

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA
BOARD FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

**A submission to the Australian Parliament House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations**

The following response is made on behalf of the Board for Lutheran Schools through the Office of the National Director for Lutheran Schools, Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA). This office is recognised by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs as a national interest group. The response provides a context for Lutheran schools and then addresses the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry.

1. The Lutheran Context

1.1 Overview

The LCA operates 78 schools and employs 1807 teachers. 35.6% of these are male. It educates 24762 students, 51.4% of whom are male. The first Lutheran school dates back to 1839. Coeducation has always been a feature of both primary and secondary Lutheran schools in Australia.

1.2 Ethos and curriculum

The LCA has a commitment through the mission of its schools to develop each individual within the school community so that they may effectively serve society to the glory of God. It does this through an education which enhances the gifts of the individual. It believes that academic achievement is dependent on social/emotional development and it believes that schools have a significant role to play in this development, in cooperation with parents.

Thus there is a special emphasis on the social education of all students and this emphasis is reflected in the fact that Lutheran schools:

- operate exclusively **coeducational schools** where students establish a natural brother sister relationships with members of the opposite sex. Accordingly a warm friendliness generally pervades our schools.
- regard **schools as community** and emphasise parental involvement in the curricular and extra curricular life of the schools.
- run extended **outdoor education programs** in both upper primary and junior secondary with the specific goals of personal growth, interdependence in community, spiritual growth and an appreciation of the natural environment. These are regarded by students and parents as some of our most successful programs of self development. They allow for both activity and reflection and the modelling of individual

goodness and the good community as well as conflict resolution under guidance. They help to develop responsible autonomy as well as group awareness.

- maintain a strong tradition in the **performing and expressive arts** with significant participation by all students.
- maintain a **Christian Studies program** which provides time and curriculum flexibility to explore the theological and sociological issues in topics such as **gender construction**.
- maintain strong **pastoral care programs** and a professional chaplaincy. This caters for individual counselling for troubled or difficult students, often boys.
- maintain regular **worship services and spiritual programs** to allow students to express their concerns beyond the human dimension.
- maintain the Lutheran ethos that God in Christ is for us and **forgives, restores and renews** us so that although we fall, student or staff, there is always a new start.

2. Boys in Trouble – social, cultural and educational factors

2.1 The problem

With this emphasis on the social development of all, Lutheran educators have therefore noted with concern the disengagement of some boys from their school life – to the detriment of community life and the student's own educational performances and life chances.

It is clear that some boys do well in school and at work and become well rounded, creative and productive members of society. We see them all around us growing up to become teachers, pastors, police officers, ambulance officers, health care workers, truck drivers, mechanics, farmers, business people, entrepreneurs, fathers, lovers and good husbands.

However schools are failing with some boys and for many of these there are some very unhappy outcomes.

In a Master's study in one Lutheran secondary school, research on power and conflict in the classroom suggested that when teachers exercise power over students to meet the need for control and order, students and particularly boys, exercised their need for personal power or autonomy by either disrupting the educational process or withdrawing from it.

Other findings in the same school match anecdotal evidence from other schools:

- 85% of the students sent to the office for higher level disciplinary action are boys.
- Boys' school performance represented by the tertiary entrance score was far less in a number of cases than their academic capacity as measured by the Queensland Core Skills test would have indicated.

Obvious evidence of the problems encountered by boys in the education process is seen in the following:

- **Social values and actions**
Boys who are disaffected behave in ways that are anti-social, anti-feminine, anti-learning, bullying and self-destructive.
- **Outcomes for boys – academic**
10% fewer boys than girls complete high school and boys consistently perform worse than girls on a major number of academic and other school measures of social and personal competence. Some boys do well but many do far worse than their academic capacity indicates.
- **Outcomes for boys – life**
Statistics indicate that boys suffer more deaths, suicides, violence, homicides, drugs, injuries at work, and are more often gaoled than girls.

