

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Government welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Commonwealth Inquiry into the education of boys. The submission outlines a range of social, cultural and educational issues affecting the education of boys in Victorian schools, details the approach taken by the Government in addressing these issues and makes a number of recommendations.

The Minister for Education recently released the Report from the review of state education in Victoria, Public Education - The Next Generation (PENG) which provides the context for this submission. The PENG Report refers to Victorians understanding that 'education must contribute to resolving complex economic, social and environmental issues'.

This submission recognises that gender is a complex economic, social and environmental issue that impacts negatively on both males and females and continues to restrict individuals from realising their full potential. It also recognises the changing aspirations of men and women in Australian society and the challenge for schools to address these evolving needs.

While gender is only one of many factors affecting the school experience of our young people, it is a key issue in determining the educational experiences of boys and girls in the school system. Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools 1997 provides a comprehensive nationally agreed framework for action to address this issue. It details how gender often constrains and limits, rather than improves options and possibilities for boys and girls in our schools. It states:

“Any approach taken by schools to work for educational experiences and outcomes for girls and boys needs to be built on an informed understanding about how girls and boys come to understand and position themselves as female and male... positions taken up by individuals can often be contradictory or fluid, as girls and women and boys and men take up a range of different femininities and masculinities, depending on the context.”

Further to the role gender plays in shaping the experiences and attitudes of students in schools is the need for students to learn about gender in the context of understanding diversity and valuing difference, an approach which many schools have adopted.

The Victorian Government has made a commitment to “build a comprehensive support structure that will allow our schools to provide all children with improved levels of learning”. (Australian Labor Party, Pathways and Standards – Labor’s commitment to the Victorian Community, 1999, page 2).

In addition to PENG the Government has implemented a range of strategies to achieve this goal including those in the Report to the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training (the Kirby Report). The Kirby Report has provided a vision that will reshape post compulsory education and training with a focus on both young men and young women and their needs. In accepting the report the Government has established the following goals for post compulsory education and training in Victoria:

- increase the percentage of young people who complete year 12 or the equivalent.
- increase the number of adults undertaking education and training and so increase the overall level of educational attainment and literacy levels in Victoria.
- increase the level of participation and achievement in education and training in rural and regional Victoria and among groups where it is presently low.
- make near-universal participation in post-school education and training the norm in our society.

The Government is also making available resources to introduce Managed Individual Pathways to assist in providing additional support and achieving improved outcomes for young men and women in the transition from school to work and education and training. Funds will be distributed to providers on a needs basis to meet guidance and other transitional needs as well as to provide a managed individual approach to services, including pathways planning. Resources will be linked to outcomes such as the improved tracking of students through and between post compulsory education and training and employment.

Improved information and guidance support will be provided to students to strengthen their ability to make effective transitions between education and training and employment, and between various employment and self-employment experiences. Careers information and pathways guidance services relating to education, employment and training for young people and adults will be improved.

The State Training Board will be reformed to become a high-level Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission to advise on and monitor benchmarks for the performance of the system. A new Victorian Qualifications Authority will contribute to the new model for pathways for students and for a more student-centred, cross-sectoral, collaborative approach to post compulsory education and training. New Local Learning and Employment Networks will play a role in effectively planning for post compulsory education and training to improving outcomes for young people.

Further, the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) has implemented a Managing Diversity strategy and strategies for the Early and Middle Years of Schooling, which have a strong focus on literacy and numeracy. In each of these areas there is a range of issues for particular groups of boys. The approach within DEET is to address these issues within the broader context of an overall strategy rather than to isolate boys as a group and develop strategies because they are boys.

The most successful programs in schools are those taking a broad, multifaceted approach, which has strong support from the whole school community. These programs include the Reading Recovery program and programs within the “Working with Boys Project”.

Intense concern for boys’ school performance by the media, politicians and the community has highlighted the need for informed academic research. Many documents and articles have been written about specific issues facing boys in the education system. But little academic research has been produced to clearly identify the issues or support any assertions that are being made.

If a simple comparison is made between boys’ academic success and girls’ academic success then it can be argued that there are issues facing particular groups of boys in our education system and that overall boys do not perform as well as girls in our schools. This has been the case for one hundred years. (The Age, August 5, 2000).

However this comparison does not go far enough in analysing outcomes for boys and girls. If a comparison is made of the success experienced by boys and girls after leaving school a very different picture emerges. Leaving school early has been found to be more detrimental to girls than it is to boys. The average weekly earnings of young males are higher than the average weekly earnings of young females. Many women remain in low-paid jobs with little or no prospect of advancement to the most senior positions and women still only earn 66% of the male wage. (ABS statistics The Age, 6 May 2000).

Further work clearly needs to be done to examine the issues that particular groups of boys face in schools. If particular groups of boys are leaving school early and limiting their opportunities, education systems need to find ways to support them to remain in school/education. Similarly, work needs to be done to examine issues such as why girls are reluctant to participate in subject areas such as information communication technologies, which enhance their post-school opportunities. In respect of gender issues actions must be taken to determine which teaching and learning strategies will best assist particular groups of girls and particular groups of boys to experience greater participation and success in a range of subjects that will increase their career opportunities and future life options.

It is essential that as a society we clearly articulate what qualities we value for all human beings and develop ideas on how to foster such values. Approaching the issue in this manner allows for discussion outside the confines and preconceptions of the gender debate.

This submission provides an overview of issues identified by DEET, programs in place to address these issues and a series of recommendations to support the development of a national response on the needs of particular groups of boys in schools. The recommendations are:

Recommendations:

1. That the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) fund a three-year national gender strategy to be developed and implemented collaboratively with states and territories through the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). In recognition that gender is one of the key factors affecting the school experience of our young people, this national gender strategy should consist of six key components:
 - 1.1 research
 - 1.2 policy development
 - 1.3 pilot projects and programs in schools
 - 1.4 professional development
 - 1.5 evaluation
 - 1.6 reporting to the community.
2. That DETYA supports states and territories to establish ongoing comprehensive longitudinal studies which track individual students who leave school, to find out why students leave, where they go, and documents the pathway of each individual student in the study through local planning networks or organisations.
3. That the Commonwealth and state/territory governments work together to ensure that the support needed to address some of the issues faced by boys from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are met. This includes funding to:
 - allow additional assistance to refugees and those entering under the humanitarian stream to enable additional assistance to be provided
 - develop and provide professional development for teachers which aims to:
 - Address issues raised relating to boys within the context of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school population.
 - Provide teachers with an awareness of these issues and skills in dealing with classroom behaviour resulting from different cultural practices and/or pre migration experiences that may interfere with the learning of all students.
 - support goal 3.3 of The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, which states that:
“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students”.
 - Extend the services provided by specialist agencies, for example, by the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST) need to be readily available in both metropolitan and non- metropolitan areas.

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PART A

The range of social, cultural and educational issues affecting the education of boys in Victorian schools

The Minister for Education recently released the Report from the review of state education in Victoria, Public Education - The Next Generation (PENG). It provides the context for this submission, 'Federal Government Inquiry into the Education of Boys in Australian Schools-Victorian Government Submission.'

The PENG Report refers to Victorians understanding that 'education must contribute to resolving complex economic, social and environmental issues'. This submission recognises that gender is a 'complex economic, social and environmental issue', that stereotyping impacts negatively on both males and females and continues to restrict individuals from realising their full potential. It also recognises the changing aspirations of men and women in Australian society and the challenge for schools to address these evolving needs.

The PENG Report discusses the diverse needs of children and young people. This submission discusses the diverse needs of boys and girls as well as emphasising the needs of particular groups of students such as rural boys or multicultural girls. The Working Party for Public Education identified the need for a responsive public school system to meet the needs of generations to come. This submission emphasises that, 'all students should be able to benefit from high quality schooling' and the system should ensure that 'students are all receiving their full educational entitlements'. Local Gender Education networks are recommended in this submission which supports the position taken in the PENG Report for 'developing community infrastructure, which can reduce structural inequalities that schools alone cannot overcome.' This submission supports the position that 'a pro-active whole-of-government approach is needed to reduce persisting inequalities in school achievement', for some boys and some girls, 'that reflect social and economic disadvantage and that lead to significant numbers of young people leaving school prematurely and becoming marginalised.'

In relation to teaching and learning this submission supports the focus on students instead of curriculum, because 'what young people learn and how well they are taught and how effectively the learning environment promotes their well being can make a difference to how boys and girls engage with their schooling.' This submission advocates professional development for teachers to help them to understand the diverse ways students learn. It acknowledges that boys and girls may learn differently in some areas and that teachers need to recognise and act upon this knowledge.

This submission supports the following recommendations of the PENG report:

Recommendation 5: Curriculum Flexibility within a statewide framework as schools should have the ‘responsibility to develop teaching and learning programs that are consistent with that framework, and for implementing them in ways that best serve the interests of their own community’ and ‘use their flexibility in delivering curriculum to ensure that all students attain agreed standards in literacy and numeracy and that all students have the skills needed, including skills in information and communications technology, to progress successfully, through their schooling to further education, employment and training’.

