

**SUBMISSION TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION
AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS
INQUIRY INTO THE
EDUCATION OF BOYS**

**NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION
23-33 MARY STREET, SURRY HILLS, NSW 2010**

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General Secretary**

The New South Wales Teachers Federation is a public education union with 77,047 members (based on Federation membership data base for 2000). Our members work in a broad range of public education worksites including pre-schools, schools, schools for specific purposes, TAFE colleges, AMES (Adult Migrant English Service), juvenile justice centres and educational facilities in jails. Teachers in public schools work directly with over 765,000 students (based on figures provided in the 1999 Department of Education and Training Annual Report), boys and girls across a range of ages, socio-economic status, locations and ethnicities. Teachers are uniquely situated to put forward a series of recommendations, observations and insights.

The NSW Teachers Federation has a proud history of pursuing social justice, questions of equity and promoting the enhancement of student learning conditions. It is Federation's view that education founded on social justice is of social and community benefit, where quality education is for all and not only the privileged.

This submission seeks to reflect teachers' specialist knowledge encapsulated in recommendations and policy decisions developed by Women's Conferences (attended by over 300 female delegates from across the State), State Council meetings (300 male and female delegates from across the State) and Annual Conference (over 500 male and female delegates from across the State). Other sources are from our federal union, the Australian Education Union (AEU) policies, in particular the AEU Draft Gender Equity Policy (Appendix 1) and Federation's submission to the Government Advisory Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs on Gender Equity and Boys Education Strategies (Appendix 2).

While the Federation contends that some boys experience problems in relation to their educational, social and cultural experiences in school, it is our view that not all boys face the same problems, nor to the same degree. It is important that any inquiry into the education of boys investigates beneath the surface of media hype and the associated moral panic. Headlines such as :

'Boys will be boys and they're suffering for it' – Daily Telegraph, 5 July 1999

'Education is failing boys' – Courier Mail, 8 January 1999

'Culture of defeat KOs schoolboys' – Courier Mail, 7 January 1999

'Boys lack the will to win in reading game' – Courier Mail, 23 October 1998

inhibits the education community from making considered and balanced observations in a vexing complex debate. An informed debate is required, one which has as its primary concern the best interests of all students rather than ideological or social engineering agendas.

Our submission will seek to tease out the questions of "which boys?" and "which girls?" are causing concern for themselves, their parents and their communities. The recommendations are focussed to support all students, including those at risk. Federation rejects any attempts to use simplistic, generic or homogenous definitions to describe boys and girls educational, social and cultural experiences.

'Boys will be boys' – Sunday Examiner – 13 December 1998

'Boys think English is for girls' – Courier Mail, 10 December 1997

'Men reading badly in the culture of women' – The Australian, 22 March 1999

'Boys see reading as women's work' – The Age, 12 March 1999

'Girls win honours, boys wear dunce cap' – The Weekend Australian, 9 January 1999

'Girl power tops class – gender gap leaves schoolboys behind' – Sunday Telegraph, 9 August 1998

These attention grabbing headlines creates an oppositional relationship between male and female students, which recasts and problematises boys as the new disadvantaged. Girls are positioned as the ascendant and powerful at the expense of boys. This simplistic rendering is untrue and biased in nature.

This aspect of the debate will be addressed in the attached supporting material of the submission through some analysis and observations of external quantitative data and an examination of the resourcing and provision of early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery. Federation is aware that much more goes on in our schools that cannot be processed or reduced to quantitative data; however, they provide useful indicators regarding the experiences and educational successes of boys and girls in our school.

It must be noted at this point that Federation is concerned by the parameters of the terms of reference being limited only to the question of pre-determined biological sex, i.e. boys. Informed debate has sought to move beyond this way of describing individuals to the notion of an individual's gender forming the basis of a better understanding and a focussing of appropriate analysis. Secondly, that the focus of the inquiry is located solely in the school setting. Schools cannot be isolated from the communities or the times in which they operate. These factors also impact on the experience of students and their schooling and will be expanded on in the supporting material attached.

Where Federation uses the term gender, we are using the term to acknowledge that one's masculinity or femininity is not fixed, nor is it determined by biology and that gender is socially constructed. When using the term gender, we acknowledge that masculinities and femininities vary greatly between cultures, times and class/social levels in the same culture. Federation understands the active role that schools play in the development of a range of masculinities and femininities via relationships between teachers, peers, the school culture and the curriculum offerings. Schools also teach boys and girls how some forms of masculinities and femininities are more valued. Finally, boys learn at schools that a way of feeling powerful as a male is being able to wield influence over other males and females.

Schools must play a role in assisting all students to understand the coercive pressures that are upon them to normalise certain celebrated masculinities. Having said that, it is also imperative that this work is done in an environment that does not apportion blame on boys, individually or as a group. Boys and girls, like men and women, are victims of this tyranny.

When considering an individual's educational social and cultural experiences, it is imperative to acknowledge that one's gender, intersects with other variables that also inform and impact upon an individual's identity. The variables we will examine specifically are socio-economic status (class), ethnicity, Aboriginality, geographic location and sexuality.

