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Making the connections: Schools, teachers and role models

- 6.1 Measures of educational participation and performance, such as school retention rates, rates of truancy and expulsion, levels of achievement and admission rates to tertiary education provide evidence of the educational alienation of many students, especially boys. For example, the Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD) in Victoria¹ and research on motivational factors affecting ACT secondary students² both confirm a significant decline in positive attitudes and/or factors between Year 7 and Year 9 for both boys and girls.
- 6.2 Chapter 2 considered a range of participation and performance measures in education and a range of social and economic indicators. High school students without sound literacy skills are more likely to become alienated and disengaged from learning. The importance of literacy and measures to ensure that all children acquire adequate literacy skills were considered in Chapter 5. However, poor literacy, while a major factor, is not the only factor contributing to boys' disengagement and under-achievement. This chapter considers other factors that emerge, particularly during the high school years, and contribute to boys' disengagement from learning. It also gives a number of examples of approaches schools are using to address these issues.

1 see Australian Secondary Principals Association, *Submission No. 81*, p. 9.

2 Martin, A.J., *Improving the Educational Outcomes of Boys — Interim Report*, June 2002, p. 74.

Relationships

Peer relationships

- 6.3 Peer influences are important for all young people, becoming increasingly significant during adolescent years. Their influence varies from student to student, depending on a number of factors such as personality, personal circumstances and the strength of other relationships. Peer influences can be either positive or negative in terms of attitudes towards school, the level of engagement or disengagement, and the level of motivation and/or achievement.
- 6.4 Young people need to feel valued and need to belong. A common symptom when this need is not being met is disengagement from learning or worse, hostility to school and society.
- 6.5 Schools and the wider community would normally provide a supportive role to families in meeting these needs in young people. However, where a young person's family is not supportive, school and peer relationships become more important than they already are. Where both the family and school connections have broken down the primary source of identity and affirmation becomes the peer group.

Some boys at one end of the scale have insulation—I use the word 'insulation'—which is usually families. If you have that insulation in your life you can often be protected from a lot of societal pressures...Without some degree of insulation you will find boys, and girls as well, with coping problems in society. Gangs are an example of insulation...We need to understand that if we do not provide it as a system these kids will find a substitute somewhere else.³

- 6.6 Peer acceptance also appears to be a more important consideration for boys than it is for girls.

From my experience...girls at that age, and they are in year 5, tend to have more of a preference to please the teacher. Whereas I find that the boys have more of a preference to please their peers. There is a greater social issue with boys, I think, to be part of a group.⁴

Where the peer group turns negative or anti-learning as in the 'cool to be a fool' dynamic, schools face an uphill battle. As a

3 Mr John Fleming, Boys in Focus, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1031.

4 Miss Tracey Hopkins, Teacher, Griffith Public School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1161.

group, boys are more concerned about power, status and independence...⁵

6.7 It is possible to employ peer influence to exert a positive influence over boys' behaviour and engagement with learning and to counter the anti-achievement attitude which affects some schools. In secondary schools, the most effective times to attempt to guide peer influence are early in the first year of secondary school before peer relationships are fully established in the new environment and at other times, typically outside normal activities or at the beginning of each year, when peer relationships are less stable.⁶

6.8 It is vital that we strive to build an environment which is affirming for boys. This involves promoting a culture

...where leadership, success, acceptance of praise, acceptance of authority and respect for tradition are permissible within the peer culture. Boys must [also] be taught to value empathy, sharing, nurturing and a sense of community, as well as the traditional values of strength, loyalty, leadership.⁷

6.9 The essential element in most of the strategies for turning peer influence in positive directions is creating a sense that boys belong and are respected and valued. The range of ways this might be done in schools is very broad and what is possible and appropriate will vary from school to school. Some effective examples include involving students in decisions about, and in creating, their physical environment and in setting class and school rules.

...if you want boys and girls to actually look after something, they basically have to put some blood, sweat and tears into it in terms of doing it themselves. I can go and paint all the rooms for them, but they need to do that. Once they have had ownership and input into it, they are far less likely...to mess their own.⁸

If you treat boys in a way that they feel is just and fair, you tend to earn their respect very early in the piece and that is what they are seeking... If you can set up a system that they perceive to be fair—and you have to do that in negotiation with them; they will not accept your imposing it upon them—and then you actually work that system in the way it has been negotiated and in the way you

5 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Submission No. 153*, p. 1.

6 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Submission No. 153*, p. 2.

7 Mr Sid Sidebottom, MP, *Submission No. 130*, pp. 15-16.

8 Mr Ian Lillico, Principal, City Beach High School, WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 933.

have discussed, you win points very early in the piece from those boys. If you continue to maintain that system, then, even if a child steps outside the system, the others tend to say, 'Hang on, that's how it is; we've agreed...'.⁹

- 6.10 Mentoring programs where older students coach or mentor younger students can help build a sense of self-worth in the mentors while acting on peer culture in positive ways by giving students responsibility. Mentoring programs, such as peer reading, are also a subtle way to help boys develop their capacity to nurture others.

We could not have told the boys, 'we are going to teach you how to nurture, we are going to teach you how to care, we are going to show you how to be responsible. They would have all as a group said 'hang on, we don't want to do that sort of stuff. That's not for us, boys don't do that'. But those things came without them really realising it.¹⁰

- 6.11 Guiding the influence of peers towards positive attitudes is important for the majority of students, not just the problem boys or those boys who are at risk of disengaging or turning against school. However, the need to redirect, or find a substitute for, the negative influence of peers is greatest for those young people, usually boys, who are already engaged in destructive behaviours.

Boys in Focus

- 6.12 One example of a program for boys in this category is the Boys in Focus program which aims to create a positive peer environment for the most difficult to manage boys in a western Sydney high school. Essentially, the program aims to establish loyalty and trust within a group of boys before introducing activities that build on group loyalty and trust to develop responsibility, honour and leadership skills. At an appropriate time for the particular group opportunities are taken to provide information and discuss matters, such as drugs, that meet the specific needs or interests of the group. As the group bond develops, individual boys become answerable to the group in a structured way that is independent of any disciplinary action the school itself might take for inappropriate behaviour. The program aims to establish an alternative peer group that, by trusting, valuing and caring for boys and teaching them how to cope

9 Mrs Cheryl Crossingham, Teacher, Griffith Public School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1171.

10 "Into the Maxi Taxi" *Boys in Schools Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2000, p. 10.

with their own circumstances in a constructive way, successfully counters the negative influences for their loyalty and attention.¹¹

Initially I actually was against being involved in the program. I fought it pretty harshly for the first three months or so... most of the guys living in my street were drug dealers or stole cars and things like that. Those were the sorts of guys who I wanted to be like. It was funny when I finally got put in front of some other guys who were just as tough, who were just as strong, who were basically everything I wanted but who also cared and were a lot of fun to be around. That really appealed to me, that whole team atmosphere and the sense of community.¹²

6.13 The school system currently is not good at supporting programs like Boys in Focus. Some high schools in disadvantaged communities could easily use two or more full-time coordinators for programs like Boys in Focus but there is no provision to find, train and assign such people to schools that need them. Boys in Focus was developed and run by a teacher with an otherwise full teaching load who later found the support of the local controller of the Police and Community Youth Club (PCYC). The involvement of the PCYC became instrumental in the development of the program because it provided access to a bus and opportunities for other activities.¹³

6.14 The success of programs like Boys in Focus is totally dependent on the passion and commitment of the people that develop and coordinate them. It would be possible to document and duplicate the Boys in Focus model, fund it and train people to run it elsewhere. However, it is unlikely to work unless the teachers replicating it believe that the boys can be retrieved and have sufficient commitment to that end to see it through.