Research discussed in this submission highlights that some boys require special assistance in literacy, and other areas and some girls require special assistance in numeracy, technological skills and other areas. At the same time however this submission advocates that the traditional understanding of ‘literacy’ should be more diverse. ‘Literacy’ requires a broader definition than that which is commonly understood. For example it appears that technological ‘literacy’ is a new type of ‘literacy’ and it is more likely to be a skill that boys have and this leads them to have greater opportunities in career choice than girls. Therefore there may a need to provide girls with opportunities so that they can learn ‘technology literacy’.

Recommendation 7: Student Support & Wellbeing to ‘ensure equitable, coherent and coordinated provision of services to schools on the basis of student need’ it is very important in the early years that teachers understand that boys and girls need all curriculum experiences open to them ie. numeracy, literacy and technology as well as other KLAs so teachers need to know the diverse ways students learn and teach in diverse ways so that they can ensure that all students benefit fully from their learning environment.

Recommendation 8: School Funding: this submission agrees that there is a need to establish clearer links between the educational needs of students, the programs necessary to meet those needs and the resources required to deliver programs. Concentrating on the students rather than the curriculum should ensure that the needs of boys and girls ‘at risk’ are catered for. The emphasis on ‘an increased equity component’ is of particular importance in regard to the needs of the boys and the girls at risk. This emphasis should ensure that their particular educational needs will be catered for so that those students are retained at school and so that they experience educational success’.

Recommendation 11: Reporting to parents and the community: it is important that the parents and the community learn about the findings about the needs of the boys and the girls at risk. The recent media campaign has taken the educational needs of ‘boys’ out of context. Parents need to know what the educational issues are in regard to boys and girls and what is the recommended support to bring about improvement based upon sound educational research.

The PENG report highlights critical issues for the education of students in Victorian schools. Within this broad context DEET Victoria has identified key issues in relation to the education of boys. These issues are grouped under the nine areas identified by the Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Gender Advisory Group. The areas are as follows:

- 1. Boys and girls not seen as competing victims**
- 2. Performance in literacy and across a range of subject areas, as well as performance in end of schooling examinations**
- 3. Behaviour (disruption/aggression, suspension and exclusion, peer relations)**
- 4. Retention rates to the end of year 12 and continuing participation in education and training in the post-compulsory years**
- 5. Alienation from and negative attitudes to schooling, working and achieving, authority figures/structures, to women teachers and other students eg racism, homophobia**
- 6. Participation in aspects of school life (leadership positions, community service activities, the range of curriculum offerings)**
- 7. Changes to the labour market**
- 8. Risk taking behaviours, health outcomes, and death rates, including suicide**
- 9. Rates of violent and criminal behaviour and of imprisonment and detention**

Many of these issues are currently being addressed within the Victorian education system within the context of other key initiatives such as literacy or science. The schools and DEET Branches who provided material for this submission clearly indicated that projects that address issues for boys within a broader context have the greatest success. In addition they point out that 'boys' problems affect only certain boys and are also highly relevant to some girls. Most of the other states report similar findings. It will also be seen in this submission, that within programs identified in Victorian schools and those conducted by the central office, there is an overwhelming perception that the issues for boys in education are best tackled as a whole-school strategy which is part of an overall gender equity strategy. In this way issues such as literacy or boys' lack of engagement with learning can be addressed.

This submission provides background information, analysis and relevant comments on each of the issues identified.

1. Boys and girls not be seen as competing victims

Background

To understand boys' needs in education the discussion needs to be placed within the broad context of the principles of social justice in education. In the 1970s and 1980s social justice in education was informed by the 'access and equity' discourse or the 'deficit model' of change. Girls were deemed to be lacking in self-esteem, in access to the same resources and to the same educational experiences and therefore to the same outcomes as boys.

Statistically it was (and still is) possible to argue that girls as a category did not have the same outcomes as boys. Far fewer of them did (and still do) study higher level mathematics a subject that is now used as a critical filter for determining 'intelligence' and hence access to higher levels of education. Far fewer girls did (and still do) access alternative modes of education, including apprenticeships and traineeships. Far more girls still end up in part-time and casual employment.

Associate Professor Richard Teese, states 'discussion of, for example, school retention rates will not lead anywhere productive if it is limited to the citation of statistical averages. It is well known that girls finish school more often than boys,' he says. But it does not follow that they are thereby advantaged in their post school outcomes. And girls who do leave school early, are at much greater risk of unemployment and display a much more disrupted pattern of schooling than boys. (The Age, Education Age, Wednesday 9 August, 2000, p2).

Major structural change to the labour market with the impact of industry restructure, globalisation, changes in industrial legislation and the severe decline in the manufacturing sector has resulted in increasing casualisation and part-time employment in Australia. Women remain concentrated in lower paid and casual/part-time employment in the Victorian labour market. In fact Australia still has one of the most sex-segregated labour markets in the OECD.

Today the same discourse of disadvantage is being applied to boys' education as it was to girls' education in the 1970s and 1980s (Allard, 2000, p3). Now, as it was then, it is possible to cite specific statistics to demonstrate disadvantage. For example, boys as a category do less well in literacy, do not go on to university education in the same numbers and do not gain the same aggregate scores as do girls, as a category. (Allard, 2000, p4).

Girls and boys as binary opposites – a social/cultural construct

However by constructing the discourse around 'disadvantage' versus 'advantage', around girls' education and boys' education, around equal versus unequal, we simplify and categorise differences into either/or binary oppositions with the resulting arguments reduced to a simplistic duality: either girls must be doing well or boys must be doing well. Such a discourse serves to reinforce the notion of equal opportunity as a plus or minus game. There is only so much opportunity to go around and if you give a larger

piece of the pie to one half of the equation, it is at the expense of the other half. The popular media is discussing topics such as ‘the trouble with boys’ or ‘girls outperforming boys’, ‘bad mothers’, and so on. These topics demonstrate binary thinking and a discourse of access and equity to ‘a limited pie’ and to the same outcomes continues to inform popular and possibly educational debates.

Particular subject areas and assessment processes used in different subjects may also reflect binary modes of thinking which are socially and culturally reinforced. Mathematics for example is often understood as relying upon abstract reasoning, right answer/wrong answer and linear processes of analysis. In contrast, as seen from the comments of adolescent boys in various research exercises, it is important to note that English as a body of knowledge is conceptualised as reliant on emotive, interpretive, interactive processes. While the two halves of binaries are often viewed as complementary they are not given equal status. The rational, analytical, abstract processes (considered masculine) are often credited as being of higher value and greater significance than the emotive, imaginative and context based processes (considered feminine).

Many factors influence a student’s educational experiences and outcomes. For example, aboriginality, socio-economic status and remoteness are factors that have a far greater influence than gender on retention rates. In addition, boys are not a homogenous group. Not all boys are the same, nor are all girls the same. Similarly the issues that affect some boys will also affect some girls and vice versa. The current discourse on ‘issues for boys’ and ‘issues for girls’ would be more usefully served if a broader view of all relevant factors impacting on a student’s school experience were taken into account. In addition for accuracy the discussion should be about the needs of ‘particular groups of boys’ and ‘particular groups of girls’ not boys and girls as homogenous groups who all require the same treatment or the same solutions.

Current quantitative research (eg Teese, Batten and Davies, 1995) explores the intersections of gender with socio-economic background and clearly highlights the ways in which particular groups of boys, for example, rural and working class boys, do not gain the same access to higher levels of education as do their city bred and middle class peers. (Allard, 2000, p7).

A recent research project report funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs titled Factors Influencing Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School supports the findings of Teese et al. The Report found that with regard to gender and other variables the research pointed to the overarching significance of socio-economic status (SES) for school participation and performance.

The Report concludes that: “SES makes the largest difference to educational participation, particularly for boys – about a 30 percent difference between males from professional/managerial backgrounds and those from unskilled backgrounds. SES makes somewhat less difference for females. Poverty is a major indicator of likely low

participation and performance for both genders. SES makes a larger difference than gender to Year 12 performance, even in subject English where girls generally do better than boys.” (Collins, Kenway and McLeod, 2000, executive summary, p4).

Particular groups of non-English speaking girls remain most ‘at risk’ of not completing the full thirteen years of education and of not gaining ongoing employment. Investigating intersections of race/culture with gender, such as the retention rates of Aboriginal girls and Aboriginal boys compared to their non-indigenous peers also provides useful statistical data to highlight problem areas. (See for example, Long, Frigo, Batten, 1999.)

DEET strongly supports goal 3.3 of The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, which states it is essential that, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in schooling, so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students’.

Participation rates of boys and girls within subject areas

If the current model of looking at gender statistics in isolation and comparing ‘boys’ education’ to ‘girls’ education’ is adopted some interesting statistics come to light. An example is that in Information Technology, one of the key subjects that lead to the best career opportunities, female participation rates (which were never high) are declining. (Board of Studies, Victoria, 2000, p6). Boys participation rates on the other hand are increasing, a fact that belies the commonly held view that the vast majority of girls in schools are ‘doing better’ than the vast majority of boys. Similarly in Physics, the ratio of students in Year 12 between 1975 to 1999 has never changed from two-thirds boys, to one-third girls. This is another subject that increases future options in the science and engineering fields.