Hence the earlier questions attempting to refocus this debate around "which boys?" and "which girls?" are expanded and better articulated by an understanding of these other contributing factors. The attached supporting material will expand these complexities to support the recommendations made in the Submission.

With this understanding, the NSW Teachers Federation will make recommendations that will enhance the learning experiences and education of all students, including all boys and girls. The strategies outlined will better position all students to be able to embrace the future positively.

Importantly, teachers acknowledge that there are no quick fixes to the problems facing girls and boys in our schools and their lives beyond. Rather, teachers, parents and students expect schools to be safe, inclusive, meaningful and challenging where they can examine gendered alternatives. Accordingly, Federation asserts that the following recommendations be adopted:

1. All initiatives must be supported by a fully funded, free, quality, public education system.
2. A continued commitment by both Federal and State governments to the recommendations that underpin both "Gender Equity – a Framework for Australian Schools" (Gender Equity Taskforce) and specifically to NSW, the "NSW Gender Equity Strategy 'Girls and Boys at School' 1996 to 2001". Federation's 1999 Women's Conference endorsed the theoretical

underpinnings of both of these documents. Both the national framework and the specific NSW strategies provide a way forward, some work has begun in some schools and this work must continue.

It is pleasing to note that the NSW Inquiry into Boys Education in 1994 led by Mr Stephen O'Doherty, MP, and the subsequent Labor Government support of the Gender Equity Strategy approach in our state, has allowed this work to commence. In a climate of change for change sake, it is important that this strategy has an opportunity to continue the work started, move towards its goals and be able to evaluate progress and set direction based on informed attitudes and opinions.

The understanding and the use of these policies varies from school to school and relies on the commitment of individual teachers. Hence the important role the Federal and State governments must play to ensure a proper implementation of the Gender Equity Strategic Framework.

The NSW Gender Equity Framework sets out these focus areas:

2.1 Teaching and Learning

Support in the form of both Professional Development and increased release from face to face teaching must be provided so that schools can question their:

- Curriculum offerings and course content
- Representation of male and female achievements and experiences
- Which students are under-achieving and in what subjects
- Students subject choices and analysis of those choices, do they reflect gender stereotyping that will impact on post school destinations
- Participation rates in physical activity without a focus on competitive sport
- Strategies to deal with body image and eating disorders.

2.2 The School Culture and Organisation

It is imperative that additional support be provided to deal with the problems associated with violence and school culture, by this Federation is specifically referring to sex based harassment. This phenomenon affects both boys and girls and impacts negatively on the range of experiences had in any one day at school. This includes friendships, subject choices, aspirations, behaviour, school attendance, class participation or appearance or any combination of these. Sex based harassment limits students, boys and girls, social, educational and cultural opportunities.

“Fear of others’ opinions and of isolation and the need for a secure identity are primary motivating factors leading many to adopt safe behaviours and to make choices within gender conventions”.

“Are boys victims of feminism in schools? Some answers from Australia” – Jane Kenway, Sue Willis, Jill Blackmore and Leonie Rennie.

Homophobic regimes in schools play a powerful role in reinforcing dominant concepts about celebrated masculinity and femininity. The dominant heterosexist masculine hegemony that celebrates masculine practices solely such as sports, looks and girls puts all boys and girls at risk.

Federation has developed policies on Sex based Harassment (Appendix 6) and Sexual Orientation and Gender Preferred Identity (Appendix 7) for how the additional support would manifest itself – bold areas deal specifically with students.

- Students from K-12 need to develop the skills/tools to be socially critical citizens. This means students must understand and be able to articulate how gender is constructed, the role that sex based harassment plays and its impact on individuals, groups and society.

2.3 The School and its Community

Support must be provided in the form of decreased face to face teaching responsibilities so that a dialogue can be set up between the school and its community. An important component of any successful policy is the support provided by parents and caregivers. This is more so for the challenging area of gender, gender construction and its impact on students' lives (Appendix 3, specifically "Exploring Gender for Everyone with a Girl or Boy at a NSW Government School" as a model of best practice in this area).

2.3 Monitoring, Evaluation, Review and Development

Support must be provided in the form of quality Professional Development and training so that teachers can be reflective on the teaching practice. It is insufficient for data to be collected and that to be an end point.

Information on attendance, participation, retention, attainment, students at risk, students in need of extra support and post-school pathways are of little use unless this information is disaggregated and used to inform teachers' classroom practices.

3. **"Backlash comes from those people, male and female, who have the biggest investment in the old gender order and whose identity is rooted firmly in the gender order and who, for these two reasons, fear change".**

(Page 2, Presentation to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Boys' Education by Dr Jane Kenway on behalf of Women and Education NSW)

3.1 Given the power of the quote, it is imperative to provide increased release from face to face teaching duties for all teachers, for those reasons stated above, and the acknowledgment that teachers are also players in the construction of gender. Numerous academic studies have indicated that an increase in release time improves educational outcomes for students, for example, the current "School Reform Longitudinal Study (SRLS)" by Lingard, Hayes, Luke, Ladwig, Mills into the delivery of education in Queensland plus the 2010 consultative project undertaken by Education Queensland.

