



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND  
WORKPLACE RELATIONS

**Reference: Education of boys**

WEDNESDAY, 21 MARCH 2001

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

**Wednesday, 21 March 2001**

**Members:** Mrs Elson (*Chair*), Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Mr Emerson, Ms Gambaro, Ms Gillard, Mrs May, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

**Members in attendance:** Mr Barresi, Mrs Elson, Ms Gillard, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

- the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling; and
- the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.

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**Committee met at 9.11 a.m.**

**DALLY, Ms Shirley, Manager, Gender Equity Curriculum Policy Directorate, Department of Education, Training and Employment**

**LEAK, Ms Jude, Principal Policy Officer, Curriculum and Equity, Department of Education, Training and Employment**

**STEHN, Ms Jennifer Dawn, Executive Director, Curriculum, Department of Education, Training and Employment**

**KIRKMAN, Mr Anthony John, Manager Middle School, Department of Education, Training and Employment**

**CHAIR**—I would like to welcome you to our hearing and thank you for the time that you will be giving to us today. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Ms Stehn**—I have responsibility for curriculum policy within the state sector, curriculum standards and what we refer to as curriculum futures—that is, the regeneration of curriculum policy.

**Mr Kirkman**—I am here in the capacity of Manager Middle School, Hallett Cove School, a very large state school on the south coast with approximately 1,400 children; reception to year 12, so we have five-year-olds to 18-year-olds on campus at all times. The middle school is the largest section of the school, currently with around 600 students, 590, on any given day, give or take 10 per cent.

**Ms Dally**—My brief is advice and advocacy on gender issues in particular and connections with other issues from birth to year 12. I have state and national responsibilities, being on the national committee for gender equity.

**Ms Leak**—I work for Jennifer and have a responsibility for looking at curriculum developments and ensuring that principles of equity and inclusive practice are incorporated into what we do. In my previous life, for the past six years I was principal of Le Fevre High School in the western suburbs of Adelaide, a school of about 700 secondary students.

**CHAIR**—I would like to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but if at any stage you should feel that you would like to give evidence in private, please let us know and the committee will consider your request. Would somebody like to make some opening remarks?

**Ms Stehn**—Yes, I will do that. As our introductions indicated, even though we are here providing the policy perspective, the overall department perspective, it was very important for us that we have both the school and the policy perspective represented in our group before the inquiry this morning. I would like to reference some of my opening remarks in the submission

that we made last August, but I do not want to confine them to that because obviously you have had that submission and I do not want to go over some of those issues that we raised in that, just for the sake of it. I want to concentrate particularly on what we mean when we talk about, 'What are we doing?' on some of the more recent initiatives that we are looking at.

I would like to go back to half a dozen major points that we made in our submission about the education of boys. Where we are coming from for the basis of our policy and our action is, we have a very strong understanding that boys are not a homogenous group. Even though we use that generic term throughout all of our discussions, we cannot make the assumptions that boys are a homogenous group. There are huge varieties of experiences amongst boys—their life experiences, their cultural allegiances, their socioeconomic status—which affect the way they experience things within school. We work from an understanding that gender is an historical, social and cultural construct; that gender is not just something that we are born with, it is something that also evolves through our social experiences, through historical factors and through cultural influences.

We have identified, in our submission and in our work within the state schooling sector, three key issues for the education of boys. As I was saying earlier, it was my feeling when we were talking about these yesterday, surely you must have heard these three again and again and we would be interested in that sort of feedback in the discussion that comes; the extent to which these are emerging as common issues. Certainly for us, on the evidence that we have, we think that literacy learning and achievement is a major issue for boys, subject choices and the impact that that has on boys and on their education, and issues to do with social relations and the impact that that has on their participation and, indeed, achievement retention within education.

We have a number of key principles that inform the way that we operate. We think that—we need to; that is why we are in the game—education has a critical role to play in changing some of these things: early intervention, the earlier we act the better; that whole school and interagency approaches that include the community are those that are more likely to be effective. We have said, as educators, for a long time that a key thing to success in education is the relationship between the learner and between the educator. That is a critical issue to do with the education of boys as well.

I would like to briefly refer to why we say these three issues. There is no point talking about the issues unless we have the evidence to say that they are real topics. So for the first issue—literacy learning and achievement—why is this an issue for boys? Our state-wide literacy and numeracy assessments over the years have indicated that boys have not achieved as well as girls in these assessments. You will see that for year 3, over that three-year period, in fact the boys' achievement is at one unit less than the girls. But what then becomes more of a trend to note is that at year 5 that has moved to two. For each of them, it has moved to a two-point difference. We can extrapolate but we would need to pursue with data whether or not this is something that is a trend through schooling. But it is a consistent pattern. That is in the primary area.

If we look at secondary schooling to year 12, whilst we do not have data like that, we have the outcomes of research by Collins, Kenway and McLeod which talk about the fact that the average girl is consistently outperforming the average boy in year 12; that the high achievers in year 12 are of both genders, but that boys tend to represent more of the numbers that are at the lower end of the scale. Our evidence of why subject choice is an issue: research again by

Collins, Kenway and McLeod indicates that boys consistently choose subjects, when choice comes into it, that are in a more narrowly confined cluster. They choose subjects that focus on the mathematical, the logical, and the formulae acknowledges the maths and the sciences. We say this is when subject choice comes into it—that they consistently choose more in those areas—but it is also issues about disengagement in the years when the full eight learning areas are required. This is not just an issue once subject choice comes into it in mid-secondary school; this is an issue in primary school where boys disengage in those areas as well.

In our public examined subjects in year 12, this represents the number of government students receiving result by subject. There, again, the figures indicate the huge difference in English studies. There are more than twice the number of girls than boys doing English studies; maths 1 double, 263 girls, 609 boys; maths 2, the same trend; physics, double the number of boys as girls doing physics. Professor Richard Teese has made the comment that boys' absence from the humanities and English means that they are denied access to a whole range of cultural and linguistic experiences that are important for our interactions within the community, our prospects in the workplace and the nature of our social relations. It is very hard to go into a straight discussion of what the issues are.

Social relations: there are a whole range of issues associated with this, but in the data we are looking at issues of exclusions and suspensions as an indication of the nature of the relationships within the site or the school. Our data shows very clearly a significantly higher proportion of boys than girls amongst those who are suspended and those who are excluded from school. There are over three times the number.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Mostly over the age of compulsion?

**Ms Stehn**—Yes, which is an issue do with the nature of the curriculum that we offer within those years. This is a bit harder to see. If we look at those issues before suspensions and compulsions occur, what is termed as 'mucking around' in class, the blue line shows double the number of boys are involved compared to girls. Ridiculing others, contribution in class: again, two-thirds more boys than girls. Scoffing at others who try to work: there is really very little difference between primary and secondary. Those are indicators of the issues. There are a whole range of other issues that are associated with social relations. But in terms of the data, those are good end point examples.

What is the Department of Education, Training and Employment doing about this? Having recognised this as an issue for attention, in order to ensure that all kids get the best out of education, what are we doing? Here I want to talk a little bit about something that I do not think was talked about in much detail in the submission because of the fact that last August we still did not have our new curriculum.

We are operating very strongly from the notion that, given the significance of the issues, there is no point in attending to them just through add-on programs that happen at the periphery of schooling. They need to be attended to within the main business of schooling within the curriculum. When we developed our new curriculum framework, issues of gender were at the centre of what we had constructed. We have a new curriculum framework for the state. This is for the government sector and the Catholic sector. The independent schools were also partners in the development of it. It is called the SACSA, the South Australian curriculum standards and

accountability framework. It describes learning areas, traditional learning areas, essential learnings. It has equity and curriculum perspectives across it and it looks at vocational education.

One of the main ways that we need to attend to issues for the education of boys has to do with expectations about whether or not they will or can succeed. Within our framework we have standards that are pegged at year levels. We have developmental outcomes for birth to year 2 and then from year 2 through to the end of schooling we have standards that are pegged at years 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and then we have year 12. The delineation of these standards puts up front for students, teachers and parents what we expect all teachers to be able to achieve. It is an important part of the strategy.

Most critically, what we have incorporated in our curriculum is a recognition that just learning science, maths, studies of society, geography, history, whatever we might call subjects, is no longer enough for kids to be able to learn effectively, interact effectively with their peers, with adults and then as a preparation for post-school life. We have centred, to a large extent, our curriculum around what we are calling essential learnings. It is those five things that are absolutely key to, we think, the ability to succeed in schooling and the ability to continue learning throughout life.

Unlike the past where these were things that were just stated as good motherhood statements on the side, these are actually in the standards, in the detail of the curriculum. You can see within those that if we are looking at issues of identity, we are looking at issues of communication, we are looking at issues of interdependence, even if boys continue with the narrow cluster of subject choices, that if these are attended to within the way that we teach science and the way that we teach mathematics, then we will start to address some of the issues that are of concern.

I have brought along just a two-sided page that is about the curriculum, and rather than go into any more detail now in the interests of the conversation, I will move over that. The new curriculum framework is the basis upon which we are taking action, and it is about action which should happen on a daily basis in the classrooms. Apart from that we have got a range of projects that were mentioned in our submission and are still happening in our schools. One is looking at literacy learning and achievement. I will provide this for the inquiry in terms of the greater detail but it is, in particular, of interest to do with expectations, and schools and teachers working upon the expectation that boys will do well and actually being explicit about putting that into practice is something that has a positive effect.

There are issues to do with subject choice projects that we are working with. The pre-school who has been looking at single sex methodology and is reporting a positive impact of that on the boys within their groups. A large southern area R to 12 school, which is in fact Tony's school, has been working in a middle years' project approach that has set up again single sex classes, and you might wish to ask Tony about some of those a bit later.

Another issue to do with subject choice, and what I have not put here in the overhead, is we are just opening in South Australia a new Australian science and mathematics school in association with Flinders University. That school is taking a very deliberate approach that it is science and mathematics within the context of the whole curriculum, and looking at



interdisciplinary approaches and ways of making science more contextualised both within knowledge as a whole but also with industry and tertiary institutions.

Some other projects that are examples of addressing the social relations aspects is the example of R to year 7 group that is looking at strategies to do with learners as researchers and learners as citizens, and finally a cluster of secondary schools are addressing explicitly the issues to do with bullying and strategies to address those. As I said, we have indicated within our submission a number of those projects, and I will provide the detail of this for the inquiry. So that is a very quick run-through of what we have identified as the major issues, and introducing the notion about the new curriculum framework that has to be at the core of the way that we address some of the issues to do with education of boys and their participation and their achievement. Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Would any of our other witnesses like to make any statement?

**Mr Kirkman**—In terms of the issues that Jennifer has spoken about of subject choice, our experiments in year 8, in particular with single sex classes in language, arts and technology, are illuminating. But the compulsory areas of study for year 9 students have a really large effect in terms of some of the data that Jennifer has already referred to, and that is to do with the suspensions of students in year 9. I brought a quick run-down of the stats from our school for the first seven weeks of this year. You think the school is running really nicely, but when you look at the kids who have been in behaviour planning rooms, detentions and such, you start to think, ‘Well, that’s not too flash, I’m not very pleased about that.’

But the truth of the matter is that once you get to year 9 the figures explode. The difference is just astronomical between boys and girls. The interesting bit though is that there is not an arithmetic relationship between the compulsory areas of schooling, the compulsory subjects and the subjects that the kids have chosen. Boys get sent out of class far more often than girls at year 9, but they get sent out radically less proportionately from the subjects that they have chosen than from the subjects that they just have to do.

An investigation of why that might be is probably a sound place to work from, I would think. Some of that has to do with the fact that the class sizes are smaller. The fact that you choose a subject means that you are on side with that subject to start with rather than just suffering through it because you have got it. I actually think that there is probably an engaging type of methodology in those classrooms that is not necessarily evident in some of the compulsory subjects. The other thing about the chosen subjects for year 9 is that in all cases in year 9 at our school they are semester long, whereas the compulsory subjects are year long in the main. So there are some fertile grounds to look at that will certainly guide us in what we are doing at our school.

**Ms Dally**—Can I just comment about that as well. I did not say earlier when I introduced myself, but I work very closely with a number of schools too. I do not want to be not in touch with what is going on at school. It is an exciting place to be at. One of the schools that we have been in touch with focused on the middle schooling project where they were trialling and focusing on the essential learnings with the draft SACSA framework materials. There was a glowing report from the school about the engagement of those middle schooling students when the focus was on things like identity and futures. It energised and excited the students, so there

was a really good relationship with the subject, and the big focus for the school is the relationships and supporting the boys to be able to hang on in there and conduct themselves with others more fruitfully in the classroom. That supports what you were saying.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Do you want to make any statement, Jude?

**Ms Leak**—Probably the one thing I would want to comment on is to do with our essential learnings, our SACSA framework and professional development of staff. My experience at Le Fevre High School is that we have spent the last two to three years focusing very much on our version of the essential learnings, looking at learning theory and looking very much at connecting and reconnecting our staff in a professional way and valuing the fact that they need to be kept up to date. The world has changed so much so rapidly, and for our young people a lot of what we carry on about is normal for them.

But as educators we actually need to have the skills and understandings about the notion, the differences between global and local, which is a reality for young people. We also need to understand a lot of the learning theory that has really come about in the last 10 to 15 years and understand what that means in terms of curriculum delivery for young people. I know at Le Fevre we would say very much that certainly the number of boys who have been suspended and excluded well exceeds the number of girls, but over the last three years that total number has decreased—not off-the-planet decreased, but it has decreased, and we have improved retention rates for young people, and that I believe has a lot to do with the quality of professional development of staff and the valuing of staff and their critical role in the delivery of a challenging and relevant curriculum to young people.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. There are no doubt many questions we would like to ask you, so I will ask Julia to start.

**Ms GILLARD**—I have been asking this of almost everybody who has come to this inquiry. One of the motivations with this inquiry was tracking boys' achievement data over time and noting that 20 years ago boys were equal with girls or slightly outperforming girls, and now 20 years later there are big differences in literacy attainment, retention rates, those sorts of things. During the course of the inquiry I have been asking people to focus on what they think has changed in that 20-year period. A lot of people have come along and said, 'Boys learn differently from girls because of these factors,' but they are actually pointing to factors that must have been true 20 years ago, as they are today. I am trying to get people to focus on what has changed. From what you have said, Jennifer, maybe the curriculum developed in a way that did not assist with the engagement of boys and now we are trying to redress some of that, but are there other factors that you could point to that we can say have changed in that 20-year period and could explain that differential outcome?

**Ms Stehn**—I will start, and I am sure the rest of our group here has a view on it. The curriculum is one issue. We increasingly have the pressure on us to make sure that the curriculum is relevant and engaging. You might say 20 years ago there was more of an acceptance that you did not question so much. This is a very healthy thing, that young people are increasingly critiquing and questioning and asking the relevance of. We are at a bit of a turning time in terms of what is learnt in schools, certainly secondary schools, in terms of a traditional subject focus and assumptions that that is what we need to structure our schooling

around, to something that is focusing more on competency and skills and understanding and rich emergence in knowledge areas, but not just working from old content areas. There is a huge amount in that. I celebrate the fact that more young people question now.

But one of the big things that has changed has been about retention. The fact that we have many more young people participating in senior secondary has brought some of the issues to the fore and made us go back and find and dig and discover the issues that have been there inherent in the early years and primary years for a long time. I would not necessarily say that these trends were not there in the early years 20 years ago. It is that we have become more alert to the fact that they are in our face in senior secondary.

**Ms Leak**—There are career pathways. Life has changed. Technology has had an incredible impact on not just the quality of people's lives but the pace of people's lives, and it has confronted us very much with the notion, 'I'll keep coming back to the global versus local, or global and local,' and actually young people looking at trying to find meaning in terms of those two quite often contradictory and very frustrating factors.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It is a bit hard to find meaning in a call centre, isn't it?

**Ms Leak**—Absolutely. Connected to that, I believe that, given those changes, in terms of career pathways and looking at pathways, they have changed significantly. Lots have opened up, and again, through technology, lots have closed down or are emerging. There is a whole range of pathways and jobs and whatever that we do not even know about at this point in time. Young people are more astute, they are more connected through the media to what is going on and technology. That is part of their lives. They are questioning and no longer accepting what was because we said it was. It is a reality for them. It is in their face everywhere they go, challenging.

There is heaps still, though, about stereotypes and expectations, and quite often what the stereotypes are saying and the reality of economic trends and social existence are again contradictory terms. I believe that causes immense frustration for boys and for girls in terms of them trying to make sense for their lives and their identity. Those factors are really critical over the last 20 years. There are expectations that girls will complete secondary education these days, the pathways are open, and I do think that is a factor.

**Ms Dally**—And too, reflecting on 20 years ago, it is a different time and schooling was a different place, in a sense. Just prior to that 20 years ago, there was the inquiry into girls' schooling in society, and that was published in 1975. There was an awakening to the ways that girls were not getting access to pathways and so on through schooling, they were not getting the rewards of schooling. Just tracking on then, it was just after that that work began in that area. Then girls and boys were performing about the same.

I do not know this for a certainty of 20 years ago, but after that, then, looking today are some of the patterns of participation, girls and boys as groups tend to use schooling in different ways. Boys are not as engaged in the broader social life of a school quite often. These are generalisations, but there is less of the social involvement and more looking for pathways for careers and jobs and so on. Girls balance out across. Girls in a sense have become more flexible or are

building on flexibility; boys have remained a little narrow in the way they look at schooling. Now we can see that there must be social as well as academic outcomes out of schooling.

**Ms Leak**—And that is the challenge for us as educators, and we certainly believe our framework and the essential learnings are a critical path for all educators in terms of how we go about our core business. Our core business cannot just be about knowledge and skills. It has actually got to be about developing young people so they can be independent, they can take control of their own destinies, they can contribute to their society in a positive way. We have to learn and be able to integrate those essential learnings so they are an automatic part of what we do, so that both girls and boys are successful.

**Ms Dally**—Can I just make one more comment about that? It is about some of the issues that are really important to focus on in promoting boys' education. It is certainly not about blaming the boys. What part does schooling play? The research that John Ainley did in social relations or the social outcomes of schooling showed one of the significant gender differences was that girls were not that crash hot at social relations—they were not that far up the scale—but they were lots better than the boys were at conducting social relations, some of those things that are really important for a 21st century civil society. That is one of the ways we in schooling have got to be able to work with these essential learnings.

**Ms Stehn**—And some of that is about a greater awareness of some of the issues that were probably dormant 20 years ago. We have become better readers of our kids' needs.

**CHAIR**—We have taken this committee inquiry into a number of states so far. There seems to be a trend there for vocational training within the school to stop the drop-out rate. What does South Australia have in place for their vocational training? Do you have any figures of success and how many young people would be involved in that and how many students would go on to full-time work when they finish school?

**Mr Kirkman**—One of the major initiatives in our neck of the woods, the south coast, is the Southern Vocational College. It is a huge establishment, probably about 12 campuses, I reckon. It has been up and running, but is currently appointing more staff. The most recent appointment is a really enlightened one, if we leave the vocational argument aside, and that is a project officer at deputy's salary to work R7 in terms of enterprise learning, and that is the stuff to do with the essential skills and understanding stuff that we are talking about that underpins the SACSA framework to embed those learnings in school curriculum at an early age, the outcome of which should be that students, boys and girls, are better rehearsed, have a better understanding of the place of their social entrepreneurship at an earlier age, and understand the consequences of that.

For us that is a big thing. Those courses have been highly prized by students. A number of them are out of hours. The success rates for kids getting placement runs at about 80 per cent in apprenticeship kind of courses, the industry placements, and certainly the ongoing into TAFE kind of courses is really huge from those courses. That is a big success.

**CHAIR**—When do you identify these students who would be suitable to go on to that? What age do you identify them at, and encourage them and support them?

**Ms Stehn**—Senior secondary.

**Ms Leak**—Vocational education and training in our schools is really something that we value for all students. We do not necessarily look at a particular student. Most schools now are looking at offering several pathways. It has a very strong vocational thread at certificate 1, certificate 2, sometimes even certificate 3, even certificate 4 when we get really daring. We very much encourage all of our students to be working at some stage, and it might be year 9, year 10.

**Ms Stehn**—We work from the premise that some kids go into a job the first year after school or some go as soon as they can leave, that even those who study medicine go into a job when they have finished their training. Everybody is aiming for a vocational end point. So vocational education and training is not just for the kids who are non-academic. The academic kid needs vocational training as well, and it is the sort of thing that is not about putting people in boxes because this will increase issues to do with boys' education if we say that basically a vocational path is the only thing that will confine you to that path, cut off your options, and then it is about not necessarily addressing all the issues to do with the scope of the learning, I guess. That is about being a well-rounded citizen.

**CHAIR**—Yesterday we talked to some students that actually had been removed from the normal classroom over to a vocational type education, and those children were very happy with the fact they were not put under the pressures of all of the other subjects they had to study, picked the ones they were very interested in, and were doing the vocational training at TAFE and seemed to be more interested in their school work when they had the choice. That is why I was looking at whether the South Australian government had something similar to that or the students are still assimilated within the same classroom as the other students.

**Ms Stehn**—We have a very strong VET in SACE, a very high participation of students in vocational education and training in senior secondary. Over the last couple of years it has multiplied enormously and it has been one of the things that has meant that more boys have succeeded in senior secondary. The policy position is that it is important not to start that specialisation too early because then you have to ask at what cost in terms of their general education. Whilst there can be immediate engagement, it might be creating longer-term problems if that specialisation started in year 8, for example.

**Ms Leak**—The engineering pathway in South Australia is a flagship for vocational education across Australia. That pathway starts in year 11.

**CHAIR**—Does the South Australian education department have any drop-out figures from year 10?

**Ms Stehn**—Yes, we do, but we do not have them with us.

**CHAIR**—Would it be possible to get those to us?

**Ms Stehn**—Yes, we could.

**CHAIR**—We would be interested in that, thank you.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You are the first education department to acknowledge that you need some quantitative data in terms of where you plan policies. You also have evidence of a quantitative nature that the differential between boys' and girls' attainments, certainly in primary schools, is relatively small compared to what we have experienced in other states, particularly Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. There schools and the Commonwealth department of education acknowledge that some of the differentials are up to 20 percentage points. Yours, being even two at year 5, are quite small by comparison. However, my questions relate to quantitative and qualitative data. You acknowledge in your submission that '*Gender equity: a framework for Australian schools* has guided educators in South Australia as they have grappled with aspects of boys' education.'

We have had plenty of evidence of qualitative data being based on that but I do not find any quantitative data of a substantive nature to support the introduction of gender equity programs or understanding of gender as a social construction in this country. Could you point to any in this country that supports those programs?

**Ms Dally**—I am not sure what you mean—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Qualitative data is data that is subjective, small samples and subject to value judgments and opinions. Quantitative data is objective data. It measures actual things. If you cannot point to any, that is fine.

**Ms Stehn**—The data we used 20 years ago was in terms of the education of girls, and in the last five years in terms of the education of boys. The sort of data I put up earlier is data that shows the differences in achievement, participation and retention—although we do not have the retention ones there. What you have mentioned as a program—that is, gender equity programs—is a chosen response on the part of systems to addressing those issues.

**Mr SAWFORD**—And I am asking on what quantitative basis have those programs been introduced?

**Ms Stehn**—It is that sort of data that you then use to make the decision that in order to address the difference—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Sorry, that sort of data was only available in South Australia from 1997. These programs have been in evidence, as Shirley indicated, from probably 1975.

**Ms Stehn**—Yes, we can provide data that shows that was the basis. If we are talking about gender equity programs, if we look at programs for the education of girls that were operating in the seventies—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes, qualitative data.

**Ms Stehn**—Quantitative data in terms of girls' participation.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Professor Faith Trent from the faculty of education at Flinders University will appear before us this afternoon. A school we visited yesterday was one of the schools that

Faith and a doctorate student visited, and she has some very provocative statements to make. I will just read a couple to you:

What ought to be constructed for boys is adult learning environments rather than vague, unproven notions of gender construction. Wouldn't boys' education be more successful if teachers based their educational programs on what boys describe of what works, rather than gender equity experts?

**Mr Kirkman**—She has qualitative and quantitative data on it, has she?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes. Do you want me to read some of it, just the executive summary?

**Mr Kirkman**—I was just wondering, about 20 years ago—

**Mr SAWFORD**—No, this is boys now.

**Mr Kirkman**—When you were in schools, didn't you run programs that were for both boys and girls?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Certainly.

**Mr Kirkman**—And you based those on what?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are you questioning me? I am quite happy to answer the questions but I want you to tell me where the quantitative data is. Obviously you cannot.

**Mr Kirkman**—No, that is not true.

**Ms Stehn**—Not true.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You have not told me one example yet.

**Mr Kirkman**—From 20 years ago we would have some—

**Mr SAWFORD**—I know that research and there is no quantitative data in it. I am sorry but it is not there.

**Ms Dally**—I am not sure what research you are referring to.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I know, exactly. I do not want to pursue that any further.

**Ms Dally**—I have not had a chance to speak.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Let me tell you what boys in South Australia are saying. When it comes to exclusion and suspensions, the rate in South Australia is incredibly low for the children under compulsion. It is one in 500, which is 0.002 per cent, so it is not a significant problem. It grows dramatically post compulsion.

**Ms Stehn**—Absolutely.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Let us have a look at some of the stuff that Faith Trent says that boys in South Australia are saying:

The adult world is not listening, not genuinely listening. Most boys don't value school. Most girls get treated better but so do boys who find it easy or necessary to comply and conform. School work is boring, repetitive and irrelevant.

That is an indictment on the educational program and teaching styles perhaps:

Schools do not offer the courses that boys want to do. Most boys neglect or reject homework because it is too intrusive, destructive and ultimately unachievable. Year 8, 9 and 10 waste too much time. The year 11 workload is excessive. Schools pose too many contradictions and debilitating paradoxes. Schools are about getting boys out of education.

That is a remarkable statement coming out of this, and so it goes on and on and on.

**Ms Stehn**—That is for the SACSA framework. One of the key parts of the SACSA framework, Rod, is to do with essential learning.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What I am saying is here is some quantitative information done in this state that is saying—

**Ms Dally**—That is qualitative information.

**Mr SAWFORD**—No, it is not; it is quantitative.

**Ms Stehn**—It is opinions.

**Mr SAWFORD**—No, this is taken out of the data.

**Ms Stehn**—It is opinions of boys.

**Ms Dally**—It is qualitative.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But there is quantitative; 1,800 students were done in the Catholic, independent and state systems.

**Ms Stehn**—Could I add to your sources on that?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes.

**Ms Stehn**—You might want to refer to them as well in terms of these issues which we are highly aware of and which are behind why we are constructing a number of these programs. There has been a major study done by Flinders University, the education department and SSABSA that has been tracking senior secondary students, those who are at risk of leaving and those who have left. The report is called *Listen to me: I'm leaving*. It has a whole range of horror stories in it. If we do not do something soon about senior secondary education and the quality of what is happening within that, we are going to have more quotes like the ones you have quoted from Professor Trent and the ones in this other study. SSABSA, our senior



secondary authority, with the three education sectors, has conducted two STAR projects and we are about to embark on a third. STAR is 'students at risk' in senior secondary education.

In those projects quotes like the ones you have read come through from those students who feel that traditional education is not connecting with them, is causing them to leave early, is causing them to be excluded from schools. We have a huge issue in senior secondary. This is what we are facing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—In South Australia you have a comprehensive school system at secondary level.

**Ms Stehn**—That is right.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It does not have the diversity of the private system and it does not have the diversity of even years ago when you had technical schools, selective high schools, selective technical schools, area schools and so on. There is a range of secondary education available to the parents and children in South Australia that is no longer available in the public system. In the United Kingdom at the moment—

**Ms Stehn**—Just before you talk about the United Kingdom—

**Mr SAWFORD**—The point is that my question is about what is happening in the United Kingdom. Tony Blair and the education ministers there, both the senior and the junior one, have given comprehensive secondary education in the UK a great big boot up the backside. I know they are coming to an election in May and part of this is in the electoral cycle, but there is also an awareness that comprehensive secondary education has failed particularly boys in the United Kingdom. Perhaps more than in any other English speaking country, they have had specific boys' programs since the early nineties, which have not been seen in Australia, the United States, Canada or New Zealand. It is only the UK that you see those programs happening.

**Ms Stehn**—Can I come back to your statement about a comprehensive schooling system. In South Australia we have a commitment on the basis of a range of things we have said from a policy position about a general education and the importance of participation across the range of knowledge, skills and competencies. However, we will have increasingly—within the South Australian government sector and under local management—in the future, specialisation in particular schools.

We have Le Fevre High School that has a specialisation in learning technologies. We have Brighton High School with music. We have a range of other schools that have specialisations that are increasingly publicised about particular aspects of the curriculum. We have schools like Willunga High School, that has a very active vocational education program and is well known for that. Hamilton Secondary College is well known for its vocational program. Wirreanda, Salisbury High—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Salisbury High School is an enterprise high school. There is a classic example.