...the situation for the apparent school refusers or failures almost always comes down to someone caring about them enough to find out what it is they need...The one in Camden involved older boys becoming mentors to younger boys. That would never have happened without that teacher taking the older boys through a lot of orienteering, saying, 'You can do it if you choose.' There was a lot of building up of their capacity to make a difference in their own lives which, for the school refusers, is a big factor. It often

11 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1036-40.

12 Mr Gregory Allott, Team Leader, Boys in Focus, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1034.

13 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1035.

comes down to the relationship—or you could call it the charismatic nature—or how the teacher creates the spark.¹⁴

Teacher/student relationships

- 6.15 The relationship that a teacher establishes with students is important for all students although the need for the teacher to establish a connection with individual students is more important for boys, and particularly critical for difficult boys. There is widespread agreement among good teachers on the necessity of establishing a good relationship with boys and the adage that ‘boys learn teachers not subjects’. It is equally true that good teachers primarily teach students, not content. Both are consistent with the views of boys themselves.

I think successful teachers are genuine, and the boys know immediately if you are a genuine human being or not. If you are showing them who you really are and bringing your own worldly experiences to the classroom and giving them an opportunity to know you as a person, that is really important, which I suppose springboards off what [was said] before about developing relationships. A successful teacher has empathy with each and every student for a variety of reasons, and they understand the background of each of these students.¹⁵

What I want most is a teacher coming here as a teacher of students, first, and a teacher of mathematics, English, or physics, second. They have to be able to relate to students, and they have to be very fair. They have to have fair dealings with the students with very clear boundaries but within those boundaries a very open, close association with kids.¹⁶

...particularly where boys feel nurtured—I find they respond well to English teaching.... but delivery is really critical. I think an understanding and compassion but also a liking of boys is necessary because a lot of teachers find some boys confronting. If you are comfortable with robust boys, it makes a huge difference and, if you can build links with them in other aspects of life, that pays dividends too. If you know that they are good footballers and

14 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 447.

15 Ms Jeanette Terry, Teacher, Canberra Grammar School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 283.

16 Mr Ian Lillico, Principal, City Beach High School, WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 929.

you can tap into that because you have seen them play or whatever, that gets a very good connection going.¹⁷

It is a case of 'Show us you care.' If they know that you care about them as individuals and if you tell them some funny stories, that is good teaching...¹⁸

I think that she was a really skilled teacher, but also one with a real zest for teaching—a real love of it. It came through, and that is where the respect came from for the boys, because she really loved what she was doing and it showed through... When you say to them, 'I am pulling you into line for your own good, because I care about you,' then you have got a whole new scope for talking to them, and a whole new way to talk to them. Their eyes come up and you get through to them then. But to just berate them doesn't work. This teacher was the same—she would take them aside and speak to them on their own. By the time they walked back into the classroom they still walked back in with their dignity, and then the lesson went on.¹⁹

- 6.16 Boys' views on the characteristics of good teachers were remarkably consistent across Australia. Very few boys thought the sex of a teacher had any bearing on a teacher's suitability to teach boys. Well above all else, boys place high importance on the ability of teachers to relate to them as individuals.

A teacher should be good with the students and have a personality which makes the students talk to them.²⁰

I do not like very strict teachers who just focus on school work. I think teachers that take the time out to talk to the students have more humour and can deal with more different types of students. That is what makes a good teacher.²¹

A good teacher is one that can relate to the kids that they teach. They have got to have a general knowledge of what they are

17 Ms Frankie McLean, Assistant Principal, Palmerston High School, NT, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1313.

18 Dr Michael Slocombe, Principal, South Campus, Trinity College, SA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 814.

19 Mr Bobby Willetts, Executive Teacher, Griffith Public School, NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1174.

20 Nick Kacevski, Student, James Cook Boys Technology High School, Sydney, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 696.

21 Stan Sklias, Student, James Cook Boys Technology High School, Sydney, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 710.

teaching, of course, and they have got to be able to communicate well with whoever they are teaching. If a student has got a problem in class or out of class, the teacher should be able to go, 'That's okay, if you want to do this'—try to encourage you a little bit more—or say, 'No, that is not really the way to go.' Just someone you can get along with really easy.²²

Someone who listens to you when you have got a problem.²³

She gives everyone a fair go. When you walk into the classroom, she doesn't think, 'Oh, this guy's going to be in trouble,' or anything; she will wait to see how well you go first. And she will make the class fun, sort of... You get along well with her, and it makes a big difference. She is an easy person to talk to.²⁴

- 6.17 Good teachers instinctively know that they need to develop relationships based on mutual respect and trust with their students, irrespective of the gender of the teacher or the student.

School structures which promote positive peer cultures and relationships

- 6.18 The most effective strategies for promoting positive peer and teacher/student relationships usually adopt a whole-school approach. The particular strategies and structures used vary greatly from school to school and there is no necessarily correct approach. However, it is encouraging that a number of schools are trialling different approaches with a view to improving teacher/student relationships and maintaining/enhancing student engagement in the learning process.
- 6.19 Some strategies, such as middle school structures, are organisational and may even involve physical accommodation changes in line with middle schooling ideals. Other approaches to student welfare and behaviour operate on Glasser choice theory which emphasises that students (and teachers) are responsible for their own behaviour and that their behavioural choices have known consequences. Of course, middle schooling ideals are consistent with choice theory approaches to welfare and discipline and they can comfortably coexist in the same school.

22 Chad Neylon, Student, City Beach High School, WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 946.

23 Theodore Backhouse, Student, City Beach High School, WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 946.

24 Samuel Allinson, Student, Wade High School, Griffith, NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1182.

Middle school structures

- 6.20 Middle school organisational structures aim to create a physical and organisational environment that supports the establishment of sound peer and student/teacher relationships through Years 7/8 to Years 9/10. The actual school years included will depend on school and system parameters²⁵ but the objective is to create smaller group structures within the school to enhance students' social development.²⁶ Smaller group structures, by supporting a sense of belonging, are also thought to support the academic engagement of students over those years where boredom and disengagement set in.
- 6.21 Typically, a middle school approach to school structures would provide for separate schools, or sub-schools within a larger school, dedicated to the middle school years. This enables a less traditional approach to curriculum and school organisation which focuses on the social and developmental needs of the students rather than subject groupings.
- 6.22 As far as possible, and to a much greater extent than in a typical high school, class groupings in a middle school are consistent from subject to subject and possibly from year to year. A small core team of teachers teaching the same class for a majority of the time mitigates against student anonymity and allows the development of better teacher/student relationships.²⁷ Having fewer students also assists the teachers to build better relationships with the students.²⁸
- 6.23 Some middle schools accommodate classes in a home room which is not used by other classes, to give students their own space²⁹ and to minimise the disruption caused as students move from place to place according to the constraints of a traditional timetable.³⁰ Disruption and discontinuity can also be minimised by timetable structures characterised by a reduced number of longer periods per day.³¹ Another organisational strategy tried is to accommodate teachers in staffrooms by year level so that they relate to each other on the basis of the social environment and the students they teach rather than the subjects they teach.³²

25 Traditionally high school starts in Year 7 or in Year 8 depending on the jurisdiction but some independent schools are including Year 6 in middle school.

