

## Inquiry into the Education of Boys

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40% of Boys in high schools have a low self esteem.

**A healthy self esteem is going to mean better learning (including literacy) and better social skills by enhancing student self confidence.**

*“Pouring the golden wine of knowledge into a broken cup, before  
repairing the vessel is not wise”*

This alarming figure is increasing each year and it's only over the last ten years that the phenomenon has been noticed and become a concern to parents, teachers and principals, particularly in our high schools.

### **The history of our concern.**

It began five years ago at a meeting of the Hawkesbury Local Industry and Education Network, (An ASTF funded work placement program with a committee consisting of representatives from four government and one catholic school and also attended by their principals) the guest speaker failed to arrive and to replace the item the principals were asked to discuss their most pressing problem in their respective high schools. As soon as the first principal spoke up “**I have a problem with the boys' self esteem in my school**” there was a chorus of agreement around the table. The principals were unamanous that a figure of 40”% of boys were so affected. This would be close to the national mark bearing in mind that the Hawkesbury demographic would give a very good pointer to the average for all schools in Australia ( The Hawkesbury area in the Northwestern region of Sydney contains the towns of Windsor and Richmond, with a similar national balance of urban to rural population , with 30% working and living in the area.)

### **The Consequences.**

As there has been no clear definitive study of the problem we can only rely on the experienced educators opinions and observations. This is complicated even more by the fact that as yet there is no answer to the question of what causes a low self esteem.

The principals observed that the consequences of low self esteem is shown by boys who don't volunteer to participate as much as the girls readily do and that many boys' body language and behavior displays introspection and disinterest in life in general. On the other end of the extreme spectrum is suicide and attempted suicide.

Can we use suicide as a marker, being the tip of the iceberg which tells us the extent of the mental state of the boys and girls in high school?

Professor Waters in his evidence to the Standing Committee on Social Issues looking at “Suicide in Rural New South Wales” (Evidence, 26 April 1994) “... The studies show very clearly that the vast majority of people who suicide, when you get information from the family... (felt) hopeless, worthless, run down, depressed...”

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Boys with a low self esteem could well suffer from all these states as they would probably be regarded as natural partners in the same emotional state.

So it seems this problem may have a common cause with the state of low self esteem through to depression being a sliding scale.

We would like to focus on the need for developing a program which gives boys the ability to be effective as students, so enhancing their ability to learn and also to be happy as a person, so enabling them to develop confidence in themselves and contribute to their society. As girls play an essential part in the socialisation of boys any repair or development program must naturally include girls. (Girls attempt suicide at higher rate than boys so there is obviously a problem here also, a program encompassing both boys and girls is desirable.)

**The benefits of a self esteem building program in Learning.**

“Safer classrooms” with more mature student behavior

Lower truancy & suspensions.

Students knowledge take-up would be increased.

Teacher morale will be raised and therefore their teaching ability increased.

The over stretched education dollar will work better by doing it better.

**The benefits of a self esteem building program in Socialising.**

Improved self concept will increase boys’ confidence in socializing with girls.

The community will benefit from better street behavior outside of school hours.

The family benefits from improved student behavior.

They will be better prepared for work place attitudes.

*Only a small amount of time is devoted to developing self esteem in the various state curriculums, it will require federal funding and state cooperation to correct this problem and begin the journey of repair.*

**Mentors**

Together with a self esteem elements and values integrated into the curriculum, a complimentary program should be developed. We assert the value and importance of a curriculum segment at school, but in acknowledgment that the school curriculum is already overcrowded, the provision of a program such as mentoring becomes all the more important (and any curriculum submissions to your committee would have to come from professional educators).

After a short mentor selection and training process, such a program could be up and running quite quickly. Mentors could be either volunteers from service clubs or part of the Governments over 45’s community involvement program.

Service clubs such as Rotary would be more than willing and capable of supporting a mentor program as many clubs are already involved in long term youth programs. The current “school psychological support network” in N.S.W. is over stretched, and could never be realistically expanded to deal with this problem with fully qualified staff even in the long-term.

The mentoring program, to be made available to all students in a school ( or as determined by the school, and in a manner, venue and time negotiated with the school), would see the trained mentor matched in consultation with the school. If the student has already indicated a career choice by year 9( which appears to be the time support begins to be needed) a mentor with a background in this industry would be a suitable choice. The role of mentor would be to provide the student with listening time to discuss their difficulties with school life matters, probably including career choice. The training of the mentor would concerntrate on establishing rapport with the student, acting as a role model or tribal elder as well as providing support and advice in life matters.

The ideal will be to create self esteem in students through mentoring programs from K-12 in the long term, but as the problem is manifesting itself most obviously in Years 7 to 12 students, this cohort must be the immediate concern.

### **Summary**

**This is a problem that must be fixed, this is a problem that can be fixed. Despite the very excellent programs available, the invitation to invite them into the school is coming from the individual principals and teachers, it should be the Government which is taking the lead in this issue.**

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Revised strong opening statement.

During the last three wars both America and Russia researched and developed psychological warfare to demoralise their enemy, our society has unwittingly brought this same warfare to bear on our youth. 40% of Boys in Australian High Schools today suffer from a low self esteem, we have an internal war on our hands and it is time to take up the war cry.

Globalisation will force our youth to compete against the youth of other countries in a few years time, with a low self esteem they will be going into battle with one hand tied behind their back.

WE have all the programs and people to implement these programs all it takes is the political will and the organisation to achieve victory.  
socialise