**Ms Stehn**—Absolutely.

**Mr SAWFORD**—There is a classic example of difference in the sense that what Peter has done—not always with the department’s support, as you and I both know. Essentially there is an increasing range of principals and senior faculty people, particularly in vocational education—and this comes back from the UK as well—who will say that if you have an academic high school you will not have a successful vocational program in the same school. They will not work. Principals from both the private and public sector have told us this during this inquiry. Teachers have told us this.

**Mr Kirkman**—Is there confusion here about ‘comprehensive’? If it is a comprehensive high school then its charter is, in fact, to deal with providing satisfactory and improved educational outcomes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—They have not been able to do that because basically the academic sector tends to rule over the vocational sector. We talked to a fellow yesterday who happened to be in a private school but came from a public system. He was a technology teacher who basically gave up in terms of getting a fair share of the budget from the so-called technology high school that he attended. He went into the private system where he had a little bit more freedom.

**Ms Stehn**—One of the last things we want to do in addressing the issues of boys is create an unnecessary division between vocational education and academic education. This is the way of the past, not the way of the future.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Says who? And based on what research?

**Ms Stehn**—We want to make sure that we do not short-change boys.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Boys are being short-changed and there is a quantitative study that shows that quite clearly they are.

**Ms Stehn**—I agree. But in our solutions we do not want to short-change boys by giving them narrow, confined pathways.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am not asking for that. I am saying they should be expanded. That is one point on which we agree. It should be expanded and what has happened in comprehensive high schools is far too narrow.

**Ms Stehn**—One of our best vocational high schools I hope is going to be the Australian science and mathematics school, which will be vocational, highly academic and highly connected with industry and tertiary institutions. We need to break the nexus that exists, that you can have either one or the other. We have to make sure, because of all those issues to do with social relations, that we are still attending to things to do with learning about our culture, things to do with learning about our past, learning the skills to be able to influence our future, whether we are learning physics or engineering.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But on what basis are you saying that there is no future for separate vocational and academic high schools?

**Ms Stehn**—Again, if I can come back to our data, to absolutely divide schooling to say that you have academic kids that have one type of schooling that concentrates on traditional academic knowledge and you have non-academic kids that you need to teach how to get a job—that is what I am saying.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am not saying that. I am saying that kids and parents ought to be given choices.

**Ms Stehn**—Absolutely, and they need to have the information for choices.

**Mr SAWFORD**—And I am saying that those choices are not evident in the comprehensive high school system in this country. People are voting with their feet in public education by fleeing to the private system.

**Ms Leak**—Not in all cases.

**Ms Stehn**—Could I also provide the inquiry with some information about the vocational education within our schools?

**Mr SAWFORD**—We would be delighted.

**Ms Stehn**—Also the participation rates across our comprehensive high schools.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, Jennifer.

**Mr WILKIE**—Just in terms of subject choice, boys both here and in New South Wales told us that often when they get into upper school one of the reasons they are choosing maths, physics and chemistry is that there are no other options. They have to choose those if they want to go on to other forms of education, universities or get a career path. I thought that was an interesting observation made by a lot of the kids. What I am really interested in is the professional development programs you have for staff. How do you identify when staff need assistance, for example, in working with boys? How do you know there is a problem and what do you do there?

**Ms Leak**—It is the principle, it is not just about whether they need to deal with boys; it is about boys and girls and being responsive to the learning needs of all students. I do not think there is a particular thing that happens. It is about the need to be constantly upgrading our skills, our knowledge and our understanding because of some of the factors I have said before. The world has changed so rapidly. Those of us who have been in education for 20 plus years very much need to have ongoing PD to ensure that we understand the learning needs of all our students and that we have the skills and strategies to put in place a curriculum that is challenging and relevant today.

**Mr WILKIE**—A lot of the boys we have talked to say that if they have a good relationship with the teacher, then they learn, they get on, they do the work and they thrive.

**Ms Leak**—Absolutely, yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—Whereas with the same curriculum with a different teacher who cannot relate to them, they go downhill very quickly.

**Ms Leak**—Yes, absolutely.

**Mr WILKIE**—It is different to a certain degree between boys and girls. Girls will tend to go off and learn a subject, irrespective of the relationship with the teacher, but with boys it is far more critical. This is evidence that has been presented to us.

**Ms Leak**—Yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—So that is why I am curious to see whether the current training of teachers is adequate when it comes to trying to get them to develop with students relationships that create a good learning environment.

**Ms Leak**—That is why the essential learnings are such a critical part of the curriculum framework in the state, because without those sets of values and learnings it is possible to continue teaching in a way that was appropriate 25 years ago. It was very much silo based in terms of subjects rather than ensuring that, whether it is the nanotechnology or biomechanics of blah, it is actually taught in such a way that is engaging, that is relevant and that allows students to negotiate their learning and to participate socially with other students.

**Mr WILKIE**—I agree with all of that, but how do you identify where teachers are not doing it? How would you know if you have a problem with a particular teacher or group of teachers? How would you then approach that? How would you get them to take up that further training or whatever is necessary?

**Mr Kirkman**—One of our major problems is that we do not have the influx, like we did 25 years ago, of young teachers. That is a major problem, to be perfectly honest.

**Ms Leak**—It is a challenge, yes.

**Mr Kirkman**—Yes, it is a big deal. I have to tell you that when our young teachers come in they are generally extremely successful. They do not know about the system and all that kind of stuff but their teaching is usually exceptionally good.

**Ms Stehn**—It is only the very good ones who get in.

**Mr Kirkman**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is another problem.

**Mr Kirkman**—Yes. At our place we would say that problems to do with discipline or class management are indicators of estrangement from the curriculum, and that is very often about teaching practice. We deal with that in two ways. We deal with it at a whole school level, the kind of training and development program that you provide for the whole group of teachers, the middle school teachers or whomever it is—because the SACSA framework is coming in and

there is some imperative to provide it—or you would do it as part of the training and development that goes alongside your professional responsibilities as performance managers.

In that case there are personal interviews between the line manager and myself for about 10 people about basically, ‘Where are the problems? Where are the good bits? What is going right here? What is going wrong here? What are the bits that are bugging you and what aren’t?’ At our place we collect a lot of statistics, like all systems do, and you use them as the basis for some of your descriptions, like who are the problem kids.

**Ms Stehn**—Increasingly we will have data about achievements. We have data for literacy and numeracy for years 3 and 5 and from this year we will have it from year 7. Then with the introduction of the framework we will have data that is for years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 across the full range of the standards. It should be for a line manager and a teacher to be looking at the results of kids and where there are big differentials between the success of boys and the success of or girls, or where there are individuals that those two can track. They should be paying attention to it and responding to it. The use of data is absolutely significant in finding the issues for the kids and addressing them.

**Ms Dally**—I work with schools in a number of projects. Those projects are both about professional development as well as about student learning outcomes. It is a great opportunity for teachers to work through what is going on. As we have noted on several occasions during this hearing, the social relations, the behaviours bit about boys is one of the biggest issues; it is one of the most noted.

We have got quantitative evidence about that that has been ongoing for quite some time, about boys’ behaviour and so on in relation to girls. For quite a long time the issue of gender was not brought into it, so I am bringing that into this discussion. Some of the more successful programs have not been in long enough to know; we have not got the actual learning outcomes in a sense, although what we do know is that things have not worked so well for boys before. That is why we are here.

So to bring in an understanding of how gender operates, what it is about how a boy sees himself as a boy and what he should be doing and should not be doing, are key questions for schools to work with in their ongoing professional development and work on whatever projects, whatever information that the student welfare information, the behaviour management information all lack, as well as the learning outcomes. Have a look at what is going on with what boys think they ought to be doing and what they think they are not getting and so on.

Those conversations about gender need to take place as well. In South Australia we have in national surveys been given some credit for work that we have undertaken in addressing gender for girls and boys.

**Mr BARRESI**—The committee has heard from a number of witnesses the issue of male role models and the lack of appropriate male role models in schools. That sometimes can be evidenced by the fact that there are very few male teachers in primary education. That may cause some of the problems that we are witnessing as well. Do you accept the notion that the lack of male role models is a factor in what we are dealing with here? If so, what is the South

Australian education department doing to entice more male teachers into the primary education sector?

**Ms Stehn**—Role models is an important issue. Adults who are capable in effective relationships with young people is a critical factor. We have to come first to people who are good teachers. There is no point addressing the issue unless we get good teachers in our primary schools. That has to be the first criterion, not just based on gender. But there is a national recruitment strategy which is looking at issues to do with gender that I am sure all the states will be acting on. Our chief executive is the chair of that national task force.

In the short term there is a range of other things that schools can do. It takes into account community members; in a secondary school it could take into account mentors, whether they are industry based or community based. We need to be generally looking more broadly at the idea that it should not be just one teacher for 25, 28, 30, or 35 kids. It should be about the class teacher as facilitator for a whole range of relationships and amongst those there need to be men and women who are good role models for the learners.

**Mr BARRESI**—I accept that all those other aspects are important and certainly getting male mentors, whether it be from business, sporting or wherever else, to play a role in the curriculum would be one of the things to do. After hearing the witnesses that have come to this committee, maybe we need to be more accurately looking at enticing male teachers into primary education. That does not mean you drop your standards. You still have your high standards of entry but is it possible to have a more male affirmative recruitment strategy employed at the primary level?

**Mr Kirkman**—The corollary of that is, from my school, we have a wild imbalance of male teachers in the secondary component.

**Mr BARRESI**—My concentration is more at the primary level. I wanted to specifically mention primary education because that is where a lot of the evidence is coming from. It is in the primary years, the formative years, where they need that balance and that positive role model.

**CHAIR**—It is a very complex issue.

**Mr Kirkman**—Students need mentors, not role models. If you are in the position of requiring a role model in order to be successful, then you are in a really difficult position. What you need is a mentor to be able to support you through what you have to learn. If you are talking about role models, I am not convinced that the role models of teachers are where the problem is. The role model in society and in the family might be as big an influence, and providing teachers as role models is not the way to correct that. The providing of mentors, teachers who provide the skeleton and the scaffold for really strong independent social learning, is the way forward, not by gender balance in the staff.

**CHAIR**—We might have to stop now. You have made a very worthwhile contribution to our inquiry. Hopefully by the end of the year we should be able to bring down a report and we will make sure that is sent out to each and every one of you.

[10.29 a.m.]

**BURCHNALL, Mr Richard, President, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**NICHOLLS, Mrs Bronte, Secondary Heads Committee, IT Committee, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**WEBBER, Dr Brian, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia**

**CHAIR**—Good morning, and welcome to our inquiry into the education of boys. We apologise for being late. We welcome representatives of the South Australian Independent Schools Board Inc. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Dr Webber**—Yes. The written records have been handed over. The name of the ISB has now been changed. It is now the Association of Independent Schools. If you have travelled around the country you will know there is a group of associations of independent schools. Consistent with that, we are now the AIS of South Australia. You have a submission before you from the group which represents some 88 schools, and they are of varied nature, from the small primary school to the bigger schools, and they have varied clientele and different socioeconomic backgrounds. This submission we have made is representative of that group. I am the Acting Executive Director of AIS while Mr Le Duff is on leave and in that capacity I come to you this morning. I have had years of experience in both co-ed and single-sex schools, but my primary experience recently has been in a boys' school.

With me is Bronte Nicholls who is the head of Muirden College, which is a senior secondary college dealing with young people moving on to further study and presumably into other activities. She can explain that perhaps a little more. Muirden is a co-ed environment and a unique school in Adelaide, a long-established school. Mr Burchnall is the head of a boys' school in South Australia and currently the President of the Association of Independent Schools.

**CHAIR**—I remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but if at any stage you wish to give the evidence in private, please acknowledge that and the committee will consider it. Would somebody like to make some opening remarks?

**Dr Webber**—You would have received many submissions and this one culls a series of ideas from member schools. They were circulated with information about the hearing and the seeking of submissions, so ideas came into the AIS and were formulated into a report. Then there were some face-to-face meetings with a group of people from representative schools to consolidate it. You have before you the contributions from that group of people representing that diversity. In that way the submissions are not a reasoned argument, if you like, leading to conclusions. They

are a lot of anecdotal comments and reflect the feelings of people in the schools and the relationship of teachers with young men. In that way they raise a lot of ideas.

Out of each area there is a set of recommendations which are a little more firm, and we certainly advocate what we have said there in the way of recommendations. I believe you have had the submissions and, without pointing to anything in particular, unless you would like me to, I am happy to leave it open to you to ask us the questions you want to ask.

**CHAIR**—We have taken evidence from a number of states, even though this inquiry has only been going for about four months. We seem to have had a lot of students and teachers telling us that they do not get quality upgrading of their skills as they think they should. How do you implement professional development amongst your teachers? What would the budget be on upgrading their skills?

**Mrs Nicholls**—I will start with what we do. In the senior secondary school, all of the curriculum we teach is SSABSA, which is the equivalent of the VCE and whatever you have in your states. We use the SSABSA training and make sure that each teacher goes to their training. We also pay for each teacher to be a member of their subject association within each state and we encourage teachers to attend conferences. At the moment we are not funding that ourselves but do provide time for them to do that. Being senior secondary, they need to keep in touch with what is happening in their subject area—for example, I am a science teacher.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What subjects do you offer at Muirden?

**Mrs Nicholls**—All of them.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Everything?

**Mrs Nicholls**—When I say everything, academic. We do not do any of the technical material. It is a very academic traditional curriculum and for that reason we need to keep abreast of changes in technology and those sorts of things.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I wanted to get that on the record. That was all.

**Mrs Nicholls**—Yes, thank you. We do not spend a lot of money on teacher development at all, I must admit. We use what is happening at the time. There is quite a lot available in South Australia at the senior level.

**Dr Webber**—Perhaps I will comment briefly. Muirden is a small school of how many students?

**Mrs Nicholls**—We only have 80 students. This year about 80 per cent of them are school card, so very much students living in poverty. We are also a re-entry school, so we have a number of students who are independent. The ratio of boys to girls at the moment is about 40 per cent boys and 60 per cent girls, so it is weighted towards the girls. Most of them have not been successful in traditional schooling. That is why they come to us. They are seeking a different model, the adult learning environment. It is very different to a traditional school environment.



**Mr WILKIE**—What is the ratio of male to female teachers?

**Mrs Nicholls**—There are only 10 of us. There are four males and six females.

**CHAIR**—Are the males improving under a smaller school system like that, or is it too early to tell?

**Mrs Nicholls**—Our average class size is about 11. We have a discipline policy of a zero tolerance to physical violence and they know that when they enrol. We give them a walk-out clause, which means if they are feeling uncomfortable in any class they may leave the room. They do not have to explain why they need to leave the room. The teachers do not ask for an explanation. That is how we handle any aggression that may be developing within the group, but because the group is very small the teachers can control them. It is not like you have 30 students to control. You might have anywhere between four and 20 in a class.

**CHAIR**—So giving them the responsibility to walk out, do they do that often?

**Mrs Nicholls**—Not often. It depends. We do have students who are mentally ill, who may need that, and through careful counselling you go through strategies that they can use to cope with their anger or aggression, the ADD students in particular. If they are feeling frustrated with a task they can quietly leave, and when they feel they can cope they walk back into the room. The other students do not question it. I do not quite know how it works but it works really well. They support each other and we do not get, ‘Oh, why he’s leaving?’ We do not get that sort of comment at all.

**Mr Burchnell**—Perhaps I could address your question about professional development of teachers. I am head of St Peters College, which is an all-boys school of 1,150 from reception to year 12. We support our staff, as Bronte does, in membership of subject associations, attendances at seminars and conferences, which we would pay for; in addition, from time to time, some overseas travel to look at what is going on around the world. Teacher exchanges, particularly with countries overseas, is a very useful form of professional development and also we would support and pay for teachers to upgrade their qualifications to further study a masters, PhD or something like that. Professional development is a very important element of support at the school.

**CHAIR**—Is there a system within your school to test whether students are happy with the way they are being taught? We have spoken to a lot of students who say they think some things are not worth learning and other things they get benefits from and they are interested in learning them. Do you talk to your students in that way, ask them for an input?

**Mr Burchnell**—In the sense of is there a formal appraisal of staff by students, the answer is no. We do not have that. It is a fairly open school for discussion of what is working and what is not working. One of the best barometers, of course, are the parents themselves who are very quick to let you know if something is not going as well as they think it should be going. Often that is something that their children will have said to them. You tend to know what is working and what is not working.

**Dr Webber**—The AIS through an authority distributes targeted program moneys. There is a lot of professional development that is operated under that program—workshops on literacy and numeracy—and they are made available to member schools. Each individual school, though, has its own professional development program for its staff. The AIS tries to offer things for all schools which are useful, and certainly a targeted programs area is one where there is a lot of work done. There is also a reference group dealing with the secondary areas of curriculum and there is support offered in that way. But we do not go out of our way to run particular professional development programs at the AIS, apart from the targeted programs.

**Ms GILLARD**—Part of the motivation for this inquiry was looking at boys' achievement data over the last 20 years and comparing it with girls. There is some statistical debate to be had about whether we are comparing apples with apples. But putting that to one side, 20 years ago the boys, if anything, were slightly in front. Now, in a whole series of indicators, the boys are behind. I have been asking each body that has come before the inquiry to try and identify factors that have changed in the last 20 years which could explain that change. One of the reasons I am doing that is because people come along and say a lot of things about education which are undoubtedly right, and a lot of things about boys' education which are undoubtedly right but would not have been when you analyse changed factors in the last 20 years. At some point we need to flush out precisely what the changed factors are. I would be interested in your view about that difference.

**Dr Webber**—We have both been around for 20 years.

**Mrs Nicholls**—One of the things I have noticed is that certainly with the senior curriculum it is very language intense. If we go back to, let's say in South Australia, the physics course, because girls were seen to be underachieving in physics, the physics exam and the structure of the physics course was changed to make it more appropriate for girls. This meant an extended response question was put in, the multiple choice questions were taken out; more problem solving, more literacy type skills required in the physics exam. We have seen this shift now. The girls are achieving better but the boys are dropping, because they are actually having to write extended writing in physics and chemistry. All of the exams now, except for maths 1 and 2, have an extended prose section. Many of the boys find that difficult. They cannot use, in South Australia, a word processor in the exam unless they have special provision, so it means that in the analytical side of things, the mathematical side, the problem solving side, they are not able to demonstrate those skills as well as they could 20 years ago in the older courses. But girls are achieving better, so we have that interesting change there.

**Ms GILLARD**—Do you recall when that change happened or was it gradual?

**Mrs Nicholls**—I was involved in the gender of science stuff in the early nineties, so late eighties, early nineties that would have been. That is one change I can report on.

**Ms GILLARD**—Anything else?

**Mrs Nicholls**—In general, from what I am seeing, the boys' literacy skills are becoming worse, their actual physical writing is becoming worse, and because that is the mode that is required at senior secondary level for assessment, if we do allow them to use a word processor they can perform just as well as the girls, but as soon as you take that medium away and they go

back to having to handwrite, their self-esteem drops. We did a research project on it with SSABSA where we introduced a number of online subjects where the students could actually do their subjects using a computer for everything, and the reason we had to introduce that was because our boys were not passing English.

They simply were not getting stage 1 English at year 11 level because of the writing, but once they could use the medium they felt comfortable with, which was the computer, and they could type, they could chop and change, they started to perform better and we managed to get a group of boys through their year 11 year who otherwise would have dropped out. That is our own experience at our school, and these were boys who had been school refusers, they had actually left school. They had said, 'No, I'm not going back to school,' so we had to do something for them. That was the strategy we used and it has been quite successful.

**Ms GILLARD**—Is there any educational reason why you cannot use word processors in exams?

**Mrs Nicholls**—It is an interesting debate. I am on the special provisions committee at SSABSA and it is a debate that has been going on for quite some time. I do not know if either of these people's schools had laptop programs, but at schools like Scotch College, for example, all of the students use laptops throughout their schooling. They of course would argue, 'That's the way of the world, why can't we?' and at the moment it is just a logistical thing. How do you actually make a computer safe to do the exam so you do not have all the other programs that they could get into? It is all of those things.

**Mr Burchnall**—And fairness with those who are writing and do not have access to word processors.

**Mrs Nicholls**—Many people would choose to handwrite because they prefer handwriting, but many people, particularly the boys, would probably choose to PC their work. They would much prefer that.

**Ms GILLARD**—And other change factors?

**Mr Burchnall**—It is interesting. We are talking about information technology, which is an area where boys have found something that they certainly like and are generally very good at, and it consumes a lot of their time and their interest. Whether that has been at the expense of the more traditional reading and writing processes I am not sure. I suspect if you are looking for a factor that might have influenced a decline in literary standards for boys, the attractiveness of information technology and the time spent in various forms of information technology may actually have been a factor that has detracted from the more traditional reading.

If we are talking about literacy, I believe the importance of being read to at a very early age—and I am really talking in the family—is absolutely crucial. This is a culture that I do not think exists to a large degree in this country and perhaps to a lesser degree than it used to. But following that on, young boys in particular spend quite a lot of their time from a very early age on the computer refining their computer skills at the cost of perhaps some of that important reading that may have happened in the family.

Two things: one of the reasons why boys are now being outperformed by girls generally is that there has been over the past 20 years considerable emphasis on the needs of girls. Your inquiry shows that the pendulum is now swinging back towards concern for the needs of boys, but I think very successfully, too, there has been addressing of the needs of girls.

**Dr Webber**—I agree with that wholeheartedly. That has been one of the factors. Dr Barry McGaw, who is head of ACER, recently commented that the shift in the outcomes of the year 12 level would continue to favour girls because of the language skills and the shift to the language emphasis, if you like, in testing, which is reflected in the comments Bronte has made earlier. That is a big reason for the shift in computers—

**Mr Burchnell**—Can I mention something related to that, and that is that there has been in the last 20 years a move towards different forms of assessment, and much more emphasis on internal assessment, the number of tasks, meeting deadlines, being very organised, rather than the final exam on which everything is based. I have to say this style of learning and assessment does favour girls or seems to favour girls more than boys, and they tend to be better organised, they tend to plan ahead better and meet those deadlines. Boys are a little bit more rumbustious and the skills of planning ahead and meeting deadlines for an adolescent boy is a pretty difficult thing to achieve.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Have we forgotten how to teach boys? It is interesting in the research recommendation that your association made. ‘More research is undertaken by a range of appropriate groups into the learning styles of boys,’ et cetera, et cetera, yet what Bronte is saying is correct. We have removed the multiple choice. A question in history 20 years ago would have said something like, ‘List the main attributes or the main elements of the Bill of Rights introduction to 17th century England and its impact on Catholics.’ Bang. That was the question. Now the question is, ‘Describe how it feels to be a young Jewish girl in Nazi Germany.’ They are different sorts of questions and what I am saying is, yes, the latter one does suit girls, but there is an attitudinal difference.

For example, if you looked at some of the skills they intrinsically have, boys like examination systems, Sydney or the bush. They like the risk of the examination. Girls are much more comfortable with continuous modules, meeting deadlines, being organised and having those sorts of skills.

**CHAIR**—Excuse me, Rod. I was about to go on to Phil, who was before you, but we will come back to you.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Hang on, I have asked the question. Let’s have a response.

**CHAIR**—I thought you were making a statement there.

**Dr Webber**—In a way we have to be careful. We are generalising a lot, too, because some boys do cope with this, but there is an essence in what you say because of the shifting expectations and the emotive things that are often asked for. That does not necessarily put boys out of it but it changes the emphasis for them. That has had an influence on the curriculum that we offer within our schools as well. We are far more conscious—and I suspect that is where the

question is coming from—of their physical wellbeing and their health wellbeing, their spiritual wellbeing, than we ever were before, and that is a positive thing, not a negative thing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—The boys are disengaging from the curriculum at a rate of knots. There have got to be reasons for that. They say the content is wrong, the way it is presented is wrong, the long, continuous learning modules are wrong. They prefer shorter, more active learning styles. The relationship with the teacher is more critical than it is for girls. Just talk to the boys themselves. They are telling you this. Now, we do not seem to be listening.

**Mrs Nicholls**—There are a couple of other factors that have influenced our drop-out rate, which I will admit is pretty large. We have a huge transient population go through our school, which is not the case with many other independent schools at all. It is probably more like the other re-entry schools. There are some very appealing things out there for boys at the moment, like traineeships, apprenticeships. A lot of the VET stuff is very appealing to a boy who has not experienced immediate success at school and, from my experience, if the boys do not get that immediate, ‘Yes, I’m doing well in this,’ they will look for something else and they will go on to that something else.

Even though at the end of the day it might not be better for them, they will take a short-term traineeship or even a job, and they think, ‘This is really good,’ and it only lasts for a couple of months. We find that these students then come back 12 months later, saying, ‘Can I have another go now?’ and you say, ‘Yes, but are you really ready for what school is?’ And you are quite right, in a lot of the stuff we do we are not accommodating what the boys need. So they are looking at the other options out there that are very appealing to them, like the traineeships, apprenticeships, the armed forces seems to be grabbing a lot of them at the moment, or just simply dropping out. There is a huge percentage that are not going on to anything else. They are just simply dropping out, and that is a huge concern.

**Mr BARRESI**—I note most of your recommendations are calling for either further research or more funding. I was going to say there has been a lot of research that has been done in this area certainly by a number of academics, and we have had submissions from those in Melbourne and elsewhere. It must come to more than just simply a funding issue. It is this whole concept that Rod talks about. It is verbal reasoning skills and learning methodologies versus perhaps the traditional abstract or conceptual skills which perhaps boys are more comfortable with. So is it a matter of just simply going back and looking at the way the curriculum is structured and the teaching methodologies and professional development, rather than just simply sinking more money into more research, because that seems to me the basis of just about all your recommendations.

**Dr Webber**—Fair enough. It is not clear, even though you say there is a lot of research out there. Maybe it is not documented in a way which makes it obvious as to the better ways of operating. I guess we often still use anecdotal feelings and reactions to how best to deal with it. What we do know is that you have got to pay attention to young men and you have got to listen to what they are on about, and you have to show that you genuinely care for them, that you are genuinely supportive of them, and give them options and never put them in a corner that says, ‘This is the only way to do it.’ You must offer them variety and you must offer them scope to develop skills that they might have in not necessarily the classroom. It may be in outdoor

activities, it may be in chess, but you have got to give them scope to feel good about themselves. That we know.

I guess the push on funding is more on consolidating the research evidence in a way which is presentable to teachers, and if it is necessary to have professional development on that, then that is where the funding goes. That is my response to your question. I understand why you had a shot at us on that.

**Mr Burchnall**—There is interesting research going on at the moment as to the way children learn, that very complex way the brain works, different learning styles that people have. That is an area that still is fertile for further research, so that we really understand better how children learn and, out of that, particularly how boys learn, perhaps as opposed to how girls learn. I do see that as an area where further research might be very valuable.

I know it is easy to say more money should be spent but the different learning styles and different teaching methodologies are very important to both understand and address if we are really going to cater for the needs of boys. We have got to employ, in our classrooms and with boys, different ways of engaging them rather than just through perhaps the traditional literary approach.

**Mr BARRESI**—This goes along the same lines as the question I asked to the education department. You have got in your submission about the breakdown of the traditional family structure, lack of a male role model, et cetera. You have identified that as one of the factors, and I agree that is one of the factors. It is not necessarily a principal factor. What have you done about addressing that issue? If you have identified that as something, that is important.

**Mr Burchnall**—I have employed for the first time a male junior primary teacher, which I am delighted about. They are very scarce indeed.

**Mr BARRESI**—Also, going beyond the recruitment of teachers, you talked about the father-son relationships through your schools. Are you encouraging greater involvement by male figures, either teachers or external male figures, and what impact has it had, if any? Is the education department right and this is a furphy?

**Dr Webber**—One of the difficulties for both of us is that in both the schools we have been involved with recently we do that. We actually encourage it in a range of ways. To be able to speak for the general group of schools is a bit more difficult for us. There is definitely a problem in the primary teaching area for male teachers. In the junior primary, for whatever reason, males are not encouraged. There is often some connotation that they may not be themselves because there is always the fear that a male interacting with young people is a potential problem and they feel it. It is something that is just there and they do not want to put themselves in a place where there might be a difficulty.

That is a huge problem in getting young men to think about teaching in the very young years. That is not the problem in the primary years and I am not sure why it is that young men turn away from the option of primary school teaching. But in our schools, when young men talk about vocational options, they often do not talk about teaching and yet the role modelling is right there before them. Maybe the reason they turn away is because other options seem more

attractive. I do not know. They often come back to it. Later on some of them do come back and become teachers but there is something about the lack of encouragement of young people to go into teaching, particularly in the primary years, which I have certainly had trouble putting my finger on.