26 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Submission No. 153*, pp. 3 & 4.

27 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Submission No. 153*, p. 4.

28 Western Australian Government, *Submission No. 120*, p. 17.

29 Mr Ian Lillico, Principal, City Beach High School, WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 929.

30 Western Australian Government, *Submission No. 120*, p. 18.

31 The Hutchins School, *Submission No. 44*, p. 2.

32 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 448.

6.24 Middle schooling ideals also encompass aspects of curriculum and pedagogy. They provide for greater student involvement in decision making on what is learnt and how learning is conducted and assessed. Appropriate middle school curricula aim to be more connected with students' personal and social interests, and appropriate pedagogies encompass a wider variety of active, cooperative and independent learning experiences.³³ With carefully planned middle school organisational structures, a wider variety of subject electives and choice within subjects can be compatible with the apparently conflicting objective of limiting the number of teachers that a student is taught by each week.

Students now typically have six teachers per week [formerly as many as 11]; they will be exposed to a core team of three staff who teach them for some 70% of the week and who meet to discuss joint strategies for individual students and themes for cross-curricular studies.³⁴

6.25 Middle school structures can provide opportunities to enhance student engagement and learning in a number of ways. An environment may be created that is conducive to improving both peer and teacher/student relationships minimising the scope for disengaged students to slip quietly and anonymously through school. The better relationships in turn create a stronger sense of belonging. Higher levels of student involvement and choice of learning and assessment build a greater sense of control over, and commitment to, their own learning. Student input and participation in decisions about school and class rules and aspects of their physical environment also promote a sense of belonging and commitment to the school and learning.

6.26 The learning and social benefits of implementing middle school ideals accrue to both boys and girls. Boys are more likely than girls to 'act out', disengage from learning or leave school altogether as an expression of frustration or boredom but boys seem to be more responsive than girls to the quality of their relationships with teachers. Therefore boys, and in particular boys at risk, are likely to be the most obvious beneficiaries of middle school reform. However, the improved learning and social environment will also help to arrest the decline in positive attitudes towards schools that some girls also experience through the middle years.

33 Western Australian Government, *Submission No. 120*, p. 17, and see Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Submission No. 153*, p. 4.

34 The Hutchins School, *Submission No. 44*, p. 2, The middle school curriculum reforms also provided greater choice, especially for Year 8 students.

- 6.27 It is important to emphasise that particular school structures are not an end in themselves but are only useful if they improve relationships, help engage students and/or enhance learning activities.

[Ken] Rowe strongly argues that initiatives that do not penetrate behind the classroom door are ineffective. To this end middle school reform only works to the extent that it attracts teachers who are prepared to change or improve the way they respond to students.³⁵

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government fund research to evaluate different approaches and strategies to maximise the engagement and motivation of boys and girls in the middle years of school.

Year 10 — middle or senior?

- 6.28 Traditional Year 7/8 to Year 12 high schools that are contemplating reforms based on middle school principles may need to consider carefully the position of their Year 10 students. For example, the number and proportion of Year 10 students who are combining school and work has grown significantly over the last 20 years (*see Table 5.1 below*) and this characteristic of the Year 10 student population, along with other factors, ought to be considered by schools with a significant proportion of working Year 10 students.
- 6.29 From 2002, a Northern Territory independent school, Kormilda College, has included Year 10 in its senior school because of a conviction that this was more developmentally appropriate for students in that age group. It explicitly recognises that during Year 10 most students turn 15 and (in the NT) are no longer required to attend school. The inclusion of Year 10 in the senior school is intended to promote the reality to students that success at Year 12 is built on good study habits developed earlier, and to get students to focus on Year 12 from the beginning of Year 10.

In years 8 and 9, we can engage in holistic approaches to learning. But by year 10 the imperative of NTCE, or the International Baccalaureate that we also offer, requires fairly traditional and systematic study habits and methods. We find that being part of the senior school is part of creating that ethos of 'we are now seniors; we are now focusing on year 12,' and developing, if you

like, that culture or tradition that ‘the middle years have ended, we are now approaching senior school’. It is also trying to overcome the disengagement that occurs around years 9 and 10— for boys in particular.³⁶

- 6.30 South Australian school boys are reported to believe that “Year 10 is a bludge year and it is filled up by the schools with boring stuff”.³⁷

Years 8, 9 and 10 are a waste of time as far as they are concerned. They know they get serious at the beginning of year 11. They also know that the workload at that point is hell on earth and it cannot be managed.³⁸

- 6.31 This view deserves serious examination by State and Territory education departments as the problem does not appear to be confined to South Australia. It resonates with the observations of a Deputy Principal at Wade High School in Griffith, NSW, who was concerned about the discrepancies in the performance of students between their NSW School Certificate examinations at Year 10 and their half-yearly results in Year 11.

... in the New South Wales system, there is one facet of the curriculum that is really counterproductive to boys achieving well in years 11 and 12, and that is the School Certificate examination. Able students can basically coast through junior school, walk into those exams, score in the nineties quite easily without studying—I have had several boys say, ‘I did no study and I got 89 or 90 in the School Certificate exams’—and then they get into year 11 or year 12 and think that is going to continue, and it does not. That is a really major problem that needs to be addressed... I do not think those exams are sending the right messages to our able students.³⁹

- 6.32 Wade High School is having some success in addressing this issue by interviewing students and their parents in Year 10 in preparation for the transition to Year 11 and then, during Year 11, conducting follow-up interviews with students. However, it is an additional support provided to students above the normal responsibilities of the staff involved.⁴⁰ No doubt many other schools are adopting similar or varied approaches to

36 Mr Stephen Kinsella, Principal, Kormilda College, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1279.

37 Mr Malcolm Slade, Research Assistant, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 882.

38 Mr Malcolm Slade, Research Assistant, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 882.

39 Ms Jennifer Hill, Deputy Principal, Wade High School, Griffith, NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1200.

40 Ms Jennifer Hill, Deputy Principal, Wade High School, Griffith, NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1200.

involve students and parents in more effectively bridging the gap between Year 10 and Year 11.

- 6.33 The inclusion of Year 10 in senior schooling with Years 11 and 12 and redistributing the senior school workload more evenly over the three years might be a part of the resolution of some of the issues discussed above and in the section on senior school structures below. Such approaches may help reduce the conflict between school and other aspects of students' lives and help ensure participation, engagement and retention rates are maintained.
- 6.34 The inclusion of Year 10 in senior schooling would have major implications for some States and Territories in respect of external Year 10 examinations and changed accommodation arrangements for Year 10 students. However, it is an approach that deserves consideration.

Senior school structures

- 6.35 As discussed in Chapter 2, the social and economic environment experienced by secondary students today is quite different from that prevailing 20 years ago. This is particularly true for senior students, a large proportion of whom now combine part-time work with study (see Table 5.1). The combination of part-time work with full-time secondary education, and the change in the size and social composition of the senior high school student cohort caused by the rise in retention rates, are together responsible for major changes at senior secondary level that schools need to address directly.