Premier’s Award results

Another interesting statistic is the results of the Victorian Premier’s Awards for 2000. Although the winners included 139 girls and 96 boys, the top 10 were 7 boys and 3 girls in ranked order. While there were more girls than boys as overall winners, on closer examination of individual subjects the following results come to light:

- The ten mathematics winners were all male
- The five economics winners were all male
- The five systems and technology winners were 4 male and 1 female
- The six literature students were four male and two female
- The 5 chemistry winners were 4 male and 1 female
- The 5 physics winners were 3 male and 2 female

The KLAs in which girls dominated include the areas of Dance, Drama, Contemporary Society, Music, Technological Design, Texts and Traditions. These subjects are not valued in society and are not the path to high status, highly paid employment. Attitudes to these KLAs could be the reason that boys do not value them. Boys should be encouraged to value these areas of study.

2. Performance in literacy and across a range of subject areas, as well as performance in end of schooling examinations

While it is true that many boys are experiencing difficulties with literacy it is evident that the debate is not as simple as is currently being portrayed in the media. It is also true that many girls have problems developing strong literacy and communication skills. The discussion needs to focus on the broad range of students who have problems with literacy rather than accepting the media ‘hype’ that boys are the only ones in crisis with regard to literacy levels. What is needed is more informed academic research that looks at the range of factors influencing literacy outcomes in our schools.

DEET has for many years run excellent programs designed for all students, such as Reading Recovery and parent reading programs involving both fathers and mothers. Approximately 60% of students accessing Reading Recovery at Year One are boys, indicating a higher proportion of boys at risk at this level of schooling. Boys in general spend longer in the program but on average achieve similar levels to the girls. Further information about the reading recovery program is discussed later. (See Early and Middle Years report in Part B)

A critical question here is – ‘what is literacy?’ Literacy is generally defined as students’ language capability and ability to communicate. This definition does not encompass literacy in the area of information communication technology, an area that is growing exponentially. Boys are taking this up in large numbers and girls are not.

Student Performance

In addition it is essential that assessment and teaching and learning approaches include diversity of learning styles, as different students learn in a range of different ways using a variety of learning styles. All students should have the opportunity to demonstrate their skill level in a way that best suits their individual learning style/s as different groups of students learn in different ways.

It is important that key issues such as how a child develops between the ages of 0-5, how children learn and how the brain functions are focussed on as critical questions underpinning the current debate on ‘boys’ education’ or ‘girls’ education’.

The debate needs to be refocussed on finding the balance between individual student learning needs and preferences, and identifying broad issues such as gender and socioeconomic background and identifying their impact on particular groups of students.

To challenge how particular learning processes/styles are often thought of in oppositional terms as ‘either/or’ categories, teachers might begin by analysing student preferences and strengths across the range of learning processes. The following table shows a continuum of learning styles developed based on the body of research into gender assessment and reporting which shows that in a typical class the following applies:

Boys and Girls Learning Styles

Rarely used • • • • • • • • • • • • • • Commonly used

Collaborative

Rarely used • • • • • • • • • • • • Commonly used

Independent

Rarely used • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • Commonly used

Factual/information

Rarely used • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • Commonly used

Creative/imaginative

Rarely used • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • Commonly used

Interpretive

Rarely used • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • Commonly used

Linear/'logical'

While it is very important to recognise the ways in which such learning processes may be gendered (due to students' experiences, understandings, beliefs), it is also useful to remember that gender is an ongoing social process, always changing and changeable. Provided with ample opportunities to learn and to be assessed on a wide range of learning processes in different contexts, all students can and should be able to demonstrate success across the continuums.

Gender-based expectations

The debate however does not end here. Research in the area of boys' education also finds that judgements by students and teachers as to what learning is appropriate can have long term effects. Current research on literacy and the English curriculum shows us that while many girls have extensive experience reading different kinds of fiction and are therefore very able to demonstrate expertise in analysing and writing fictional genres, this competence is almost irrelevant in the world beyond school. In contrast boys' educational experiences are more likely to provide an 'appropriate preparation' for positions of real power and influence in the public world. ('Gender Perspectives in Assessment and Reporting', Education Victoria, 1999)

In careers, which require a high level of literacy skills, women are often outnumbered. Women number 150 of 600 politicians in Australia, in journalism men have the senior jobs, and in the Law Courts there are very few women magistrates or QCs. While many women and girls demonstrate superb competence in small-group communication skills and oral speaking 'post-school options for girls in high-profile careers that require oral competence (such as politics, the law, and the church) are limited and in some cases even declining for women.' (Education Victoria, 1999).

Educational performance and post school experiences

As far back as 1975 *Girls, School and Society*, report of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, drew attention to the fact that boys as well as girls were limited by narrow gender stereotyping. It expressed serious concern that 'schooling should assist both girls and boys to gain confidence and capacity to make choices across a range of alternatives actually or potentially open to them'. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975, p10). In 1975 this report pointed to the narrow definition of male success, the straightjacket of the male working life and the social stigma connected with males choosing to involve themselves in child-rearing activities. It also referred to boys who 'escape from school at 15 or shortly after, obviously with relief'. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1975, p 49).

Professor Kenway says that it should be noted that boys and girls can both suffer from various social and educational disadvantages and that both sexes should be given help where needed, but neither at the expense of the other. For example, she says, "many girls could do with being given encouragement at school to value and develop economic independence in adult life, while boys can have particular emotional vulnerabilities which become repressed because they are often perceived as weaknesses (and thus not masculine)." (Education Age, Wednesday 9 August, 2000, p 2).

Further data can be provided to support the view that after leaving school young women face structural, systemic discrimination that has a major impact on their capacity to develop the economic independence Dr Kenway is arguing girls should develop. The ABS data for 1998 shows us that if we distribute males and females for each category of post-school qualification in May 1998 we find:

- Males were more likely to have qualifications at the skilled vocational and higher degree levels
- Women were more likely to have qualifications at the basic vocational, undergraduate diploma and postgraduate diploma levels.

Changes in participation rates by undergraduate students at Monash and other universities suggest that girls are ‘dropping out’ in greater numbers than boys are. This is a recent trend and requires more investigation.

Current Research

Drs Ken and Kathy Rowe recommend that there needs to be a radical re-think of traditional and current modes of schooling provision for boys particularly in the middle and senior years.

The Rowes argue that over the last fifteen years there has been an increasing demand for higher and higher levels of verbal reasoning skills in school education. There has been a change in pedagogical emphasis from maths to numeracy. In specialist maths in Year 12 in Victoria there is a requirement for students to demonstrate extremely high levels of verbal reasoning skills. This means that sophisticated levels of verbal reasoning and written communication skills will be required, skills that at present are more ably handled by girls. This maybe one reason why on average girls consistently out-perform boys across all academic curriculum areas from Prep to Year 12, although it needs to be remembered that the top 10 students in all maths subjects in Victoria in 1999 were boys.

The Rowes argue further that boys are disenchanted with the ‘contextualised’ and ‘feminised’ curriculum. To compensate, many boys place a premium on success in sport and some of the more ‘macho’ risk taking activities that yield positive feedback from their peers rather than recognition from school staff. The Rowes conclude that professional development is urgently required so teachers can assist boys to develop a higher standard of literacy. This conclusion follows from their research, however this research is based on limited assumptions. Rather than analysing whole school issues related to gender conditioning, the Rowes focus on the fact of boys’ disengagement with school and subsequent failure in key areas like literacy. It is boys’ attitudes to literacy that have changed over time not just the demands of the subjects. Comprehensive research into the causes of boys’ disengagement with school and failure in literacy is imperative.

All education systems need to ensure that the overall focus is on all students achieving the skills required in our community generally as well as in the work place. The range of skills required is changing at a rapid pace. Ten or fifteen years ago literacy in information communication technology was not seen as a high priority nor was there a strong emphasis on the notion of life-long learning. Society needs to better match the emerging need for eclectic work skills that will be useful in the future economy.

This submission is recommending that broad-based research be undertaken into the issues being canvassed in relation to boys' education. The research needs to incorporate a comprehensive analysis of the different ways different individuals learn. The research should be used to inform professional development for teachers so that they can develop a range of teaching and learning styles. In this way all students will have the opportunity to develop a range of learning styles.

Another contribution to the debate on boys' education comes from the Accountability and Development Division of DEET. Philip Holmes-Smith found that from 1996-1999, boys were performing 1.53 study score points below girls in the VCE. He found that girls outperformed boys consistently in all studies except:

- Literature
- Mathematical Methods
- Chemistry
- Accounting
- Economics
- Information Systems, and
- Systems and Technology

He also identified that on the few occasions when boys receive a higher grade than girls it was in the examinations that required less emphasis on written communication skills, except interestingly literature. Subjects like mathematics, chemistry, physics and accounting exams are subjects in which boys receive a higher grade than girls. However it appeared that the superior communication skills of the girls were sufficient to assist the girls to just outscore the boys on each CAT. In turn these small margins flow through to give the girls a higher overall study score.