**Mr WILKIE**—Mr Burchnall, I am wondering, what would be your ratio of male to female teachers?

**Mr Burchnall**—I am writing it down. We have 70 males and 36 female teachers. Of those 36, probably close to two-thirds would be in the primary R to 7 part. We have got about 14 in years 8 to 12.

**Mr WILKIE**—70 male, 36 female.

**Mr Burchnall**—Yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—What would you look for in a teacher? Do you think there is any difference between a teacher you would have that is teaching in an all-boys school as opposed to a mixed school?

**Mr Burchnall**—No. The first thing I would look for would be somebody who loves children, because if they do not then they are going to have a hell of a time. Secondly, somebody who is both knowledgeable and passionate about their subject area. Those are the two things I look for when interviewing for a teaching position. There are other things but essentially it is that real love of children and wanting to help children.

**Mr WILKIE**—Does anyone know if research has been undertaken to look at the educational attainment levels of children who are in an all-boys school as opposed to an all-girls school or as opposed to a mixed school? Obviously we have different gender schools but do you know of any data that suggests which is the way to go?

**Mr Burchnall**—It is interesting. As a principal of an all-boys school I keep my ears out to data which says that all-boys schools are advantageous to boys, and there is that data. There was a very interesting study in America that was done, comparing two schools that were on as many grounds as could be matched equally, except one was a coeducational school and one was a single-sex boys' school. The findings were really very interesting, not only in terms of academic ability. One of the findings was that the boys in the all-boys school had a better appreciation and understanding of the roles of women than in the co-ed school. That is just one bit of research. I am sure Bronte will probably tell me of lots of other ones.

It is interesting in the United Kingdom where they rank schools in league tables. I am not a great fan of league tables at all because they just measure one aspect of what a school has to offer. You will find that about 45 of the top fifty schools are single-gender schools, either boys' schools or girls' schools, rather than co-ed schools. That is some of the research, some of the information that I am aware of. There is also, I am sure, plenty of information on the other side as well.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You can always tell from some submissions, what is in there and what is not in there, how to ask the question. You mention in there that you reject out of hand—Gary does—the deficit model. That is an interesting thing. I would like you to comment on that, if you would not mind; the deficit model, in terms of boys' education. Other than using the term 'gender stereotyping' in just the description part, you avoided totally gender equity programs and the construction of gender. Would you like to comment on that?

**Dr Webber**—The deficit model, as I understand it, publicly declares that boys are deficient in something. The counter argument is: let us reinforce those things that they are positive with, the positive side of young people and young men. If it is impulsiveness, if it is the willingness to take risk, if it is that sort of thing which is part of their make-up, then that is what we should be looking to note.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you think there has been a greater emphasis on boys' deficits in the last 20 years than there has been previously?

**Dr Webber**—There has been a renewed emphasis on girls' attributes, probably more, in some ways. I do not know whether by inference that says that boys are inferior but some feel that, I suspect. I do not know whether that is true or not.

**Mr Burchnell**—I certainly have the sense that there is more and more comparison being made to the detriment of boys, if you see what I mean. We were talking about one or two examples of this before we came in, where there is perhaps the opportunity to highlight the achievement of boys but sometimes that does not happen and maybe the achievement of a girl may get precedence over the achievement of a boy.

**Dr Webber**—There was a prime example of that recently.

**Mr Burchnell**—There were seven students in South Australia who had done particularly well in science olympiads. There were six boys and—

**Dr Webber**—There were nine, because there were three medals in each of biology, chemistry and physics. There were three gold medals, all boys. There were three silver medals; one was a girl. There were three bronze, all boys. The media presentation was a terrific colour photograph of the young lady. She had done terrifically well but she was the one who was highlighted and the boys were in threes in a little black and white picture down in the corner. I accept the girl deserved a response. They all did. Why not a colour photograph of the whole lot of them all performing exceedingly well? The boys feel, in that case, 'I did pretty well. How come I am just put to the bottom?' That is only one example of what we are trying to convey.

**Mr SAWFORD**—In the submission there is no reference to gender equity programs or social construction of gender. There is a reason for that?

**Dr Webber**—Not specifically. I cannot answer that easily, I am sorry. It did not come up from those who wanted to say anything about this issue. Maybe that is because they assume that gender equity is an idea that we should accept.

**Mr Burchnell**—Maybe, the focus being on the needs of boys.



**Mr SAWFORD**—Would you accept anything in education that did not have quantitative research?

**Dr Webber**—Experience does count for something. Over a period of time an involvement with people does give you ways of operating. That counts, but I understand that it is often good to have some quantitative backup. Quite often that is focusing on a specific area and it reinforces often what you feel, or may not, but it doesn't often get at the broad picture of things and a wide perspective.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you need both qualitative and quantitative research to make reasonable judgments about directions we should go in education?

**Dr Webber**—The answer is yes to that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Time has run out but we really appreciate and value your input into this inquiry. Hopefully by the end of the year we may have a report down and we will make sure that a copy of that report comes out to you. Thanks again for being with us today.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.09 a.m. to 11.20 a.m.**

**BUTLER, Mr Geoffrey Neil, Coordinator, Boys Education Task Force, Board for Lutheran Schools**

**JERICHO, Mr Adrienne John, National Director for Lutheran Schools, Board for Lutheran Schools**

**CHAIR**—Welcome to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations inquiry into the education of boys. I would like to remind you that today's proceedings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you would like to have a private meeting, please indicate and the committee will consider your request. Would both or one of you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Jericho**—Yes. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak to our submission. We want to affirm the importance of this topic. It is very clear you are giving it worthy consideration and we thank you for that. As national director I have oversight of Lutheran schools in Australia. There are 82 Lutheran schools in Australia and we have had Lutheran schools since 1838. In the first page of our submission we list some highlights and features of Lutheran schools which led us to want to get a group together to make a submission and to engage in follow-up activity.

We have always had coeducation. We have emphasised outdoor education. In Queensland, where we have seven significant secondary schools, there are four outdoor education centres servicing them. We have always emphasised the performing and expressive arts. Pastoral care, a sense of community and a spiritual dimension have always been important for us. We value very much the development of each child to the achievement of their full potential.

So the first thing we want to do, before we look at some of the challenges, is to acknowledge and celebrate the great achievements of boys and girls in education. As someone who moves around in schools and sees some of the good things, whether it is musicals or achievements or community service or leadership activities, I see there are some wonderful things happening in schools by both boys and girls and that makes me very proud as an educator and administrator. At the same time we need to acknowledge that there are issues, but we must not let these issues or challenges overshadow the need to celebrate the good things that happen in education.

For us, as we look at our data, there are issues relating to the achievement of boys, there are issues relating to the engagement of boys in the learning process and there are issues regarding boys in relation to behaviour. I would like to invite Geoffrey to say a few things because he was involved in some research in Lutheran schools.

**Mr Butler**—Some of my informal research came from talking with boys. It is essential to actually talk with boys. 'It is not much fun.' 'It is not exciting.' 'It is not self-directed.' 'It is not adventurous.' 'It is too controlling'. 'It is very competitive'—and that is an interesting thing for a boy to say. The research I was doing was into power and conflict in the classroom. Excessive controlling—that is 'power over' type of behaviour by teachers and by the bureaucratic rule focused nature of schools to meet the social requirement of the classroom and school order; and

that is a very strong requirement of course—actually leads to disruption, power behaviour or withdrawal by students, particularly boys. Eighty five per cent of visits to my office as dean of students are by disaffected boys. I stress ‘disaffected boys’ because a huge number of boys are doing wonderfully in schools and getting a lot out of school. That is the first point: schools are an exceptionally controlling environment.

The second is the lack of affiliation. Boys’ performances at school are enhanced when they have strong social and emotional support from a mother and a father and, in a school environment, from friends and teachers. When this is lacking, their performance is badly affected. We need to focus on the development of self-efficacy—and I will define those terms—and social efficacy in boys. Unless we actually support the emotional development of boys within the schooling program and the social development of boys within the schooling program, then they are not going to achieve.

A personal anecdote here: I sat for maths 1, maths 2, physics, chemistry, modern history and English and I failed maths 1, maths 2, physics, chemistry and modern history. I did pass Leaving English. I now have four university qualifications. What is the difference? It is social, emotional and spiritual development. I simply was not ready at that stage. You will find a lot of our young fellows are not, in fact, ready at that stage. There are other things in there as well. Society, schools and the social code for boys have traditionally supported the hardening of males for work and for war.

The boys’ code of stoic independence, extreme individual exploits and courage, having power and status and avoiding feminine traits like sensitivity and gentleness, have served boys badly in preparing them for a modern society which values interdependence, cooperation, negotiation and high levels of verbal skill. That is from Dr Allan Pollack, Harvard University. This is one reason why middle-class boys do better at school, because their model of maleness includes sociability and extended conversation and they are values that are promoted in schools. They see them in the home because their fathers are socially interactive and they see them at school. Men, like women, are by nature social and it is the repression of their sociability and social agency that hinders the development of both men and women. That is important.

The recommendations I would make are three: maintain reasonable order, that is system efficacy; create caring community, which is social efficacy—you have to train for that, a sort of ‘us’ curriculum, ‘Who is us?’—and develop responsible autonomy, which is self-efficacy—a ‘me’ curriculum on ‘What it means to be me, what it means to be male and how can I get that through this schooling environment?’ The original submission touches on some details of those three types of efficacy.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that submission. We will go into questions.

**Mr SAWFORD**—When you said 85 per cent of students sent to the office for higher level disciplinary action, of what cohort—85 per cent of one per cent?

**Mr Butler**—Eighty five per cent of the school; 640 students. That was a specific school and a lot of anecdotal evidence would support that from other schools as well.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Surely if 85 per cent of the 600 were sent—

**Mr Butler**—No, sorry.

**Mr SAWFORD**—there is something wrong with the education program.

**Mr Butler**—The 85 per cent of the persons who actually appeared in that office were boys.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But that piece of information is not useful unless you tell us how many—

**Mr Butler**—That is right. That was not 85 per cent of the boys. That was a cluster of boys who were disaffected.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So how many out of the 600—10, 20?

**Mr Butler**—No, about 30 out of 600. We are talking about a small cluster of boys having a really significant impact on the school.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But I would have thought the figure—if you said 30 out of 600 it might have told a little bit more information than 85 per cent which sounds quite dramatic.

**Mr Butler**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—In your power and conflict exposition I would have thought schools are less authoritarian than they have ever been, not more authoritarian.

**Mr Butler**—I will give you one simple example as a response. I am doing some supply teaching at the moment in the Gold Coast area. Two schools have moved that wearing hats—a discretionary behaviour that children, men, women, may or may not choose to wear on a sunny day—is an obligatory matter. ‘You will wear a hat and if you don’t, you will get a Saturday detention.’ That is more authoritarian than school was when I went to school. There are matters in which school has become very politically correct and also very authoritarian.

**Mr Jericho**—I guess in some ways the fact that schooling is more competitive and parents are looking for discipline is putting pressure on schools to exercise—

**Mr SAWFORD**—I would have thought a hat is not authoritarian; a hat is just a response because we have the most horrendous skin cancer rates in the world.

**Mr Butler**—No, but the demand is a ‘power over’ behaviour. ‘You will be punished in this manner if you don’t wear a hat,’ whereas you could take a community education approach to hats. ‘This is the expectation here, et cetera, and the reasons for it are these and these. Please go and get your hat,’ rather than, ‘We will punish you with this level of punishment if you don’t wear your hat.’ That is an authoritarian response to it rather than an educated response.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Have we forgotten how to teach boys? Basically since the time of Aristotle, Socrates and Plato we have been teaching boys—certainly small cohorts, not the mass education—for thousands of years. A lot of this has all been documented, about what works and what does not work. The only person who actually challenged that Aristotelian mode of

pedagogy was Rousseau. You could argue that Rousseau's romantic sentimentality of education is quite in favour at the current time, but other than that it has always been—have we forgotten something in the last 20 years?

**Mr Butler**—I do not know, but in the last 20 years we have gone from 33 per cent of boys going to industry, factory and farms; 33 per cent of boys going to retail, trade and apprenticeships—these are invented figures, just rough ballpark stuff—and 33 per cent going on from high school to literary, professional and academic careers and we have put them all into the one box. The federal governments of the past 10 years have pushed that back a bit with the VET stuff. That is good.

I believe people need to be able to go in wider areas of giftedness. Yes, we have forgotten how to educate all boys because once they were educated through apprenticeships and other blokes educating them. Once they were educated through working with dad on the farm. I do not know how many people went into industry and so on with other men. Their upper level education was taken care of in other ways in the not too far distant past. Now we are having to reinvent. We have a changed society.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What do you do at the top end of years 11 and 12 for boys in the Lutheran system? Do you do anything special, anything different?

**Mr Jericho**—I guess there are some courses in the religious education areas where they are given a series of options, such as boy to manhood, to think about gender construction, what their maleness or femaleness means, to intentionally think about that. There has been, throughout secondary education probably for the last 20 years, a subject called something like social education which has taken up some of the social skills—human relationships education, conflict resolution, management of anger, 'Don't take those things for granted but intentionally put them on the curriculum.'

**Mr SAWFORD**—You mentioned social construction of gender; that is a modern definition. When you ask people for qualitative research to back that up, they can refer to a huge range of material. When you ask them for quantitative research to back that up they look at you and go incredibly silent. This includes the Harvard School which I think, Geoffrey, you made mention of, with Dr Carol Gilligan. Dr Carol Gilligan, of course, wrote that very important book *The Different Voice* in 1984 and is regarded as the guru of gender equity and social construction of gender programs. She has been asked by social scientists to produce the quantitative evidence for that book which is getting referred to all the time and for 17 years she resisted. But Harvard being the place that it is, it has all snuck out. Of course the quantitative research that she conducted did not suit what she was pushing and so she omitted it.

You are part of a school system and you are encouraging a certain way of looking at things which may or may not be right. I would have thought that in education, if you did not have the quantitative as well as the qualitative research, you would be very sceptical indeed about implementation of those policies.

**Mr Butler**—It is a question of how you get research on how people understand their lives. There are three types of research which is, as you say, the quantitative or empirical science. But applying empirical science to what a boy is actually thinking and what he is constructing about

what his life actually means and how hurt or wounded he feels about a particular situation, is not going to help you except to ask him. Of course, boys are not verbal and you have to have the right kind of environment for them to respond.

Social research needs to be of a perceptual kind. How are boys perceiving themselves? They perceive the code for them as being stoic, independent and strong. Fathers sometimes ask, 'Are you the man of the house now?' What, at five years of age? 'Look after mummy and daddy. You can sleep at the door of the tent.' This is an actual anecdote. A young fellow was asked to sleep at the door of the tent and there were bears out there—five years of age. What is he going to do when a bear comes? Obviously he is going to call for dad, but it is the expectation and how he feels about that expectation.

He had a reaction when he was 13 years of age; he refused to go to school camp. It was a very bad reaction and the psychologist simply discovered, and it did not take him long, that it was sourced back to that particular experience of camping with dad, mum and little brother when he was five years of age. He had this weird expectation, somewhere deep inside his psyche, that he was obliged to be a strong man when he obviously was not capable of being a strong man. So the social expectations have to be approached by social research methods.

**Mr Jericho**—The question of research was raised in an earlier hearing. There is an incredible lot of research from the universities that has been put before you and some of it is contradictory. It is confusing. However, teachers do need to be involved in research: what is happening with what we are doing? This probably leads to another issue and that is the incredible crowdedness of schools these days as more and more have been loaded onto it. You are quite correct; there needs to be reflection on what happens in a school and more research. It needs to be both at school level and at university level. But the matter of time is the first thing teachers and schools would mention. Then they would probably mention other resources.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Schooling is a pretty simple process. People have actually made it very complicated. If you add too much—and you have answered your own question. You should take some of it away.

**Ms GILLARD**—I think you were present when I asked the last group of people the question about what has changed in the last 20 years that might explain the differences we are now seeing between boys' and girls' attainment. You have identified one in the discussion, which is 20 years ago a cohort of boys, perhaps the cohort who were most struggling with academic school work, would end up in all male or largely male environments in apprenticeship models. An older male would help sort out their engagement with the workforce and with learning.

You might have heard the Association of Independent Schools mention the language intensive nature of the curriculum now, the change in assessment methodologies, those sorts of things. Are there any other factors that you would point to, or would you agree or disagree with the factors that were mentioned before? I take on board what you are saying about the cultural imagery of the strong silent male but I would have thought that cultural imagery was even more powerful 20 years ago than it is today.

**Mr Butler**—I do not think it has been adequately challenged by males themselves. That is where the exploration needs to take place. There are some other things and Adrienne might have

some thoughts about them. There has been a tremendous shift in social values, globalism and all those sorts of things. There is a tremendous shift in who works now. Mothers are very important as far as little boys are concerned and a lot of them are working now. Dads are important as far as little boys are concerned. Perhaps the attention to fathering and mothering is not as strong as it once was. It cannot be ignored. It is absolutely and utterly essential.

Here is some quantitative research: 25 per cent of brain capacity is there at birth; the other 75 per cent comes from the training, instruction and social relations that come after that period of time; and 50 per cent of it is established by about the year 5. Of course in boys that actually takes longer, so if I was to go away from this committee having said one thing, it would be that boys need longer support in social and emotional training, and perhaps a later entry to schools—some boys.

**Ms GILLARD**—That is not a change factor though, is it?

**Mr Butler**—That has not responded to the question. The change factor in that is a shift in parenting, the amount of time that is actually given to parenting. That is a significant change factor in the last 20 years.

**Mr Jericho**—I went back in the last couple of weeks and had a look at Hugh McKay's book, *Reinventing Australia*. He identifies three or four significant changes and says the most dramatic one has been the changing role of women over the last 25 years, and what that has meant for them and for families. People at my age are still working through what that means. We have come to appreciate, as male and female, the implications of that and learning to accept changes. If adults are wrestling with these issues, it must be quite confusing to young people. The traditional stereotypes—or as Pollack calls it, the boys code—were appropriate for a number of years. But the changes in the last quarter of the 20th century make them most inappropriate. So we need to think through what it means to be male, what it means to be female.

**Mr WILKIE**—Given that you have your schools in a group across Australia, have you done any studies to work out what the difference is in educational attainment between boys and girls within your schools?

**Mr Jericho**—No, we have not. From what individual schools have shown me, it would confirm what other figures would show.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Geoff, you used the term 'stoicism, a male trait'. I agree with you that perhaps that perception of that male trait, once regarded as strength, is now regarded as a weakness. But you also know that in everything in life there are pluses and minuses. Although expression is favoured over repression, maybe reality does not support that. For example, talk to RSL diggers who have come back from very traumatic experiences in World War II or Korea or Vietnam or whatever. Talk to Holocaust victims.

There have been studies done on all of this. The ones who have survived great pain and great trauma are the ones who repressed, not the ones who expressed. The ones who expressed harmed themselves and often members of their own families quite dramatically. That is quanti-

tative research in every nation of the earth who have been involved in traumas of some kind. Yet that is not the current orthodoxy, is it?

**Mr Butler**—No.

**Mr SAWFORD**—The current orthodoxy is that repression is all wrong, stoicism is wrong. It may not necessarily be so.

**Mr Butler**—In the studies in the class I looked at toxic messages for boys and girls and asked them to explore the toxic messages, what they thought were the toxic message for girls—there are plenty out there for girls, too—and what the consequences would be for the opposite sex and so on. The boys responded and said, ‘Look, yeah, but a bloke’s still got to be tough.’ I said, ‘Yeah, but tough and able to express himself as necessary.’ It depends on what the situation requires. I was not passing a judgment on boys being prepared for work and war in the past. They were, and that was just the circumstances it required. But in the interactive fast moving modern society, you have to be very communicative to be successful.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I understand that. I am not saying that expression is not important. But what is in the current orthodoxy is that repression is all harm. It is not, never has been. There is something in between that connects; it is called commonsense. There seems to have been in the last 20 years in education a remarkable absence of commonsense and the ability to connect the pluses and minuses of everything that we do in education. Would you agree with that?

**Mr Butler**—I would absolutely agree with that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is the Lutheran system doing to counteract that?

**Mr Butler**—The Lutheran system, I hope, is reasonably commonsense and it says that boys, like girls, need social and emotional support. Let us have a look at what they really behave like. Boys seem to need plenty of physical activity.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Aristotle could have told you that.

**Mr Butler**—Yes, that is right. We accept that. There needs to be those kinds of activities. What would Plato have said? He said, ‘Don’t let a boy have an opinion until he’s 30. Put him in the army, make him play games, make him do this, this, this and this—lots of mathematics and sport and stuff until he’s 30, then you can philosophise.’ I do not disagree with any of that. Nevertheless, there is the loss of that cluster of kids. There are boys doing very well in Lutheran schools. But there are boys who have Queensland core skills scores of A, which means that they are in the top intellectual echelon, who are getting scores on the OP, which means the tertiary entrance performance, of 14 when between one and five is about where they should be. The number of those, just on the data from the college I was working in, is two to three, maybe four, times as many boys as girls who are underperforming.

**Mr Jericho**—We would emphasise the socio-emotional development of all students; the importance of values. You mentioned the Holocaust victims and I thought of Victor Frankel and the book on the meaning. He said those who survived were those who had a sense of meaning. They knew what life was about. They had something to hang onto. For us that is important.



**Mr SAWFORD**—He also said they kept their mouths shut.

**Mr Butler**—Yes, they did.

**CHAIR**—In your appearance here today and in your submission, it appears that you support the need for boys to have good role models in the house and in the school. With dysfunctional families, breakdown of the family unit and so forth, boys are not getting it as strongly at home. All evidence that we have taken in the inquiry so far is that there is a lack of male role models within the school system. How many male teachers would you have within your schools?

**Mr Jericho**—In primary school 74 per cent are female and in secondary it is closer to 55 per cent.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any strategies that would encourage young men to be teachers? We have spoken to students, and if we have a dozen in front of us and ask if they want to be teachers, they say, ‘No.’ Maybe one would consider it but they seem to have the perception that it is not a good future to have.

**Mr Jericho**—It probably goes back to some of the findings of the Senate inquiry which talked of the status of teachers in society. You had a number of recommendations and it reflected the feeling of teachers, which was not all that positive. This year was the first time we saw an increase in applications for teacher education. We have been through a bit of a lull. Our counsellors tell us that they really have to work hard to sell, explain, promote teaching amongst students. Girls seem to have responded more than boys. We need to work together on promoting teaching as a vocation. Every time I see the money that goes on promoting service in the armed forces I say, ‘What can we do to make teaching that exciting?’ which it is.

**CHAIR**—Our students do say that it does not make a difference whether the teachers are male or female, as long as that teacher shows an interest in them and is fun, and gives them a pat on the back. If they bring some work to a teacher and get told, ‘You can do better,’ they will not go away and do better, but if they get told, ‘That was good, but you can improve on it,’ that makes a difference. That seems to be lacking in teachers. Do you have training in social skills amongst your teachers; encouragement, and the value of it?

**Mr Jericho**—Yes. We work on that to equip them with necessary skills and training for pastoral care, for behavioural management, emphasising the relationship. Interestingly, some surveys done on Lutheran schools, which then led to a conference, identified three issues. One was the crowded curriculum, another was teacher stress and the other was the education of boys. In some ways for me they are connected. Teacher stress will impact upon relationships and a crowded curriculum creates stress. We are looking at ways of unpacking that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add before we close this session?

**Mr Jericho**—No. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**CHAIR**—We really appreciate your input today and the time you have taken to come before this committee. We hopefully will have a report out by the end of the year and when we do we will make sure a copy of it comes to you. Thank you for your time today.

[11.53 a.m.]

**ALTMANN, Mr Philip, Classroom Teacher, Department of Education, Training and Employment**

**ADAMS, Mr Michael John Dennis (Private capacity)**

**BUTTON, Mr Roger Philip (Private capacity)**

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for being here today and appearing before our inquiry into the education of boys. It is nice to see three teachers, who are at the coalface each day, making time available to appear before our committee. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Altmann**—I am a teacher at Surrey Downs School, which is a primary school, and I have taught years 6 and 7 boys' classes and have an interest in boys' education.

**Mr Button**—I am currently a high school teacher at Craigmore High School and I am here more as a teacher than a representative of the school. I have been at several other schools over the last 15 years.

**Mr Adams**—I am principal of McLaren Flat Primary School. I am here as a parent and as a teacher. I have been teaching for 25 years.

**CHAIR**—I remind you that the proceedings today are a legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. Deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you wish to give some evidence in private, please ask and the committee will consider that. If you would like to make any remarks before we go into questions, we would appreciate it.

**Mr Altmann**—You have the items in front of you, so maybe I will talk briefly to those, and then we will take it from there. I can show you these too. These are a couple of pictures of what the school looks like. In my situation I have been involved in managing and teaching boys' classes for the last two years, and it was a challenge to try and find a curriculum and a way of engaging those students, knowing that boys are very difficult to engage. My background is that I went to Footscray Technical High School as a young boy and learned lots of trades—lots of metal and lots of carpentry, woodwork and things like that—and I grew up in a working class background where uncles were carpenters and farmers and I was involved in milking and working on the farm, in very practical things. So I have a very practical side in my history.

I endeavoured to use those skills in engaging the boys in model making and doing practical things within the classroom—making boats and cars and solar cars and so on. It was to engage them at that level. Also, I have a graduate diploma in educational counselling and I am very much into teaching boys cooperation and collaboration; helping each other and caring and understanding each other's points of view and addressing issues of male macho behaviour,

bullying and harassment that boys often engage in and get involved in. I have notions about an equal playing field for boys within the classroom and respect for each other, and acknowledgment that not everybody is good at everything but together they have the answers. Everyone has different strengths. I try not to develop a paradigm of hierarchical structure but a paradigm of a level playing field, and I am part of that level playing field within the culture of teaching boys.

**Mr Button**—I am a technology teacher. Before becoming a teacher I thought very carefully about the whole idea. I did my apprenticeship and worked in an all-male environment for General Motors-Holdens here in Adelaide and when retrenchments came through I thought I would continue with that. I was training apprentices as a tradesman myself and went on to become a technology teacher. Since then I have worked predominantly with teenage boys and in area schools, from year 2 to year 12. In one lesson I am teaching year 2s how to construct and design something in groups, and then in the next 40 minutes I am teaching year 12s how to do some welding and fabricating, and then I have a mixed group for science in year 4-5. In one day I will have eight different classes, ranging from six-year-olds to 18-year-olds and I see the whole spectrum on a daily basis.

Since moving from area schools to a lower socioeconomic area in Adelaide's northern region, I see almost daily kids who suffer from family break-up. More than half of the children in our school do not have their original father at home and kids from what we would call normal families are in the minority. I have been encouraged to be a student counsellor on a number of occasions by previous counsellors because a lot of the boys will open up to me in workshops. I have seen a lot of situations where kids will be very emotional because something has happened the previous night and they almost latch on to the next available male the next day or they just break down completely. It is fairly severe and I see the same consistent pattern.

Working in country schools you will see a male attitude come through. I have worked in Woomera where there is a military clientele and you see a different student mentality. If you go to the lower socioeconomic areas, your heart goes out to some of the boys in those areas but also to the girls they live with, the mothers especially, because a lot of single mums have to deal with the problems. I have a paper here that I would like to table. It outlines what I have observed over the last 15 years and what are the factors that have contributed to the educational disadvantage of boys. They are in some sort of priority order. But No. 1 there, family break-up, single mums are the ones who take over the raising of sons. At primary school we see very few male teachers, as previous speakers have mentioned, and I have never heard of a male kindergarten teacher in my life. They are really the most important issues for boys.

Reading some of the work of Steve Biddulph, he refers to some of the studies and some of the papers and books that he has read, and talks about the biological and chemical differences of male and female brains. There are different chemicals flowing through male and female brains. They have done autopsies on male and female brains and car accident victims and shown the two sides of the brain and the corpus callosum, and how strongly linked it is with girls and how that creates an affinity for verbal expression of ideas. There is always going to be that, and it is great that males and females are different but can be so compatible and work together as well.

One of the things I see in the northern end of town is the social or cultural attitude, as previous speakers have mentioned, of being the strong silent type, being trained for work or for

war—although not as relevant these days—and that a male does not do any child-rearing duties, that is the wife's job, and he is also there to dominate women. I see that in the attitudes of boys that I work with every day. It does not matter how much you tell them that that is not the case and, 'That is not what you should be saying,' they learn by the way they live and by what they see.

When I was at university I saw studies that said boys would take on the attitudes of their father long before they would take on the attitudes of a male teacher at school, and it is only in the absence of a strong male role model that they will inadvertently search for another one. Quite often that is the bully in the schoolyard. They are the ones who need to have some sort of control, even passive control. They are the ones that insecure boys will latch onto—or the sporting hero on TV. The media will always promote somebody that they can latch onto.