Table 5.1 Part-time employment of secondary students 1982-2002

	Age 15 (Y10)	Age 16 (Y11)	Age 17 (Y12)
June 1982 No. Employed	33,400	32,600	16,200
June 1982 No. Attending School	224,100	157,400	87,000
June 1982 Proportion Employed	14.9%	20.7%	18.6%
June 2002 No. Employed	60,100	88,900	68,800
June 2002 No Looking for Work	19,300	12,600	8,200
June 2002 No. Attending School	255,500	229,400	181,600
June 2002 Proportion Employed	23.5%	38.8%	37.9%

Source ABS Labour Force Status, 15-17 Year Olds Attending School.

- 6.36 The magnitude of the change is clear from the data in Table 5.1. The proportion of young people 16 and 17 years of age (broadly equivalent to Years 11 and 12) combining school with part-time work has doubled between 1982 and 2002 so that nationally almost 40% of Year 11 and 12

students are working part-time. In schools in areas where part-time employment is readily available the proportion of senior students working is higher.

- 6.37 A much higher proportion of young people stay at school compared to 20 years ago, and the number of Year 11 students in 2002 who combine part-time work with senior schooling (88,900) is over two and one half times the number that did so in 1982. The number of Year 12 students in 2002 who combine part-time work with senior schooling (68,800) is over four times the number that did so in 1982. Also, in June 2002 nearly 20,000 Year 11 and 12 students who were not working were looking for part-time work.⁴¹
- 6.38 The employment commitments of students represent significant personal achievements. The typical duties of a senior student working in a retail or fast food outlet may involve dealing with customers, handling goods and money and preparing, serving or selling food in accordance with health regulations. A significant number of teenage employees could add the supervision or management of other employees to this list of responsibilities.
- 6.39 There have been successive changes to the senior secondary curriculum to improve the range of subject options to appeal to a more broadly representative cohort of senior students. However, the physical, social and authority structures of most Australian secondary schools have not changed in ways that recognise and accommodate the changed expectations and the more complex work and social responsibilities that senior secondary students now have. The conflicts between life in school and life outside of school are, for some boys, so irreconcilable that they choose to leave.

An example is a boy in a country town with three mates...he was heading to be an engineer... He stayed at school because he wanted to do Year 12... The other three left [and] got jobs in the town... One of them has a flat he shares with some mates and they are all adults in the town as far as he is concerned. He plays football with them. He says, 'I am a second-rate citizen in this town. I come to school and they tell me to change my shoes. I am not allowed to go home at lunchtime. I can't walk down the street at lunchtime. I have to sit in the classroom and do exactly what I am told. These people can take away my future.' Out there, they are earning money and they are being people and they are treated

41 An additional 0.2 to 0.6% of Year 10 to 12 students combine study with full-time work or about 400 to 1,000 students at each Year level, nationally.

that way. I went back to that boy five months later and he had gone.⁴²

...by this stage they are driving cars, they are running complex social lives, they are very often working, they are often saving to do the things that they want to do, whatever they might be. In some cases in the rural communities they are actually supporting their families with that money, and yet that is not valued because you worked till 2 o'clock in the morning and you didn't get your assignment in on time. 'So what can we do with you? We'll put you on detention.'⁴³

6.40 The research by Slade and Trent also highlights a range of other contradictions in senior schooling that boys say contribute to their disaffection. These include:

- School expects adult behaviour but doesn't deliver an adult environment.
- School pushes the rhetoric of education (e.g. fairness, justice, respect, flexibility, the celebration of difference etc.) but produces the opposite in practice.
- School is about getting most boys out of education.
- School is about preparing you for adult life, but adult life gets in the way of school; culturally celebrated achievements and rites of passage into adult life (e.g. participation in competitive sport, getting a driver's licence, owning a car, getting part-time work, providing for their own needs, helping to run a household, as well as establishing an adult identity, social life and sexual relationships) are negative influences on school achievement and on the preparedness of boys to stay at school.⁴⁴

6.41 Girls also experience these conflicts.⁴⁵ The gender dimension to these issues in senior schooling arises because, on average, girls appear to cope better than boys do with the conflicts that school presents. This is partly due to more girls conforming because they have a narrower range of employment options. Other factors that may help girls to cope with the conflicts that school presents are that, generally, they are better organised

42 Mr Malcolm Slade, Research Assistant, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 886.

43 Professor Faith Trent, Head, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 883.

44 Trent, F. and Slade, M., *Declining Rates of Achievement and Retention: The perceptions of adolescent males*, June 2001, p. 21.

45 Trent, F. and Slade, M., *Declining Rates of Achievement and Retention: The perceptions of adolescent males*, June 2001, p. 25.

than boys at that age, they tend to be more focused on the future and they are probably more tolerant of things being unfair.⁴⁶

- 6.42 Being focused on the future and having goals to work towards is an important motivator for some students, and many students, boys in particular, who do not have clear goals, struggle to see the importance, relevance or value of school work.

I have been involved... in interviewing all year 11 students this term. That included boys and girls. One of a few strong things that came out is that the boys who are really struggling—the ones who are floundering, the ones about whom we have sat down and said, ‘This kid really is not coping with year 11’—are the ones that do not have any goals whatsoever. You will say to them, ‘What do you want to do when you finish school?’ and they will answer, ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Why did you come back to school?’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Do you want to stay in Griffith for the rest of your life?’ ‘I don’t know.’ They have absolutely no idea of why they are doing what they are doing and why they are where they are... Quite a few of them said to us in the interviews, ‘I have trouble getting motivated to study. I can’t see any point in it.’⁴⁷

Many of us did not know where we were going at that age, and they do not, and therefore they are not prepared to make the investment in an environment that they find difficult, unpleasant and very often treats them with less respect than they would get working in McDonald’s at 2 o’clock in the morning...⁴⁸

- 6.43 These conflicts are mitigated for boys by teachers who are willing and able to establish relationships based on mutual respect and whose actions demonstrate a genuine commitment to the rhetoric of education.⁴⁹ However, teaching is not the only reason for boys’ disaffection with senior schooling. Senior schooling, which in this context may need to include Year 10, needs to be recast in a fashion that fully recognises and accommodates the circumstances of contemporary students and dispenses with some traditional requirements that may be no longer relevant or useful. Some questions that might be usefully asked are:

46 Professor Faith Trent, Head, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 883.

47 Ms Jennifer Hill, Deputy Principal, Wade High School, Griffith, NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1199.

48 Professor Faith Trent, Head, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 883.

49 Trent, F. and Slade, M., *Declining Rates of Achievement and Retention: The perceptions of adolescent males*, June 2001, pp. 21 & 29.

- To what extent should students have input into educational programs?
- Could assessment processes be partially negotiable within a suite of options that enable students of the same course to simultaneously select different modes of assessment to measure the same learning outcomes?
⇒ Universities permit student choice in assessment in some courses.
- Is there sufficient flexibility to negotiate homework and assignment due dates to recognise the other commitments students have?
⇒ Many workplaces vary deadlines and expectations in recognition of the prevailing circumstances of individual employees.
- Should enrolment in post-compulsory education necessarily require compulsory attendance at school in study periods and at lunchtime?
⇒ ACT senior secondary colleges do not compel students to attend but set minimum class attendance requirements for each unit of study.
- Are other school rules negotiated and expressed in a way that involves students and recognises their adult responsibilities in other spheres of activity?
⇒ Rules made by students are more likely to be observed by students (see Discipline Structures *below*).