While focusing on retention and school achievement is critical, so too is the destination of exiting students. In Year 11 we find that girls and boys are leaving school but the decline in the number of boys remaining in school is greater than that for girls. By the end of Year 12, 62% of the original cohort of boys who started secondary school remain to complete Year 12 and 80% of the cohort of girls remain at school to complete Year 12. However a higher percentage of boys go into traineeships than girls and a higher percentage of boys gain full-time employment. Of those who complete Year 12, 7% more girls go to university but slightly more boys go to TAFE, training or seek work than girls.

Holmes-Smith concludes from his findings that boys are self-selecting into courses in which they are strongest, namely courses that require science, mathematics and technology skills whereas girls tend to self-select themselves into courses of study that require more communication, arts and humanities skills. He concluded that in this way both boys and girls are maximising their potential to succeed at the VCE.

However there is another way to analyse these results. If we consider that girls and boys make choices based on what is seen as appropriate for their gender then it is evident that girls and boys are still choosing the subjects that are traditionally appropriate for their

gender. The subjects boys select are those that are valued and rewarded by society whereas the subjects girls choose are not accorded the same status or prestige. Boys choose subjects that will give them the greatest choice of tertiary courses and the most lucrative careers.

Holmes-Smith concludes that girls begin in Prep/Kindergarten grade ahead of boys. Girls also show more persistence and concentrate better in class. He concludes that there needs to be further work done on how to engage boys better so that they can achieve better at VCE and not drop out of school.

Holmes-Smith has seen the issue as a comparison between girls' and boys' success in the VCE instead of looking at the issue as a whole school issue, as other researchers have done. For example Teese et al have found that half of all low achievers (boys and girls) hate being in school so they are reluctant learners, difficult to teach and often disruptive in the classroom. Major changes in the workplace in recent times have exacerbated the problem of disaffection with school, states Professor Peter Hill of the University of Melbourne. These low achievers in the past were of much less concern to educators because they could leave school and get a job. Professor Hill believes that all students can succeed if they get proper support. He says that it is no accident that 30% of students enter secondary school illiterate and 30% do not complete school. In OECD nations Australia is very poor on this account.

However the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, Final Report provides some interesting insights into students who leave school early, prior to completing Year 12. 'Most young people who leave school do so either during Year 11 or at the end of it'. Many of them feel they have completed one part of their education and are ready to go to work and enrol in 'off the job' training. 'However those young people who leave school before completing Year 11 have experienced difficulties more often and have not adjusted well either to the VCE or to school as a social setting'. (Final Report, Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, p 57).

Further the report finds that 'early leavers' do not abandon study. Over half of all those who attempt Year 11 continue in some form of education or training when they do leave school. Educational activity is much higher among those young people who do finish Year 11 – 63% compared to 46% of those who do not finish the year. The likelihood, however, of continuing in education or training is also strongly related to gender. Regardless of whether they complete Year 11 or not, boys are more likely to be in training than girls are, and the differences are large. Over two-thirds of boys who reach the end of Year 11 go on to further study or training compared to only 53% of girls. These gender differences are due in large measure to the fact that boys have much greater access to structured combinations of work and training. (Final Report, Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, pp 57-58).

For girls the picture is less appealing. 'The economic risks in leaving school early are greater for girls. They are, in effect, obliged to stay on at school longer'. (Final Report, Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, p 49).

Early school leaving is a complex issue and 'not a uniform phenomenon.' It covers a range of behaviours and school experiences and therefore requires a range of solutions to address the problem. (Final Report, pp 58-59).

A recent PETE report found that in Victoria's most depressed areas students who can least afford to leave school do so in alarming numbers. For example 45% of boys and 27% of girls in the state system do not finish school. However this is not the case in independent schools where students dominate the best VCE results. These students dominate in areas of the curriculum such as maths, sciences, languages and traditional humanities that count most for tertiary entrance. Choice of education systems is a key indicator of successful outcomes. Both Teese and Hill believe that failing students can be rescued if education departments focus on under-performing schools and intervene to provide specialist help. This could be an effective approach rather than focusing on comparisons between boys and girls, although gender clearly remains a key issue as to future employment and training prospects after school.

Sheehan found in his research that 'there is something of a malaise in the school system'. (Sheehan, 2000, p53). He found that:

- because boys perform badly in English, literature and history compared with girls their self-esteem is falling in the coeducational environment
- boys behave inappropriately in classroom situations. Boys want to remain cool and in control and non-responsive
- secondary college is not seen as warm and friendly to boys who are often seen as behaviour problems
- schools do not have specifically designed curriculum or teaching methodologies, which meet the particular needs of boys. There is a dearth of male teachers in English, literature and history.

While it identifies some useful contributing factors this work does not take into account the broad range of issues which impact on a student's educational experience and outcomes outlined elsewhere in this paper. It cannot be argued that gender is the sole factor determining students' educational experience or outcomes.

Schools need to help both boys and girls to envisage themselves in broader ways and in ways that cross-traditional gender boundaries. Schools also require the courage to teach students to see themselves and others in more complex and enriching ways than a carefully constructed 'them and us' dualism.

It is important that teachers and students understand the concept of diversity in its broadest sense and that differences such as gender, culture, language background and being of aboriginal origin are equally valued in schools. All aspects of school life including school organisation, curriculum, teaching and learning strategies and stated policy need to reflect such values.

Girls in the past have had their horizons broadened by policies and resources and professional development for teachers. To ensure educational access for all students and particular groups of boys in this case, governments must provide and support personnel and encourage all schools to value good gender practice.

The research conducted by Collins, Kenway and McLeod, is a comprehensive analysis of factors affecting school and post school outcomes for students. The study was funded by DETYA to 'investigate the patterns of males' and females' educational participation and performance at school and their initial destinations after leaving school, the key influencing factors and the disadvantages that arise from them.'

Although gender was the major factor under consideration, other independent variables such as geographic location and socio-economic levels were examined for their relative impact.

The overall finding of the report is that 'there are indeed major gender differences in educational participation, performance and outcomes. However, it also shows that these do not translate into disadvantage in straightforward ways'. (Collins, Kenway and McLeod, 2000, p2.) As discussed elsewhere in this paper the report confirms that 'differences in performance need to be examined according to differences both between and within gender groups', not boys or girls as separate homogenous groups.

In the recommendations the authors define a 'which boys which girls?' approach as fundamental to any further research related to educational performance and outcomes, combined with a detailed strategy for those girls and boys most disadvantaged. The 'which boys which girls?' approach is one strongly supported in this submission in order to refocus the public debate away from boys and girls being seen as competing victims.

3. Behaviour (disruption/aggression, suspension and exclusion, peer relations)

Complaints about boys disrupting classes and making it impossible for girls to work have been prominent in the literature on girls and schooling since the early 1980s. The study, Gender and School Education confirmed in its research in 1996 that disruption by boys in coeducational settings is a serious gender construction issue. Over 60% of secondary coeducational students and nearly as many primary coeducational students reported that boys often 'mucked around' in class, while a third of secondary and a quarter of primary students reported that boys often ridiculed other students' contributions in their classes.

Boys were reported as leading the anti-work push, which featured in the O'Doherty report. (O'Doherty, S. Challenges and Opportunities: A Discussion Paper, 1994). The discussion paper was prepared on behalf of the NSW Advisory Committee on Education Training and Tourism, Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs. In it boys are reported by nearly 90% of secondary students as sometimes deriding those who wanted to work. Physical harassment by boys was seen to happen to both sexes. Sex-based harassment was found to be commonplace.

The report also found that many principals and teachers shared recent public concern about boys and told the researchers that they were particularly concerned with how boys constructed an image of themselves. Strong evidence was found of boys' under-achievement, of their disruptive behaviours including anti schoolwork behaviours and by their consequent over representation in suspension and expulsion statistics. Boys are also over-represented in 'completed suicide' statistics.

American research supports Australian findings that a large number of students (75% in America) are bullied. It is a pervasive high-risk public health problem and is seen as one of the main reasons why some boys do not attend school. It appears that the strict rules of masculinity are being challenged and to cope boys enter the cycle of bullying, one way or another.

Boys who appear weak or seem feminine or gay to their peers are bullied. Many boys suffer from low self-esteem becoming sad or depressed and lashing out at their peers. Thus the same set of concerns such as being seen as unmanly, being rejected and isolated by peers, or of feeling that there is no one to turn to for help leads boys to become both victims and perpetrators of these bullying behaviours.

Issues identified as of relevance to particular groups of boy's include

- student attendance
- bullying
- drug taking
- vulnerability
- health and wellbeing
- risk behaviours
- gender identity and orientation and
- gender and power in sexual relations and relationships.

It is clear however that these issues do not only affect particular groups of boys but also impact on particular groups of girls in schools.

Research indicates that a similar core of underlying factors may lead an individual to be vulnerable. Thus, any response needs to be a multi faceted one that acknowledges the complexity of the issue and ranges from prevention to intervention to post-intervention.

Cultural factors can also be significant in the behaviour of boys. For example, boys who have come from a strong patriarchal society may be perplexed to find that certain behaviours in the classroom and playground, which may have been acceptable in their first country, are not received in the same way in their new Australian school. While they need to learn to be sensitive to and respect different cultural values, their new schools also need to be aware of and sensitive to their students' cultural backgrounds if they are to address such issues effectively.