I have seen boys who have recently lost a father—several of them have been through death; some of them have been through family break-up—and they act almost like an animal imprinting on a parent for the first time. I have had kids who will follow me from my technology centre, my workshop, across to the staffroom, wait by the door, and when I have finished they follow me back again because they want to talk to me on the way there, on the way back, and they stay behind after lessons. They are all the boys who have lost fathers. I do not think I can think of an exception where there has been a boy who has tried to come and speak to me or latch onto me not because he had anything that he really wanted to ask me, but he would fabricate something to have a conversation with a male, someone that they can relate to.

I take boys on outback trips. It is called Operation Flinders. It is mentioned in my submission. We have 10 of those boys and they respond very well to the Army and police discipline and find it a challenge. Ironically, uncannily, a lot of the boys I have in my current classes seek to join the military or become a policeman themselves, almost in a craving for discipline. They do not know why they are doing it themselves but I see that as a common pattern; boys who almost seek discipline because there is nothing at home for them. They do not want discipline from mum any more and they give their female teachers a really hard time because of it.

There are a lot of common patterns that I see because I am working with boys, and I can be a better counsellor in a workshop while I am working with somebody—have a chat to them, 'How are things going? I heard you got in trouble today with Mrs Such-and-Such'—and where they will tell me the whole story. I find that I can do a better counselling job as a tech teacher than I can as a counsellor, instead of summoning people to my office.

I will not go through all of the stuff that is there. The large school issue is another one. If you have read the books by Desmond Morris, *The Human Zoo* and *The Naked Ape* and all those, they talk about how large schools will create subcultures and those school bullies will become the dominant males for a whole range of insecure boys, and we do not want that happening.

There are a whole lot of other issues—the idea of teaching relationships, values and community responsibility in schools. No longer make it hidden, make it a formal and obligatory part of an education, because it only happens in a very random way and totally relies on the enthusiasm and professionalism of teachers to do it. If they choose not to because they are busy this term and they may be doing other things—I always find it hard to find time simply because

I am a coordinator of a basketball club and I have 11 basketball teams and 11 coaches. I get phone calls every night for that reason and that also teaches me a lot about boys and how they learn—and girls, because I have, I guess, equal numbers of both. I will not go through all those eight that are on there, but there is certainly a whole range of things there that I see needing attention.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr Adams**—I guess people are aware of that Ian Lillico workshop he ran. I got it off the Internet and it resonated with me, with 52 recommendations to engage boys in schooling. I agree with some of what I heard earlier, that it does not matter whether you are a male or female teacher, it is whether you care.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We are seeing this person tomorrow.

**Mr Adams**—When I got it off the Net, the 52 recommendations just hit me as, ‘This is what it’s about.’ It is about boys feeling they belong in schools, and a lot of boys do not feel that now. They see it as other people’s business. People make them do things they really do not want to do and they see no purpose in doing, and they have to come there.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can you give us some examples of things that boys do not want to do.

**Mr Adams**—I am just talking about boys with writing. If you ever try and get boys to write a story, they seem to struggle with the notion. When you look in the recommendations here, what he is saying is boys need to be encouraged to talk first, before they are asked to write, and things like that resonated. If you can get boys to talk about something, if they have an idea about what it is we have to put on paper—I am talking now from experience with my son. He had to write an essay yesterday for chemistry, he is in year 11. We had to sit with him and basically work out paragraph headings for him so he could fulfil the expectation. They are the sorts of things. But basically I am here to answer questions.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We appreciate the contribution you have all made.

**Mr BARRESI**—An essay for chemistry sounds absolutely ridiculous, but that gets to the point that Rod and I have been on about, how the teaching methodology has changed over time. My question is actually to you, Roger, and I am very intrigued by your comments about the male role model and the imprinting that takes place by the young boys who perhaps have gone through separation or loss. I do not dispute what you say. Is there any evidence that that same sort of behaviour is evidenced with girls when they are going through a loss or they are being cared for by a single father? Is this just a phenomenon which is indicative of boys?

**Mr Button**—Probably not. Because I am in touch with boys all the time, that is what I see. We have a lot of girls who get pregnant long before they should and go through all sorts of traumatic things in their lives and live in a lodge called Elizabeth Lodge up near our school, and they have social workers visit them every day or so. Because I was a home group teacher I did have girls that would do exactly the same thing. They would come to see me like I was almost a father rather than a teacher, and if I responded in an angry way about something they had done they would sulk with me and would not speak to me, but then they would come back—so, yes,

the father-daughter relationship in some ways. But I do not see it as much because I am a technology teacher and I guess 90 per cent of my customers are boys. As a year level manager for year 8s, years 12s and 13s, they are predominantly boys again as well.

**Mr BARRESI**—If the education department was here listening to your evidence, and they were here this morning, they would say that some of the reasons why these things are occurring is because you, Roger Button, happen to be a very good teacher. It has nothing to do with you being a male teacher. It is because of your ability as a teacher, and I do not dispute that. But you also make the observation that perhaps it is a matter of more male role models and recruitment of more males into teaching. I put that to the education department this morning and they scoffed at it, as does every education department that we have met so far. It is almost like they have their head in the sand. Why is that the case?

**Mr Button**—I guess they would like to promote their system as being one that is faultless or that any problems that do exist are being addressed, it is overexaggerated, it is not happening in large quantity, it is not really a major issue, and this might be an isolated incident. I guess they want to defend their system. I am not a unionist by any means but I come from a school that has a strong union. I see school administrations wanting to sweep a lot of issues under the carpet, simply because it is bad press, and we are currently competing with a whole new level of education, with the more affordable private schools. Parents are wanting their students to go to schools that are going to provide some morals, some values training and are going to have more discipline.

We have a private school quite close to us and we get all of their suspended students, the ones they do not want. We have no choice but to take them because by law we must educate all children that come to our door. They have often been to our school, been taken out to the local college and then they come back again. It is nothing to do with the quality of education they can provide. It is more to do with the power that we can exert over unruly students being less. We are expected to keep them and go through a very unwieldy system of a certain number of suspensions, a student development plan, where one person in the school is in charge of a whole year level, 250 kids. Maybe 20 or 30 of them have a student development plan and an interview. You could have somebody working full-time with every year level without doing any teaching and still be snowed under, in the school that I come from at least. There are a lot of hidden issues in schools that departments, because they are not in schools, either do not see or do not recognise.

**Mr BARRESI**—They do not see them or they do not want to listen to the story, or are your male teachers being covertly repressed from telling a story?

**Mr Button**—I am not sure what it is but it is bad press. We got to the point our union of 65 teachers threatened to walk out of the school next morning unless we had a security guard placed in our school full-time, because we have kids with their mobile phones in the yard saying, 'Such-and-Such just called me a name, mum. Can you come and sort her out?' Parents come into the school and will fight with students. We have had that happen three times this year already. We suspend between five and 10 students every week in our school. You can imagine the numbers by the end of the year. We have a whiteboard which is just devoted to suspensions, and that is filled by usually Thursday or Friday each week.

The attitude comes from home, and we have had to actually exclude and have restraining orders on parents as well as ex-students. The department wanted to take our security guard away recently or cut his time in half, and we then had to threaten to go on strike again and we had to keep a logbook every day to show that he was needed, and it is full every day. There is an incident two or three times a day with our security guard. We have just bought 10 walkie-talkies so we do not have high phone bills for making mobile phone calls to the office or to the police. We have a very close liaison with our local police department.

We are not a tough school in the Elizabeth area, and it is happening down at Noarlunga as well. You go down there and you really need to say, 'These are our demands, this is what we need. We need money, we need support. We want people who are in charge of behaviour management as a sole job, no teaching at all.' We will have staff meetings every week. I have never seen a calm, relaxed teacher in my school in the nine years that I have been there. You feel like a CFS worker putting out spot fires, never having time to cut the fire break, as it were. That is how I feel working in the school, and we all have our own ways of coping.

**CHAIR**—This seems to be a very important area of education and boys' behaviour within the school system. Are you telling us that the state government needs to give teachers the rights for discipline?

**Mr Button**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—I am only going on a personal basis here. In my electorate a lot of parents tell me they opt out of the private system over to the public because of the lack of discipline, and yet I have had eight children go through the public system and I know it is a good system.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You meant public to private.

**CHAIR**—Yes, sorry, out of public into private. My children went public and I have a great love for the public system, but the perception out there is that if your children are going to get a chance in life they have got to go private because of the lack of discipline and behaviour in the classroom. You are saying you do not have those rights as a teacher and you need those rights given to you, in a controlled manner, of course.

**Mr Button**—Yes, I agree. A day doesn't go by when a teacher doesn't say, 'I wish I could use the cane again, like in the old days,' and that is just an expression of their frustration, to have some sort of control. When you look at a school of 1,000 students and another 65 staff, that is larger than your average country town in South Australia.

**CHAIR**—That is right, yes.

**Mr Button**—But we do not have the powers of police, yet we should have our own counselling system, our own detective system, our own law and order system. They say we are educating tomorrow's lawyers and doctors and they will promote that in the media, but we are also educating tomorrow's criminals and rapists and murderers, and everyone must go to school. That is seen in our jails; they all go to school. In my paper I say there is a larger percentage of males from lower socioeconomic areas in jail and they come through our schools in the northern and the southern regions. If we do not have more powers or have people who can concentrate on



teaching and then have some intermediate person who has the power of the police or a police person in every school, who is in a school—we have a close liaison with our police, more so recently.

Our current principal is on stress leave for a month because of the issues that are created and the personal threats. We had a principal run off the road by an angry parent, his car rammed and things like that. So when that happens in schools and they feel they have no comeback and teachers cannot sue parents for defamation, they cannot tape interviews, we feel we need a security guard in the room with us when we interview parents. It is sometimes hard just to get a mum or dad to sit down and listen because they solve their problems through aggression.

**Mr WILKIE**—Teachers can sue parents for defamation through the union, can't they? I have seen that happen in Western Australia.

**Mr Button**—No.

**Mr Altmann**—No, the union does not allow it. The union will defend you if there is a problem, but if you want to sue, the union will not put the money up.

**Mr WILKIE**—That is interesting. In Western Australia they have threatened to take action against parents who have—

**Mr Altmann**—Not here, no.

**Mr Button**—There needs to be a legal precedent and that would send a very strong message to the communities of some of those schools.

**Mr Altmann**—Yes, I had that with a friend of mine. A parent found out something and tried to implicate him in some sexual misconduct with a child, and it turned out in the end that it never happened and the parents apologised to the teacher. The student apologised for making the false allegations and the union was there all the way through the process. When it came to his time to maybe sue the parents or get some sort of retribution, they said, 'No, sorry, that's it. You've got to do it yourself out of your pocket.'

**Mr Button**—You do not feel supported from your own department.

**Mr Altmann**—You do not. You do not get it. So you ask why don't men become teachers? Come on, guys. There is a good reason, you know.

**Mr Button**—A close colleague of mine was taken out of the school on the very same day that he put his hand on a girl's shoulder to restrain her from doing something that she was not meant to do. She was just going to run off and he restrained her. There was no physical injury. He made physical contact with that girl. He was removed from the school for a year to work at another school.

**Mr Altmann**—That is right. That is what they do.

**Mr WILKIE**—Mr Altmann, I see you have worked in both a system where you have had boys and girls in a class and then boys in a class.

**Mr Altmann**—Yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—Is there any different teaching style you would adopt when teaching boys as opposed to girls or mixed?

**Mr Altmann**—I guess really the way to engage students is to find out what they are interested in and where they are coming from. The premise is to talk to students and find out what they know, what they understand, what they are interested in. Then, if they are interested in technology, you do that; if they are interested in some sort of music, you help to create the curriculum around what their interest is. It is all about making connections with students, of course. It is not about imposing a curriculum or ideas upon someone. It is actually about saying, 'What's important to you? What do you want to learn? What area of study is important to you? Tell me about your family background. Tell me whether friendship is important.' You actually have to engage them in conversation and then find out what is important to them in their world, what construct they have in their heads. Then from that an effective teacher develops curriculum from the students' world.

Then you take that curriculum and you develop it with outcomes that you want, that you think are important—literacy, numeracy and so on—but the child believes that you actually are coming from their world. That is the key, whether it is girls or boys.

**Mr WILKIE**—It has been suggested that boys tend to work a lot better in school when they have a positive relationship with the teacher and they get on well with the teacher, which is probably more important for boys than girls. Has that been your experience?

**Mr Altmann**—Boys can make it pretty hard for you if they have got it in for you, and girls, too. It is in your interests to develop a positive relationship. Why wouldn't you? Most kids want to be a friend to you. I do not think for a minute that kids want to be your enemy. My premise is that kids want to be your friend. It is a matter of finding a way into their lives so they can connect and you can be their friend and at what level. There are different levels, of course.

**Mr WILKIE**—Yes.

**Mr Altmann**—That is the skill of a professional.

**Mr WILKIE**—How do the others feel?

**Mr Adams**—I tabled the Lillico report. I am the only male in a school with 8.4 teachers. I am also the principal of the school, which gives an imbalance to power structure for the girls in terms that I am the only male but the principal. When I tabled this the women on our staff all said, 'This makes so much sense.' To me it is just good teaching practice, whether you are a boy or a girl. There are a few specifics in there, like breaking things down a bit more for the boys. For us, as staff, it was really relevant to look at those 54 recommendations.

It was done in a very informal way. It was not imposed on people. I just said, 'Look, I've read this on the weekend.' I tabled it. I did copies for people and they all disappeared. People came up to me, women with sons, and said, 'This make sense to me, Mike. This is the sort of stuff we need to look at.' In our BST results last year our boys actually performed really well, which means they are coming up, if you look at the improvement and the trend graph. That was really encouraging.

You do not need to have all males to get the boys on the right track, but you do need to have people who care about them and they know they are cared about. I go back to that stoic view of the world. If boys are being stoic and men are being stoic, how do people know they are cared for? We all have a persona that we have to perform as males. That is the stuff we want to look at. Rod, your comment about the Holocaust: there was an expression of that and it was called Israel. After the war I believe that anger, that frustration, that persecution made a nation that is quite strong in the world now and will not be persecuted again.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But the individuals did not—

**Mr Adams**—Not individually, but collectively I think is what we are talking about. This needs to be a collective thing. This is not boys against girls; this is a collective Australian nation. We want everybody in this country to do the best they can.

**CHAIR**—Further to the recommendations you have in front of you, are you under the state education system?

**Mr Adams**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—If you wanted to incorporate what you see in front of you there because it is going to be better—

**Mr Adams**—There would be no problem.

**CHAIR**—No problem with the system.

**Mr Adams**—No, I do not believe there would be. There is nothing in here that says we are asking for more money, so people will be happy with that. Mostly we are saying, 'Let's look at what we do and make differences.'

**CHAIR**—But you could incorporate your own program.

**Mr Adams**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can I ask a different slant on the same question: the South Australian Education Department is very strong on gender equity programs and social construction of gender. There is a debate out there that not everybody accepts that argument. Can you reconcile those good teaching practices with gender equity and social construction of gender programs in your school?

**Mr Adams**—Yes, because one of the things in there is that exact thing; we need to look at gender; we need to look at it and say, ‘What do we see?’ The boys and relationship courses run in South Australia actually say that. What do boys get out of the media? What do they get out of it? What is their experience of being a boy and then being a man?

**Mr SAWFORD**—But isn’t the point Philip made more important? If you do not ask the boys you will never know.

**Mr Adams**—That is what I am saying. This is what the boys and relationships course is about. It is actually getting the boys together and saying, ‘What do you think it is? What do you aspire to be?’ Often my experience of my son and his friends is that you will ask them what they aspire to be and it is, ‘Get through today,’ basically. Yet my daughter, in comparison, just seemed to breeze through school. It has been a long haul with my son and my nephews and yet the two girls just seemed to breeze through school. They knew how to play the game.

**Mr Button**—I would like to respond to Kim’s question, too, about how he would change teaching large groups of boys or girls. Philip mentioned you had to have a good relationship, you had to make sure that you were firm but friendly and they found you approachable. In my school you will have six different classes in a high school situation. You are not a primary school teacher looking after about 30. You are looking after 30, six times over. You do not see that group once, you see that group four times a week each. You will see 180 students four times a week each for 40-minute blocks. That is not an overcrowded, overworked person, that one person in charge of 180.

In my workshop situation I am only allowed to have 20 students for safety reasons, so I will have 120 students that I am in charge of four times a week each. It is pretty hard to have a close relationship with every single one of them. In fact, after the first term some teachers are lucky to know a name and a face and remember their name in the yard, because you have so many. It is not a primary school situation where you know your kids intimately after about the first three or four weeks.

**Ms GILLARD**—Just to clarify the discussion, that boys in relationship course is part of current curriculum, is it?

**Mr Adams**—It is promoted by the Catholic ed system and our district looked at it. At the previous school I was at we trained two male teachers to run that program in the school.

**Ms GILLARD**—Right, so it originated in Catholic ed but it is being used in state schools.

**Mr Adams**—Yes, it can be.

**Ms GILLARD**—Can be.

**Mr Adams**—If the option is taken up, yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are you in Catholic ed, Michael?

**Mr Adams**—No.

**Ms GILLARD**—No, using it in state schools.

**Mr Adams**—But we saw it.

**Ms GILLARD**—I am going to ask you to follow that point because it is something that has come up. It seems to me there is a real tension between creating schools of a sufficient size so that, particularly at the post compulsory years, you can offer a wide range of options. We have heard a lot of evidence about engaging boys at years 11 and 12 particularly, where you have to have flexible, tailored packages so that they can do a bit of this at school and go to TAFE and have technology classes, all of which resource-wise means you have to be at a particular size or you are not going to be able to offer that diversity. The other side of that coin obviously is what you have just said, where the bigger a school gets the easier it is for kids to become anonymous, have no ongoing relationship with any adult in the school, and you can get subcultures developing and all that kind of thing.

Then there is the argument you put earlier that if you want to have security and counsellors and all that, it tends to mean you would want schools of a particular size to support it. I am just wondering how, in your experience, that is best balanced. I do not think we are in the business of recommending all schools should be at a certain size. It is never going to be that mechanistic, but can you give us a feel on that continuum of what you think advantages boys best, because there is a trade-off there.

**Mr Button**—There is, yes. The pendulum has swung very much in our school from spending more time doing what we call a home group session, where one teacher will have their home class and it is their responsibility—social development, any problems they have. But that is really only happening in our school for about 40 minutes a week on a Tuesday morning, for example. That way you can learn to know your group.

But what you say about resources is very true. You need a school of a certain size to be able to have a technology workshop and VET programs happening outside of the school. Then again, those things are not mandatory for teachers to take on. I take on a VET program. I coordinate an electronics pathways program and I have a group of boys who have been selected to go off and do an electrotechnology program every Friday. They only do a four-day week for the whole year. That is only possible because I am in a reasonably sized school, as I acknowledge.

I guess you do need people stopping those subcultures from developing. You need them, in my school situation, to be full-time policeman, if you like, part-time detective and even part-time father and tell them, 'This is not how you should behave.' We have chaplains in our school and their role is very hazy in what they can do. They are very easily labelled by teenagers saying, 'You don't want to talk to him,' sort of thing.

You need to earn the boys' respect. We have a boys committee that meets every Tuesday afternoon and people like to come up with a whole series of things. I am sure plenty of those are in that paper. It is a matter of freeing up teachers to do it and it is also a matter of making it compulsory curriculum. It cannot be one of those hidden curriculum things, one of those extra-curricular things where a conscientious teacher will target a group of boys who have no male

role models, or who are in trouble with the police or dealing with drugs, and then go and do something about it. That is an enormous amount of energy and time and affects the whole school timetable. It needs to be made compulsory. There need to be people who are devoted to it and their job description is to control those subcultures but still maintain the size of a school.

I have been through Murray Bridge High School with 1,400 students and if subcultures do not develop in that school I will be absolutely amazed. They are divided up into four campuses, four different colours, in order to break it up because of that—

**Mr Altmann**—Your question about numbers has a sense of numbers are not the issue; it is the populace you have. If you had a population in say, Elizabeth, of 800 students and you know there is a high level of social problems and whatever, obviously you would have a lower population. But if you had a population in a middle-class area, say Tea Tree Gully or the eastern suburbs of Adelaide, you might have a larger population because you do not have the degree of problems. There is another way of looking at your question about numbers.

It is the same with classes. People say, ‘I can have 30 kids and not have any trouble.’ I can have 20 and be run off my feet because I have lots of problems there. It is not an issue of numbers, it is what problems those kids bring to that school, or what problems do those kids bring to your classroom.

**Mr Button**—I can testify to that.

**Mr Altmann**—The government thinks in numbers, they do not think, ‘What is the group like?’

**Mr Button**—As an example, if I have 20 students in a class and we have a day where there is going to be an afternoon off because teachers are going to do some training, half the parents in the school will not send their children that day and so we will have classes of 10. I can get around and speak to every single child. I can give them a bit of personal attention for up to two or three minutes, which is more than they have had. I can speak to students I have never spoken to because they are cruising along and are not demanding any help. Usually the ones who are troublesome are not there that day. Or, if you have one troublesome child, you can get them back on track, get their self-esteem and their momentum back up and feeling good about where they are with that particular class. It makes a huge difference. If we responded to disadvantage in a much bigger way that would certainly be a strategy.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Philip, in terms of cooperation and competition—the vexed issue—managed badly, competition can be an evil thing.

**Mr Altmann**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So can cooperation.

**Mr Altmann**—Can it?

**Mr SAWFORD**—It can reduce everything to the lowest common denominator. There are pluses and minuses in everything. From your submission it seems that you reject out of hand all competition. Is that correct?

**Mr Altmann**—No, it depends on the nature of the group again. If I think the nature of the group is a highly competitive group and that competitiveness brings out negative behaviours and harassment and bullying and put-down and bad language, I will then temper the competitiveness.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What if it does the opposite though: it challenges them, it makes them take risk; it makes them creative?

**Mr Altmann**—Great, fantastic.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you use those strategies.

**Mr Altmann**—Yes. Again, it is the nature of the group. What populace do I have? What group do I have? That determines what I do, how I do it, what I say. It is not the methodology. It is what the kids are like.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Roger, a question on violence. If you look at the negative behaviours that are sometimes portrayed about boys—and girls, for that matter—substance abuse has been recorded in the education department information we had that 92 per cent of boys never get involved in gross substance abuse. In other words, the majority do not. I think it is 96 per cent for girls. If you look at young boys who have been convicted of a crime of violence under the age of 18, you are looking at less than half a per cent of the boy population in Australia. America is looked upon as a very violent society but the figures from the United States are exactly the same, yet we have examples of Littleton and Columbine High School. Do you think in terms of—Elizabeth has difficult schools to work in, but sometimes negative behaviours of boys are too dominating in terms of the agenda and just turn them off even more. It is a deficit way of approaching things. I thought we got past running deficit models, but listening to the education department this morning it seems you are still into them in this state.

**Mr Button**—When you say a deficit model—

**Mr SAWFORD**—In other words, you focus on negative behaviours instead of focusing on positive behaviours. Instead of writing about and documenting teaching strategies that work, you document problems that are identified. It is a different way of looking at it. I thought we had got over all this deficit modelling in education 20 years ago. Here it is, it comes back and it stares you right in the face again.

**Mr Adams**—One of the things that I do know is going on with a lot of schools is we are investigating the culture of a school: what is it we want, how do we promote a positive culture? They are the questions that some schools are looking at. I agree with you about the deficit model. That has got to go.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you agree it is there though?

**Mr Adams**—I would say it is a lot less than it was 20 years ago.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I was there 20 years ago. I am telling you, there is a lot more now.

**Mr Adams**—I would disagree.

**Mr Button**—There is a balance between hiding your head in the sand and saying it does not exist. That eight per cent that you talk about is usually the most overt 8 per cent. They are the eight per cent that break 80 windows in our school in one weekend; that steal six computers; that flood a whole level of a classroom because they have broken in and been able to—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Does that then make questions for the judicial system?

**Mr Button**—It does.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Those two young boys in Columbine High School have been walking around the school for years with ‘I am a serial murderer,’ on their T-shirts. They had swastikas all over themselves. They were involved in Nazi memorabilia for years and never had been challenged by the school system that that was inappropriate. They had access to guns too.

**Mr Adams**—That is what I mean about the culture: knowing what you accept and expect from kids and knowing what is okay and not okay. We went through a time where we accepted that however people wanted to act in schools was okay. Now we are getting to a point where we are saying clearly there are some things that are not okay. Our culture has to say, ‘This is not okay,’ because what we are producing is people for society; if it is not okay in our schools then we need to address it in our schools.

**Mr Altmann**—One of the things we are looking at at our school—we have been doing it for the last six months—is what values the staff have. They are the teachers, they are the practitioners. We are looking at what they value in education; what they think is important to bring to the site. How do they resolve conflict with other staff? How do they address student conflict when it arises in the classroom? What do they think is important? We are looking at our values and then, from our values, we ask the students what are their values. We marry together student and teacher values and it becomes a site set of values, so you are not dysfunctional and you are not coming from all different positions. You actually talk about your language: ‘What do you mean by equity?’ I bet you everyone in this room has a different idea of what it means. ‘What do you mean by harassment?’ I bet you it is the same.

The question is, ‘What are your values?’ You take those onto the site. The kids put their values together and as a population we develop a culture of the school and the values of the site. That has been missing in the department strategies because that is the glue that keeps the community together. That is where the energy is now being put. That is the new focus and it is about time.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Unfortunately time has run out. If I can ask one final question, out of interest: that book of an example of a student, Tristan, is a very high standard. It was very clean, neat and correct.



**Mr Altmann**—Yes, very good.

**CHAIR**—What percentage in the classroom would be like Tristan?

**Mr Altmann**—That is one of the best. He would be in the top two or three per cent, absolutely.

**CHAIR**—I would like to thank you, because it has been a very honest, open and frank discussion. That is what we need to be hearing. We value your input and when the report is brought down we will make sure that we get a book sent out to you.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.35 p.m. to 1.48 p.m.**

**SLADE, Mr Malcolm Douglas, Research Assistant, Flinders University**

**TRENT, Prof. Faith Helen Elly, Head, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Flinders University**

**CHAIR**—Welcome to our inquiry here in Adelaide into the education of boys. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Prof. Trent**—Yes. My discipline area is education. I am a professor in the field of curriculum and, along with my partner in crime, Malcolm, we have just been engaged in a DETYA funded project looking at the perceptions of adolescent males on schooling and retention.

**Mr Slade**—I am a research fellow at Flinders University in the school of education and principal researcher in the work done last year on boys' education, headed up by Faith.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but, at any stage, should you wish to give private evidence, the committee will consider that. Would you like to make an opening statement before we proceed to questions?

**Prof. Trent**—Very briefly. I was involved in this originally because I had adolescent sons and it occurred to me, as they were sitting around and eating their way through the cupboards, and listening to them, that there was a whole range of issues that I did not believe had been explored. So I went to the literature and discovered that, in fact, most of the literature about adolescent males had been written by teachers, by academics, by parents, and there were lots of comments from the media, but nobody had actually heard the boys at all. Nobody had asked them what they thought. That was the genesis of the project. I went to Canberra and it was funded from there.

**Mr Slade**—We talked with 1,800 boys last year for an hour and a half each, in groups of 10; one group of year 9s, one group of year 11s—they were chosen at random—and a group of mixed year 9s to 11s, considered by the school to be boys at risk either in terms of achievement or retention. In the first 20 schools we returned to those boys with a summary of what we thought they were saying, and gave them the chance to look at it, decide whether it was their views, and to alter it where necessary. With the subsequent 40 schools we did much the same thing towards the end of their 1½-hour session. So we are quite confident that what we have put together is, in fact, the views of these boys. Usefully, it was very uniform, which makes it easy to present; surprisingly uniform, given the diversity of the sample.

**CHAIR**—Did you go from private to public and to all-boys schools?

**Mr Slade**—Yes. The sample included 60 schools across all sectors, a very broad and comprehensive representation of schools in South Australia, without question.

**Prof. Trent**—Both rural and city.

**Ms GILLARD**—In selecting the 60 schools were you trying to replicate proportion wise the South Australian education system overall—so many state, so many Catholic, so many Anglican?

**Prof. Trent**—We started off doing that. We were originally going to go to 20 schools and we started the project by sending a letter out to South Australian schools saying, ‘Would you like to come and hear about a project we’re thinking about?’ About 50 schools turned up. Everybody said, ‘We’d like to be in this,’ and at that stage we had an idea of whom we might select, because we also received from them the projects they were running. It is in the report. You will see that when the report comes out. It is due to be published very shortly. There are tables of what those schools were already doing and how useful they thought it was. Then, accidentally, we sent the letter to all of the schools saying, ‘You’ve been chosen.’