6.44 The structure of secondary schooling and modes of assessment vary significantly around Australia. The ACT and Tasmania have Year 7 to 10 high schools and senior secondary colleges for Years 11 and 12. However, the ACT has school-based assessment whereas in Tasmania some subjects are externally examined. NSW has Year 7 to 12 comprehensive high schools with a combination of school-based assessment and external examination but these are supplemented by a variety of selective high schools, single-sex schools and senior secondary colleges. Queensland has Year 7 to 12 comprehensive high schools with school-based assessment. Western Australia has school-based assessment in Year 8 to 12 high schools with some Year 8 to 10 middle schools and Year 11 and 12 senior secondary colleges. South Australia and the Northern Territory have Year 8 to 12 high schools with school-based assessment. Victoria has comprehensive Year 7 to 12 high schools with a combination of school-based assessment and external examination.

6.45 The impact of these structural factors and modes of assessment on school retention and engagement with learning have not been thoroughly examined. It would be very useful to conduct research aimed at discovering the extent to which the differences in Year 12 retention rates for both boys and girls in different jurisdictions are attributable to:

- the range and type of courses offered;
- assessment systems;
- the availability of alternatives such as Year 10 and Year 12 courses at TAFE;
- the school environment in high schools versus senior colleges (e.g. relationships with teachers, rules regarding attendance, dress, and behaviour);
- behaviour management; and
- other relevant factors.

6.46 The results of this research could then inform future changes to curricula, school structures and assessment processes.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth fund comparative research into the influence that different school structures, curricula, assessment systems, the availability of alternatives to senior school (such as TAFE), behaviour management and other factors have on the apparent retention rates and attitudes to school of boys and girls.

Choice theory discipline and welfare structures

6.47 A clear, consistent and caring approach to student discipline and welfare is a necessary part of maintaining a positive school environment and positive relationships. Different schools approach this in different ways.

6.48 One approach used to transform the learning and social environment of some schools involves adopting Glasser choice theory discipline and welfare structures for managing student behaviour. Such methods are based on the principle of students taking greater responsibility for their own behaviour and for making decisions about their behaviour which result in either positive or negative consequences.⁵⁰

6.49 This type of system cannot simply be implemented by applying the same template to every school. To work effectively a choice theory system will require a commitment on the part of all the teachers in the school to operate the system consistently and in accordance with an agreed series of graded responses to offences against the school rules. It is also important

50 Browne, R. and Fletcher, R., *Boys in Schools: Addressing the real issues - behaviour, values and relationships*, 1995, p. 32.

that both the rules and the series of graded responses to persistent breaches are widely understood and are developed with the genuine involvement of students, parents and teachers.

- 6.50 Choice theory systems do require significant professional development for all teachers in a school to ensure that they understand the system and make the necessary commitment to operate it consistently. Students also need to be very clear about the way a choice theory system will work and this is best done through their involvement in its development, implementation and adjustment. Periodic in-servicing of teachers and student instruction on the operation of the system is necessary to maintain consistency of operation, student awareness and ensure that new teachers and new students understand how the system operates. A review of the system every two or three years is desirable to ensure that it continues to meet the expectations of students, teachers and parent. Periodic reviews help to maintain student commitment to the school rules.⁵¹
- 6.51 Canterbury Boys High School in Sydney has been operating a Glasser-style system successfully since 1988. Its implementation followed extensive consultation with students, parents and teachers about the existing problems and their expectations of a new system. Their expectations were that that a new system needed to be:
- easy to follow and easy to understand;
 - positive and not punitive;
 - based on a reward system;
 - committed to promoting self-discipline and encouraging students to be responsible for their own behaviour;
 - based on a whole-school approach to preserve consistency and universality;
 - based on negotiation;
 - centred on the classroom; and responsive to parental involvement.⁵²
- 6.52 The high involvement of students in the development of the system lightens the burden of enforcement for teachers and senior staff.

The change has been very powerful for the deputy and me, especially when we have to deal with those few students who are referred to us. 'We all know the rules' I say, 'I can't change the rules, even though I am the principal of the school. We all agreed

51 Browne, R. and Fletcher, R., *Boys in Schools: Addressing the real issues - behaviour, values and relationships*, 1995, p. 36.

52 Browne, R. and Fletcher, R., *Boys in Schools: Addressing the real issues - behaviour, values and relationships*, 1995, p. 33.

these are going to be the rules.' And they really have no comeback, because they realise they are the community's rules.⁵³

- 6.53 When a student is disruptive in class the initial response from the teacher must be consistent and measured, providing an opportunity for the student to acknowledge his or her behaviour and return to work. Further disruption should be met according the graded series of responses which might initially suspend the student's participation for that lesson and require the student to negotiate a plan of action with the teacher to avoid further trouble before he or she can return to the class.⁵⁴ This type of process avoids initial 'high stakes' confrontation and requires the teacher and student to meet and discuss the problem and negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. There is a focus on both what the student must do and what the teacher can do to support the student.⁵⁵
- 6.54 Another important principle is that teachers are required to consult with colleagues and reflect on whether aspects of what they are doing are contributing to problems that arise in the classroom.⁵⁶ While this does not absolve students of the responsibility for their own behaviour, it does share the responsibility for making the necessary adjustments when this is appropriate.
- 6.55 In high schools choice theory discipline systems are most effective when accompanied by other reforms, such as the middle school reforms discussed above, that support better teacher/student relationships and give students more choice and control over what they study and how they are assessed. However, elements of choice theory are also effective in primary schools. For instance, the Committee saw that Eagleby State School in Queensland uses elements of choice theory in its behaviour management⁵⁷ and Griffith Public School in NSW involves students to positive effect in the formulation of class rules.⁵⁸ The Vinson Inquiry has also devoted attention to the value of student participation in school discipline structures and discusses a number of other examples.⁵⁹

53 Principal, Canterbury Boys High School, Sydney, NSW, as quoted *Inquiry Into the Provision of Public Education in NSW*, Second Report, July 2002, p. 76.

54 Browne, R. and Fletcher, R., *Boys in Schools: Addressing the real issues - behaviour, values and relationships*, 1995, p. 34.

55 *Inquiry Into the Provision of Public Education in NSW*, Second Report, July 2002, p. 76.

56 Browne, R. and Fletcher, R., *Boys in Schools: Addressing the real issues - behaviour, values and relationships*, 1995, p. 34.

57 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 540.

58 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1171 & 1172, and see *Inquiry Into the Provision of Public Education in NSW*, Second Report, July 2002, p. 77.

59 *Inquiry Into the Provision of Public Education in NSW*, Second Report, July 2002, pp. 73-82.

- 6.56 No system in itself is a panacea. The effectiveness of any approach depends on the consistency, commitment, knowledge, experience and skill of the teachers and school leadership.

