school and give up? Why don't they do well? Here I am speaking specifically for my indigenous brothers (though I think its true for a lot of boys): They say they come to hate school because they are worried about looking dumb. The fear of looking dumb is so strong in them. They know they probably haven't done primary school as well as a lot of kids and that scares them when they come to high school. They see themselves inferior to others. I hope you will listen to what they are saying - it is a big thing for them to talk honestly like this.*

My last point is about the special relationship boys have with nature. We talked a lot about this. There is something that happens for a boy where he's close to nature. Some say that they "feel free to be themselves". Some say "it is where they get in touch with what is happening inside the. For me, I think being with nature brings me peace and lets me get things in the right order. It is easily seen where we go to school - boys go camping on the weekend, they build shacks in the scrub, that can sit out among the trees that overlook the river for hours. What about boys and men's fascination with fishing? What I am saying is that it looks like schools that help their students to be with nature a lot are going to have happier, more contented boys.

In Newcastle, a group of Year 9 boys from St Pius X High School designed and conducted their own Year 9 Boys Survey. The questions were offered to the boys with a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The final questions, and the percentage of the 97 boys who completed the survey who agreed or strongly agreed, are given below.

Teaching And Learning

Question	% Boys Agreed or Strongly Agreed
There should be no difference between teacher's rules.	67
Blue slips should be given out more often for consistent and/or improved effort as well academic.	94
Assessment tasks should have clear guidelines on what you will be marked on.	97
All assignments should be marked so you know where you went wrong in detail and where marks were lost.	98
There should be less or no homework during exam and during the week before exams.	97
Teachers should consult with students when setting assignment and due dates.	87
Teacher should accept notes from parents about assignment extensions and homework.	91

Treatment Of Girls Vs Boys

Teachers should be more fair in giving yellow / red slips between girls and boys.	94
Girls and boys are treated equally at St Pius.	30
Girls cause as much trouble as boys.	62
Girls receive lighter punishment than boys for the same offence.	88

Sport

Sport choices should be more boy oriented.	57
Students should be able to borrow sport equipment at lunch.	90
Sport should not be compulsory	47

School Arrangements

We should have more activity days	97
Students should be able to leave school premises during lunch time with a pass	90

In each case the boys presented their findings to the school staff (and in one case, to parents) thereby initiating a process of negotiation on improvements to the school.

Recommendation

Schools be assisted to develop boys' involvement in negotiating their learning environment.

Recognising differences among boys

The first recommendation of the *Factors Report* is to adopt a "which boys which girls" approach. This approach is claimed to offer a more sophisticated understanding of gender than previous formulations. Of course, addressing differences within the categories of boys or girls is advisable, but the usefulness of framing the discussion of gender and education as "which boys which girls" is questionable.

The report claims that those who advocate for attention to boys' needs are using a "simple analysis of 'all boys' versus 'all girls,'" and to have "naive conceptions" shaped by the media (Collins *et al*, 2000:20). This characterisation is offered without evidence and in disregard of the genuine concern expressed by parents and teachers for the welfare of the boys in their schools. It also ignores the direct evidence from the authors' own research. The *Gender and School Education* report notes that boys' education was a recurring theme in the comments made on the returned questionnaires and by the principals in primary and secondary schools, in rural and urban schools and in government and non-government schools visited by the research team.

It is hard to see how the principal quoted in the research can be said to be suffering from media hype:

*There's a couple of aspects of it that have certainly come up for consideration so the strongest one that we are dealing with at the moment is the issue of boys' under performance...The way it's being talked about out there, and certainly the way it's been discussed among our staff, it's not the flip side of the girls' equity agenda, which was long overdue and quite necessary and related to things like access to curricula areas, career opportunities, being able to find role models etc. and all that sort of issue and I think that's all good and fine. But the effect that we are seeing here is not the girls going ahead, but the boys going behind. And the questions of why they are going behind concern me a great deal (Collins *et al*, 1997:133).*

In contrast, the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* sought to address girls' needs while remaining committed to "students who benefit least from schooling." The Men and Boys program strongly advocates that this approach also be used addressing boys' needs. While the reports and policy cited here pertain to education rather than health per se, it is unfortunate that the comprehensive evidence that addressing health-related behaviours across population groups is more effective than targeting those at the highest risk, has been disregarded.

The most serious fault in the "which boys which girls" approach, however, is that it places the burden of reform squarely on the most disadvantaged groups of boys. While the report

advocates resourcing programs for “the most disadvantaged” boys it suggests the resources be expended to address those boys who belong to “peer cultures of banter, bravado and bullying” and who lack “a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members” (Collins *at al*, 2000:9,11). The clear implication of this approach - that it is only boys from low socioeconomic groups, Aboriginal and ethnic groups who “subscribe to outmoded and inflexible gender identities” seems not to have been considered (Collins *at al*, 2000:10).

(For an example of the need for boys’ education within a specific, cultural context, see the 1995 Report of The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. Recommendation 34 states that a top priority for Commonwealth funding should be to support research on the causes of educational alienation experienced by indigenous boys and young men.)

Recommendation:

Policies and programs be developed to target all boys, as well as the specific needs of particular groups of boys.

Teaching about gender

The methods used to teach boys cannot be separated from the messages that we wish to convey. Unfortunately, a particular method of teaching about the “social construction” of gender has become entrenched. Through discussion of material presented by the teacher the boys are to understand that power (as measured by income and occupational prestige) is valued and that, as males, they have more than their fair share of power. This approach contradicts what we know about good pedagogy. As researchers have noted in their assessment of approaches to girls’ education:

Too often the feminism presented to girls was dour, negative and even condemnatory yet the pleasure principle was vital to the girls and so too was a recognition of their growing maturity. These adolescent girls constantly pointed out that teachers (gender reformers among them) treated them as children and didn’t value their capacities to make sensible decisions (Kenway & Willis, 1993:34).