We went back to Canberra and told them that we had made a mistake but it could be fortuitous and they then funded us to do the 60 schools. To round it out, in February of this year we asked the schools to come back to talk about our findings, and 45 of them turned up to have more discussion about what research they thought should be done, what else they wanted to see done—you might be interested in that—and to hear what we had said.

**Ms GILLARD**—So the schools self-selected, effectively.

**Prof. Trent**—Yes, but given the number of schools, it was a large mix.

**Ms GILLARD**—How many of them would have been all-boys schools in that 60?

**Mr Slade**—There was one all-boys school. Most of the all-boys schools in South Australia, as you may know, are now co-ed schools. In some cases we visited schools where there were only 16 girls. It was effectively still a boys’ school.

**Ms GILLARD**—How was the random selection process done?

**Mr Slade**—The school selected the groups prior to our coming. They used their own choice of random selection. In most cases it was done quite well. It appeared in the first few weeks that it was not, because of the uniformity, so we did a couple of things to ensure that it was random. One of the things was ask the boys, ‘How well are you doing?’ To our surprise, we found before us straight-A students, students who were doing okay and students who were not doing well. It was very clearly a random selection. I do not have any doubts about that now, although I did in the first two or three weeks. But that was clearly unfounded.

**Ms GILLARD**—Then a group in each school was selected as being at risk?

**Mr Slade**—Yes. The years 9 to 11 group was selected as boys known to be at risk. Again, surprisingly, they did not stand out very much in discussion; perhaps only in the degree to which they were prepared to respond to certain things, the intensity of feeling perhaps here and there. Generally speaking, the boys’ views were uniform across the board.

**Ms GILLARD**—Did you conduct the interviews?

**Mr Slade**—Yes. They were not conducted as interviews, though. They were discussions. They were focus group discussion sessions. The initial question posed to them was, ‘The figures suggest that there are declining rates of achievement and retention for boys. The media you’ve heard talk about it. Perhaps you’ve heard it talked about at school. What do you think the issues and problems are? Is this an issue at all for you? What do you think they are and what do you think explains it? What sort of things do you think we should be doing in response to it?’ That was the only question that was asked of them.

**Ms GILLARD**—Except for you, were there other adults present?

**Mr Slade**—No.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Would you describe your research project as essentially qualitative, a combination of—

**Prof. Trent**—Qualitative.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Totally qualitative?

**Prof. Trent**—The data on retention and achievement is out. We used that as the basis. That was part of what we knew was out there. There was no point in replicating it. The rates of male participation in education are declining, and they are declining in South Australia, so we did not see any point in following that. This was, in fact, intended to plug what we saw as a gap. As I said, there is a lot of literature about the quantitative stuff. We also did a questionnaire later as a pilot and there are some results from that. But we did not have a sufficiently large sample to justify it as being something that we would say was universal.

**Mr SAWFORD**—One of my observations—and it may not necessarily be shared by my committee colleagues—is that when you have a look at the orthodoxy that is presented by state education departments, some in academia to a lesser degree, certainly in the AEU that we have seen and in the independent education union we have seen, there is an almost slavish copy of the Carol Gilligan school of gender studies from Harvard. When you ask for references to quantitative research they all say, ‘Yes,’ but they can never point to any. You said there is quantitative research available on boys’ education. Would you like to point us in the direction of where this is?

**Prof. Trent**—There is certainly ABS statistical data.

**Mr SAWFORD**—No, other than that. That is ABS data, that is just there. You make a qualitative interpretation of that. I mean actual quantitative data on gender equity or boys’ education. Is there any information anywhere?

**Mr Slade**—There is not a lot of quantitative data on their views of it, that is true. I have not found a lot of quantitative data on the views of teachers either. One of the reasons, in fact, for preparing this pilot quantitative survey was to come up with 100 statements that the boys frequently made, in order to put those statements to the student body in a larger sample. We

thought that would be something quite new and it would be something quite useful. Nothing like that, to my knowledge, has been done. It would be useful to do.

**Mr SAWFORD**—This seems to be a very polarised debate. We have had presented to us from some people that nurture is everything and nature is nothing. We have had presented to us that qualitative research is the only research that is required and quantitative research is not required. We have had put to us a whole range of even smaller concepts of cooperation is all good and competition is all bad. They basically go down that particular line. If I go back to your executive summary, you were saying exactly the opposite to the orthodoxy.

**Prof. Trent**—Yes. We are saying that. I do not think we see it as a dichotomous issue. I was quoted in the *Advertiser* recently as saying that I think the kind of adversarial system that we are setting up—girls versus boys, X versus Y—is totally destructive and damaging. It is focusing things in all the wrong directions. There are obviously issues for some girls in some schools, there are issues for some boys in some schools and, as Malcolm keeps saying, there is a lot of overlap. There are some boys that behave in the way that traditionally the girls behave, for all sorts of reasons.

There are some people who think that teaching boys to be masculine is the most important thing you can do in the world. We would reject that, and the boys would reject it. This is really phenomenological stuff and we need to respond in that way. We have to deal with it differently. It is not a matter of gender equity.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Why do you say it is not a matter of gender equity?

**Prof. Trent**—Because the responses vary across a whole spectrum. There are issues about being adolescent and male in Australian society, but they impinge differently on different groups of kids. The model that we used for girls' education was based on political questions. The question was different, in my view. The girls' stuff was a political question about the role of women in society, about a political way of changing the perception of women's access to education. In many ways, it was giving girls confidence to do well. To put that model on top of the boys, and think that you can do it that way and fix the boys up—this terrible desire to 'fix the boys up'—seems to be very dangerous. What you are getting—that it is this or this or this—means you are going to fix them up because you have an ideal model in your head about what they ought to look like.

**Mr SAWFORD**—There is a lot of orthodoxy around of—almost the Gloria Steinem method—'We will raise our boys as we raised our girls.' You would see that as very dangerous?

**Mr Slade**—I came into this without any idea of preconceived views, and not a great deal of knowledge about orthodoxy. One of the things that surprised me when I went through the literature in detail from the outset was that there were two schools of thought on this in the literature, coming mainly from gender, about gender difference or about gender equity, and the other school was coming at it as masculinity crisis, masculinity issues—this is about boys, and boys and masculinity.

What we did was not to decide whether they were right or wrong, nor did we decide whether the boys were right or wrong. It was not the task from the outset. The task was to bring their

views onto the table: this is what they think. Whether they are right or wrong is not the issue. We need to know what they think. We need to know their perception of what is going on around them. Is it a gender issue? We cannot definitely say, 'No, it's not.' What we can say is that they do not think so. They are in fact very clear that it is not. Yet, they identify gender issues, they identify gender differences. They even go on about the perennial gender rivalry. This is the sort of thing that features in their discussion.

Their reasoning and their views clearly support the view that it is not a gender issue; this is about the ideal, the preferred, student. Most girls meet the criteria of the preferred student. Most boys do not. That is how they understand it. In the middle of a discussion I would frequently get a couple of boys saying, 'Why are you talking about boys' issues with all this? It's not about boys. I'll get some girls and show you.' And before I could stop them they were halfway out the door. They are very strong in their belief that this is wrongly talked about as a boys' issue. Girls believe the same things, it is just that girls are much more careful, much more focused on year 12.

The boys say they must be, because there is a bracket of jobs in the middle that they do not want. The boys say, 'I'm happy with them. If that was what I had to get, I'm quite happy.' So the girls are focused on year 12, the boys are not, and they know they are not. Years 8, 9 and 10 are a waste of time as far as they are concerned. They know they get serious at the beginning of year 11. They also know that the workload at that point is hell on earth and it cannot be managed. It cannot be managed by a bunch of boys who have already been bored out of their brains at school. They have already reached the point where, at 16 or 17 years of age, in a society that has decreased the age at which we become adults, they see themselves as being adults outside of school. At that point—they have part-time jobs, they have sport, they have girlfriends—they have a whole lot of reasons why they cannot do a workload like year 11, and they chuck it in.

**Prof. Trent**—You asked whether it is a gender equity issue. It is more an alien in the classroom issue, Rod. There is a much greater gap between life in school and life outside school than probably there has ever been before. The kinds of notions of adulthood that are portrayed in the wider society are often rejected in the school environment. Up to 80 per cent of these kids work up to 20 hours a week, they go to school and somebody gives them a lecture on how to get a job! We kept finding all these sorts of things. That is a very simple example of the kinds of things I am talking about, but we have lots of stories like that. All they were getting were these mixed messages. Then if they said, 'Well, we don't believe that,' they were seen to be behaving rudely, being rude, challenging authority, et cetera, with many of the teachers in many of the schools.

As Malcolm said—and this is really important—we really were not interested in whether they were right or wrong, because this is their reality and that is what they are living with. That is what they are acting out. That is what they are responding to. One school where Malcolm went, he had it all set up to go immediately after the middle of the year. All of the groups were there and when he got there the first day of term 2 everyone was gone. They were all gone, all 30 of them. They had left the school in the break. They had gone because it was not worth it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If you were recommending to education departments and government, what would you be recommending? Would you be recommending that there needs to be more

research on this issue? Would you recommend following the current policies of state governments around the country in terms of the education of boys? What would you be saying to government? What would you be saying—if they would actually listen—to state education departments around this country?

**Prof. Trent**—There does need to be more research. I think you have picked up some of the issues. We need to know more about how you might decide what good teaching is. The boys were very clear about what good teaching is and we have actually put up with ACER, a proposal to look at good teaching and defining an instrument of how you might measure good teaching, in terms of what the kids say as well as what we have traditionally said. We are hoping to get some funding for that. That came out of the Melbourne conference that James was at.

There are other issues about looking at what an adult learning environment really is. Is it just the top two years of the school hived off somewhere, where we still behave the same way as we did before? Where is it successful? Is it successful anywhere in Australia? We need to try and distill those elements so we can then start to say to state departments, 'This is the kind of environment we need. If you really want these kids to succeed, these are the kinds of things that you need to look at when you think about staffing of schools, when you think about putting suitable teachers in, when you think about giving teachers more autonomy.' Teachers are caught in a bind; it is not all black-and-white. There is very little time in school days any more for teachers to listen; the pressures on them are enormous.

I have my own private views about some of the things we could stop doing. This is not out of the research. The fact that we have a curriculum defined by a credentialing agency, or a credentialing agency defining a curriculum—i.e., the SACE stuff has a whole lot of stuff that needs to be unpicked. In this state we have just gone through the process of the SACSA project but we have to wait and see how well it operates. It certainly purports to have very different underpinnings from those that have underpinned education traditionally. Although it has the eight key learning areas, it also has those essential learnings, and it comes slap up against the year 11 and 12 curriculum and pressures on the kids to do a whole lot of assignments under time lines that disadvantage the boys. Continuous assessment advantages girls. It does not advantage the boys, by and large.

**Ms GILLARD**—Why?

**Prof. Trent**—Most girls are better organised at that age. There are issues of nature. I am not suggesting that it is not, I just do not think it is all X and Y or Z. But girls tend to be better organised, they tend to be more future focused. They are probably more tolerant of things being unfair than the boys. Not being fair is something that is a very strong push among young males, whatever it is, and whether it is or whether it is not. With continuous assessment girls tend to get assignments in on time. It is the same with first year university. Boys did much better when we had sudden-death examinations, but there were problems with that as well and I am not suggesting we return to it.

Maybe we need to look at alternative forms of assessment. We have this view that if you assess everybody in the same way then it is fair, but in fact if you start off with things being different and you assess everybody the same way, you get different results. It is that kind of notion. We begin to see it when we deal with people with disabilities. We are not very good at it but we

are better at it than we were, but we are certainly not good at it in dealing with different learning styles, different aspirations and all of those sorts of things.

There are all sorts of curriculum issues that follow from this and I would want state departments to start to look at that. I would want them to start to look at the issues, and this is true across the states. It is true in New South Wales with the HSC. Queensland is interesting because, of course, it does not have a final public exam, and neither does the ACT. You have different systems. Nobody has done any comparative stuff to have a look at what that might mean, so there is research to be done on that.

State departments need to look at where the focus is, too. I suspect that teachers are also bound by a whole set of assumptions about classrooms that might not be true. I have just written a paper that I am giving tomorrow in Perth about current educational issues. If you really think about it, the classrooms of today are often not very different than they were at the turn of the century. The desks are not nailed down and school is the only place, apart from the army, that you herd a whole lot of people together and shout at them, only we call it assembly. We should start to think about the cultural messages that go out, often because of hierarchical stuff. Bullying at schools is the same kind of thing: we are a bullying society, in many ways. We have a tradition of it. Look at schools: we have systems of prefects, hierarchies, the kinds of things that are expected of teachers, and the kinds of structures that we put in. Then we are surprised when the kids pick up those messages and start to act them out.

There are a whole range of things that you can say to departments. We could think about what is good practice. How does it get to be good practice? What are we doing to try and change, to loosen some of the ties to change what we do in schools?

**Mr SAWFORD**—It seems that everything, when it comes to boys, is overstated. Even the department provided information this morning that, in terms of substance abuse—and the studies are all there—92 per cent of boys are not involved in any heavy substance abuse.

**Prof. Trent**—Sure.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It is a minority. With girls, it is half that size at only four per cent. Regarding violence, we have had those terrible stories about Columbine and Littleton and so on, but even in America boys who are convicted of violent crime—or is it charged? It might be convicted. It is 0.05 of the male population. In some ways we do not have the comparative data from, say, 50 years ago, but it would seem that, although unacceptable, it is not blown out of all proportion. Yet many boys seem to feel, in terms of how they are responding here, that they are all regarded as violent; they are potential rapists. Some people actually describe them that way in the literature.

**Prof. Trent**—I think our kids are terrific. I think the boys are terrific. In fact, one of the things in one of the chapters is the unacknowledged curriculum vitae—these kids are successful, but they are successful in terms that the school does not necessarily measure as success. I think they are kinder and gentler than we were. I think they are far more tolerant in a whole range of ways than we were. I agree with you. But in a lot of the literature the approach is ‘fixing up the boys’. They are bigger and they are heavier and they are noisier than they were. We have created a culture in which if you see five boys together you are frightened of them. I am not, but



you see it, and all they are doing is shouting at each other in a normal kind of way, and part of that has been the press they receive and the assumptions about how they ought to behave. I do not think they have probably changed over the generations. It is just that we are looking at it through a different lens.

**Mr SAWFORD**—The use of Ritalin in some areas in Australia is just unbelievable.

**Prof. Trent**—Malcolm might want to say something about that.

**Mr Slade**—What do we do? Rather than tell you what I think, I would rather tell you what the boys think. They think that there are very simple things to do. Most of their problems they think can be fixed very quickly. One good teacher is enough, just one, and the whole world is good. As far as they are concerned, 'Teachers need to be retrained. They don't like the job, they don't teach well. They don't understand us. They're too old.'

When they talk about 'too old', they do not talk about old in terms of years. They talk about old in terms of attitudes. There is out there, it seems, a generation gap that is much larger than we saw in the sixties, but we cannot call it that because most of our now old people are groovy, progressive, the rhetoric is fantastic stuff if you read it. It is all very progressive. It is just that it is not done, and the boys think that it is not done. I do not think there is disagreement out there about what ought to happen. I just think there is disagreement about whether or not it is happening. They believe that it is clearly not, and the way they talked to me sent me home thinking on the first night, 'Has nothing changed in 35 years?'

And then I said to Faith in the second week, 'There are lots of surprises but I'm surprised we're surprised.' They believe that we need good teachers. They have one or two. Ten per cent was the number they gave me in most schools. Where there are a lot more, younger teachers in the country schools, where there are a lot more, younger teachers in the smaller private schools, low budget schools, the number gets up around 30, 40, 50, sometimes 60 per cent. Age seems to have a big difference. Gender does not have much difference at all. It has no impact whatsoever. They talk about teachers, male, female, very rarely drawing a distinction. When they are asked, 'Is there a distinction?', 'No, you people have got hang-ups about this gender stuff. You're always talking about gender.' 'They've a 30-centimetre rule in my school. What the hell's that?' They do not understand the adult world in terms of gender and they do not understand our interest in it.

It is not about gender for teachers either. It is about attitudes. It is about where you are culturally. And in many cases, I suspect their attitudes are not that far from the teachers. Again, it is whether or not you express it. 'The good teacher is the person who shuts the door and breaks the rules. The good teacher is the person who is not compliant and does not conform. The good teacher is the person who gets on with us and says "Bugger the rules."' 'One quote is in the report, I think, and that is, 'He abides to his rules, always, but not the school's,' because they get in the way. 'He is a good teacher, he's a legend.'

Another legend that was talked about the entire day at one school turned out in the afternoon to be a crisis I wish I had avoided, a teacher who had been reprimanded recently for being too close to students, a teacher who had come to that meeting to resign and was waiting for the principal, and I had the misfortune of saying, 'Well, they think that your librarian is pretty

good.' It happened to be that teacher, and that was a pattern that was repeated in most schools. The legends are not legends in the staffroom because they break the rules.

**CHAIR**—We might get on with a few more questions, as time is running out.

**Mr Slade**—Sorry.

**Mr BARRESI**—Just to follow that, Malcolm, because we have also heard from some other witnesses and we have experienced it as well with perhaps our own families or friends, more and more parents are moving their kids out of the public system into private schooling. Obviously we must have it wrong as well as parents of these kids, moving them to an environment where there is greater control and greater discipline, where perhaps that scope to break the rules to suit the expectation of the kids is not there. Do you have a comment to make about that? That really is a contradiction in terms of not only what the Education Department is providing but what we are providing to society as well.

**Mr Slade**—One of the surprises is that the schools that they are moving them to—and I suspect parents, like the rest of us, are suffering with uncertainty and anxieties and they want to see their kids safe, certainly in the future, and moving them to what they think are safe schools is an indication of the cultural gap yet again. As far as the boys are concerned in those schools, these are not ideal environments. The way they describe and talk about their education is, 'It is no different from the public school that I went to down the road, no different whatsoever.' It is just a lot more expensive, it seems.

However, as far as a particular senior school in Adelaide, as far as the boys are concerned, it has no problems whatsoever. This is a good school. We spent an hour and a half talking about the problems of the previous schools, private schools and state schools that these boys had been to. Why is this one a good one? 'Teachers are on first name basis, they treat you as an adult, they respect you. You've got a name around here,' and so on. It is a cultural difference, largely.

There are some other interesting little suggestions, if I might make them, that the boys have put forward. For years 8, 9 and 10, they think for example that there is a lot of wasted time, piles of it. Interestingly, the profession believes they are largely responsible for it, but they believe that there is too much wasted time. 'We should be able to do all that work in two years. I would work a lot harder if I could. I'm being lazy, I'm being disorganised because I'm bored.' They think it could be done in two years. They think year 10 is a bludge year. It is universally described as a bludge year in all schools, so much so that some schools bring Australian Studies, which is universally described as the most boring wasted subject anyone has ever dreamt of—by the way, I have spoken with hundreds and hundreds of staff on this journey in many staffrooms that I have addressed now for long hours, and they feel exactly the same.

As to Australian studies, where have we gone wrong? It is a disastrous course, 'boring, out-of-date, who wrote that thing?' These boys believe that year 10 is a bludge year and it is filled up by the schools with boring stuff. 'Why do they do that? It is bad enough as it is. But year 11 is when it gets serious. The staff get serious, the whole thing gets serious. Parents get serious. But life is now very busy and we can't hack the pace.' They believe, 'Give us year 10, give us a flexible program. Why can't we do 10, 11, 12 if we work part time, or do it all in one year if you're good enough. The whole thing is too tight, it's too rigid. These people are living

in the past. Where are the computers?' they want to know. 'Where's the online learning?' they want to know. Where's the flexibility that this stuff provides? It does not give it to them. It is in the resource centre run by the librarian, who is as strict as hell and tells you to go outside because you make a noise.

**Prof. Trent**—And who also is concerned to make sure the girls get access to the computers, and because if they do it at lunchtime and they do not drop crumbs in the computer, they get access, and many of the boys are not getting access to the computers, which is counter-intuitive to what we think is happening. If I might say, in terms of your question, I think we sound as though it is all very clear. For them, too, they are quite clear about what they think, but in many cases they recognise that parents are trying to do the right thing, but for them the focus is in the wrong place, and that is the issue. The really sad thing that came out of a lot of it is that for many of them the notion of lifelong learning is the most disastrous thing anybody could ever possibly imagine, 'Because when I've finished this, I'm never coming back again to anything.'

Now, some of them will say, 'I'm going to university because I'm going to somewhere,' but for the large number of them they do not know where they are going. Many of us did not know where we were going at that age, and they do not, and therefore they are not prepared to make the investment in an environment that they find difficult, unpleasant and very often treats them with less respect than they would get working in McDonald's at 2 o'clock in the morning, and that is the really terrifying part of this, because, as Malcolm's response said, by this stage they are driving cars, they are running complex social lives, they are very often working, they are often saving to do the things that they want to do, whatever they might be. In some cases in the rural communities they are actually supporting their families with that money, and yet that is not valued because you worked till 2 o'clock in the morning and you didn't get your assignment in on time. 'So what can we do with you? We'll put you on detention.'

It is that kind of stuff. The rhetoric, as Malcolm says, is all right, but what is happening and the relationship between the cultures is just so far apart that it is almost irreconcilable. That does not mean it cannot be done, but what we have to do is really focus on education and not on the trivia. You probably can learn equally well if you have the wrong colour shoes on, as you can if you have the right colour shoes.

**Ms GILLARD**—One of the things I have been asking almost everybody in this inquiry, and it comes out of this discussion, too, is this: part of the reason for having this inquiry is if you looked at data about boys' educational attainment 20 years ago, not much difference with the girls; if anything, slightly in front. Now when we look at it, boys behind in some sets of statistics—badly behind. What I have been trying to get my head around is what has changed in those 20 years, because people come along and tell us things, boys like active learning and they are more likely to squirm and wriggle in class. That was undoubtedly true 20 years ago, a hundred years ago. So that cannot be the factor causing the change, and I am trying to come to grips in my own head with what those factors are.

I was in school 20 years and I suspect if anybody had come and asked the boys then, they would have said school was crap and the teachers were crap and studying Shakespeare was crap and it was all irrelevant. I can understand the disjuncture between outside life and school life is probably greater now. I think that resonates as correct. But in terms of these attitudinal things, is there anything in your research which would enable us to suggest that those things are becom-

ing more acute and, if so, why are they becoming more acute, and is it just because we are trying to retain in education a cohort of boys that we would have happily let move into the labour market 20 years ago, or are there other explanations?

**Prof. Trent**—Can I pick up the stats thing and let Malcolm pick up the rest. I think it depends what you are measuring. What happened 20 years ago is that fewer of the girls went on, so you have changed the balance of the numbers that you throw at the system. That is the first thing. Data that we have from England from 100 years ago shows that the same thing was true then: girls outperformed boys, but there were far fewer of them and therefore nobody cared as much. That has always been the case.

There is also the fact that economically it is much better for girls to go on because there are still jobs out in the community for which the level of education does not have to be years 11 and 12 for boys, where they can still earn a reasonable amount of money. That is not true for girls. There is a much better economic return for girls than there is for boys, and this is a generation that has quite a sense of materialism, and they are well aware of that. So I do not think that the statistical changes are all that great. I think several other things have happened. Because we are throwing everybody at the system now and because more of the kids of the middle class are in fact starting to drop out, where once upon a time the goals of the parents tended to shape the goals of the young. That is different. Kids are making their own decisions much earlier and in different ways and it has become a political issue, because now it is important, and people who once upon a time did not mind if the blue-collar workers dropped out are now seeing their own kids following a pattern that they would rather they did not.

**Mr Slade**—A couple of related things that are paradoxical: one of them is that there has been an increase in democratisation and liberalisation over the last 30 years in this society, and unquestionably it has been driven by a generation of baby boomers, starting in the sixties with a vengeance. That same generation of baby boomers is now occupying the profession of teaching and in greater concentrations perhaps than any other profession. The average age of teaching in South Australia is 47. It is much the same in other states. However, if you look around the classrooms in metropolitan state schools in particular, it is almost 55, maybe even higher. This clearly is a major factor and it has not been brought into the discussion at any point that I have seen.

It is also a particular type of person, of course, a person who did well at school, a person who did well at university and a person who lives a very similar lifestyle—middle-class Australia, in fact—who has a very narrow and clear idea of what constitutes the sort of person I can handle and I am happy to be with. That is one dimension to it.

The other one is that the girls, the boys believe, feel the same way. They just have to comply, they have to conform, they have no other option. They have been pumped up to take a place in the workforce, which is fine. The boys are entirely happy with that. They bear no resentment whatsoever to the girls and they see no reason why they should not get everything they are working for. They are working hard and they deserve it. That is their view. The girls, they say, are working hard, are sucking up where necessary, they are doing what they are told. They are getting the work done because they do not have any other option.

They must get through to year 12 because that is the only way they can do well. They have been told that by parents. They have been told that by teachers and they believe it. The media tells them. That is what the boys think. 'We have got more options than they have. We do not have to take this. The girls'—they say—'believe this is equally an out of date, unpleasant environment and they would like to get out just as much as we would.'

**CHAIR**—Thank you. We have time for one last question.

**Prof. Trent**—Before you asked the question, you asked me about recommendations and I have a recommendation for the federal government, so can we come back to it?

**Mr WILKIE**—It probably follows on from Julia's question—very similar to it really—I was in school 20 years ago as a boy. Had you asked me the same question that you have asked the boys today I would have said exactly the same things they have said. Given that basically the responses would be identical and I would imagine the same percentage of boys would have said the same things, what is the difference now? You have said that girls go on more now than they did, but boys go on a lot more because they found there were not any opportunities for them to do other things. What is it that is different now, 20 years down the track, that is causing boys not to learn at the same rate?

**Prof. Trent**—I think they learn at the same rate. They do not learn the same things.

**Mr WILKIE**—The discussion on curriculum, which I thought was a very important issue which a lot of people have raised, touched on quality of teaching.

**Prof. Trent**—As I said before, we have a far greater gap between what happens outside the school and what happens inside the school than we have ever had before in terms of what we accept as adulthood, the age at which people become adults and the age at which they make decisions. The nature of the debate.

We have spent our lives as baby boomers trying to get our kids to communicate, argue and discuss. When they do we say, 'Well, we really don't like that very much.' You only have to look at American sitcoms and see the interactions those kids are exposed to. They expect to have a right to have a say. I think that was not so true—we might have thought it, but we did not necessarily voice it—so you are getting different kinds of pressures. Very often the response of teachers is that they become very defensive. That is the responsibility of teacher education. We have to do it differently in universities.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can I clarify one thing you said to Kim. Are you saying that boys are in fact learning a whole range of things that are not being measured?

**Prof. Trent**—Yes.

**Mr Slade**—Absolutely. There is a chapter in our report called 'the unrecognised CV'. I wrote that in the first three weeks and after that I saw absolutely no reason to change a word of it. It was a repeated pattern throughout. They have a range of achievements they believe are important; so important that they are prepared to sacrifice success at school, which is not as important. These are very important achievements and they tie in a lot with the cultural shift.

With respect in the last 20 years there has been a big change and it has been a cultural change. It has been a change brought on by the baby boomers.

Yes, the issues are very similar. The intensity is much greater. The age at which they want these things is much younger. A lot of these boys talk about running their lives already at 12, 13, 14. 'My mother and father both work. I have been running my life for a long time.' It is not an issue for them. They are not angry about it. It is just a reality, but it is a reality no-one understands less than the school, as far as they are concerned.

**Ms GILLARD**—What sort of achievements are on this unrecognised CV? It is that, is it, running life and—

**Mr Slade**—Yes. Of the year 11 boys, 60 per cent to 70 per cent had part-time jobs. These are part-time jobs the adult workforce does not want. They would not have them. They are supervisory jobs. They are jobs where they have to come in at short notice and do another shift at 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the morning. They do not get their homework done. They come along to school the next day with a fudged homework. 'You will get a low mark, how do you feel about that?' 'Well, bad luck, I can't give up my job. I won't give up my job.'

**Prof. Trent**—'It gives me independence.'

**Mr Slade**—'It gives me adulthood. In that job I am treated as an adult. I've been waiting for that for years.' An example is a boy in a country town with three mates—had grown up with them, went to school with them, same school, same teachers—he was heading to be an engineer. This is how he described himself on the first visit. He stayed at school because he wanted to do year 12. It was important to him. The other three left, same reasons. They got jobs in the town, not difficult to get. One of them has a flat he shares with some mates and they are all adults in the town as far as he is concerned. He plays football with them. He says, 'I am a second-rate citizen in this town. I come to school and they tell me to change my shoes. I am not allowed to go home at lunchtime. I can't walk down the street at lunchtime. I have to sit in the classroom and do exactly what I am told. These people can take away my future.' Out there, they are earning money and they are being people and they are treated that way. I went back to that boy five months later and he had gone.