Tallebudgera Beach School — 3R Program

- 6.57 The Committee visited an alternative education setting at Tallebudgera Beach School on the Gold Coast in Queensland for children who are at risk because they are not coping in mainstream education. At the time of the Committee's visit, the program was staffed by three teachers and was catering for 15 students, 14 boys and one girl. To that point, since the 3R program began it had taken 43 students, only two of whom had been girls.⁶⁰
- 6.58 The program is called 3R because it aims to **retrieve** students who are not coping, help them to develop **resilience** and then **reintegrate** them into mainstream schooling.
- ...it is about retrieving kids from mainstream education who are having difficulties... It could be because they are verbally abusive, they are physically violent, they are completely non-compliant, or they are incapable of following instructions.⁶¹
- 6.59 Like Boys in Focus, 3R is intended to assist students at the most difficult end of the spectrum of behaviour. Most of these children are affected by one or more of a range of negative and damaging experiences. Of the students that 3R had taken during 2002 up until the Committee's visit in May: 33 per cent had experienced sexual abuse, 46 per cent had experienced physical abuse, 53 per cent were accessing, or had accessed, mental health services, 26 per cent were from families with a history of drug abuse, 93 per cent had experienced one or more suspensions from school⁶², and 30 per cent of the students were on medication.⁶³
- 6.60 The program is currently funded from the behaviour management budgets of the other schools in the Gold Coast South District. The program

60 Ms Veronica Buhner, Teacher-in-Charge 3R Programming, Tallebudgera Beach School, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 1212 & 1214.

61 Ms Veronica Buhner, Teacher-in-Charge 3R Programming, Tallebudgera Beach School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1211.

62 3R Program: A Gold Coast South Initiative, *Exhibit No. 155*, p. 5.

63 Ms Veronica Buhner, Teacher-in-Charge 3R Programming, Tallebudgera Beach School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1213.

managers hope to expand the program from its current focus on students 8 to 14 years of age to include young people 15 to 23 years of age.⁶⁴

- 6.61 The students at the 3R program must be referred by their existing schools and the program ensures that students maintain a link with their school by requiring them to return there for at least one day each week. A learning plan is developed for each student in conjunction with the students' home school. The 3R teachers report weekly or fortnightly to the students' parents and home school on their behavioural and academic progress. The length of time a student remains at 3R and the time spent each week at the home school, may vary according to the needs of the student.⁶⁵
- 6.62 After establishing teamwork and trust, the program focuses on building resilience and developing coping and cooperative skills in the students. A range of activities, which draws on the physical activities available through the Tallebudgera Beach School, is used to teach the necessary skills and build confidence and self-esteem. Reintegration usually occurs gradually by increasing the number of days each week that students attend their home school.⁶⁶
- 6.63 The 3R program is highly successful. Of the 43 students it had assisted up to May 2002, 61 per cent were primary school students and 39 per cent were secondary students. Of the primary students, 96 per cent remained in school after 3R intervention. Of the secondary students, 59 per cent remained in school and a further 11 per cent were attending TAFE after 3R intervention. A range of improvements in the areas of behaviour and learning was reported for individual students who had participated in the program.⁶⁷
- 6.64 The behaviour management procedures at 3R do not set out a list of rules but aim to present a set of values that underpin desirable attitudes and behaviours. A focus on student/teacher relationships and choice theory is apparent in the approach.

We aim to provide an environment and nurture relationships that assist our students to make the right choices.

...

Consequences are seen as a learning tool, not as a punishment.
Students are encouraged to learn appropriate behaviours in the

64 Mr Ron Daniels, District Director, Gold Coast South, Education Queensland, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1210.

65 3R Program: A Gold Coast South Initiative, *Exhibit No. 155*, p. 1.

66 3R Program: A Gold Coast South Initiative, *Exhibit No. 155*, pp. 2-3.

67 3R Program: A Gold Coast South Initiative, *Exhibit No. 155*, pp. 5-7.

light of known consequences. The student, who chooses to ignore requests for the inappropriate behaviour to stop, while being aware of the consequences, makes a conscious choice for the consequences to follow. Consequences will be reinforced and applied consistently.⁶⁸

6.65 Consistency is one of the keys to the success of the program.

...we are successful because as teachers we are incredibly consistent, to the nth degree, with these children, and that is what they have lacked in their lives—consistency.⁶⁹

6.66 The continuing relationship between the student and the referring school is also important because it gives the referring school a stake in the outcome for that student.

I think the most important thing is that we maintain the link with the schools. By not accepting enrolments directly from outside, but by coming through the school, we maintain that link between the host school and our school. That is absolutely critical because it means that the school has to maintain an interest in that student.⁷⁰

6.67 Other important factors offered by the providers of the program to account for its success were: relevant curriculum, early intervention, the low student-teacher ratio, the support from schools, parents and other government and non-government agencies, and access to Tallebudgera Beach School facilities and expertise.⁷¹

6.68 The Committee was impressed by the commitment of the staff and the apparent success of the program but is aware of the need for further evaluation of this, and similar programs.

68 3R Program: A Gold Coast South Initiative, *Exhibit No. 155*, p. 4 and see Mr John Graham, Coordinator 3R Program, *Submission No. 188*, pp. 16-17.

69 Ms Veronica Buhner, Teacher-in-Charge 3R Programming, Tallebudgera Beach School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1220.

70 Mr John Graham, Coordinator 3R Program, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1228.

71 Ms Veronica Buhner, Teacher-in-Charge 3R Programming, Tallebudgera Beach School, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 1214, 1220, 1223; Mr John Graham, Coordinator 3R Program, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1216 and Mr Allan Rafton, Principal, Tallebudgera Beach School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1224.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that Commonwealth Government fund the assessment of existing programs being run by the States and Territories and community organisations to assist the most vulnerable and disengaged students with a view to the States and Territories expanding successful programs.

Teacher education

- 6.69 Developing higher quality interpersonal relationships between teachers and students will promote better learning and improve social harmony in schools. More emphasis on the skills teachers need in order to establish and maintain productive teacher/student relationships is required in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Recommendations specifically about pre-service and in-service teacher education in early and remedial literacy instruction were made in Chapter 5.

Pre-service and in-service training on relationship matters

- 6.70 In some schools, where there are difficult to manage students who may be abusive, or even violent, towards teachers and/or other students, establishing mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students throughout the school may have to overcome entrenched attitudes and behaviours on both sides. In these circumstances, strong school leadership, and consistent, whole-of-school approaches are almost essential to achieve success.
- 6.71 The implementation of middle school structures, more engaging curricula, discipline and welfare systems will not be fully effective if teachers are not committed to their implementation and equipped with the necessary skills to maximise the opportunities created.
- 6.72 The most difficult to manage students, who are a small minority of students even in the difficult schools, are usually boys. It is important to recognise that their problems usually originate outside school but that the community expects schools to successfully manage the symptoms. The Committee has been told by experienced teachers that they have not been adequately prepared to deal with young people who are damaged, angry and dysfunctional.

Poor teachers and ordinary schools do not cause the problem. They contribute to the problem by failing to address the problem—and that, I think, is a very important issue. They do not create the problem, but they do contribute to the problem not being addressed. We continue to hope that hardworking and innovative teachers can magically, if you like, create microclimates of success in isolation, or we can support them through specific systems and training that operates in terms of developing microclimates of this type into wider school climates.⁷²

6.73 The Ramsey review on teacher education in NSW found that pre-service teacher education in most institutions does not adequately address behaviour management issues and poorly prepares student teachers for the issues they will face in disadvantaged schools.⁷³

6.74 Another issue arises from the way that some teachers respond to questions that challenge their authority or from their lack of interest in understanding the circumstances leading to a particular incident. It is at this level of daily interaction between teachers and students that boys most keenly feel the disjuncture between the rhetoric of justice and fairness in education and its inconsistent implementation.