State and Commonwealth Governments need to work together to ensure that the support needed to address some of the issues faced by boys from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are met. Below are some areas for consideration.

- Additional support for students entering Australia under the humanitarian stream.
Currently education jurisdictions in states and territories are funded the same amount for each new arrival student regardless of their migration category. It can be argued that the time taken to learn English and the associated settlement and welfare issues of refugees and those entering under the humanitarian stream require additional funding to enable additional assistance to be provided.
- Increased opportunities for professional development for teachers.
Teachers and other educational professionals need to be aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school population. In particular they need to be aware of, and skilled in dealing with, classroom behaviour as a result of different cultural practices and/or pre migration experiences that may interfere with the learning of all students. Funding to develop and provide additional professional development which aims to address some of the issues raised relating to boys could be provided by the Commonwealth.
- Additional funding for specialist agencies
Where the effects of pre migration experiences are so extreme as to warrant specialist intervention, such services should be readily available. For example, the services provided by the VFST need to be readily available in both metropolitan and non- metropolitan areas.

4. Retention rates to the end of Year 12

Continuing participation in education and training is an area of concern for educators as there is ample evidence to support the view that a student's future options are far broader the longer they remain at school. However as argued previously in this submission the fact that girls remain longer at school than boys is not necessarily to their future advantage. For example staying at school longer than boys does not advantage girls in relation to career advancement, pay equity throughout their lives, or in a range of other areas such as the expectation that they will have primary responsibility for the care of children.

Again it is of no advantage to set up boys and girls as competitors on the issue of retention rates. It is critical that further research is undertaken to find out why students are not continuing with schooling and what happens to them when they do leave. This is important for boys and girls.

As the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Employment and Training, Ms Lynne Kosky, recently stated - school drop out rates were prolific in certain areas of regional and metropolitan Victoria and the opportunities that come with economic growth were not being shared equally among young people in certain areas. The Minister goes on to say that "equally disturbing is the fact that the most recent data shows we don't know what happens to nearly 50 per cent of those who leave before completing Year 12." (Education Times, 10 August, p 4).

It is evident that there is a group of students in the 15-16 year-old age bracket, who are potentially being lost to the education/training system. Many of these students, both boys and girls have wide-ranging social/emotional problems and do not easily fit into the school environment. There are currently not many options for students in this category. The VET in Schools program may support some of these students. The needs of other students in this group may be best met in other educational environments.

When the graphs for retention rates are analysed it is evident that both boys' and girls' retention rates are declining seriously too. The National Report on Schooling in Australia indicates that the decline has been common to boys and girls. However recent research demonstrates that aboriginality, socio-economic status and remoteness have a far greater influence than gender on retention rates.

In Victoria the Government has accepted the Final Report of the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (the Kirby Report). The Report has provided a platform for reform that will reshape post compulsory education and training in Victoria with a focus on young people and their needs. The Government's Local Learning and Employment Networks may provide greater local accountability by communities to ensure meaningful post compulsory education and training participation by both young men and young women. Managed Individual Pathways and advocacy support can only assist in addressing the non-academic impediments to participation.

5. Alienation from and negative attitudes to schooling/working and achieving, authority figures/structures, to women teachers and other students eg racism, homophobia

Most children learn behaviour, values and attitudes deemed appropriate for their gender from birth. Babies are often dressed in particular colours, given particular toys to play with, are reacted to in specific ways and have certain behaviours actively encouraged or discouraged. The underlying social rules that result in gender specific roles for girls and boys are deeply entrenched and largely unstated. Although it is commonly acknowledged that the 'gender game' is played this way, change is minimal and is occurring slowly. For many children schools reinforce these entrenched values and behaviours. For many students schools serve to reinforce the binary construction of gender.

There is the continuing saga of deciding who is masculine and who is feminine and who is cast out. The 'elite' boys decide this and they particularly bully boys who are seen to be on the other side of the divide. These decisions are made on the basis of appearance such as those with a small physique or a view that someone is considered a 'nerd' or other supposedly feminine attributes. 'Nerds' are viewed as overly interested in schoolwork, which is seen as a feminine, negative trait. Those bullied are often called 'girls', 'poofs' or 'fags'. To call a boy a 'girl' is one of the worst insults.

In a survey of 400 schools, bullying of boys by boys was reported by 90% of Year 10 students and reported as happening often by 43%. Gay put-downs of boys were reported as happening in their school by nearly 90% of students and as happening often by nearly 50%.

An added complexity is that 'what it means to be masculine' is constantly changing in schools. One hundred years ago the study of languages and history was seen as socially acceptable for males but it is now rejected by many boys as being inappropriate. The same social shift is currently happening with English. Playing and working with computers has become a male thing, although in primary school both girls and boys enjoy computer games. In some school environments boys are now defacing female students' computer work and finding out their passwords in an attempt to maintain their territorial control over the computer equipment.

So while resource use in schools has been improved for girls and expanding their admission to 'traditional male' subjects has occurred. The underlying gender issues have not been addressed. Boys are still protecting what was seen as their territory.

The gender game is fundamentally about the protection of masculinity and all the advantages of being male in our society. Often what is defined as masculine is seen as the 'norm' from which everything else is measured. Although girls may also play gender games they do not have the same ground to protect and maintain control over.

Maurice Sheehan in *Cool Guys, Geeks and Nerds* recommends that more male teachers in primary schools and a greater number in English and humanities departments in secondary colleges would also help boys to feel more comfortable in their learning environment.

In regard to teachers however, the whole school environment needs to be considered. It is important for boys and girls to see adults in a wide range of roles. It is important for boys and girls to see women as principals, so that they can have balanced role models. Just as having more male teachers in humanities and in primary schools is important, as role models for both girls and boys, it is important to have female teachers in the maths and sciences. However it must be remembered that there have always been more female than male teachers in primary schools, with more male principals.

In secondary schools women teachers have always outnumbered males, especially in humanities and again there are more male principals. Recent DEET figures show that only 31% of principals overall are women. In similar fashion there are very few male teachers in the early years of schooling. In primary schools that do have male teachers the majority of them teach in the higher grades.

Teaching as a profession needs to be examined in the context of employment patterns generally. Women often choose teaching as a career as it is convenient for combining with family responsibilities. Teaching is not a highly paid profession which is probably one of the main reasons males do not choose it as a career. Males seldom select teaching as a first choice but those who go into the career are more likely to become principals and then attain the highest promotion positions in DEET. This has been the case for more than one hundred years. (Annual Reports, Minister for Education, 1900-2000, Victoria).

Recently the television program, A Current Affair concluded that one of the reasons for boys' alienation from schooling is that boys' technical schools, that had more active educational programs for boys, were closed. It argued that schools should ensure that these types of active educational programs are maintained.

Other research has found that if schools begin each morning with 15 minutes of exercise all students behave and perform better. Sheehan who states that 'boys prefer to learn by doing or being involved in some action based task' also commented on this activity factor. (Sheehan, 2000, p54).

6. Participation in aspects of school life (leadership positions, community service activities, the range of curriculum offerings)

As previously discussed girls have had their horizons expanded in schools. However in most schools the changes have confirmed rather than dismantled the gender chasm. As a society we have tended to see boys' subject choices which focus in science and maths as good choices instead of being aware of the narrowness of what they do. Boys need to be counseled and supported to spread their choices more broadly across the curriculum.

Many of the problems schools face are because boys have not been encouraged to take on non-traditional subjects or roles. Boys' subject choices are appraised as career relevant without acknowledging the narrowness of many boys' learning experiences and insisting that they, like girls, should broaden their choices. (Collins, *Refractory Girl*, 1999, p20).

It is vital that boys as well as girls learn values and behaviours that are about respecting others, developing a strong self-image and developing healthy, productive lives. Strong support should be given to boys to broaden their career and life options, and expand their understanding of family responsibilities and care of children.

A great deal of work has been done for girls in this area although change has been slow. Boys need permission to explore careers other than the traditional professions or trade and other male dominated areas. There is still enormous pressure on boys to become the strong family provider and to take on roles that require extremely long hours at work and little time to explore other aspects of life.

Recent media reports have questioned the long-term benefits of traditional male career paths. While these career paths have given men much greater access than women to money, status and power, some men seem to be realising that the 'much sought after career path' has potentially negative consequences for their health and life expectancy. These men are now seeking to regain some balance and sense of wellbeing in their lives.

With regard to student participation in the curriculum, The Age newspaper has reported on a new study by ACER titled *Subject Choice by Students in Year 12 in Australian Secondary Schools*. The study has found that:

'students' choice of subject is still heavily influenced by gender, the type of school and their parent's occupations.'

'While the enrolment patterns reflect the traditional gender differences in subject choice – males tend to choose the higher-level maths and physical science subjects, and females dominate humanities, languages and the biological sciences – the gap has narrowed slightly.'

'In the physical sciences, participation by students whose parents are in professional jobs remains more than twice the level of those students whose parents are in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Higher levels of parental education are also associated with higher enrolments in mathematics and humanities and social sciences.'