**Prof. Trent**—Can I make one recommendation?

**CHAIR**—Yes, please do.

**Prof. Trent**—There is a large job to be done in terms of both teacher education and in professional development of teachers.

**Mr WILKIE**—I am glad you raised that because I was going to try and slip that in as a question.

**Prof. Trent**—Teacher education in university often suffers from the same sorts of issues the schools do, so I hold no brief for this being the best place in the world, but there are two things I wanted to say about that. There is money in professional development that the minister has put out for professional development, but it is all in literacy and numeracy and science and maths

and it is not about how you deal with kids. That is one thing. The focus needs to shift so that we look at what is really happening to the culture of the school. How do we take those teachers who are in the system and get them to confront some of the issues that Malcolm has been talking about, about the cultural change?

The second thing is we have, over the last four years—at Flinders anyway—filled our teacher education courses with students with first preferences. They are an outstanding bunch. The cut-offs are high. Most of them will find it very difficult to get jobs because there are not the positions here. They are being picked up by the private schools or they are going to the United States or the United Kingdom.

But one of the problems for us in teacher education is that it is extremely badly underfunded. It was funded at a time when, if you were a teacher, what you did was use a piece of chalk on a blackboard. We are also in the position that we are in the only profession that pays teachers to initiate the young in practice teaching. In other words, there is an industrial agreement whereby we have to pay for—this is across Australia, this is not separate—but we are not funded for it. In teacher education I have half a million dollars that comes into my budget to teach students and it does not touch the sides. It goes straight out the other side.

We are now at a point that in order to be able to deal with teacher education it desperately needs funding input right across the country in order to do the kinds of things that we expect our teachers to do. We expect a huge amount of them. They have to be able to deal with the norms of society. They have to be able to input IT across the curriculum. They have to be able to counsel kids. They have to be able to deal with kids with special needs. They have to be able to understand the fact that kids live different kinds of lives. They have to be au fait with at least one of the eight key learning areas and probably two. If they are primary teachers they have to be able to deal with kids from non-English-speaking backgrounds, quite often without any support.

In teacher education we are trying to compress this in a time when we cannot hire staff. We cannot hire staff because we do not have enough money, so everybody is skimping. If we want really good teachers, the funding of teacher education in universities needs to be relooked at. It has not been looked at since the 1970s when there were no computers. Nobody had computers in teacher education. None of the staff did, none of the students did. There were a whole range of things that people were not called on to do any more, that they are now called on to do. It has really reached crisis proportions. There is a role for teacher education; we need to rethink it but we need to be able to afford to do the things that we want from our teachers.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We really appreciate your input today and value the time you have given to us. The report hopefully could be down by the end of this year and we will make sure you get a copy of it.

**Prof. Trent**—I do not know if it is of any interest, but I have written a paper for Perth on current issues. If you would like a copy of it I am happy to leave it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We would love it.

**Prof. Trent**—It deals with this and bullying and other things. Thank you very much for listening to us.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.



[2.40 p.m.]

**HORSELL, Mr Graeden Robert, President, South Australian Association of State School Organisations**

**WOOLLACOTT, Mr Henry Mark, Executive Director, South Australian Association of State School Organisations**

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for the time you have given us this afternoon to appear before our inquiry into the education of boys.

**Mr Horsell**—Our association is the peak parent and school council body which represents public schools, school councils and now governing councils in this state and an increasing number of preschools as well. Our interest in the issue of boys' education is not, as with the previous speakers, from a research background but it is certainly from the background of having a very keen participation in the lives of schools, through the work of school councils—and now governing councils, which is an even more decisive role—and of course the whole issue of boys' education is an issue in every school of every one of our affiliates.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr Woollacott**—My background is as a teacher and then later as a principal in both government and non-government schools—it was an all-girls non-government school, I might add—and following my time there I was pleased to join SAASSO to work with parents. I come at it from that sort of perspective. Of course, parents have a particular interest in this whole area of the education of boys and it is from that background I am keen to be here.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I would like to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you wish to give evidence in private please indicate to us and we will consider your request. I would like to introduce the members of the committee to you before we start—these are just some of them, I should say. We have Mr Philip Barresi from Victoria, Julia Gillard from Victoria, James Rees, our inquiry secretary, I am from Queensland, Rod Sawford, our deputy chair, is from Port Adelaide and Mr Kim Wilkie from Western Australia. Would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

**Mr Horsell**—Yes, thank you, just a brief statement and probably less than I had originally prepared. We would like to thank the inquiry for asking us and providing the opportunity to speak. We do believe this is a very important issue and by dint of this inquiry we see it as being taken seriously. Two things I would like to say to underlie whatever we might say from here on in, so that I do not have to repeat them. Firstly, our position is that we do not see boys as a problem. Boys face problems, many of them. Different boys at different times face those problems in different ways.

The other point I would like to make which underlies the position we take is that we do not, have not and will not advocate that whatever happens for boys should in any way be at the expense of or in place of things which are there for girls. But it is position we take of being 'as well as' not 'instead of'. It is a fair go issue. As I said earlier, our association does not have the capacity for research. Others do that. The previous speakers have indicated very clearly the value that comes from that.

Our submission, which contains articles we published over a number of years—and a number of years ago—comprised a strategy we had which was to raise awareness, to provoke thinking and to get the issue into the minds of particularly our affiliates, who are the parents and teachers and principals on the school councils in our schools.

Our campaign does reflect the fact that concerns have been expressed over the years in many ways. Certainly looking at the transcripts of evidence that has been given before this committee, much of what has been said—even earlier today—is the sort of thing that we have experienced. Our hope is that this inquiry will put on to a very legitimate agenda the matter of boys and their education, and insist that the matter be dealt with by compassionate people, genuinely concerned with the state of education and its impact on the learning and lives of our boys and young men in Australian schools.

I want to quote from one of Bob Connell's works, because it seems to me that this quote summarises what this inquiry is on about, and what we hope can result from the exposure of the issue of boys' education:

Educational work on gender with boys cannot be treated as a technical issue, hidden away in a corner of the curriculum and discussed in muted tones. To have any chance of flourishing in the form of whole school initiatives, it must come out of the closet and be proposed as an issue for public debate, an issue of concern to teacher unions, and a key question for parent and community involvement in schools.

The position we would like to put broadly to the committee today is that that is the case.

It was interesting to listen to the evidence of the previous speakers because, if I can inject a personal note, without any great detail, a conversation very like the evidence put to the committee previously I had last night at home—year 11, does not like school, cannot cope with the subjects, it was all great last year, pressure is on this year, 'I can't see the relevance of the subjects. I want to leave school. I want to leave home,' and so forth. So while I began with this large folder and the preparation of a broad, general issue, it was really rammed home last night in a very personal way. This is a very bright lad, one who is not struggling with literacy per se, but who is struggling with the meaning of school, particularly those last two years of secondary school.

The other thing I would like to say in opening is the disappointment we have had as an association with the position taken by the local Department of Education around boys' education. We have seen their submission. I did not hear their evidence this morning. We have on a couple of recent occasions asked questions of the department and the minister about what is happening in respect of boys' education, premised on the fact that prior to the last election the current government made a promise that they would employ or put into place a project officer to look at education for boys. That has never happened. My understanding is that that has not happened because the people who are currently involved in 'the gender equity unit' indicated

quite clearly that that was unnecessary, and that they were handling the matter of boys' education quite well.

The gender equity unit is in fact made up of exactly the same people who were the education for girls unit. Our concern has been that the gender equity strategy seems to be a nebulous and amorphous strategy brought on when there was a bit of a public airing of the issue of boys' education, but in many respects might be a rebadging, to some extent, of the work for girls. As I said, what happens to girls is not an issue as far as we are concerned; it is making sure that something is also happening for boys. I wonder whether we should not have two complementary policies: go back to the national education policy for girls in education, because it was focused and provided a framework in which issues for a range of girls could be taken seriously.

Maybe, using exactly the same words—which is what I have done in the back of this paper here—that set up the reasons for the policy, the objectives of the policy, the framework of the policy, makes exactly the same sense if you simply translate the word 'girls' for 'boys'—about raising awareness, getting some decent information, doing research around Australia, taking the matter seriously. Then what the gender equity strategy perhaps has tried to do, but I do not think terribly successfully, is then match the two policies, have a framework which dovetails the two policies together, but having each taking seriously the issues of boys and girls.

We accept, of course, that it is some boys and some girls, and not all boys and not all girls, and differently for some boys and differently for some girls, but there are a lot of boys' issues. It is interesting that today on the talkback radio the issue of bullying and violence came up. I listened to Malcolm Buckby, our education minister here, talk about it—and I think quite well—in response to the issue of bullying and violence, and the issue was, in terms of the special schools we have like the Beafield centres and the behaviour management policies, which are school council policies in most of our schools. But it struck me, and I rang back immediately and spoke also, that a lot of what we are doing in schools about the issues that mainly concern boys is—and this is a quote that you will probably resonate to, because it is a Ken Rowe quote:

We are putting the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff but what we are not doing is putting the fence at the top.

The reason we are facing a lot of issues around boys and violence and destructive behaviour relates to issues that Faith Trent talked of earlier, things like disengagement, lack of interest, an apparent irrelevance of some parts of the curriculum. It is a matter of the focus of our schools in meeting the needs of the range of children that are attending them. It is an issue of the quality of teaching that our students are confronted with. Again, Ken Rowe's research has shown, I think very clearly in the paper he presented to you, and in his evidence, that boys respond badly to poor quality teaching, and they respond well to good quality teaching, and that has been my experience. At the beginning of each year, I get a five-minute psychological assessment of the teachers for that year, and pretty much that is going to dictate how the year is going to go—'Good, structured, can't get away with anything, interested in us'—good subject, good achievements—'Don't like the person, doesn't know their subject, doesn't like us'—going to be a bad sense of achievement.

It was interesting recently that a particular teacher who gave a clip across the ear to some of the mainly boys in the classroom was in some strife, because you cannot do that these days, it is

not allowed. In a subsequent conversation I asked my son, 'Who do you think is a teacher who is doing something right by you that you feel good with?' and it was this particular female teacher who he named. I said, 'Doesn't she give kids a whack across the back of the head?' and he said, 'Yeah, but they deserve it, but she also cares about what is happening to them, and on the occasions that I've been sent down to the focus room or the time-out desk, she is the one teacher who comes down and says, "How's it going? What's happening? Come on, buddy, lift your game and get on with it.'" It is that appreciation that there is a teacher who actually has an interest in what is happening in the lives of the students, as well as simply getting across a curriculum.

**Mr Woollacott**—While Graeden collects his thoughts I might just comment that I was at a seminar recently which was focusing on the topic of behaviour management in the junior primary years. As I indicated, I was representing parents at this seminar of educators. I was actually quite astounded to hear some of the things that were being said. One of the recommendations that came out of that seminar was that in fact a program of boys' education was needed from preschool through to year 12. People seemed to be recognising that behaviour management was such an issue, and commencing at such an early stage that there needed to be a more comprehensive plan developed right across all years of schooling.

I quote from a couple of principals who were there—female principals, I might say. One quote was, 'Boys should be kept at home longer.' In other words, they were not ready to start school at the age of five was an opinion that this particular person was putting forward. That is, again, in relation to some boys. Again, the danger, of course, is generalising. When I say 'Boys should be kept at home,' some clearly are ready and some are not. I guess the same thing could be said about some girls.

A parent who had an autistic child put forward the view that many boys need more time in kindergarten, in that they develop more slowly in those earlier years than girls of a similar age. Another comment from another principal was, 'Many boys at a younger age seem to be so angry,' and in fact was suggesting that there needed to be some sort of social skills program added in, even at the junior primary level. I was staggered at this conference to hear of boys of five and six years of age being suspended from school, some of them in fact suspended for quite some time, even within their first couple of years at school—something which I had not been familiar with.

Another point of view that came forward was that boys take a long time, longer than girls, to get used to the structure of schooling; that practices need to be different, and an example was given that a problem exists for boys with the early years teaching strategies, and that there was insufficient physical activity being built into teaching in those very early years. Whereas boys would benefit from a greater degree of physical activity, that was not always the case as far as the teaching programs were concerned. The same person went on to say that the first year of schooling should have more play built within the framework. Quite clearly, the emphasis needs to change: the pressure is much greater and these days we do not have the same amount of creative play as these teachers were recounting was the case previously.

We have had a greater degree of emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and of course we are pushing that—our association as well as everybody else—but one of the offshoots of pushing this heavier emphasis on literacy and numeracy in some classrooms has resulted in less activity

based sessions and more nonactivity based, which tend to be not appreciated by some boys within the group.

They were some of the difficulties that were highlighted for us when I was involved in that seminar, but the thought that we have had as an association for some time is that this whole emphasis on teacher training and professional development is something which really needs to be focused on. We were fortunate enough to hear the previous witnesses and, not just wanting to take their words, that is something which we have been pushing for quite some time. In our view, we believe that there needs to be a much greater emphasis placed on teacher training and then teacher in-service and teacher development, right through the life of teachers.

We would like to see built in to that, of course, teacher accreditation, and then all the things that flow from that, because from our point of view the whole emphasis in this education of boys really is good teaching, along with significant curriculum development, and then reassessment of the patterns of assessment that are used. This notion of boys, perhaps to a greater degree than girls, becoming disengaged in the learning process tends to come about through the quality of teaching or even the style of teaching, linked with the style of assessment and what is assessed. We really need to be having a look at the review of—yes, the other phrase that comes to mind—the culture of the school, particularly in middle schooling and senior schooling years, but then in association with that is this notion of quality teaching and then appropriate curriculum and appropriate assessment styles.

I heard a question asked earlier: ‘What’s changed in the last 20 years?’ In fact one of the things that has changed in the last 20 years—as I think back to my work as a teacher then—is that there is a different pattern of assessment. I heard also being spoken about earlier the notion of continuous assessment as compared to the straight end of the year assessment. There has certainly been changing patterns in that period of time as far as assessment and even the style of teaching and the style of tasks that have been given to students in classes.

**Mr Horsell**—I talked earlier of the secondary years, and I guess in many ways in the secondary years we reap the seeds that have been sown in the junior primary and primary years but perhaps not watered well. One of the disappointments I had in the government’s report here, as an indication to us that they take this matter seriously, was the very brief comment they made about the BST results, the basic tests results. I think the only comment made was of a few schools in which boys were doing as well as girls.

In fact, the information that was provided for that report, but not used, indicates that in 1997, 1998 and 1999, the literacy mean scores in year 3, the girls outperformed boys by a couple of points in each year. The literacy procedure in the skills bands show that there are more boys in the lowest bands and more girls in the highest bands in each of the years 1997, 1998 and 1999. In the year 5 situation it was much the same story; girls outperformed boys in the literacy mean scores in each of those years and there were more girls than boys in the highest bands in year 5.

In a like-schools analysis it does not matter what cluster of like-schools, whether it is the cluster which we would see as the ‘leafy greens’, as I think they are often pejoratively labelled, or the other end, in any one of those cluster of nine like-schools, girls outperformed boys. Girls perhaps did not do as well in cluster 9 as in cluster 1 but they did better in every cluster than the boys in the same cluster in year 3 literacy in 1999, in year 3 literacy in 1998. In the year 3

reading benchmark percentages, again in all clusters of like-schools, the girls outperformed boys. In year 5, the situation is the same, again in all clusters of like-schools. In the writing assessment means in 1998 and 1999 girls outperformed boys in year 3 and year 5 in both years.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for those statements, and the members would like to ask you some questions.

**Mr WILKIE**—It sounds from what you are saying that the Education Department here is not being responsive to the perceived needs by your organisation for boys. I am also curious, over the last 20 years do you think that the standard of teaching has been maintained, or do you think the standard has gone down?

**Mr Horsell**—Mark can comment on the issue of standards. It is my perception, having been involved over the past decade in the education arena, that there has been a general shift in the content of the curriculum, a much fuller literacy content. The pedagogy has been much more literacy focused. The assessment processes are much more literacy focused and I think that the emphasis through those three areas has not advantaged boys and has maintained an advantage for girls where I think most of the evidence that we have seen, and you as the committee have seen, is that literacy skills, reading skills, concentration skills of girls occur earlier, last longer, and can occur, to some extent, irrespective of the quality of teaching.

I would repeat the research of Ken Rowe that poor quality teaching has a much greater effect on boys than girls, but conversely excellent teaching has a much greater effect on boys than girls, and partly it is the difference between the chatter and clatter approaches to schooling. The chatter for girls: they talk amongst themselves, they get on with their work, they can concentrate, they can focus. The clatter for the boys, where it is activity, interaction, short sharp bursts, and I do not think the pedagogy differentiates. It is a one size fits all way of teaching. One size does not fit all.

**Mr Woollacott**—I would like to add a couple of things. I am just trying to think back to where I was 20 years ago and think of some of the people I worked with, actually, and compare them to some of the teachers who are good practitioners today. I doubt really whether there is a massive difference in the quality of the people. I think those that are good performers today would have been good performers 20 years ago. In fact, those of today might even have been better than many of the teachers were 20 years ago.

Other things have changed. I am not involved in the schools now, but in the school setting it seems as though schools are far busier places. With the range of demands that are placed on the schools, the range of demands that are placed on teachers, and we probably do have higher expectations, I am sure the teachers now are expected to focus on the needs of individual students a little more than they did 20 years ago.

At that time, if my memory serves me correctly, things like streaming and other forms of grouping tended to be quite predominant in schools, and teachers were teaching to one group of students and really able to pitch to the middle of the group and cover most students in the group reasonably satisfactorily. Today, of course, we have swung away from that method of school operation, and we expect teachers to be able to vary their teaching methodology to suit more

individuals in the class. So I think on one sense, why we know there are some reasons for it, we have made the task harder. I think the community has this greater degree of expectation too.

So while on the one hand we are arguing we want a higher quality, we are actually saying we want a higher quality in a situation which is probably more difficult today than it ever has been, and with a greater degree of challenge being thrown at teachers. or instance, we expect all teachers to make sure they can develop a teaching methodology to tie into the current information technologies. So instead of just being able to teach content and teach factual stuff that they did probably 20 to 25 years ago, where it was more subject based, my understanding as a renegade from the classroom, is that we are now looking at more of a process base type of learning.

We are expecting the teacher to be more of a facilitator. I was probably quite good 20 years ago at standing up in the classroom and giving my geography lesson to 3B which tended to be fairly much content focused about the cyclone in Darwin or wherever it was. That was a bit easier than trying to develop the style that we now expect today of a research base learning where I am the facilitator working with 25 to 30 students in the class, and then I am omitting certain students in the class who I overlook for various reasons. So I certainly do not think the teachers are any worse today at all, they are probably better but we expect a lot more of them.

**Mr WILKIE**—Do you think the training given to potential teachers is adequate?

**Mr Woollacott**—No, I do not, and I was at a session only last week. You see, the dilemma that we face in teacher training, if we are looking at secondary teachers, is that we expect the teacher to do a degree first so that they are strong in their knowledge base. But we then expect them to have some training in teaching methodology, education, psychology and all those things. We also expect them, as part of their degree and part of their education studies, to look at the new methodologies, the technologies that I was referring to. These days we also expect and like to think that they will have some skill in diagnosing student learning difficulties; we expect teachers to be able to pick up if a student is not learning to read extremely well. Those specialties that we see today that a top professional teacher should have were not taught when I did my teacher training. Now I hear that we almost expect the person to have their academic study and degree in three years on a one-year teacher education diploma course. In fact, I would submit to you that we really ought to have about a six-year teacher training course; three years in the degree area and then three years in the education and those other areas. Of course when people come out more highly qualified, then salaries ought to be adjusted accordingly.

**Mr Horsell**—Can I add it is not so much the standard of teaching but the environment in which teaching occurs. Over my life there have been some subtle changes in schooling structures. I went to a coeducational primary school but the odd classes were the coeducational classes. There were a couple of them. I went to a boys' high school, and there were a few around at the time, and now it is a coeducational high school. Some of the research that we have seen and I think some of the evidence that you have received is suggesting that there could be a lot more innovation in the structure of schooling within coeducational schools because I think the likelihood of boys only schools is a faint hope, should it be one's inclination.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It will happen within 10 years, mark my words.

**Mr Horsell**—You reckon? I am told not to throw away the shield from the school I am involved in.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do not throw them away, bring them back.

**Mr Horsell**—Certainly I think there are more than ample opportunities in schools, if the issue is taken seriously and provides a basis for some research, of gender specific classes. There is a lot of evidence to show, particularly in literacy or English type subjects, or highly literacy based subjects for boys, single sex classes—you take away some of the dynamics where the relationship between the genders often, I think, leads boys to go to the ‘cool to be a fool’ approach: ‘I am not quite sure how I’m coping. The girls seem to be coping, so I might as well cope as badly as I can because then I can say I’m meant to do that.’ It is not as easy to do that in a boys only class because the competition culture swings in then and it is probably better to be better. Probably with some classes for girls, perhaps not as much as boys, but in the maths and physics area they may well benefit also from single sex classes.

I do not know of a lot of examples where that has been tried, and I feel that there is a sense of, ‘We don’t really need to do that, that’s not a real issue for us,’ amongst some teachers, or at least a number that I have spoken to. I think that is worth looking at.

**Mr BARRESI**—I wouldn’t be so dejected by the Education Department here in South Australia. It seems to me that every education department that we have met right across the states are all tarred with the same brush at the moment but that is little comfort.

**Mr Horsell**—Cold comfort.

**Mr BARRESI**—You have mentioned the lack of male classroom teachers but it seems to me there are consistent messages coming through from a number of witnesses about the importance of—given, of course, high quality teaching in itself is the ultimate—getting a balance of gender in the classroom. I put that question to the Education Department this morning, you may want to read the transcript. As far as they are concerned, we are right off the ball if we discuss that issue.

**Mr Woollacott**—Right off the ball?

**Mr BARRESI**—Yes, they do not believe that is a concern at all. I just wonder why is it that they are taking this approach if there is a consistent feedback on it? Where are they coming from on this? I am asking you to almost put yourselves in their position. Is this politically inspired? Is it feminisation that has taken place within the Education Department or what? I am asking the question rather than making judgments there.

**Mr Horsell**—It is interesting in terms of a couple of recent press coverages of issues, that there was almost a three-quarter page article with a big picture, when last year, I think, just over 50 per cent of leadership position appointments went to females. It was a big thing. It has been about half and half for many years but it is about 55 per cent. I was asked to make a comment. My comment was, ‘That’s terrific.’ But it is not really that important. The big issue for me is that 80 per cent of the teachers in primary schools are female and have been for many years.



Many children go through their primary years without seeing a male. Maybe that is not important; certainly the previous president of the local teachers' union did not see that as being an issue at all. I think my two boys have been lucky, they have both had one male teacher in primary school in their seven years there. I think it is important for a couple of reasons: boys learn to interact with adult males in a setting where they are spending a lot of their developing years. As a parent, I look at schooling as the law requires me to hand over my children to a whole bunch of adults, most of whom I know very little about, for a whole stack of their growing up and developing as kids and young people. I want to know that some of those people are going to blokes, and some of those people are going to be lovely women, and some of them are going to be older and younger. But that balance that would be part of—I will be shot, I suppose—a normal upbringing is not there to the same extent.

It is an important issue when it comes to some of the subject areas, and seeing males teaching reading and enjoying reading must have an impact. My background academically is psychology and I cannot believe that you cannot say that there is a role modelling effect on children of both genders from their teachers of both genders in some activities, their appreciation of activities and the interaction between the teachers themselves; watching males and females interact in the school setting.

So I think it is important. I do not understand why they do not think it is important. You have used words which I have been warned I probably should not use.

**Mr BARRESI**—I am just feeding back what other witnesses have said to us, Mr Horsell. I am not making any judgments. Their come-back line was, 'Perhaps we can fill that gap by having male role models from outside the school environment rather than teachers themselves,' whether it be the father figure, business people or sports people that come in. But I sense that even though there is a growing number of women going into the work force, there is still a disconnectiveness with the fathers in the school. I am not sure that we are going to breach that by asking fathers to take a greater role. I went to my first parent activity last year with my kids where I was like a classroom aide. I got a lot of value out of that. I thought it was fantastic, and I put myself down again this year. But you come up with all these reasons why you cannot be there and that in itself, while it may be a useful alternative strategy, I am not sure it is going to work as well.

**Mr Horsell**—I have to say that, quite seriously, the comments that have been made about it—'It's not necessary. It doesn't really matter'—I think are a cop-out. As a parent it angers me. As the president of the association it worries me and I think it is something which governments need to take some very serious account of. You are hearing it, we are hearing it. Why are the ears of the education bureaucracy closed to that? It is important.

**Mr Woollacott**—We would not want to be heard to be being critical of the department within that context, but if we were able to sit back and say the ideal school staffing situation would contain roughly 50 per cent men, 50 per cent women; some people who are younger and some who are a little older. Younger people help to bring a vitality for certain activities. I remember as a principal it was great to know that I had a range of people in the staff. Younger people tend to be a bit more inclined to get involved in the physical activity—the sports days, the sports programs—whereas older people have other interests that they are able to bring to the school.

Men and women bring different interests. Certainly we would acknowledge that, first of all, you need a good teacher, male or female, then beyond that a spread of both men and women, and a spread of both men and women in leadership positions would be the ideal structure that we would seek. Now, okay, from a bureaucracy point of view, I guess there are some difficulties in achieving all of that. But that is what we would be putting forward as a goal. We think at the moment it is a little bit out of balance and we would be keen to see that efforts be made to try and restore that balance, and I think probably some research does need to be done. We cannot blame the women who are there. Why is it that more men are not going into primary teaching?

We have heard various theories put forward—they feel scared about it, they feel as though they might be in trouble if they start getting too close to students, and those sort of things. I am not sure if that is the reason. I think a greater degree of research probably needs to be done on that. They are issues which we believe are very significant in that cultural development in the school. As we were talking about before, twenty years ago, the schools that I was thinking of where my own children went to primary school, there was more of a gender balance within the schools.

**Mr BARRESI**—Your gender equity strategy or comment that you make here resonated with me when you talk about: ‘Equity in outcome is not equity in treatment.’

**Mr Woollacott**—That is right.

**Mr BARRESI**—Perhaps that is a message that needs to get through. We are talking about the outcome, rather than the treatment. By moving towards this other model, we are not throwing out a girls’ education strategy in place for boys’.

**Mr Woollacott**—Our affiliates would kill us if they thought we were here today wanting to downgrade the achievements that have been gained in girls’ education in the last 10 to 15 years.

**Mr BARRESI**—Sure.

**Mr Woollacott**—That is one of the other things, of course, that has happened since your question when you asked, ‘What was the situation that you would have responded to 20 years ago?’ Not a lot has happened for boys, but a lot has for girls. We are now saying we think it is probably time, yes, for the girls’ programs to be maintained but for boys’ programs to be put in place as well.

**Mr Horsell**—I should probably posit this as a personal view rather than an association view per se. I think I would throw out the gender equity strategy. It is not doing anyone any real good. I would bring back the national education strategy for girls. I would implement a national education strategy for boys. All the words that have been used in raising the policy objectives and so forth can be used exactly, except it is girls in this one, boys in that one, and an overarching framework to dovetail them. But I think the focus needs to be there for both, to bring both to the point where it is not equal treatment, it is equal outcomes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Maybe that is a challenge for your organisation. Please do not take this as personal. It is not meant in a personal way. I think a lot of organisations, like a parent organisation, I think teachers in the field, you get a very different message when you talk to teachers,

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kids and principals actually operating in the schools than you do from, say, the representatives of the teachers unions who come before us, and particularly education departments and at least 50 per cent of academia. Graeden, you have been in this organisation for 10 years.

**Mr Horsell**—About six years in the organisation, but school councils and involvement in my kids' schools for—

**Mr SAWFORD**—As I said, please do not take this personally. It is not meant that way. I would say that your organisation has been a bit soft—has it—in dealing with a department that has been in denial, and there is plenty of evidence about that, in terms of, 'The problem doesn't exist.' I think what you have both put forward to this inquiry this afternoon just reeks of balance and commonsense. Now, I would have thought those arguments should have been put far more strongly to state education departments. I get the impression from parents who I know—and this is anecdotally, not quantitative research or anything—that a lot of organisations have wimped out. Professor Faith Trent said the introduction of many of the girls' programs was needed, but it was a political event.

Now, there are some people who want to turn the education of boys into a political event. I do not think it ought to be. If organisations like yours keep taking the orthodox propaganda that is being promoted, then nothing will change. There was, once upon a time—and in New South Wales you still have examples—boys' schools within the public system. Over the last 20 years you have had a transfer at a huge rate—this state included—of public to private. Parents are voting with their feet. Maybe those parents ought to have been asked why. I think some of them would explain that they are not sure what public education at a secondary level is on about. They do not know any more and when they do not know, they have doubts. When they have doubts, they transfer.