[Boys say] teachers get behavioural problems wrong because they don't ask how and why something happened, and with an open mind. Instead, '*they just pick on the boys with a reputation*'. Teachers would understand more if they would '*just listen to you*', and recognize all of the things that are going on.⁷⁴

We have spent our lives as baby boomers trying to get our kids to communicate, argue and discuss. When they do we say, 'Well, we really don't like that very much.' You only have to look at American sitcoms and see the interactions those kids are exposed to. They expect to have a right to have a say... Very often the response of teachers is that they become very defensive. That is the responsibility of teacher education. We have to do it differently in universities.⁷⁵

6.75 Education departments should provide more in-service training opportunities for teachers to enhance their classroom management skills

72 Mr John Fleming, System Director, Boys in Focus, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1032.

73 Gregor Ramsay, *Quality Matters, Revitalising teaching: Critical times, critical choices*, NSW, November 2000, p. 77.

74 Slade M., *Listening to the Boys*, Flinders University, 2002, p. 145.

75 Professor Faith Trent, Head, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Flinders University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 884.

and their confidence to communicate with young people, and difficult young people in particular. When implementing new discipline systems or school structures schools should be sufficiently resourced to ensure that every teacher in the school receives the necessary in-service education and skills development. The Committee endorses the Ramsey review recommendations on behaviour management and, in particular, that:

approaches in initial and continuing teacher education programs give priority to issues related to interpersonal relationships.⁷⁶

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education, Science and Training encourage university teacher education faculties to place greater emphasis on the development of behaviour management and interpersonal skills, particularly those that will support teachers to establish effective relationships with boys.

The Committee further recommends that more professional development be provided for this purpose for practising teachers.

Male teachers

- 6.76 There is a great deal of public and media interest in the decline in the number of male teachers in both primary and secondary schools. Nationally, the proportion of male primary teachers fell from 26.3 per cent to 21.3 per cent between 1991 and 2001 (*see Table 5.2 below*) and the situation is not likely to reverse itself in the near future. At the University of Western Sydney male primary teacher enrolments were only 15 per cent of the total in 1998⁷⁷ and some teacher education campuses report a proportion of male students in primary education as low as 10 per cent.⁷⁸ A survey of over 1,400 Year 12 students in Catholic schools in Sydney found that only five per cent of boys, compared to 15 per cent of girls, were considering a teaching career. Also, most of the boys considering teaching were considering secondary teaching.⁷⁹

76 Gregor Ramsay, *Quality Matters, Revitalising teaching: Critical times, critical choices*, NSW, November 2000, p. 81.

77 Mr David McCumstie, *Submission No. 94*, p. 5.

78 Mr Ed Lewis, Lecturer, Australian Catholic University, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 352 & 353.

79 Mr Ed Lewis, Lecturer, Australian Catholic University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 354.

6.77 Nationally, the proportion of male secondary teachers declined from 49.5 per cent to 45.1 per cent between 1991 and 2001.⁸⁰ However, men are proportionally more likely than women to hold promotional positions.⁸¹ Therefore, the proportion of male classroom teachers in both the primary and secondary sectors is lower than indicated by the ABS data.

Table 5.2 Male Primary Teachers — Govt and Non-Govt Combined — 1991-2001 Compared

State	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
1991 %	25.4	26.0	28.2	28.4	27.0	22.4	25.0	16.9	26.3
2001 %	20.0	20.5	22.7	24.6	23.1	21.6	18.5	16.5	21.3

Source ABS Schools Australia, Cat No. 4221, 27 February 2002, Table 20, p. 26.

6.78 The level of public and media interest in the gender balance of the teaching force and submissions to the inquiry indicate a high level of public concern about the decline in the proportion of men in teaching, and in primary teaching in particular. The Committee shares this concern but rejects any suggestion that there is widespread discrimination by female teachers against boys or that female teachers cannot be excellent teachers for boys.

6.79 Nevertheless the ACT and Western Australian departments of education indicated that they would prefer a more even gender balance in their teaching workforce and Education Queensland is also looking at ways to attract more men into teaching. However, the gender balance of the pool of teachers to recruit from combined with a commitment to merit selection, which precludes discriminating in favour of any particular group, are difficulties for practical strategies to achieve a more even gender balance.⁸²

Factors discouraging male teachers

6.80 A whole range of reasons has been advanced to explain why fewer men want to become teachers. Generally, the status of teachers in the community, salary, career opportunities and child protection issues are significant reasons advanced by teachers.

80 ABS Schools Australia, Cat No. 4221, 27 February 2002, Table 19, p. 25.

81 Australian Education Union, *Submission No. 150*, pp. 17-21.

82 Mr James Colbourne, Executive Director, School Education Division, ACT Department of Education and Community Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1331 and see Mr John Garnaut, Director, Learning and Teaching, Education Department of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 970.

- 6.81 Central to the issue of status is the public image of teaching and teachers, who are very well aware of negative public perceptions.

There have been 20 years of open season on teachers, and I am bipartisan about this. It is unsurprising that people draw the conclusions: (a) that they do not want to be teachers; and (b) that learning is not a valued characteristic in youngsters. This is because people who are in charge of governments of all stripes have got stuck into the profession, the organisations and all parts of them and teachers in general. People draw conclusions that not only is teaching unimportant and unattractive as a career; so are the things that teachers do.⁸³

- 6.82 For a range of other reasons teaching is now perceived to be a difficult occupation and one where the financial rewards do not recognise the difficulty.

Yes, status, money and the child protection issues are all very significant, but you hear so many people say, 'I wouldn't be a teacher for quids,' because it is such a tough job these days... It is getting more complex and a greater burden each year that goes by... We have all heard the stories: we used to just teach maths or English, but we have become father, we have become uncle, we have become big brother, policeman, social worker, and sometimes we are doctor or family planner.⁸⁴

There has been a perception of it being difficult, of morale being low, of there being poor remuneration. There has also been a lot of media coverage of the relationships sometimes between males and children, and those things are all impacting. Why put yourself in those situations? I am sure that affects the primary school a little more than it does the secondary school, but those are issues, and they come up very often.⁸⁵

- 6.83 There is no doubt that child protection issues are a significant factor in men's attitude towards teaching, generally, and that this factor is magnified in relation to primary teaching. The community attitude towards male primary school teachers is a troubling paradox. People say they want more male primary teachers in schools while many harbour suspicions about men who want to work with children.

83 Mr Denis Fitzgerald, Federal President, Australian Education Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 213.

84 Mr David Maclean, Deputy Principal, Palmerston High School, NT, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1318.

85 Mr Ian Morgan, Principal, New Town High School, Hobart, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1128.

... something that was of great concern... was this business about physical contact with children and the possible allegations of child abuse... This was something they said they carried around with them daily, all of the time... one of the guys said he felt he was under scrutiny. He came as a casual teacher to take kindergarten, and all the mums and dads were there waiting. The principal introduced him and built him up in a big way but he really felt that he was under scrutiny. He wondered whether a first-year out female teacher would feel the same thing.⁸⁶

- 6.84 The issue of teachers' salaries is a less complex factor than child protection but it is still difficult to resolve. Starting salaries for teachers are generally comparable to other public sector opportunities for graduates. However, once employed, salary progression and promotional opportunities for teachers do not keep pace with the opportunities available outside teaching.

