

MALCOLM MAYNE,
41 MACKIE ROAD,
ROLEYSTONE WA 6111.
28-06-00

Last week I heard your interview re boys / education on W.A. talkback radio and as an ex teacher for the past 40 years, I too noticed, with alarm, the decline of achievement in boys' education. I believe that this decline extends across all ability levels, but especially those boys who are of average and below average ability. The latter group seem to have given up completely and I think that a lot of the problem is to do with the structure of the curriculum, poor teaching / teachers, and massive social change. For boys of above average ability the decline is there but not as noticeable. While not in any special order of importance I believe that the following points may contribute to the problem.

- **LACK OF STRONG ROLE MODELS:** With the increasing disintegration of the family due to rising divorce rates many boys lose a major role model namely their fathers. While there are access visits for fathers / sons, many boys are separated by huge distances which reduces any mentoring from the father. Apologists for the modern 'divorce disease' might point out that during war time, boys may have limited experiences with their fathers but during WW1, 2, extended families were more closely knit and there were often uncles / grandfathers who could fill the void. The relationship between stepfather/stepsons in many cases leaves much to be desired. Rejection by boys of the stepfather and vice versa is not helpful in the development of self worth and this, linked to often difficult levels of access by boys to their biological fathers is not helpful in the development of a healthy male image. In the wider society insufficient emphasis is placed on successful achievers in Australian society. Today's heroes are sporting personalities many of whom are of a dubious nature, especially their lifestyle and exploits. Not enough is done to promote males who are successful in business, the professions, and trades. While many sportsmen are fine examples of maleness, boys need to be made aware that their careers are limited to the years of physical ability / strength. Another aspect linked to the sporting theme is the yobbo / ocker image that is portrayed by the media at games. Many boys identify with this image and dress and behave accordingly.

- **OVER FEMININISATION OF EDUCATION:** There can be no doubt that the feminist movement has been a major factor in pushing boys "down" to the extent that the 'maleness' of Australian society has suffered a crisis of identity. Primary schools are predominantly staffed by women and in secondary schools in WA over half of most staff are women. This presents two interesting concepts. – a) boys perception of education is one dominated by women and hence because of the lack of male role models, especially in primary schools education is "women's business" and therefore rejected. b) Because women teachers of today are mostly a product of the feminist

movement girls are encouraged at the expense of boys. Boys are either put down / ignored while girls are encouraged. Now I do not say that girls should not be encouraged but not at the expense of boys.

- Not only is the influence of women dominant in the classroom, but I suspect that most curriculum writers are women too. With the femininisation of education no wonder boys are “giving up” in large numbers. Another point worth investigating is the lack of boys entering teaching as a career. Is this phenomena also related to the over femininisation of education?

- PARENTAL APATHY – I strongly believe that an important factor in the poor performance of boys in school is related to the endemic parental apathy towards education in general and their offspring’s achievement. Having had mediocre to bad experiences at school themselves, plus exposure to soft assessment schemes that have in many cases been adapted from less than desirable American schemes, parents of today’s boys were able to drift through school with no effort required and this attitude is passed on to the children. For many parents, and I would say at least 70%, education ranks low in their scheme of things so no wonder children place a low ranking on learning and achievement, Added to this is that students who are focused on achievement are “bullied” by the poor achievers (many of whom would be better served by putting them into the workforce), and their parents are forced into putting their children into private schools in the belief that this new environment will be of benefit to them.

I believe too that many of the problems boys face in co-ed schools are just that. Boys need male bonding and with girls in schools there is too much distraction. Recent experiments in W.A. with single sex classes has seen a significant improvement in boys achievement, so perhaps there is a strong argument supporting segregation within a school and separate schools.

- DINOSAUR RATE OF CHANGE IN SCHOOLS. Generally schools are notoriously slow to adopt to changes in society. Delays in deciding what to change / how to implement change seriously impede the success of schools. Bureaucratic infighting, ego trips with the Education Department and schools do not keep either. Democratisation of decision making in schools slows down the implementation of change in many cases results in an inferior product for students 50% of whom are boys. I believe that today’s education is too general for most high school students. Streaming needs to be done by year 9 so that students can follow academic or vocational streams. Students, especially boys need to have relevant work experience of they are in a vocational stream. By this I mean, at least 2 days / week with an assessment based component built into the final result. Twenty five years ago, most boys who were totally unsuited to a general education were in the workforce by age 15. Today they are forced to stay at school until 15 and told they will have a “better” prospects for employment by staying on till 17. I think that such thinking is counter productive to boys, but it is better for the politicians who can point to increased “retention” rates and lower youth unemployment with its associated youth on the dole bogey. What is forgotten is that the AUSTUDY scheme is simply youth dole payments under a foney name. Students who qualify for AUSTUDY – are poor achievers, chronic attenders, disruptive and bored stiff. Many use the AUSTUDY money to buy

an old vehicle which enables them to come and go as they please. Surely there must be a better way to help boys especially eg. – work experience instead of having to do meaningless courses which bore them witless.

The consequences of the modern education system which devalues boys / young men has seen an increase in drug dependence, anger and violence, apathy and lack of motivation, increase in suicide and a resentment towards women who are seen as serious competitors to themselves.

While my comments may be considered biased, I am extremely concerned about boys / young men in today's society. That a study is being mounted Federally indicates a national concern. I hope that you raise this issue more loudly because unless it is, the whole study will fall on its sword.

Yours faithfully
Malcolm Mayne