There has been a huge growth of low fee Christian schools of various denominations in South Australia, particularly in the growth areas north and south of Adelaide. We went to one yesterday—2,200, and if you include another couple of schools, probably 3,000 students; Trinity at Gawler. Whether you agree with what they are doing or not, they are meeting a need that is not being met by public education. If you are believers in public education, I think that balance needs to be redressed and I think you have a responsibility to do that, not only to make recommendations to us.

**Mr Woollacott**—We try to focus on that particular issue for a large portion of our time. A lot of those parents, though, that you are saying have moved from the state to the non-government system, have not gone into boys-only schools. We cannot just say that is a gender issue. In fact, I do not know of any of those low fee non-government schools that are single-sex boys' schools; the trend in South Australia has been for the single-sex boys' schools to become coeducational schools. I think there are still two boys' schools left, although I take your point that that trend may change. We are actively trying to push the issue that you relate to, but not necessarily through the issue that we have come here to speak on today.

**Mr SAWFORD**—The United Kingdom has developed a boys' education network and I would suspect that if you are looking for some qualitative and quantitative research, that would be very useful in putting forward arguments to state governments, and also the views of the education ministers of the Blair government, both the junior and the senior ministers, who have

given comprehensive secondary schools in the UK the biggest kick in the rear they have ever had, and the reasons why they have done that.

**Ms GILLARD**—I will correct the record, given a complete misrepresentation of my position by Mr Barresi. It makes intuitive sense to me, and I think would make intuitive sense to anyone, that in a perfect world you would have all sorts of role models in schools—men, women, young, old. The interesting thing, though, which we were mentioning a little bit over lunch, is when we have interviewed groups of boys in this inquiry—and I note that the last submitter interviewed 1,800 boys—we have specifically asked them, ‘What sort of teachers do you like? Does it matter if it’s a man or a woman?’ and on every occasion they have said they like young teachers, they like fun teachers, they like teachers who have a sense of humour, and then there is a whole thing about knowing who they are and caring about them. But not one, when asked, has said, ‘I prefer to have a male teacher,’ or, ‘I don’t like women teachers.’ I have not had the opportunity to read the full paper that deals with those 1,800 interviews, but the conclusion is that the boys do not mention gender. Of course, that is not to say that, if you look at any level in our society, if you believe as I do fundamentally merit is equally distributed between the sexes and you see an outcome where you are getting disproportionately one sex, it has to lead you to the question, ‘Why is this happening, and are there a lot of men who would be very meritorious teachers who aren’t in the service?’ and for what sorts of reasons. We should be looking at that, I accept that. I do think we should note that, interestingly, the only group that has not come along and said it is a problem in the whole course of this inquiry has been boys themselves. So I think we have to weigh that up a little bit.

**Mr Horsell**—I do not know what age group the boys were, but if they were in secondary schools the imbalance is not as apparent.

**Ms GILLARD**—That is right.

**Mr Horsell**—If they are in junior primary, the imbalance is perhaps not a relevancy for them yet.

**Ms GILLARD**—Yes. I accept that there would be the upper primary; junior primary has always been a highly feminised profession. I cannot recall having met a male junior primary teacher in my life, from when I was in primary school myself onwards. I think perhaps upper primary has become more highly feminised. Whether or not that is a problem for the boys involved, I am not sure we have a handle on that yet. Having clarified my position, I now have a question which goes, again, to these changed factors. You have pointed to curriculum. The literacy basis to the curriculum has changed; assessment, although I would have to say, as someone who has always opted for 100 per cent examinations if the option was open, that examination stuff jars with me a little bit; certainly retention rates and labour market destinations for young men, so we are probably trying to keep a cohort in now who in other eras would not have stayed in schooling. However, I am still struggling with change factors in teaching methodology, because we are told boys prefer structured tasks, short, sharp tasks, plenty of movement—all of that sort of stuff. My clear recollection of my schooling 20 years ago when boys were doing better was that the last thing you ever did was move because you would get banged on the head with a duster. To suggest we had a highly interactive curriculum that allowed boys to move around 20 years ago seems to me not right, according to my own experience.

Then we say maybe it is discipline and that boys would thrive better in more traditional school settings with better discipline and then we had the last submitter come along and tell us that boys hate that, and that is the outcome of his interviews. I am still trying to see where teaching methodologies have changed to allow the slippage in results.

**Mr Horsell**—I suspect the paradox is it is a bit of both. When I went through, it was very highly structured, and the boys responded to the high structure. It was, I guess, discipline backed. These days I think most classrooms are probably somewhere in between. They are not overly structured but do not go completely to, ‘Do your own thing in your own time at your own pace.’

It is probably that bit in the middle which is the danger area. That would be my intuitive response. It is neither completely active focused or short-burst focus, but it is not very highly structured either. It is the paradox of having a long lead.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. I am sorry we have to finish it there. I would like to thank you for your submission and the time you have taken to appear before us today. We really appreciate it. We hope the report will be finished by the end of the year and we will make sure you get a copy of it. Thank you. We will now have a five-minute break.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.31 p.m. to 3.43 p.m.**

**PHILLIPS, Mrs Rosyln Helen, Research Officer, Festival of Light (South Australia)**

**CHAIR**—A big warm welcome from the committee into the hearing of the education of boys. We appreciate the time you have given to this committee this afternoon.

**Mrs Phillips**—I apologise for the fact that other representatives could not be here. David d’Lima, who is a trained teacher as well as being our field officer, is in Alice Springs and unfortunately could not be with us today.

**CHAIR**—I would like to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but if at any stage you wish to give evidence in private, please ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I would like to introduce our members of the committee first: Philip Barresi from Victoria, Julia Gillard from Victoria, James Rees, our secretary. I am from Queensland and our deputy chair, Rod Sawford, is from Adelaide and Kim Wilkie is from Western Australia. If you would like to give an opening statement now before we ask questions, thank you.

**Mrs Phillips**—Certainly. I have been most interested in hearing some of the witnesses earlier and delighted to find that there seems to be general agreement that there is a real problem with boys in education. Do I understand that there is also general agreement that boys are different from girls?

**CHAIR**—Yes, I think we all agree.

**Mrs Phillips**—It has been scientifically established that the brains seem to be wired differently, so they have different rates of development, slightly different ways of learning things, skills in some areas that are made up for by other skills in other areas. We published a resource paper in 1981 which highlighted the research that had been done, showing the differences between boys and girls, even from babyhood. The way they, as young children, played with toys was different. In this paper we included a little diagram of what some experimenters have found when boys and girls play with blocks. There tends to be a very different pattern between the genders.

You can see this is the girls and this is the boys—you probably cannot see—but it so happened that a few years later my own two younger children, a boy and a girl, were playing with the family block set, which was all sorts of blocks. They often played with them together happily. My husband noticed that what they produced was just like this diagram. He took a photo, which you might be interested in, back in 1984. That boy and girl have grown up now but that was just taken on the spur of the moment when he saw that our daughter had produced this nice, little low enclosure in which she had put little people. Our son had produced this great, high tower and steps leading up to it and, yes, he did knock it down. There is a difference. I think the problem that people are recognising these days is that our educational system does not adequately recognise that different people need different treatment. One concern I have had, as a trained teacher myself, is that you should not just go back 20 years, as you have been

talking, but 30 or even more years, to where the big change in educational philosophy began. I was there when it was happening. I was at Sydney University. I did a science degree and a diploma in education and it was all new and exciting. They said, 'No longer is teaching going to be chalk and talk, it is going to be aimed at the children's individual needs.' I remember my hero in those days was Pestalozzi, the Swiss educationalist. They talked about him in the middle of a room of children doing all different things, all happily on their own individual tasks learning from experience. The teacher was just the facilitator, the guider. There was no clear structure but that was what we were aiming for. That was the ideal I was taught in my Dip. Ed. year.

They also taught the way children learned to read was not the way we had learned at school. I remember at age four learning to read. I went to a little preschool every day and we had the letters up on the board. It would say 'A for apple' and we would chant them. We would learn them by heart. We would learn the sounds they made and then we would decode the words in our readers. I learnt to read at the age of four. But then in the sixties I learned that was not the way you taught reading. You taught it by immersing the child in whole language. You simply read to the child from books all the time and you surrounded the child with books. You do not have to teach the letters. You do not have to teach the letter sounds because the child will just pick it up naturally.

When my first child arrived that is what I did. The trouble was my first child was a boy and he did not learn to read. I decided it was my teaching method because, after all, I was basically a secondary teacher, not primary, so I thought I had done it wrongly and that was why he could not read and therefore the school would do it right and I would lay off. We continued, of course, to read him lots of books and surround him with books. He went to school and he did not learn to read. After a while he was down at the bottom of the class. I knew he had a lot of intelligence there but it just was not coming out and he was feeling dreadful and it was my husband, who was not a trained teacher at all, who taught him to read.

Every night he would come home from work and sit down with our son—my son would bring home his reader which he could not read—and my husband would say, 'What does that letter say?' He would eventually work out that it was 'A' or 'B' and they looked within the words to find some phonetic thing where he could join the letters together. He would think it was great when he could actually blend two sounds together. That way my husband taught my son to read. My son is near to finishing a PhD in pure mathematics, but he would not have got there if it had not been for learning to read at home, not at school.

I have since done quite a bit of research in this area and found that this unstructured way of teaching to read really disadvantages the boys more than the girls. We brought out to South Australia Sam Blumenfeld from the United States in 1990, who ran a seminar on phonics reading. You will find it in our submission. It was our best attended seminar. This is the video of it. If you are interested you may have that video. It was a great success.

Sam also went to see members of our own South Australian education department to try to persuade them to adopt this method of initial teaching reading, rather than this whole-word. They would not listen. We went to some local primary schools to see how, in reception, they were managing reading. Each child starting school would be given a list of words. Some of them were quite difficult, like 'light' and 'green'. I just remember a few of them. They had no

phonetic connection with each other and the children—remember this was their very first contact with learning to read—were expected to learn by heart these words on their card. Surprise, surprise, it was these very words that were in their reader which they took home. Because they had learnt them by heart they could then ‘read’ their reader and felt very proud. Their mothers thought, ‘Only at school a few weeks and they can read these books.’ But they did not understand the idea of phonics and decoding, it was just their memory, learning some way, any way, how to read.

After a while, when their memory could not hold any more words, they were introduced to a new word and they could not manage at all. Girls seemed to get by but boys, using this unstructured method, are really failing. I saw the results when I went back to teach in South Australian schools in the mid-eighties. I was teaching one class which was mainly boys, because in this particular school they were streamed. I found that when I was talking to them—remember, I was teaching them science—they could understand what I was saying beautifully and they could give me sensible answers to my questions. But when I gave them tests and they had to write down answers and read the questions, they were hopeless. Remember, they were mainly boys in this lower class, could not read, because later on the school tested them and found that was their problem. They were back at year 2 level for reading.

I think that is what has happened in the past 30 years. A teacher told me that it was in 1964 in South Australia that teachers in primary schools were ordered no longer to use the phonics method of teaching reading and were to use the whole-word method. When I went to parent-teacher nights at our children’s primary school one of the teachers told us that she liked the phonics method of teaching reading but whenever the principal came into the room she had to stop. I find it incredible that that is the case.

If I leave you with no other ideas, could you please mention in your report that it is not just teacher training that we need more of—because we have heard we need more funds for this—it is how the teachers are trained and what they are trained to do and that boys are disadvantaged by lack of structure, as the previous witnesses told you. You may be interested, although it is not in my submission, that when I was teaching in the late sixties at Armidale High School, New South Wales, they brought in the Wyndham scheme, which was a revolutionary new scheme in education. I do not know if you have heard of it. I followed the guineapig year, the first year that did it all the way up. When it came to year 11, that was when they first introduced year 12 into the secondary school. Year 11 used to be the leaving year and then they did an extra year. Their method of teaching science was radically different from previously.

The first four years they had a very great overview of all sorts of different forms of science, but very shallow. In maths it was the same. They had lots of different mathematical ideas thrown at them but none of the old drill and really in-depth study of maths that there used to be. Coming to the senior years they were hit by in-depth study for the first time and it was a bit of a shock to the system. But we were all in an innovative, new things mode and one of the things we discussed in the staffroom was the problem of boys and girls in science and maths. The girls seemed to not be doing so well in science and maths.

In co-ed schools they are very much influenced by what the boys think. If girls appear to be too bright then the boys will not like them, will not choose them as their girlfriends. They said, ‘What about having gender specific classes, all girls and all boys?’ Since we had equal numbers



of girls and boys for science in the senior year, we put it to the students themselves: 'Would you like to have an all-boys class and an all-girls class?' They said yes. The head of the department took the boys' class and little old me, who was only a fairly new teacher, took the girls.

Would you like to hear the result of that experiment? It was a very difficult first six months for me. It was a new course, new for all of us—the science master as well as me. It involved a lot of in-depth stuff and physics, which I had never done at school, had only done at uni. It was Newton's laws of motion. Does that mean anything? And a whole lot of scientific equations which they had not been prepared for by their maths teachers, because they really had not studied  $X$  equals so-and-so very deeply. I had some girls in my class and they complained every lesson that they could not understand it, and it was too hard. They were girls and I was not teaching them properly. None of the boys complained at all. These girls did not only complain to me, they went to the science master. They said this was not working, it was too hard, I obviously was not explaining it properly. I tell you, it was a very difficult time.

Then came the exams halfway through the year. The exam was set by the science master, so I did not see it beforehand. Do you want to know what happened? Most of the boys failed. Most of the girls passed. What conclusions do you draw from that? I think it was because of the difference in attitudes between boys and girls. The boys were very gung-ho and they did not like to appear as if they could not understand, so they did not complain. But the girls, who were more interested in details and doing their work properly, complained, and I made sure I drilled them in how they did these problems.

That experiment was not repeated in future years. It was a very painful experience, because of the exam results, for the science master as well. But it just showed that, yes, girls and boys are different—and not always in the obvious ways—and there are a whole lot of factors going on that I would not like to fully analyse here.

I do think it is a good idea, though, to have boys' schools and girls' schools and co-ed schools available. That is available in the private sector but it is not these days available in the public sector. For some students, there is an advantage. I myself went through a girls' school. I was only co-ed in the very earliest years, and then in New South Wales there were lots of boys' schools and girls. I look back on my school days as extremely happy—no bullying that I can remember, although I have seen girls be very emotionally bullied here in schools in South Australia.

I felt that I had very good role models in the all-girls school I went to. I felt there was nothing I could not attempt. I did not have distractions of competing for boyfriends and trying to appear stupid in front of boys in the same class, so that was never an issue. These days, as previous witnesses have said, there have been vast improvements in girls feeling about themselves that they can do anything well. I felt that, too, when I was going through many years ago.

But the boys certainly are missing out. First of all, at the very basic level, they cannot read, and therefore they are behind right from the beginning. Even in teaching maths, again, the method of teaching is not structured any more so there is no rote learning of basic number facts. But if you do not know your basic number facts, if they are not up there, later on when you do more complex problems with understanding, if you cannot instantly recall that six sevens are 42, you are going to be held up and you are going to have problems. Again, I think girls are

more conscientious; they are willing to learn these number facts even if it is not rote-drilled, and maybe boys miss out because they are very offhand about all those things and if it is not drilled into them by the teacher then they often do not get them.

I believe more structure in teaching is an advantage, and different approaches; boys' schools available, not for all but for some—and for girls—and maybe, within co-ed schools, boys' classes and girls' classes although, as I said, when I was part of that experiment it was not very happy for me. Maybe it would have improved.

**Ms GILLARD**—I am trying to get people to focus on things that might have changed in the last 20 years. From what you have said, clearly you think the curriculum practices and the assessment practices have changed.

**Mrs Phillips**—Yes.

**Ms GILLARD**—Is there any other change factor you would point to that could be affecting boys' results?

**Mrs Phillips**—Not especially, just the move from structured to unstructured.

**Mr BARRESI**—You make the following comment in your submission under the heading 'Boys will be boys':

Education these days doesn't suit boys primarily because it can be "like trying to calm a tornado"

That was really also what Malcolm Slade was saying.

**Mrs Phillips**—I only heard the end of his evidence, unfortunately.

**Mr BARRESI**—That is part of what he was saying to us. That is the feedback that he is getting from boys as well, directly, that they really do need a teacher who has the flexibility or least the ability to break through the norms and to adapt their teaching style according to what they are after. And this is something which you obviously concur with, from what I have seen briefly at this stage.

**Mrs Phillips**—Indeed. In fact, in our submission we tell the story of an Adelaide family who moved their boy out of a state school because they felt there was a lot of emphasis on affirmative action for girls in the school and, as a result, the boys in the class felt they were no good. It really went overboard in the wrong direction. They moved their son to an all-boys school, and of course there are no all-boys state schools any more, only in the private sector, and they observed a wonderful change in his performance at school, his general happiness. The techniques the boys' school used were, as mentioned here before: they broke up the school day with more physical activity to get the wiggles out of the boys, there was much more hands-on stuff, much more variety, and so on.

**Mr BARRESI**—You would have heard the comment I made to the previous witnesses about male teachers. You have, in your suggestion—that I do not think anyone else has made—that federal and state sex discrimination legislation needs to change. Why do you believe that we

need to go to that level? Isn't it just simply a matter of an attitudinal issue within the bureaucracy?

**Mrs Phillips**—I think laws do affect the way people—

**Mr BARRESI**—There is a problem, as soon as you start even mooted the prospect of changing the sex discrimination laws. You are going to have everybody coming down on you.

**Mrs Phillips**—I am sure of that, but I still think it is important because I feel the Sex Discrimination Act is based on the premise that everybody is equal and, if you treat them equally, they will all end up the same. I think that is a false premise. I think women and men are different, and you should not have to treat them the same.

**Mr BARRESI**—But you are diluting whatever influence you may have in the argument by proposing such a radical change in the legislative framework when perhaps there are other ways of achieving the same end result.

**Mrs Phillips**—I would love to think it could be achieved in other ways, but I still have basic problems with a law that is based on a false premise.

**Mr WILKIE**—Can you give an example of where the Sex Discrimination Act causes a problem in relation to education? I cannot see one.

**Mrs Phillips**—No, I cannot.

**Mr WILKIE**—Okay.

**Mrs Phillips**—But I still think that the act and the general prevailing feeling that basically boys and girls are the same, so treat them the same, is the same problem. I would like to change that any way I could, for people to recognise the difference and to treat them differently.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Roslyn, we went out to two schools yesterday—one state, one private. All good teachers, in terms of teaching reading, over many years use a variety of methods. It is not a polarisation of whole-word and phonics. One of the principals yesterday said—on a different issue—that teachers have a much more practical viewpoint of putting theory and practice together, and that when you look at achievements over the last 20-odd years, even in literacy, boys and girls have made tremendous progress. There have been some differentials in some areas. So teachers have obviously been doing things that work. Teachers are practical people, and if you are going to work with 30 kids, you are going to use methods that generally work, otherwise you are going to get driven around the twist.

Do you think in some ways that what you are suggesting is a bit simplistic, that it has not been a matter of just whole-word or phonics; there are a whole range of other methods as well that work with some kids better than others? And haven't good teachers always used a variety of methods?

**Mrs Phillips**—No. I should distinguish between when you are using phonics as your very first method of attack in reception, or starting off with whole-word, which is very commonly done, and then bringing phonics in later on. A man called—Harrison, I think his name is—has done a lot of research into children and reading in Hobart. He found if you start off all children on phonics, then they all learn well. If you start off with the whole-word and then bring in phonics later, some will adapt and use the phonics thereafter to attack new words, but others are set on whole-word and they find it very hard to bring in this new approach. I think you will find in most schools they start off with the whole-word, as I have explained. They introduce the children to words to learn by heart so they can take their reader home right at the beginning and say, ‘Look, mum, I can read.’ Then later on they bring in the phonics. That does disadvantage some boys; they do not learn.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you reckon that is wholesale in our schools in South Australia?

**Mrs Phillips**—It may be improving but a few years ago it was certainly the case.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Have you any evidence to support that contention?

**Mrs Phillips**—From my discussions with the people in charge of curriculum development in our education department some years ago, and also my discussion some years later with a senior lecturer in remedial education, who agreed with this absolutely, who said that this book, *Alpha-Phonics*, by Sam Blumenfeld, was the best he had come across. So he got a copy of our video and our book, which he was going to use with his students thereafter. All this book does is start at the very beginning with very simple vowels and teach the children to blend them one with the other. The child recognises the letter that says ‘a’ and ‘mm’ and then practices saying ‘am’. This is often not routinely drilled or taught. It is the blending of the letters together that the children—some of them—take a long time to latch onto.

But the schools do not want this approach or, if they do, they bring it in later, or they find out all the kids that cannot read after a few years and then they bring in an expensive reading recovery program that uses a lot of phonics. But by this stage quite a few of the kids have got it into their heads that they have to look at a word and recognise it, as if it were a hieroglyphic or some Chinese character, not to analyse it or decode it, and they find it very hard to switch from one method to the other.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Recently we visited a boys’ primary school where they took the young boys out and they did physical activity for the first session of the morning and then came back in, and they found that they could concentrate a little bit better and their learning skills were a little bit higher. I also recall going to another school just recently, a co-ed primary school where they thought the opposite; that by sitting them down first thing in the morning when they still had concentration and did not get too tired, they were learning just as quickly. Have you had any experience in this or have you done any research on it?

**Mrs Phillips**—I have read the research, and I notice our schools here in South Australia go from one to the other. When my children were in primary school they thought lots of activity was a good thing and they did lots of it, and I thought it was working well. But then later, when our youngest came through, they had given that up. I do not know why.

**CHAIR**—I thought you may have been aware of some research that may have gone into it.

**Mrs Phillips**—All I know is that boys obviously respond well to it. Girls are probably quite happy whatever you do.

**CHAIR**—I would like to thank you very much for the contribution you have made today and for taking the time to come here and give evidence. The inquiry will be going on till the end of the year and when a report has come down with its recommendations we will make sure a copy is sent out to you.

**Mrs Phillips**—Thank you very much.

[4.18 p.m.]

**BAYLY, Mr Christopher, Principal/Member, South Australian Primary Principals Association**

**MARTIN, Ms Kate, Principal/Member, South Australian Primary Principals Association**

**WAIT, Mr Jeff, Principal/Member, South Australian Primary Principals Association**

**CHAIR**—Good afternoon. Thank you again for appearing before us this afternoon. In what capacity do you appear before the committee today?

**Mr Wait**—I am here as a representative of SAPPA, the South Australian Primary Principals Association, as are the other two here. I do have an apology from a fourth member who was to be with us this afternoon, Mr Doug Folber, who has unfortunately got sick, so he is not able to be here, but he did wish me to register an apology.

**Ms Martin**—I am the principal at the Westbourne Park Primary School.

**CHAIR**—Before we hear your opening statement I would like to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House, and that the deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you would wish to give your evidence in private, please ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. Would you like to make an opening statement before we get into the questions.

**Mr Wait**—I believe you have received some communication from the executive officer of SAPPA, letting you know where we are coming from in terms of our presentation—that is, that it is not going to be a highly research based dissertation but rather some comments from the floor, if you like, from the working front. Briefly, South Australian Primary Principals Association is the peak group in this state for state primary school leaders, comprising principals, deputy principals, assistant principals of primary schools, those being reception to year 7. Also a number of our members are in reception to year 2 sites and years 3 to 7 sites, and we have some in the middle schooling functions in some of the secondary areas and other sites as well. It is a peak body of about 530 or 540 members. Basically that is who we are here representing this afternoon.

**CHAIR**—Would you like to make any further comment?

**Mr Bayly**—No, I think that is fine.

**CHAIR**—Ms Martin, would you like to make any statement?

**Ms Martin**—No, thank you.

**CHAIR**—We can go straight into questions then. There is so much evidence and submissions that have been made before the committee. We have travelled through Queensland, New South Wales, Adelaide today, and tomorrow off to Western Australia, and we will continue to do this now till the end of the year. Then we will bring down a report. I would like to now open up to questions. Does anyone want to be first?

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am quite happy to go first. This inquiry has created an enormous amount of interest. We have heard views, if I could be polite, from the loopy right to the loopy left, and a majority of views of varying natures coming from the middle. I think we have received over 200 submissions. One of the first public hearings that we had as a committee was by the Commonwealth department of education and it was largely referring to differentials in attainment levels between boys and girls in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, where the differentials were up to 20 percentage points compared to 20 years ago.

Various people who we have spoken to in terms of education departments, teachers unions and about half of academia have one view; and when we talk to principals, teachers and students and the other half of academia, they seem to have another view. One is in terms of gender equity programs or the reconstruction of gender. There is one school of thought that ignores nature and it is all nurture. One accepts qualitative research but ignores quantitative research. You get my drift without going through all of those bipolar positions.

We have been visiting schools and they have been very useful visits. We went to two South Australian schools yesterday, one a state primary school, the other a low fee private school. Teachers do not talk about gender equity programs, they do not talk about reconstruction of gender. They talk about successful attainments of boys and girls, not one to the exclusion of the other. There seems to be a huge dichotomy between what teachers, principals and children are talking about and what your state education department is talking about. We have not had your union here today, but every other union in Australia supports basically the orthodoxy being put forward by state education departments.

What is going on? Does your organisation accept the orthodoxy that has been introduced in this state and in this country in gender equity and construction of gender, based on qualitative—no-one can point to any quantitative research. It has been a top-down model that has probably been very successful with girls, and in the last three or four years there has been an attempt to do something with boys. A lot of your colleagues are resisting, it seems, off the record.

**Ms Martin**—Resisting what?

**Mr SAWFORD**—I do not want to put this principal in the hot seat but some will say they marry theory and practice, and teachers and principals and schools have a very practical way of dealing with issues, and they do not talk about the orthodoxy as the department does. Would you like to comment on that? What do your members feel? Do your members feel as if they should be carrying out the orthodoxy of the department or should you be meeting the needs of the kids and the parents?

**Mr Wait**—I believe you are dead right, Rod, in saying that schools are on about the practicalities of daily life, and the practicalities of daily life in terms of the education of boys clearly pinpoints the information that you have been made aware of in your research so far, and

that is huge differences between the achievement levels of boys, in literacy particularly, social skills and probably starting now to leach into a range of other things which relate to engagement of boys in their learning, full stop. It seems to have been something that was a sense to something now which is looking more and more like the start of a landslide.

That is the reality from where we sit in schools. Those of us in more disadvantaged sites to others of us perhaps have had that hit us more front on, just in terms of the pure bulk of work required, and is very unequal—work required to meet the needs of boys in a mixed school, in a girls-and-boys' school. That is just the start of the landslide there and, in the practical sense that you have talked about, we start then looking at the resourcing that we have available in our schools, which is given to us on formula bases, with no specific targeting, to then meet the needs of this seemingly newly identified group of learners, boys, which have not traditionally been talked about in the orthodoxy and certainly not in our department as a group requiring specific need.

**Ms Martin**—We have talked for a long time about resourcing kids whose attainment levels are less than their peers but we have not actually talked about it in terms of gender. That is really just becoming acknowledged publicly now, that it is actually a gender issue. It is not simply an attainment level of this cohort of students versus that cohort of students. It is actually a boys versus girls issue.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So it is not, as some people suggested, that we may have forgotten how to teach boys effectively?

**Ms Martin**—No, and I think when you look at some of the stuff my colleagues and I have brought in, what it shows is boys starting behind the eight ball when they walk through the door at school. It is actually not an issue, not a compounding of what we do at school; it is from where we start.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It depends on what you measure, Kate, doesn't it?

**Ms Martin**—It does depend on what you measure. If we are talking here in terms of what we have measured, which is literacy skills and placing kids in terms of stages of development of their literacy skills, what it shows is that girls are starting school with—

**Mr SAWFORD**—What I am saying is literacy skills cover a whole range of sins.

**Ms Martin**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—There are literacy skills that are more girl-friendly or more boy-friendly. If you present literacy in a synthesis form the girls will perform far better than the boys; if you present it in an analytical form, the boys will more normally—if you make a generic statement. If you present literacy in terms of insight and intuition, the girls will be far better at the intuition, the boys often are far better at the insight. So there is a whole range of skills within literacy, and what seems to be coming across is that only half the argument is ever put.

We have had people all around Australia put to us that nurturing boys and girls is important, and no-one would disagree with that, but what I find quite difficult to accept is that the natural

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differences between boys and girls is totally ignored in the orthodoxy, and it is in your state's orthodoxy as well. How do you, as a member of a professional association, respond to that on behalf of your colleagues and also the teachers in your schools? What sort of information do you feed back to your education department, and do they listen?

**Mr Wait**—Is anyone going to comment on that?

**Ms Martin**—No.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Come on, Christopher, you have been quiet.

**Mr Bayly**—I am a bit of a reflector so I tend to sit back.

**Mr SAWFORD**—This is privileged information, by the way.

**Mr Bayly**—That is fine.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If you want to do this off the record, you can.