Collins, Kenway and McLeod year found that with regard to subject choice gender was a key factor in Year 12. Girls are choosing a broad range of subjects and appear to be less career-focussed while boys are selecting a much narrower grouping of subjects, subjects which are either more directed towards a career and/or those regarded as 'traditional male' subjects. It is interesting to note that boys choose certain of these subjects even when they may not do well in those areas.

As discussed elsewhere in this submission, it is well known that girls are outperforming boys across a broad range of subjects. However on closer examination, Cherry Collins et al find that, 'the fact the average girl is performing slightly better than the average boy is in part the result of boys' preference for particular high pay-off, and/or traditional subjects even when they may not do well in those areas.

Thus in subjects highly rated by boys there is likely to be a longer tail of boys bringing down the average performance. Girls' broader choice across subjects suggests a greater inclination not to gamble on higher status subjects if they are likely to do poorly in them.' Research over the last twenty-five years has confirmed the view that gender is a significant factor in determining subject choice.

The research of Collins et al and Teese leads them to the view that school performance levels do not advantage girls and young women on leaving school.

'The subjects at Year 12 not only reflect outcomes of earlier opportunity but they also provide the foundation for later opportunities,' states Dr John Ainley, Deputy Director ACER. (The Age, 15 August, p 5).

A further example of the gender divide is in apprenticeship training. Boys outnumber girls in apprenticeships and in particular boys choose subjects such as information technology and the majority of girls still choose hairdressing.

Gendered choices in training opportunities appear earlier in students' schooling when choices are made in the VET in Schools program (VETIS). This is clearly shown *The 1998 VET in Schools Destination Report*.

It is clear that labour market options are gendered and as a result of the choices they make boys and girls are disadvantaged in different ways, " the fact that girls in general have a higher order of literacy skills does not give them better labour market outcomes than boys. This is possibly due to the segmented nature of the labour market." (Collins, Kenway and McLeod, July 2000). A comprehensive analysis needs to occur on the impact of gender on subject choice, courses and post-school destinations of students in the VET in Schools Program. The issues identified as part of the research should be included in a national gender strategy developed in consultation with each state and territory.

The problem with continuing to support the circumstance where students are making critical future life choices based on a narrow social construct of gender is that future choices remain severely limited. While girls are seriously disadvantaged in the labour market in job opportunities and pay, many boys do not develop necessary life skills for the roles of partnering, parenting, and self-care. Schools have a key role to play in assisting all students to develop appropriate life-skills.

7. Changes to the labour market

Economic and structural change in Australia over the last 25 years has created a mismatch between the capabilities of school leavers and the nature and levels of skills required in the workplace. This affects both boys and girls. However it would appear that those boys with traditional 'male' skills who leave school early no longer get jobs as readily as in the past since those 'unskilled' jobs have gone. However of the boys and girls who do leave school early and get jobs more boys than girls do so and boys earn more. Lower skilled girls and boys are competing for jobs further up the employment ladder but these jobs require the skills and training they do not have.

It should be noted that this is a structural change. Schools have not created it.

Paid workers still cluster in a narrow range of jobs. In 1996, 56% of all employed women worked in two occupational categories, clerks being one and salespersons and personal service workers the other. Three occupational groups accounted for 53% of employed men: tradespersons; labourers and related workers, and managers and administrators (ABS, May 1996).

8. Risk taking behaviours, health outcomes, and death rates, including suicide

Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Princes Hill Secondary College points out that risk-taking behaviours are just as serious for girls as for boys but the media and the community perceive the matter differently. The Student Welfare Branch of DEET confirms his view.

Since 1994 young females are representing an increasing proportion of youth suicide. There is also evidence to suggest that while male suicide is significantly higher than for girls, girls attempt suicide more often than boys but use methods that are less likely to be fatal.

A key issue for the Australian community is that boys constitute 80% of the total suicides. But it needs to be noted that the rate of increase in suicide in the 15-24-age cohort has increased in almost identical numbers for boys and girls in recent years.

Boys are more public in their response to problems of depression and social-emotional issues. However girls engage in self-destructive behaviour that is not common to boys and is often engaged in more privately. For example, over 80% of anorexics are girls and other severe eating disorders affect young women and girls rather than men. The 1997 ABS Mental Health and Wellbeing Profile found that the rate of mental illness in the young adult age group (18-24) is the highest for any age cohort, and that this rate is highest among young women. Young women are three times more likely to exhibit affective disorders such as depression and stress, whilst young men are twice as likely to have substance abuse disorders

At the same time 1800 girls between the ages of 13 and 18 have babies each year in Victoria and this seriously affects their access to education and work options.

This submission does not seek to diminish the significance of young males committing suicide and the tragic loss of life that this entails. The impact on relatives is incalculable and urgent action by the community is required. Action is also urgently required to address issues that lead young women to become anorexic and literally starve themselves to death. A whole-school approach to mental health issues is essential.

9. Rates of violent and criminal behaviour and of imprisonment and detention

In the media some of the blame for these aspects of boys' behaviour has been attributed to the fact that women head sole parent families. However, historically this was the case 100 years ago as men were killed in the wars, left their families during the depression and died in accidents, which resulted in single parent families. The issue of women as head of sole parent families is not a 'new' issue.

The large number of women teachers is seen to be of detriment to boys. However women teachers have numerically dominated the teaching service for 100 years. This is not a 'new' phenomenon either. Males currently hold more than two-thirds of the Principal positions. This statistic has not changed either in a century. (Annual Report of the Minister of Education, Victoria, 1899-1999).

Men generally have poorer relationship and communication skills and lower levels of involvement in family and community care. More work needs to be done to ensure that both boys and girls are encouraged to understand the responsibilities of child care, family life and taking on the role of carers, such as caring for aged parents. Peer pressure and how 'norms' are defined leads to many boys believing that taking on a caring role is not gender appropriate. Girls are not only taught that they must adopt the primary care role but are encouraged more than boys to be socially responsible.

Because a key part of the social construct of being male is to address problems using physical means many schools are using conflict resolution and non-violent education programs as preventative measures. Such programs are consistent with the approach taken by DEET's Student Welfare Branch as reported later in this submission, and with school focussed Youth Services programs such as 'Turning the Tide'.

Recommendations:

1. That the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) fund a three-year national gender strategy to be developed and implemented collaboratively with states and territories through the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). In recognition that gender is one of the key factors affecting the school experience of our young people, this national gender strategy should consist of six key components:
 - 1.1 research
 - 1.2 policy development
 - 1.3 pilot projects and programs in schools
 - 1.4 professional development
 - 1.5 evaluation
 - 1.6 reporting to the community.

2. That DETYA supports states and territories to establish ongoing comprehensive longitudinal studies which track individual students who leave school, to find out why students leave, where they go, and documents the pathway of each individual student in the study through local planning networks or organisations.

3. That the Commonwealth and state/territory governments work together to ensure that the support needed to address some of the issues faced by boys from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are met. This includes funding to:
 - allow additional assistance to refugees and those entering under the humanitarian stream to enable additional assistance to be provided

 - develop and provide professional development for teachers which aims to:
 - Address issues raised relating to boys within the context of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the school population.
 - provide teachers with an awareness of these issues and skills in dealing with classroom behaviour resulting from different cultural practices and/or pre migration experiences that may interfere with the learning of all students.
 - support goal 3.3 of The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, which states that:
“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students”.

 - Extend the services provided by specialist agencies, for example, by the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST) need to be readily available in both metropolitan and non- metropolitan areas.

PART B

The approach taken by the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) and by schools in addressing the educational needs of boys.

Currently in Victoria the educational needs of boys have been identified and addressed in the following ways by key sections of the central office of the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) and by schools.

DEET PROGRAMS

Early Years of Schooling

Background

In Victoria a comprehensive approach to early literacy and numeracy has been undertaken comprising:

1. three-year research projects in both early literacy and numeracy involving extensive longitudinal data collection
2. development of the Early Years literacy and numeracy programs, informed by this research
3. provision of Reading Recovery or other one to one literacy interventions program targeting 20% of the Year One cohort
4. extensive data collection monitoring the effectiveness of the literacy, numeracy and Reading Recovery programs.

Research

Commonwealth funding was used to support the implementation of the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP) from 1996 to 1998. Analysis of the data from this project indicated that neither gender nor measures of other factors such as poverty, language and racial background (perceived to educationally disadvantage students) were significant predictors of student performance, prior achievement was identified as being the most significant predictor. The Early Numeracy Research Project commencing in 1999 has also found that gender is not a significant predictor. It was therefore decided to focus on the development and implementation of programs that would accurately identify levels of achievement and provide support for all students in moving forward but in particular support those students with lower levels of achievement irrespective of other factors such as gender.

Early Years programs

The Early Years Literacy Program has been developed in stages, from 1997 onwards and has been implemented in all schools in Victoria. Its essential features are a daily, focused two-hour classroom literacy session, case management of 'at risk' students, strategically planned home/school partnerships, professional development at teacher, Early Years Coordinator, Early Years Trainer level, the identification of an Early Years Coordinator and whole-school commitment. All government primary schools in Victoria have implemented this program. The Early Years Numeracy Program is currently being developed based on the model of the Early Years Literacy Program.