2.2 Causes

Our research and understanding of the situation would suggest the following factors influence the education of boys in Australian schools and are therefore causes for the above symptoms of the problem:

- The authoritarian nature of schools contributes to boys' withdrawal from the educative process. 'Power over' behaviour causes boys to fight for autonomy and disrupt school life or else to withdraw and become passive.
- The 'boys' code' socially constructs boys to disengage with the academic, social and cultural aspects of school. It has been suggested that society's old code for boys – stoic, risk-taking and careless, power and status seeking and anti-feminine, non-emotional non-empathetic – is counter productive. For a boy trapped in this construction, school is passive, boring and a girls' thing.
- The slower physiological, intellectual, social and emotional development of boys is ignored when entering school so that in later years or sometimes throughout schooling they are simply not mature enough for the curriculum or the social situations demanded of them.
- Boys are often hurt or bewildered by family break up and are expected to just cope without communication skills or social networks or adequate male models to lead them into good manhood – they cope by disengaging, isolation, withdrawal and depression or by lashing out.
- The specific attributes of boys and their developmental phases have often not been incorporated into the curriculum thinking of schools. A recent emphasis on group work, cooperative learning styles and oral presentations seems to have been taken up more readily by girls.
- Boys from the modern family which often has an absent or work dominated father, often encounter a school environment which is heavily feminised and where male role models are few, if not missing entirely.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To achieve at school and at life, students need training in self efficacy which is the capacity of individuals to take responsibility for themselves and do whatever is in their best interests according to the situation, ie, organising skills, self direction and the capacity to defer gratification.

Self efficacy for boys would involve programs which develop the skills required for school success:

- Reading
- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing
- Personal organisation
- Self awareness – emotional literacy (the ability to name and express feelings)
- Anger management and moral reasoning

- 3.2 Besides self efficacy, to achieve at school and at life, students also need training in **social efficacy** which is the capacity to see things from another's point of view, communicate with others, negotiate mutually acceptable solutions and cooperate to achieve goals for the common good.

Social efficacy for boys would involve programs which:

- Develop awareness of gender construction and help boys and girls to relate to each other respectfully as different but OK
- Teach the difference between assertiveness and aggression
- Use classroom techniques like cooperative learning to build interactive classroom relationships
- Raise the profile of the expressive arts like Art, Drama, Music and Dance because these give boys the opportunity to engage in emotional expression and explore issues that matter rather than suffering in silence or lashing out
- Incorporate adventure, initiative games and activity into the curriculum

- 3.3 Schools need to move towards **system efficacy**, which is the capacity to maintain order in a community without repression.

In maintaining the necessary order for learning and development, schools need to consider the following system issues which will assist in the education of boys:

- **Supply appropriate external constraints** such as clear discipline policies related to student welfare
- **Involve the parent body, especially fathers**
- **Structure** the school day to reduce bullying interactions
- **Provide successful male role models** of good men who can succeed without violence
- **Use collaborative power models** in school and student government.

- **Challenge dominant stereotypes of masculinity** – tough, power seeking status seeking and unemotional in contextual classroom discussion and in the kind of men who work in the school
- 3.4 There needs to be encouragement in the upper primary and lower secondary education levels for the development of outdoor education programs. These will embed expressive arts, and ethical and cultural programs in the curriculum, specifically designed to enhance personal and social growth and gender understanding.
 - 3.5 Schools need to be encouraged and supported in the running of parent seminars on this issue and look for ways to engage fathers and boys in dialogue on the issue of a positive sense of masculine identity. There is a need to support good parenting practise and governments need to better fund parenting projects.
 - 3.6 The specific development phases of boys need to be accommodated by a more activity based curriculum with sufficient time for reflection.
 - 3.7 Governments should initiate a concerted campaign to challenge talented and socially effective young men to seriously consider teaching as a vocation.
 - 3.8 Governments need to fund systematic research into boys and education through universities but more specifically through action research programs in schools.
 - 3.9 Governments need to collect, collate and disseminate data research and programs from the wider educational community. This information will continue to raise awareness of the problem and the commitment to working at it, as well as an awareness of successful strategies.
 - 3.10 The community needs to re-emphasise the social purposes of education rather than promoting education instrumentally as essentially a means to a better income.

This submission has attempted to highlight important factors that have influenced the education of boys in contemporary Australia. It has then outlined possible action points based on the experience of Lutheran schools, which may lead to a more effective education of boys.

I look forward to elaborating on these matters in person as opportunity permits.

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