**Mr Bayly**—No, that is fine. I think when you are trying to improve student outcomes—and I think that is what all of us as principals are trying to do; that is what the money is being given to us to do—you have got to know where you are to start with so you can set some targets to move forward. The difficulty is often, as you say, the different ways of measuring literacy, what sorts of tests are around, how reliable they are, and the information that I have tabled before you, you could probably shoot holes in it.

**Ms Martin**—Yes, the same as mine.

**Mr Bayly**—It is home grown, but some of the common tests that are around are the Roddington reading comprehension, the Westwood spelling, the Holborn reading. The Gatt and Gavidol stuff is years and years old. What we would love is some really good norm tests that we can actually use and work with our schools on a regular basis.

I have been a principal in three schools over the last six years. I have run the same screening tests right across the school because I find that the basic skills test is not enough for me. I want to know right from the word go where the students are. I actually want to map their process from reception through to year 7. What that is showing me—and I only need to involve my teachers in those tests, they can see it also—is the boys are often miles behind, not necessarily in numbers but sometimes two, three, four and sometimes five years behind where they should be. I will not say behind the girls, but where they should be; their chronological age. For example, here on the front page, in year 2, 96 per cent of the boys are actually below the chronological age in one school, 27 in another, and the girls were 87 and 45.

**Ms GILLARD**—The boxes are two schools, are they?

**Mr Bayly**—They are two schools.

**Ms GILLARD**—Which schools?

**Mr Bayly**—There is not a huge pattern here. There is a big chunk of boys in here that are behind. What it does not show is the number of years they are behind. Westwood is a reasonably reliable spelling test. I had better not say it is reliable or my colleagues will shoot me down, but Westwood is probably regarded as relatively reliable. The X's across the top are these students' chronological age. That is where they should be, and of course you have got boys from left to a little bit more than centre; there are not a lot of girls on that page.

As you flick through you start to see where these students are. The next page is Westwood at the other school, where you can actually see three years' data, so not only can you see the spread of the progress of students but also the variation in the age of achievement is very varied. Actually trying to grapple with that as a teacher and as a principal is quite challenging, given all the other demands that you are trying to achieve. You are welcome to look through that data as you like but basically it is fairly standard.

The other thing that comes into this is discipline. You find that of the many students as they move into primary that you are putting into reflection or detention—there are varying numbers of names for that—90 per cent will be boys. Then of those who continue their visits to that and maybe end up in suspension for violence and other things, I say 98 per cent would be boys. You are targeting social issues as well as specific learnings issues here. But certainly I and other colleagues that I speak to would say that the biggest problem here is boys.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Why is that?

**Mr Bayly**—As more and more data is starting to be obtained within schools, teachers and their principals from clusters of school are sitting down to actually discuss this. Some people will flippantly say, 'It is a biological thing. Boys are just not as smart as girls.' That creates one hell of a storm.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We all know that is nonsense.

**Mr Bayly**—Agreed.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Intrinsically boys and girls have equal abilities.

**Mr Wait**—You would have heard some of the reasons for this already from a lot of sources. Perhaps a little list that I might contribute contains the following. I use the word 'engagement' a lot because that is in fact the indicator that we are seeing in schools. If we talk literacy, that is fine, but it is actually bigger than that because it is about the engagement of kids and even taking on the task of learning. It is a much bigger picture.

If you cannot get any child—but we are actually talking boys here—to actually come into a classroom and have that classroom set up in a way that enables that boy to actively engage in the first stage of learning, which is join the group or talk to his teacher, or do those things, you are not going to get very far. That is what we see more and more of; we are dealing with a whole range of behaviours out here that do not even allow the boys to engage.

Some of the reasons for that are things I am sure you would have heard about. I know there is research around on this: things like family breakdown. We know that contributes to this stuff. Changing work and social patterns in our communities is a very different thing. The current generation of boys and the ones just ahead of them, if we are talking of boys in early schooling and middle schooling, are just finding out about that stuff and dealing with some of the differences from that.

Confusion in sexual identity and the patterns behind that are having an impact on these things with boys. To which degree and how far this is ingrained, I do not know, because I am only dealing with the practical discussions and information that I might have in discussions with these kids, their peers and other men and women around who are supporting them. This is the stuff I am hearing. The decrease in ongoing positive role models in their lives, particularly male role models? What are we seeing? We know a lot of those stories. We read about them and see them in the media the whole time. It is the reality out there. Maybe even the male role models they see in schools, male role models in other professions and other aspects of their lives is impacting. Growing up without a father: the research would be pointing to the fact that that has a greater impact on boys than girls.

Boys and girls have different learning styles and they have to be taught differently. That sounds very glib off the tongue but I would suggest it is true. One of the great advances for educational practice, particularly in primary schools, came about from the millions of dollars that were poured into understanding the construct of gender for girls in the eighties. That brought about real changes in practice in schools: whole changes of awareness, whole changes of headset, whole changes of belief, values and assumptions, and then changes to practice. It only happened because it was a specific project set up to do that stuff.

The ongoing legacy of that has been very impressive for girls in our schools and females generally, and that is fine, that is good. But perhaps the hidden side has been that some of the stuff we have learned there about construct of gender and its impact on girls learning we attempted to transfer across to the boys without doing the necessary learning, having the opportunities to explore that stuff; using a similar model of training and development, access to the people in the unis, the research bases, all of that sort of stuff. It has been about trying to move it across without knowing very specifically how it is going to work.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You are probably correct in saying that. What has your organisation done? Have you just complied with this? Have you protested? What have you done?

**Mr Wait**—I suggest the protests look like this: we have all this data. We have got data that we have given you, we have behavioural data in schools which clearly outlines the same stuff you would have heard—a huge disproportionate percentage of boys involved in out-of-class, out-of-school suspensions, exclusions, all of those bits and pieces. What we do with it is use the resources we are given, and they are things like special education teachers. We are given those according to formula against the level of disability. They are actually guidance assessments carried out by guidance officers and psychologists in schools.

In my school, which has 550 kids, in this term we have four days of guidance officer assessment time in our school to do direct assessments of kids, to write the reports and follow that up, talk to the parents and then meet with the teachers to discuss the impact of learning on those

kids: 550, four days. What that looks like is a huge list of kids waiting for assessment and they are assessed for a whole range of reasons but many of them, of course, are early indicators from us as educators about learning problems with boys. I am talking specifically of boys but of course there are girls in there.

What we do is we look at the targeted moneys we have. Where do we get our targeted moneys in primary schools? You would be aware, of course, of the recent federal reports that are released about inequities of funding in the primary sector and other sectors of schooling. I am sure you are aware of that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am but I do not know whether anyone else is.

**Mr Wait**—It is a big one, and of course I would encourage you to have a look at that. Targeted money, where does it come from? It comes from the basic skills testing regimes that are now introduced at many state levels, and the only other ones are probably given out as early intervention programs which target learning needs of kids about the age of six that we are supposed tackle early literacy problems with. They are very small buckets of money. What do we do with it? Basically we say, ‘Where are the big needs?’ Buy people with that, buy resources, put in intervention in small groups and bits and pieces.

We use our counsellors. I have forgotten the number of primary schools in South Australia, but 360 or thereabouts. We have, I think, 70 schools with part-time school counsellors in the primary sector. That is really impressive, isn’t it? You may not know that our association is in fact very strongly persuasive, or we are trying to be as political as we possibly can be, to suggest to the powers that be that counsellors should not be added-on bonuses for schools or only given to schools with disadvantage factors that beat others. That always means there is a cut-off line for the granting of that resource. If I have a school of 200 with a disadvantage factor of 70 per cent school card, I might qualify for 0.8 or 1.0 of a counsellor. In a school of 550 with 40 per cent of school card, I have still got more kids who are so-called in that poverty line than in that other school, and yet I get nothing. That hardly seems a fair, equitable and useful way of utilising that stuff.

AEWs and AETs, Aboriginal education workers and Aboriginal education teachers: a big part of the boys’ problem in the schools where Aboriginal populations are present is in fact that student population. Those people are key to those roles, except again they only get a little bit, or it is only this, and it is very year for year, non-continuous, non-focused stuff. It takes a lot of work from within the structures of the school to focus those resources. Many schools now are turning to use of chaplains. Are you familiar with the work of school chaplains? It is again part of the overall strategies that we are trying to put in place to address these things. It is part of the fabric of talking to kids, getting into the families, negotiating, providing different role models, all those sorts of things which are also part of the counsellors’ roles. Particular strategies; should we move on from those resources? That is it, I would suggest, isn’t it?

**Mr Bayly**—You have done well.

**Mr Wait**—That is the list of resources that schools have to deal with as well as everything else that we get. It has been interesting to see the practicalities of the strategies because, as Rod mentioned, educators are very practical people; we have to be. If you are not, you just burn out

and you do not achieve anything. So we have to look all the time at what is happening in our populations, talking, listening and making changes to what we do.

Some of the practical changes that have occurred and made a difference for boys in their learning are the introduction, for example, of our literacy blocks. We might call them learning blocks because they are not only literacy blocks. We know, for example, that one of the traits of boys' learning is shortened focus times and one of the traits of the gender construct of education of girls was that girls can concentrate for longer times. What does that look like in primary schools, and I suggest other schools as well? It is huge, long slabs of learning time not broken up, with a central focus of literacy.

So those kids come in there and learn for an hour and a half, and they are focused and they write, and then they refocus on the board and the teacher calls them together and they write some more. They might have a 10-minute period where they can talk to colleagues in a group. We know that is okay for a certain percentage of girl learners and a much lower percentage of boys. The rest are really struggling with that and yet that becomes the common practice in our schools.

So what do we do? We have to shorten those times. We have to subgroup the tasks. We have to give boys a lot more opportunity to be talking and interacting because many of those, particularly those in the middle schooling section and the middle primary section now, come along with those very poor literacy skills. What does that look like if the only means of assessing your learning is to write an essay for the teacher? It looks like, 'You can go and get stuffed.' That is that engagement stuff again. They just walk out, they refuse to engage and that sets the role model going again and again. So shorter learning times.

Specific learning blocks on social skilling: we have always made assumptions about the work of families and, yes, I am generalising but it is not a general thing. Families are as far along the spectrum as you can imagine, and I am sure you know that. Some of us might be more successful than others in doing a whole lot of stuff about teaching the skills needed to work cooperatively, collaboratively, interdependently, all the things that espouse central learnings, high-level thinking skills, all those sorts of bits and pieces. But they are not necessarily going to happen, or they will not happen, if the kids have not been taught those things or seen the model or whatever.

So what do we do? We set up learning blocks in the school day to specifically address social skilling. This is something that maybe some of our politicians and other leaders may not be aware of. It is part of the core curriculum in our schools. It has to be done. Is this the sort of stuff you want to hear?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Okay.

**Mr Wait**—Reduced numbers in groups: classes of 30, classes of 26 in the early years. That is a farce. We also know that people play around and the money factor comes in. I know that. We are not stupid either. But 30 kids in a class; get out of here—'Let's individualise learning, and let's do this and this and this.' No.

**CHAIR**—You are the principal organisation. Have you told your state—

**Mr Wait**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Is that being ignored?

**Mr Wait**—Yes. How do I answer that? You know better than I perhaps—or at least as well as I—the wheels of political manoeuvring. You know how that works.

**Mr Bayly**—Change the formula.

**Mr Wait**—You do this at various times in the cycle of elections and you make little modifications to this—'Let's take one or two numbers off class sizes and that will make a difference.' No. The research will show very clearly that real difference in practice only occurs when that number is pretty well cut in half, down to 15 or thereabouts.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Jeff, that is not even practicable in a modern economy.

**Mr Wait**—No, it is not.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You know that and I know that.

**Mr Wait**—What we do is pull these kids out, try and attract more volunteers or lesser paid professional help in schools, and put small group things into place.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Let us reverse what you are saying. A lot of what you are saying goes back to deficit stuff.

**Mr Wait**—It does.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I thought we rejected that years ago, but obviously it is back in the ball court again. This is not a personal criticism; this is coming out all over the place. So the deficit stuff is back again.

**Mr Wait**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you think that maybe schools have taken on, in a compliant, unquestioning way, additional responsibilities that have stressed teachers and principals out of their brains? Maybe the answer is that you do less better, and some of the stuff that schools are currently doing ought to go. That is the other way of looking at it.

**Mr Bayly**—What would you like us to chop out?

**Mr SAWFORD**—I would chop a lot out. I would have a balance in a curriculum that said, 'You've got 25 hours a week.' I would be making sure that maybe 10 hours of that was all the ranges of English language, including a foreign language. I would think there are only three other areas. In mathematics and science you would teach people how to think and how to manipulate information, and you would do environmental studies that would include understanding the world you live in. That would be another five hours. Then there would be

another five hours for expressive arts. It seems that in primary schools right around Australia it disappeared off the face of the earth, because kids are saying they do not have physical education any more. In many schools the teachers and principals say they do not have the staffing to be able to have effective expressive arts programs. There would then be a further five hours in which you would deal with social education.

I would have thought, in those sorts of programs, education is the focus, whereas what tends to happen in the orthodoxy is gender, race—a whole range of important issues, but they are of secondary importance compared to the educational program. If schools went back to operating from an educational program point of view—and, Jeffrey, this is what a lot of your colleagues do; privately you know this, don't you? They do not do those other things. They might nod and do all sorts of things, but actually they do those other things. They are the successful schools.

We have been around Australia and we have seen some of these schools. They acknowledged differentials of attainments between boys and girls four years ago. One is in Kay's electorate—a low socioeconomic area—and it changed the whole construct and basically the attainments were about three percentage points. They are still going. They have taken them from a wide area and have reduced them. We went to a school in Roseville. Certainly they had the advantage of being able to pay for another teacher and had a deputy principal running the program. Two-thirds of the boys were flunking, compared to one-third of the girls, and they changed the whole thing around in four years.

**Mr Wait**—What do you want us to say? Great.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If you ask them, 'How did you do that?' they will say they got rid of a lot of superfluous parts of the educational program. They did not want to say that on the record, mind you, but that is what they said and that is what they did.

**Mr Wait**—That is probably a reality statement. I am in a new location this year, but for the past six years I was in a scenario like that. We simplified it. We did literacy, we did numeracy, we did social skilling, and we did the rest.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Did you tell the department you were doing that? I am not trying to be mischievous.

**Mr Wait**—The reality is that we could prove real outcomes and differences for our kids in doing that sort of stuff. It looked like changes to the delivery of curriculum, it looked like re-allocating the resources that we had, it looked like a different range of programs—a lot more hands-on stuff, a lot more use of our technology and literacies, like ITs and all those sorts of things. It looked like the employment of and provision of specialist sports programs, because that made a difference right across the school, not only to boys but to all learners and their engagement. It looked like not teaching a second language in order to provide that level of specialisation in a primary school. They are the ways, the practical ways, that principals and their communities do those sorts of things, because it is much more of a negotiated thing now than ever before, and it should be.

**Mr WILKIE**—Were those changes successful?

**Mr Wait**—Yes, they were.

**Mr WILKIE**—How could you demonstrate that?

**Mr Wait**—We could look at our behaviour data, for example. We could see huge decreases in that stuff. We could look at our attendance data and see massive changes in that for boys who were either late and/or did not come at all—and girls, but I am talking boys here—all sorts of those things. You could feel the culture of the school change because it was focused on a meaningful understanding of how those kids were going to learn, where they were coming from and, in today's jargon, a real constructed approach to curriculum in those things. It was not based necessarily on all the frameworks and everything else we had to do.

**Mr WILKIE**—How long did it take to achieve the results?

**Mr Wait**—Five years.

**Mr BARRESI**—In asking this question I am in no way dismissing anything you have said about the resourcing and the class sizes. I understand the importance you give to it. Being primary school teachers, what is your break-up of male and female teachers?

**Mr Wait**—I am really fortunate this year. In a staff of 45 I have eight males. Last year in a staff of 28 I had two.

**Mr BARRESI**—Eight males and 37 females.

**Mr Wait**—Yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—Is that mainly in upper primary?

**Mr Wait**—No, primary. There are none in our junior section.

**Mr BARRESI**—What about you, Chris?

**Mr Bayly**—Seven to one.

**Mr BARRESI**—Seven females to one male.

**Mr WILKIE**—Any in lower primary?

**Mr Bayly**—Males? No. I have one in year 6-7, but he is only a temporary and he is supposed to move out in the next few weeks.

**Ms Martin**—I have four male teachers out of 19 staff.

**Mr WILKIE**—Upper primary?

**Ms Martin**—They are.



**Mr BARRESI**—The reason why I ask is obvious. There have been a number submissions in every state which talk about the importance of male teachers in primary education, more than any other. You have not really addressed that at all. You have talked mainly about resourcing and class sizes which, as I say, is extremely important.

**Ms Martin**—If you went down a further three points you would have got there. It is here.

**Mr BARRESI**—You have more dot points. Right. That is what you get for using computers. Do you think it is important?

**Mr Bayly**—Yes.

**Mr BARRESI**—The education department told us this morning that it is not important. Others have said it is important.

**Ms Martin**—It comes back to the issue of male role models that Jeff raised earlier. In terms of going back to whether you want to take that on board as a total society about children being reared in houses where there are no male role models—and that does not mean simply there are no fathers but there are no fathers, older brothers, cousins, uncles, grandfathers, so there are a lot of boys being reared with single mums in isolation. If you take that example, for the first perhaps five, up to six years of his education there is no meaningful contact with a male role model. There might be the odd male teacher on yard duty or a deputy who comes in, if they are fortunate.

So some boys are around 10 or 11 before they actually engage in a meaningfully relevant learning relationship with a male. In the meantime they have made judgments about the education they are getting and they dismiss it because they see it as female biased and they see it as presented by females and, therefore, not of relevance to them. They do not see men valuing reading, they do not see men valuing literacy, they do not see men valuing conflict resolution skills. They see those as feminine things and, as part of their rejection of females—which I think is part of what is there—they reject all of those things that they see females valuing.

They see the female students in the classroom. I can look at a group of brand-new five-year-olds and watch the girls censure the boys in their behaviours and their attitudes, and then see the boys over time rejecting that as simply another example of the femaleness of their upbringing and there is no male strength to counteract that and to say, 'Hang on, this stuff is actually valuable, guys. It's not just female stuff. It's actually life stuff.'

**Mr BARRESI**—Kate, if one of the problems or one of the constraints in getting more male teachers is simply the pool that is available, because of the problem in attracting male teachers to the profession, what other strategies can you employ as principals to fill that gap? What do you do in your school?

**Ms Martin**—We have very few strategies, I believe. In filling our staffing we have the opportunity to have school choice positions but we would never choose a male over a female, if all else was equal, on the basis of gender.

**Mr BARRESI**—Of course.

**Ms Martin**—I do not believe we do have—

**Mr BARRESI**—There is nothing else?

**Ms Martin**—There is not affirmative action.

**Mr BARRESI**—Apart from recruitment, if the pool of teachers available is a constraint, are there any other strategies employed to fill the gap of not having a male—

**Mr Bayly**—We are always on the look-out for bringing parents into the school in any way, shape or form, so that they can develop that triangle of student, parent—that can be grandparent—and teacher. Most of the people who come in are women, so it only further exacerbates the problem, but you take anybody that will come in and help. You are basically on your knees begging to get any males in the school, whether they are fathers, uncles, grandfathers or older brothers. They are not coming.

**Mr BARRESI**—I made the point before that last year was the first year I turned up at school to be a classroom aide for my daughter. You have all the reasons on earth as to why you cannot be there.

**Mr Bayly**—But you are doing it for your daughter and, by and large, she is taking the modelling from her mother. What we are talking about in my school is 50 per cent of those boys are from single parent homes. They are not seeing any reading taking place. This is not something that men do.

**Mr Wait**—You would have, I am sure, encountered the work of Richard Fletcher from the University of Newcastle. Is that correct?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes, we have.

**Mr Wait**—Many of the examples he reports on, where schools have singularly gone out to do something about this, are way off the face of normal practice and yet they have been effective. It might even be the one you are talking about in your electorate. He talks about having fathers' clubs and getting the menfolk in and doing all those sorts of things, and schools do report on that. Those sorts of strategies really do, I think, result from whole of school approaches, where whole schools have engaged in talking around the issues that we might be talking about there; not the deficit stuff that maybe I started lashing you people with.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It is not just you, Jeff.

**Mr BARRESI**—We can take a lashing. Don't worry about it!

**Mr SAWFORD**—Come down to Largs North in my area and I will give you a bit of counselling.

**Mr Wait**—That is right—welcome any time. But linking the policy and procedures, the whole school value stuff, and then being able to move with that, is really opening up the

discussions that we might be having more internally and in clandestine and small groups than in the wider fact around some of these issues of boys, because I believe—and I will put myself right on the hop here—there are males in our system who would feel very insecure still currently talking around this issue, particularly with some of the people that hold powerful positions in our system. There you are!

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Ms GILLARD**—I think it is important we understand this, if we are going to receive it, so we can make sense of it later. I understand this, the way you have described it. The one thing I do not understand about it is when you do the comparison with chronological age—the achievement level they should be at for their chronological age—does that achievement level vary between boys and girls?

**Mr Bayly**—The best way is to look at the graphs.

**Ms GILLARD**—No, I know what is actually attained varies between boys and girls. Is the benchmark level of attainment for chronological age—

**Mr Bayly**—To be honest, I do not know.

**Ms GILLARD**—One of the things we have been told is that the formation of literacy for boys happens more slowly and, if that is right—and everybody seems to say it is right—if you were benchmark testing at year 3 and there was a difference, that might not be a huge cause for alarm provided that the difference disappeared by, say, year 6 or year 7 or something like that.

I understand the data tells us that there is still a difference at year 6 or year 7, so I am not saying that there is not a problem but in terms of weighting the relevance of this, if the achievement levels are the same at chronological age for boys and girls, then perhaps it is distorting the picture a little bit.

**Mr Bayly**—You would have to go back to the actual construction of the tests in the first place.

**Mr SAWFORD**—As far as I can remember, they are the same, male and female. They are not distinguishable on gender.

**Ms GILLARD**—And if you could just explain—because I have no idea what this is.

**Ms Martin**—These again are very home-grown stats, but if you start with what is on the first page, just having a look at the bottom, the one that is headed First Steps, Writing, Term 4 1999, that was a plotting of where children were across the First Steps, which is Western Australian material, and it is a continuum of literacy skills that is extremely detailed. I am just looking at the boxes at the bottom. Go back up to the one above: 83 per cent of boys at the point of assessment were still in phase 1 on this continuum, whereas only 17 per cent of girls were in phase 1. So at a point in time where kids' skills were measured, 83 per cent of the boys were in phase 1 and 17 per cent of the girls were in phase 1.

If you go to the next, phase 2, which is obviously the next step moving up the continuum, 54 per cent of the boys were in phase 2 and 46 per cent of the girls were in phase 2. When you get to what you are talking about, that is fine, because by the time phase 3 comes around it is a fifty-fifty. You are starting to move and get greater representations, so the gaps are closing. But what concerns me is, when I look under phase 3, the three numbers that I have bolded, 29 kids in year 4, 11 in year 5 and nine in year 6 are still in this phase 3 level, and I believe those kids then stay trapped in there and they do not end up moving on very much.

**Ms GILLARD**—And that is disproportionately boys.

**Ms Martin**—That is disproportionate, and then the girls are going out. At the end of primary school you have more girls in phase 5. Fifty-six per cent of your girls have reached phase 5; only 44 per cent of your boys. That is just one reading, but when you go to the next page and you look at First Steps, Writing, which is plotted differently, six months later—and I am not trying to do a comparison between the two because we are not clever enough yet and we have not analysed it—you have the same thing represented again. Sixty-seven per cent of boys are in phase 1 and 33 per cent of girls. In phase 2, there are more boys than girls. In phase 3 it is starting to even up again, but if you go to the numbers above, you will see that more boys again are trapped at that phase 3 level, et cetera. And when you are looking at year 6 and year 7, 71 per cent of your girls have achieved level 5, only 29 per cent of your boys. So your girls are going off to high school better. That is in writing and, without labouring the point, if you go to the next two pages, again they just say the same things in spelling.

We are just learning how to do this. We are not collecting this data for the purpose of collecting the data. What we are doing is using it because by knowing where individual children are in terms of which phase, then that develops teaching emphases and from there your programming, et cetera. As you can see, in some classrooms you will have children in phase 1, phase 2 and phase 3, and that is part of the information teachers are using for developing their teaching and learning programs. This is not a tool for gathering stats for handing out, but when you work with your staff it makes it very clear that if your staff cannot turn around—they were saying the boys coming in are just hopeless, the girls have got so many more skills, but they are starting to say, ‘What does that mean?’

We are a traditional middle-class school, we get very little funding in a whole range of stuff. My basic skills test results are well above even my like group, let alone the state group, but within that obviously glossy veneer of a successful middle-class school, you still have kids who are in this position where they are trapped. I think the crunch is, while we are saying the boys start in a different place than girls, if we do not do something to address that, a percentage of the boys end up trapped. They leave with skill levels of nine-year-olds, 10-year-olds, and a whole lot of disinterested attitudes because they see themselves as being the loser group.

**Ms GILLARD**—That is really good assistance. One of the things that is a danger that we have to constantly remind ourselves of is because we are talking about boys’ education we sit here over the table and all day we go, ‘girls, boys, girls boys, girls, boys’, and in reality boys are not a homogeneous group, girls are not, and it is really about some boys, or most critically about some boys.

**Ms Martin**—They start differently and what you are saying is most of them catch up. You look at your year 12 results, and obviously you have the data there and you can compare boys to girls, and boys are brilliant. That is fine. But what happens is there is a cohort of boys that actually give up at about grade 4. They give up before they reach double figures, and then they say, ‘That’s it. This isn’t for me. There’s no point. I’m a waste of space,’ and then everything else moves from there.

**Mr BARRESI**—What is rec? Is that a South Australian term?

**Ms Martin**—Reception. Instead of prep they say reception. Five-year-old intakes.

**CHAIR**—We say prep. If I could just end on one thing that we have found out of the inquiry to this date, I know when I came on the inquiry I thought I was going to hear a lot of, ‘We don’t have enough male teachers and boys aren’t responding because of that.’ We have spoken to a lot of young male students at schools, and when we asked them would they prefer to have a male teacher, we do not get a response of, ‘Yes, that’s what we want.’ They say they do not care what the gender is.

**Mr WILKIE**—But they are nearly all high school students.

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms Martin**—They do not care what the gender is?

**CHAIR**—They do not care what the gender is, as long as the teacher is good—in other words, if they get on with the teacher, they will learn. If they do not, they will not respond, and it seems that a good teacher is one who compliments them if they have done something right, where females may think that we have to be a bit tougher on boys, so we do not say the gentle things to them to encourage them to do better next time.

**Mr Wait**—I think that is exactly true. That would be the sort of comment that I wanted to finish on. Teachers, all of us, but obviously women teachers as well, talk about frustration with boys. I think that frustration has come about now from years of having a whole range of inputs that suggest, ‘This is what a classroom looks like and operates like in the confines of that stuff,’ and perhaps we need a whole refocusing and opportunities to refocus and talk around the values that we as teachers wish to put forward in our schools, which are much more inclusive and need to be more inclusive of boys—overtly, I would suggest. That is a personal view. I have not checked it out with my colleagues.

**CHAIR**—Kate, do you have a different view to that?

**Ms Martin**—No. My only comment referring to what you were saying, Kay, was that while kids might say, ‘I don’t mind whether my teacher is male or female, as long as they value me,’ I think in terms of role models, while ever they are female they still miss out on—what is the word?—the non-obvious, the subtlety of male role models versus female. That is all.

**Mr Wait**—Some of the papers presented at this conference, which was held last year in Brisbane and which I was lucky enough to attend, talk around female role model teachers. I

have not shared this. Boys commented on the 'blah' factor, just being talked at all the time instead of, 'Look, shut up for a minute and let me get on with my work.'

**CHAIR**—Thank you again for your input and for your submissions. The inquiry will go through till the end of the year and when the report is brought down we will make sure that report is sent off to you. Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Wilkie**):

That the committee receives as evidence and includes in its records as an exhibit for the inquiry into the education of boys the documents received by Mr Roger Button, 'Education of Boys Overview', Mr Malcolm Slade, 'What the Boys are Saying', Ms Jennifer Stehn, 'What's New in South Australia's Curriculum', Mr Christopher Bayly, 'Tables of Statistics', Ms Kate Martin, 'Tables of Statistics', and the video received from Mrs Roslyn Phillips, 'Children are the Casualties'.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Barresi**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**CHAIR**—I now declare the hearing closed and adjourn the meeting until 9.30 a.m. tomorrow in City Beach, Perth, Western Australia.

**Committee adjourned at 5.10 p.m.**