Reading Recovery

Funding has been provided to support schools in providing one to one interventions at Year One for those students most at risk in literacy, approximately 20% of the statewide cohort. The recommended program is Reading Recovery and an infrastructure to support all schools to access Reading Recovery has also been developed. Students are selected as needing additional support on the basis of a number of performance indicators.

Approximately 60% of students accessing Reading Recovery are boys, indicating a higher proportion of boys at risk at this level of schooling. Students generally discontinue Reading Recovery when they achieve levels above the class average. Those who do not achieve these levels are referred to other professionals such as educational psychologists. Boys in general spend longer in the program but on average achieve similar levels to the girls. More boys than girls are referred from Reading Recovery to other services.

Data collection

Extensive data is collected to monitor effectiveness of both Reading Recovery and the Early Years Literacy Program. Text levels of students in Years Prep to Two are collected annually in December. In 2000, schools will submit their data with a breakdown of the gender of the students. Further data has been obtained from teacher surveys. These indicate that teachers perceive the Early Years program has been effective in supporting the literacy needs of both boys and girls. (Early Years of Schooling, Program Implementation Feedback Survey, 1999).

Early Years Conclusion

DEET has developed considerable expertise in the development of research based materials and the delivery of accompanying professional development to support schools as evidenced by student data and teacher surveys. Funding is required for further research into the literacy learning needs of students, in particular boys, and professional development to support teachers in addressing these needs.

Middle Years

The Middle Years Strategy, which was launched by the Minister in December 1999, has three major components – research and evaluation, teacher professional development and curriculum support materials.

This Strategy supports schools to ensure that the educational progress of all students is not impeded by factors that are within schools' control. It is investigating through research the reasons that particular groups of boys, and girls, are not succeeding at school. Schools are exploring ways to engage these students in their learning programs and to support them in their relationships with peers, teachers, and the broader community.

As part of the research and evaluation component the DEET in conjunction with the Centre for Applied Educational Research at The University of Melbourne, has commenced investigating the reasons why some students fail to engage with their

learning during the middle years. The Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) Project will examine students' attitudes to learning and schooling in general. Sixty-one clusters of schools will participate in the twelve-month research project. It is anticipated that the result of the research will inform schools of more effective methods of approaching education in these years.

Two research projects designed to improve students' achievements in key foundational areas of the curriculum are currently in progress, jointly conducted for the DEET, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria (AISV). Deakin University is implementing the Middle Years Literacy Research Project, working with twelve schools to assist secondary English teachers, other Key Learning Area teachers and Year 5 & 6 primary teachers to maximise their effectiveness as teachers of literacy within the English Key Learning Area in the mainstream classroom. This project is designed to improve literacy outcomes for all students, Years 5-10, particularly those experiencing difficulties.

A research project focused on improving numeracy skills in students in the middle years of schooling (Years 5-9) is being undertaken by RMIT (Bundoora). The trial phase of the Middle Years Numeracy Project (MYNRP) 5-9 involves 15 school sites trialing aspects of a Framework, organised in terms of the design elements of the Whole School Approach to School Improvement (Hill and Crevola, 1997), and informed by the on-going collection of numeracy performance data from students in years 5 to 9.

Student welfare is an integral part of the Middle Years Strategy. Welfare and pastoral care programs and counselling services will be promoted. Transition and induction programs will ease the movement between primary and secondary school for all students.

When the findings of the research are released it is anticipated that many schools will implement changes that will assist students improve their learning outcomes and attitudes to school and will impact on student behaviour, attendance and retention rates. This will be highly significant for particular groups of boys.

Science in Schools

\$21.8 million over four years has been committed to improving the teaching and learning of science P-10 in Victorian schools. The Science in Schools strategy also aims to encourage boys and girls to pursue VCE science subjects and science related careers.

The strategy includes research and development, extensive professional development, a broad range of projects that connect students and schools with business, industry and the tertiary sector and the development of student and teacher resources.

The focus on the development of on-line student materials recognises the capacity of information technology to engage boys as active learners.

Student Welfare and Support

The Student Welfare and Support Branch provides guidelines and programs for schools to develop whole school approaches to student well being which encompasses the issue of education for boys.

Issues identified as of relevance to particular groups of boy's include

- student attendance
- bullying
- drug taking
- vulnerability
- health and wellbeing
- risk behaviours
- gender identity and orientation and
- gender and power in sexual relations and relationships.

It is clear however that these issues do not only affect particular groups of boys but also impact on particular groups of girls in schools.

Research indicates that a similar core of underlying factors may lead an individual to be vulnerable. Thus, any response needs to be a multi faceted one that acknowledges the complexity of the issue and ranges from prevention to intervention through to post-intervention.

The Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools 1998 outlines a comprehensive conceptual and operational framework for the provision of student welfare. The framework supports schools in responding to the wide variety of issues facing young people such as depression, self harm and drug misuse as well as suicide prevention. Four major concepts or four levels of activity underpin the Framework:

- primary prevention, early intervention, intervention and post-intervention;
- continuity of care;
- partnerships between schools and the community and
- accountability.

The major emphasis is on prevention, with the goal of providing population based strategies as well targeted programs to provide young people with skills and strategies to enhance their resilience.

Other initiatives to assist in creating a whole school approach to student well being within the framework are

- Addressing Bullying Behaviour – It's Our Responsibility - a package aimed to assist schools develop preventative strategies to address bullying. Peer support and mediation programs are examples of strategies that schools have adopted as part of their bullying policy.

- Keeping Kids at School – a document for all schools addressing issues of student attendance.
- Individual School Drug Education Strategy (ISDES) – Schools consult with the school population to implement a comprehensive drug education curriculum and policy that takes into account the needs of students (including boys), the school and the community.
- The School Focused Youth Service – a joint initiative of DEET and Department of Human Services to enhance cooperation between schools and community agencies respond to the needs of vulnerable young people. Forty-one clusters have been developed in Victoria.

Curriculum Resource documents to promote health and well being of all students include

- Catching On - developed as part of the STD/HIV prevention education strategy in response to research and trialing conducted by DEET and the current research available on adolescent sexuality. The kit is aimed at year 9&10 and has a particular emphasis on exploring issues of risk behaviours, gender identity and orientation and gender and power in sexual relations and relationships.
- Get Real and Get Wise – drug education resources aimed at equipping young people with accurate information about drugs in our society and as well as exploring values and decision making around drug use.

Curriculum Initiatives

Aligning Curriculum, Discipline & School Organisation

Data shows us that the majority of disruptive students are adolescent boys. Of the 221 students expelled from government schools in Victoria in 1999, 196 (89%) were boys. They engage in a range of inappropriate behaviour that commonly disrupts the learning for an entire class, consumes teacher time and causes teacher stress. Apart from the impact on others, it also often leads to the absenteeism, suspension and expulsion of the disruptive student/s.

It is believed that in many cases the underlying issue is that the school is not engaging the interest or satisfying the needs of the disruptive students. It is commonly reported that these students do not find the curriculum stimulating; have poor literacy skills and so struggle with many of their subjects and generally see little or no relevance of school to their lives.

In response to this the Curriculum Initiatives Branch is currently developing a four-session Professional Development program for school teams that will address this issue by providing strategies to engage these students in their learning. The program 'Curriculum, Discipline & School Organisation - An Alignment Model' will be trialed in Term 1, 2001. The trial will include 1 metropolitan & 1 country region with teams from 5 schools in each trial. The Australian Professional Development Network coordinated by Mark Beale, in consultation with the Curriculum Initiatives Branch will run the program.

Through this program it is intended that schools and teachers will be better informed about issues related to student behaviour and will develop teaching and learning programs and structures that cater for all students. It is then expected that students will be more fully engaged with their education and as a result will be less disruptive in class and more

If successful, it is anticipated that the program will be considered for broader delivery and the findings will inform the development of related policy and guidelines.

LOTE, ESL and Multicultural Education

The following comments relate to particular issues boys may face in schooling as a result of their cultural and linguistic background. It should be noted that some of these issues also relate to girls.

Diversity

The school population in Victorian government schools reflects the cultural diversity of the state. Over 25% of the school population are from language backgrounds other than English. Students or their families come from over 100 countries and speak over 60 languages.

Approximately 3500 students who are new arrivals enrol in Victorian government schools each year. These students come from over 100 countries and have a range of pre migration experiences. Approximately a third of these students enter the country as humanitarian or refugee entrants, many of them fleeing persecution from war-torn parts of the world.

Boys account for 51.8% of all students from language backgrounds other than English enrolled in Victorian government schools.

Cultural differences

The status of men and boys in families and communities varies between and within cultures. Some male students who are accustomed to playing a dominant role in their family and community, may have difficulty in adjusting to the generally more egalitarian role of males and females which is supported by legislation, in Australia. This may impact on their behaviour at school.