Teacher stress exacerbated by increased demands on areas of teacher expertise reduces the educational experience of students.

"I have been a teacher for a long time but do not feel confident in the many changes which have made so much work for me" – female survey respondent, rural secondary – Building the Foundations of Our Future, AEU Research 1999.

To be able to deal with questions of gender and how to integrate these understandings into teachers' practices takes time for the teacher to reflect upon their own gender construction and synthesis this reflection into classroom practice.

3.2 Strongly connected to the previous part of this recommendation and also reflected in the quote that opened this recommendation is the need for the increase in the availability of quality, preferably in schools hours, Professional Development. The material provided must be expert and current research in the field of gender and education. Federation acknowledges the role the Department of Education and Training's Gender Equity Unit has played in providing good resources as illustrated by the Gender Equity Resources available for Primary and Secondary (Appendix 3). However, there has been insufficient physical support to ensure changes to teacher's understanding of the construction of gender, for

schools to develop a whole school approach and shift school cultures nor teachers to be able to develop different pedagogical approach which embrace an understanding of gender equity.

4. The continued funding (with betterments) of the NSW Gender Equity Unit so that the development of resources and the training of Gender Equity District Co-ordinators can continue. Also important is the continuation of the work currently undertaken by the NSW Gender Equity Consultative Committee.

This committee is very useful and continues a positive dialogue between a range of interested groups on the question of improving the gender equity experience of boys and girls in NSW public schools. This committee meets regularly four times a year with the Department of Education and includes representatives from parents groups such as the Federation of Parents and Citizens (P&C) and Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO) plus professional groups such as Primary and Secondary Principal's Council and Association, as well as community groups such as Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) and Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group (AECG) plus the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF).

5. The re-establishment of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Gender Equity Taskforce to complete the work it started. It is imperative that a comprehensive evaluation of progress is undertaken and future directions set.

The recommendations that follow support the educational and theoretical underpinnings of the national "Gender Equity - A Framework for Australian Schools" and NSW Gender Equity Strategies "Girls and Boys at School 1996-2001" and seek to support and enhance these documents.

No strategy will be successful unless there is substantial financial commitment from governments to provide the following:

6. The delivery of quality pre-service training to student/trainee teachers to properly prepare them to be able to deal with areas such as gender, social economic status (SES), Aboriginality, Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students and rural and isolated students and how these factors impact on pedagogy. This must become a priority area in the delivery of any quality teacher training program.
7. The protection and enhancement of the co-educational comprehensive schooling system both at the primary and secondary level. For two reasons, Federation is concerned by the expansion of the range of modes of educational delivery with selective, specialist, single sex high schools and now the collegiate model of educational delivery. Secondly, the development of gender is always relational, i.e. the range of masculinities and femininities is informed by one another. Dominant forms of masculinity are defined by the denigration of the feminine or as sometimes referred to as "the other". Students, boys and girls, need to sort these matters out together; however, there needs to be separate safe spaces to discuss gender construction and its impact on their lives but they also need safe spaces where they can come together to do this work. A single sex school would create impediments for this dialogue happening and could foster the worst aspects of gender stereotyping.
8. Federal and State government educational strategies must ensure allocation of resources to ensure all students have access to educational opportunity.
 - 8.1 Increase funding programs that create improvements for rural and isolated students such as the Country Assistance Program (CAP). Too often students outside metropolitan

areas face reduced access to services and educational provision. The NSW Teachers Federation support many of the recommendations from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HEROC) Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, specifically the maintenance and enhancement of CAP.

8.2 Increase funding for programs that create improvements for students from low socio economic status (SES) environments. Too often students of low socio economic status have reduced access to educational opportunity. Hence Federation encourages the Federal Government to reintroduce funding of the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), the NSW Government has sought to maintain this program of funding, a further injection of funding from the Federal Government would create further improvements for areas of low socio economic status.

Federation has a long held policy in support of a National and State Disadvantaged Schools Policy (Appendix 4).

8.3 There is a need to develop within a public education system, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, educational authorities and the relevant unions, culturally sensitive, flexible teaching and learning environments that best suit the needs of Aboriginal students, their parents/caregivers and their community. It is important to note that a key to create educational improvements for Aboriginal students is an ongoing, inclusive and respectful dialogue between Aboriginal communities and the other participants. Also integral is the acknowledgment that language and cultural knowledge of Aboriginal people has status with academic qualifications.

Too often Aboriginal students have reduced access to educational opportunity and lack of respect for their language and cultural knowledge. "Federation is committed to achieving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students based on preserving diverse Aboriginal culture". Also, Federation acknowledges that "any equity of outcomes for Aboriginal students and communities can only be achieved by a strong, well resourced and freely available public education system."

Federation has been an early player in the development of a NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy. Our most recent policy on this matter is our 1999 Annual Conference Aboriginal Education Policy which is attached for your review (Appendix 5).

8.4 Decrease student:teacher ratio and create smaller class sizes. Fundamental to improving the educational and hence the social and cultural experiences of boys and girls in our schools is the reduction of class sizes, so that the important teacher student teaching and learning relationship can be enhanced (Appendix 6).