

INTERNATIONAL BOYS' SCHOOL COALITION

24th July 2000

Enquiry Into The Education of Boys

I wish to bring to the Committee's attention the existence of the International Boys' Schools Coalition <http://www.boysschoolscoalition.org/> and some of the work they are doing to promote the education of boys. Currently, the Coalition has member schools drawn from the USA, Canada, South Africa, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Japan and the UK. There are 39 Australian School members.

The objectives of the Coalition are to:

Create an international network of members, both corporate and affiliate. so that useful communications and best practices are easily shared;

Promote, sponsor and disseminate research about the education of school-age boys,

Organise conferences and forums to promote education and continuing conversation about distinctive needs of school-age boys;

Provide a common forum for educators who are preparing boys to be positive collaborators in building a humane and livable world.

The annual Coalition Conferences, where best practice in the education of boys forms the core of the proceedings, have been held at **Cleveland USA 1995**, **Toronto Canada 1996**, Bethesda USA 1997, Perth Australia 1998, Nashville **USA 1999**, and **San Francisco USA** in 2000. Future annual Conferences are scheduled for London England 2001, New York USA 2002, and South Africa 2003. The Coalition publishes a Monogram biannually on matters concerning the education of boys and to a limited extent funds research into the education of boys. It is a vibrant and growing network of educators of boys.

The Coalition is committed to promoting single-sex education. Single-sex education in the 80's in Australia and elsewhere was sometimes viewed as anachronistic and backward looking and fell into disfavour. In the rush to embrace co-education, nothing was heard of boys' needs. The recent focus on boys' needs has rekindled the debate on single-sex education and there is a growing body of literature and research that examines the educational factors affecting the education of boys. The Coalition believes that the socialization of boys is best addressed in a single-sex environment.

The Coalition has funded some interesting research and monograms:

Hulse D (1997)¹ BRAD and CORY: A Study of Middle School Boys, concluded:

¹ Hulse D.J. (1997) BRAD AND CORY: A Study of Middle Schools Boys. University School Press. Hunting Valley, Ohio

Co-education may be a problematic practice ... finding, actual research to support the benefits of co-education is difficult. The conclusions from the data (of this research) are not inconsequential.

- *boys' schools boys are less defensive and less susceptible to social and peer pressure than boys who attend co-ed schools*
- *Boys 'schools boys have a higher sense of control over their performance than the co-ed schoolboys*
- *Boys' schools boys are less in conflict about many aspect of their environment than are boys who attend co-educational schools;*
- *Boys' schools boys feel that the school protects them and allows them appropriately to express their aggression;*
- *Boys' schools boys feel more comfortable about their relationship with girls than do boys who attend co-ed schools;*
- *Boys' schools boys have more egalitarian attitudes towards women and men ~ roles in society than those who attend co-ed schools;*
- *Boys' schools boys have more options available to them in defining their masculinity.*

In a pilot study Toppin (1999)² examined the attitudes of boys in USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and concluded that:

- *USA students reported a higher mean level of perceived confidence,*
- *On the measures used Australians were below the mean on every question;*
- *On questions concerning schoolwork (reading writing maths and Australians rated themselves below the mean;*
- *There is still much bullying occurring in schools,*
- *Wanting to belong to a 'group' is a discriminator between those with a positive outlook and those with a negative outlook.*

Other works include Melvoin R (1998)³ who concluded:

Understanding boys and boys' schools must not get relegated to politics or public relations; the issues are too important... we have dealt too long in this society with a co-ed is good/boys are bad' message to try simply to turn that on its head. We must look at the real issues in the lives of boys, boys both individually and together

Further publications can be found on the Coalition's website.

There is a wealth of experience of Australian and International educators who form this coalition. There is a need for funding of objective research that can cast further light on the question of the cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys.

My own on-going Doctoral research is an empirical analysis and comparison of several behavioural characteristics of boys as they exist in boys in boys' schools

² Toppin W.D. (1999) 'What are boys' perceptions about ... ? Unpublished paper presented to the International Coalition of Boys' Schools

³ Melvoin R (1998) BEYOND POLITICS: Boys, Biology. Values and Character. University School Press. Hunting Valley, Ohio

and boys in co-educational schools. Some of the behaviours being considered include a whole range of motivational behaviours related to school and life, adolescent coping mechanisms, and self-esteem. This research, involving 600 Australian boys (300 in boys' schools, 300 in co-educational schools) should be finished by early next year.

There is much qualitative work but a dearth of quantitative research. There is an element of 'rebound' in current writing as a response to the Affirmative Action policies for women. There was a period in the 80's where it was not politically correct to focus on boys, and their needs were overlooked. Objective research into the cultures of boys' schools would cast much illumination on what strategies are successful in assisting boys.

Yours sincerely,

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