Pre migration experiences

Students from countries experiencing war and civil strife will bring with them a number of pre migration experiences, which may make settling in a new country difficult. Some students, more likely boys, may have been involved in conflict, have carried arms, and been subjected to horrific experiences. Many students will have experienced the death of a member of their immediate or extended family due to the conflict. The often very abrupt move to a new country may create difficulties for both the students and schools. In addition the expectation of settling into a school routine and leading a “normal” life in a matter of days can create problems.

Breakdown of family structures

Many families settling in Australia under the humanitarian migration stream will have experienced family breakdown. There may be an absence of a male role model for some boys, as a result of war, and some boys may feel they have to assume the role of head of the family, which places an additional burden and responsibility on them for which they are not prepared.

The needs of these students are often compounded through combinations of the factors discussed above. They are also faced with the need to learn English and to study English across the curriculum. Students who have had severely interrupted schooling in their first country, or no schooling at all, face enormous challenges and require substantial support.

Development of the Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools

The primary target of the Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools, launched in 1997 is to ensure that by 2006, all students P-12 will have a multicultural perspective delivered across all eight key learning areas, and incorporated into all aspects of school life. A number of initiatives including briefings for senior staff, on going professionals development for teachers and administrators, as well as a number of publications have been developed to support schools implement the policy.

A range of support is provided to schools to assist them meet the needs of students from language backgrounds other than English. The exact nature of the support varies according to the needs of ESL learner's in particular schools. The main forms of support are outlined below.

- English language support
 - New arrival and on-going support is available for students from language backgrounds other than English who require English as a second language support.
 - The intensive new arrival programs provide an invaluable opportunity for students from cultures very different to Australia to learn, not just English language skills across the curriculum, but also about the culture and expectations in our schools and in the community. Boys from a strongly patriarchal society that may not respect women as authority figures have the opportunity to learn the expectations of a different society in a supportive, culturally aware environment.
 - ESL funding is provided to approximately 480 mainstream schools to enable them to provide on-going ESL programs for these students.
 - Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs) are also provided to all English language schools and centres and to approximately 240 mainstream schools to assist students settle into their new environment, and to provide classroom assistance
- Professional development

Teachers of ESL learners are able to access a range of professional development activities including cultural background sessions, effective classroom strategies and specialist training in dealing with students suffering the affects of torture and trauma.

- **Welfare support**
In addition to the support provided through the Student Services Section of DEET, English language schools and centres, which many new arrival students attend for between 6-12 months, assist students and their families in the settlement process. Students suffering the effects of torture and trauma can be referred to the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST) for specialist assistance. In addition, DEET works cooperatively with the VFST to provide professional development for teachers and other educational professionals, and has provided support for the Rainbow Program, a special program developed by the VFST which is conducted in schools for students from torture and trauma backgrounds.
- **Access to interpreting and translating services**
Schools are able to access interpreting and translating services free of charge to assist parents whose first language is not English, access school information. In addition, key documents for parents must be made available in a number of languages other than English, and frequently used school notices are available in nineteen languages. The use of an interpreter at the time of enrolment is particularly critical in obtaining information about new students' previous educational experiences and backgrounds.

Koorie Education

Background

Koorie 2000 is the policy framework to achieve improved educational outcomes for Koorie students in Victoria across eight indigenous education priority areas. Koorie 2000 also strengthens and formalises the involvement of Koorie people in educational decision-making at the local, regional and state level.

In 1999, there were 5112.2 Koorie enrolments (EFT) across 908 schools (ie 55.7% of schools).

Schools with between 1-5 Koorie students: 669

Schools with between 6-19 Koorie students: 201

Schools with over 20 Koorie students: 38

There is a range of major initiatives under Koorie 2000 that support all Koorie students in schools with specific strategies that support the particular needs of groups of boys.

Programs that continue to operate under the Koorie 2000 framework include

- **Koorie Educators Program:** provides support to Koorie students' schools and facilitate liaison between the school and Koorie community. Male Koorie Educators can act as role models for Koorie boys.
- **Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) campuses.** The KODE campuses have been established to provide a culturally inclusive learning and teaching environment as well as to increase community involvement in education. The unique environment of the campuses can foster and support the learning and social needs of Koorie boys.

- Koorie Intern Teacher Program. This program, which commenced in 1991, supports Koorie people to train as teachers at Deakin University with ongoing employment provided on completion of training.
- Koorie Literacy Links Project and the Koorie Middle Years Link Project. These projects focus on improving outcomes in literacy for Koorie students in Prep to Grade 3. An estimated 400 Koorie students are involved in the projects which enable students, teachers and community members to share and discuss issues relating to literacy. The projects support Koorie boys' needs in the following way:
 - motivational aspects of technology for boys
 - school community teams act as support networks for Koorie students particularly male members acting as role models
 - communication with other Koorie males across the state including family
 - identification of high interest texts for Koorie males
 - sharing of diverse teaching strategies by teachers that address multiple intelligence and cater for different learning styles

DEET, through a service agreement, supports the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated to deliver a mentor program across a number of community sites. The program supports the particular needs of Koorie young people, including boys, as identified by the local community. Initiatives supported by the mentor program include art, social, educational and cultural projects as well as the provision of individual mentor support. In addition the Koorie Education Development Unit and the Regional Koorie Education Committees can provide advice regarding specific needs or initiatives involving Koorie boys.

Sports Education

Sport Education Model - Sport Education In Physical Education Program

Curriculum models where students learn to plan, implement and play in a sporting competition as part of the PE or sport education program. Students take responsibility for the conduct of a season of sport at school and involve themselves in planning and implementation of the competition. Boys have shown a distinct interest in this approach and responded well to being given positions of authority.

Leadership

Many schools are involving boys in sports leadership programs, to develop links with community initiatives. Students, having participated in an extended training program through their PE classes, become involved in administration and/or officiating of local or school sport programs. These community options include: pre - competition programs for 5-10 year olds in Football (Auskick) and Cricket (Have a Go), umpiring primary school inter-school sports, after school sport programs based at leisure and community sport centres

As a result of leadership programs students are offered exemptions to participate in a refereeing/coaching course. A trial at Pakenham recently saw boys support local clubs in Cricket and Rugby after participating in a sports leader's program.

School and Club links

A key feature of the School Sport Unit's initiative is its contact with State Sporting Associations and the development of programs of mutual benefit to both schools and clubs. These include joint coaching courses offered to teachers and students, sport expos, leadership programs and modified sport competitions.

Through involvement of local government and schools working together, a range of programs within school and after hours have been established offering students a pathway to community sport.

- Rosebud Sport district have worked with the local shire to offer Soccer training at school and set up a six week competition after hours.
- Ararat schools district is offering a year 5 - 8 SEPEP expo for all students in the district. Students will spend a day with the coach of one particular sport learning playing and administration skills to enhance their understanding of how community sport operates
- Blackburn High School offers a lunchtime sport program timetabled, and there has been particular success with boys taking on a team as coach and assisting to run the program.

Through sport, teachers are able to develop modified competition focusing on social sport activities appealing to boys ie. roller blade, beach volleyball, encouraging boys to take an interest in competitive, energetic pursuits that have an 'edge'

SCHOOLS' PROGRAMS

Background

The "Working with Boys Project" 1998 was a Department of Education project which began in 1996 and was established partly in response to media reports focussing on the need to deal with behaviour problems emerging with some groups of boys in schools. All the schools selected for the project identified either one of two major concerns as their starting point. Some began with boys' literacy, while others began with boys and self-esteem, communication and personal development.

In addition there a many other schools that have been working on issues related to gender equity to improve the educational experience and educational outcomes of girls and boys in schools. The following are examples of this work:

Brighton Secondary College

The "Working with Boys Project" was a huge success and has expanded into a program for all Year 7 classes. They had a two-year partnership with St Kilda football club, involving Jim Stynes working with the boys. The program received funding of \$1500 from the global budget. The project is strongly supported by two staff members and may not continue if those two individuals left the school.

Boort Secondary College

The “Working with Boys Project” is still operating in 2000 with all Year 9 boys participating. There were two initial stages to the program:

- Building Blokes Program – the school’s objectives for the program were to support the implementation of gender equity strategies for girls and to address boys’ needs in the areas of personal development and communication. It was considered that the culturally prescribed roles for males were very limiting and bore many negative consequences, particularly in terms of health and relationships.
- Boys’ education action plan
A whole school approach was adopted in the development of an Action Plan. Implementation strategies were developed in 1996.

Horsham Secondary College

The school’s involvement with the “Working with Boys Project” arose from a general concern with literacy. Work was done on the issue of gender and literacy and the school investigated a broad approach to the issue of gender construction.

Willow Grove Primary School

“Making a Difference” Program – a program run by the school to give intensive support to students with literacy problems. Of the four students in the project, all are boys. Reading Recovery/Reading programs - boys are the predominant group in the Reading Recovery program. Reading programs have been altered because some students, often boys, are unable to read freely at home. Strategies include regular, quiet classroom reading, a variety of reading materials to promote interest and blending fiction and non-fiction material.

Behaviour Management programs – boys are often most in need of support which includes a strong health program operating throughout the school based on social and personal behaviours. The program states very clearly what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the school. The “Stop, Think and Do” program has empowered all students both inside and outside the school classroom. Parents are strongly supportive of the approach taken by the school.

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