The same understanding does not seem to be readily applied to boys’ learning. The researchers quoted above continue:

A number of our research schools offered special programs for boys alongside those offered girls. The strongest versions were those informed by a feminist perspective. These not only engaged the problems for boys of dominant and dominating versions of masculinity, they also identified concomitant problems for girls (34).

Feminist perspectives should inform the content of gender education for boys, and it is crucial to explore the social influences on their identity. However, the method should be respectful and positive. The Men and Boys Program has promoted two approaches which demonstrate that these aims can be achieved.

The Boys and Relationships Program

Two statements underpin the program: Things are changing (referring to social changes); and, Men often hurt themselves and people they love. A fundamental aspect of the course is to ask teachers to reflect on their own use of power in their interactions with boys. David Shores has been involved in the development of the program since its inception. He has conducted staff development seminars on the *Boys and Relationships Program* to teachers across Australia for a number of years. He describes an incident that took place in a suburban school after a Boys and Relationships training day.

I was walking across the yard with an earnest school counsellor who was keen to become more proactive with preventing the excesses of aggressive (I win you lose) behaviours that she noticed in her school. We were discussing issues from the Boys and Relationships training day. The conversation went something like this, "The idea of teachers modelling power sharing and a range of conflict resolution styles is really interesting. Excuse me a moment David. Geoffrey will you pick up that paper for me love?" Geoffrey (shaking his head), "It's not my paper". Counsellor (cajoling), "Come on Geoff just pick it up!" Geoffrey (arms folded, more defiantly), "It's not my paper!" Counsellor (irritated, possibly embarrassed by my presence), "I'll ask you then you are on a warning, Step 1, pick up that paper please!" Geoffrey (angrily snatches up the paper and throws it in the bin), "It's not fair, it's not my paper!" (Counsellor (to me), "That boy is such a hopeless case. He's so uncooperative and aggressive.!")

This program does not, by itself, “fix” gender issues with boys. It does offer a series of lessons which are interesting to boys and to teachers. In the associated professional development, teachers are able to reflect on, and rethink, the informal curriculum in the school. (See “A Boys’ Program With Cultural, Spiritual And Community Roots” *Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 1 No2, for an account of adapting this program to an isolated school with high numbers of indigenous students where the community had identified boys in Year 5 to Year 8 as the ones needing assistance.)

The Rock and Water Course

In the mid eighties in Holland, a program of self-defence for girls was developed. This program was, and still is, very successful in Holland. It has become a standard subject in the curriculum of many Dutch schools. From the early 1990s complementary courses for boys were developed, with the prevention of sexual violence as the sole objective. Over approximately ten years a more sophisticated and positive approach to boys has evolved. Freerk Ykema a Physical Education and Remedial Teacher been engaged in the writing and trialing of these approaches to boys. His *Rock and Water Course* has been sponsored in Australia by the Men and Boys Program because it offers an unusual blends of physical exercises and social skills. The boys are enthusiastic about learning how to stand with strength, how to be more flexible, and how to deal with physical intimidation. The course effectively integrates these skills with social skills using group discussion and verbal exercises. The course teaches boys to deal with power, strength and powerlessness in a constructive and respectful context. (The philosophy and teaching method is described in *The Boys in Schools Bulletin* and in Ykema, 2000)

Recommendation

Professional development be provided for teachers in teaching methods which engage boys in an evaluation of their gendered identity but in a positive and respectful context.

Role models

Students are well aware whether their teacher is male or female. The need for boys to learn what males value (reading, expressing ideas and listening to others for example) is not appropriately conveyed by female staff *telling* boys what they should value. This issue is often misrepresented as questioning the ability of female staff to effectively teach boys and advocating for male teachers to replace female teachers. Of course females make excellent teachers for boys (for a discussion see Hartman, 2000).

However, there are important aspects of learning connected to boys' sense of male identity which cannot be adequately addressed without the involvement of older males. Many schools are successfully piloting father involvement, older male student involvement and using male volunteers from the community. The Family Action Centre in Newcastle has pioneered the training of volunteers to link with "at-risk" students. Since the eight or nine out of every ten students nominated by the school are boys, a dedicated program has targeted male volunteers. The volunteers are not remedial teachers but men from the community who "take an interest" in the boy who is linked. The scheme achieves outstanding results in academic and behavioural areas (see a description of the Homelink Program in: "Providing Community Support for Boys in Schools" *Boys in Schools Bulletin* Vol 2 No2 1999)

Modeling how men and women can work together respectfully is another important area of school activity. Once the importance of boys forming positive relationships with male and female educators is recognised, the strengths of men and women, older boys and girls can be utilised to improve boys' education. Female school principals at the *Leadership in Boys Education Forum* identified their ability to model effective conflict resolution (power-with rather than power-over) as an important benefit of female leadership. (Fletcher *at al*, 1999)

Recommendation

Schools be assisted to engage fathers and father figures (males from the community) to support school staff by engaging with boys to promote a positive learning culture.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKING TOGETHER

The boys education area has developed with support from female staff , mothers and women from the community. They have joined with male staff, fathers and men from the community to promote schools' efforts to develop fine men. Parents and staff at school meetings make it perfectly clear that they believe that the whole community will benefit from an improvement in boys' education. Boys' education has the potential to bring communities together in support of schools efforts to develop fine men.

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