...I worked hard at University to become an Honours Graduate with a distinction average and now, with 20 years experience on the job, I make about the average weekly wage. I see colleagues who need to bar tend to make ends meet. I see my 24 year old niece driving ferries on Sydney Harbour and making more money than me. Essentially a teacher's salary is only seen as an adequate second income for a family. Hence the dearth of males.⁸⁷

- 6.85 The responsibility and complexity of contemporary teaching and the value to the community of good teachers warrants higher salaries for experienced teachers. In recognition of this, the Committee supports the payment of a significant additional allowance to skilled and experienced classroom teachers in recognition of their skill and as an inducement for them to remain in teaching. Whether and how this might be implemented is a matter for the State and Territory employing authorities but the Committee proposes it in recognition of the pivotal role and worth of teachers to the community.

86 Mr Ed Lewis, Lecturer, Australian Catholic University, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 353 and see *Submission No. 22*, pp.4-6.

87 Mr Ian Carragher, *Submission No. 59*, p. 2.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that State and Territory Governments urgently address the remuneration of teachers with the payment of substantial additional allowances for skilled and experienced teachers as an inducement for them to remain in teaching and to attract new teachers by offering more attractive career paths.

Teacher quality

- 6.86 The decline in the appeal of teaching as a profession is related to the difficulty of attracting sufficient high quality candidates to teacher education courses. Some education departments and organisations⁸⁸, and teachers themselves⁸⁹, expressed concern about the low tertiary entrance scores required for entry to teacher education, although there are early indications that this may be improving.
- 6.87 One analysis of the age profile of the teaching workforce estimated that 58 per cent of Australian teachers would be over the age of 41, and 28 per cent would be over the age of 51, in 2002.⁹⁰ It is inevitable that over the next 10 to 15 years tens of thousands of teachers will retire and replacements will need to be recruited. Persistent low entry requirements to teacher education courses over this period may result in a fall in the quality of the teaching workforce if employing authorities have to take nearly every graduate to ensure every class has a teacher.
- 6.88 The age profile issue is replicated in the staff of teacher training faculties⁹¹, so the capacity to train teachers could come under serious pressure at a time of high demand for new graduates. It is essential that all governments take concerted action now to ensure that Australia's medium to longer term requirements for high quality teachers can be met. All governments need to act to develop strategies that lift the status and public image of teachers and MCEETYA should develop strategies to this end.
- 6.89 For its part, the Commonwealth Government could provide a financial inducement to attract quality students into teaching by providing HECS-

88 E.g. Commonwealth, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 17, NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 314, Australian Education Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 214.

89 E.g. *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1319.

90 *A Class ACT: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession*, Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, March 1998, p. 239.

91 *A Class ACT: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession*, Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, March 1998, p. 241.

free scholarships to the top brackets of high school graduates. Further, these could be used to try and attract more males into teaching by offering equal numbers to males and females. These scholarships could operate in the form of a rebate of their annual Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) liability while they are employed as teachers by a recognised teaching authority. Recognised authorities for this purpose would include State and Territory education departments employing teachers in schools, TAFE colleges and correctional facilities, and other major employers of teachers, such as the Catholic education offices and independent schools. The intention would be to make teacher education courses HECS-free for these students so long as they remain employed as teachers long enough to receive a rebate of their full HECS liability.

- 6.90 If implemented, this proposal should achieve a number of objectives. It would affirm the value and importance of teachers and teaching to the community. Also, it should improve the supply and quality of applicants for teacher education courses and provide a financial incentive to obtain and continue employment as a teacher, at least for several years until the HECS liability was substantially reduced or eliminated.
- 6.91 Academic achievement is not, of itself, an adequate measure of the quality of a teacher. This report has devoted considerable attention to the personal qualities, commitment and the interpersonal skills that distinguish excellent teachers. The admission processes for some other professional education courses attempt to screen applicants for motivational factors and personal qualities that are considered desirable in practitioners of that profession, medicine being an example. If personal qualities and motivation were ever important to any profession, it would be in teaching. The Committee recognises that adding requirements to the admission processes for teacher professional education may make it harder to attract more candidates. However, the selection of candidates for teacher education ought to aim to select those people likely to make the best teachers.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government and university teacher education faculties work together to develop admission processes for teacher education courses that evaluate relevant personal attributes in addition to academic achievement.

Do male role models matter?

6.92 Just as it is considered helpful for girls to see women in positions of authority and involved in activities outside traditional feminine roles, it is helpful for boys to see men supporting and caring for others and men who are at ease with women exercising authority. It is also important that boys and girls see men who value education sufficiently to be committed professionally as teachers. It is desirable, if not always possible, to have a balance of men and women teaching and in positions of authority in schools. This allows all students to be exposed to both men and women in leadership positions, and both men and women sharing authority and recognising the legitimate authority of others.

...as far as the boys are concerned I think it is very important that they see balance in what is in front of them. We have made a specific decision to employ males. That is fine, but I also insist that Mrs Walton is seen taking a very constructive part in the assemblies because it is important that the boys also have a view of females in authority as well.⁹²

...it is important that we convey to boys that men value learning; not just later when you are in the work force..., but right now in that classroom in those early years. That is where we need to convince boys that men value learning. The best way to do that is to have men demonstrate that, obviously. You can imagine it is not quite as convincing for a female teacher to tell the boy that men value learning as it is for him to see men doing it.⁹³

6.93 The Australian Education Union argued that excellent teaching style 'is not dictated by gender' but a range of attitudes and abilities including an 'understanding of gender construction and its impact on students and teachers'. The Union also argued that effective male teachers 'need to understand the construction of gender and motivations for violence, and be trained in ways to intervene to deal with inappropriate behaviour.'⁹⁴ Even if this is true it places too much emphasis on gender theory and too little on the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student which is the foundation of good teaching. It gives too little weight to the value of positive male role models for boys.

92 Mr Michael Blood, Head of Campus, Southwood Boys Grammar, Tintern Schools, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 231.

93 Mr Richard Fletcher, Manager, Men and Boys Program, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1044.

94 Australian Education Union, *Submission No. 150*, p. 29.

- 6.94 Programs such as Boys in Focus, which very effectively retrieve boys at risk, succeed because of the emphasis on the relationships involved and by engaging boys in activities through which those relationships are built. The relationships are then a conduit through which the boys can be taught more appropriate behavioural responses to circumstances that arise.

It is the relationship building that I see as the most significant aspect of the program. We were seeing boys crave these significant male models and go looking for the positive models that we have within our school rather than the negative models who often become the un-nominated leaders. So they look to the more positive, and it is a very powerful thing.⁹⁵

- 6.95 An understanding of gender issues is important but the role modelling and teaching by males whose relationship and commitment to boys is genuine is the most important factor.

We know that they watch us very closely, so the way we work with women, the way we talk to women, the way we can work as a colleague is something these boys are watching all the time because in the environments that they are from that is not the sort of relationship they are used to seeing. We are very aware of that sort of thing, that what we display to the boys is what they will want to take on board.⁹⁶

- 6.96 The Committee observed the deliberate explicit teaching and modelling of respectful relationships and behaviour by a male teacher and a female teacher working together in a South Australian primary school classroom. Programs designed specifically to address violent behaviour in adolescent boys also rely, to some extent, on demonstrating respectful relationships.

[We] developed a program for violent adolescent boys which has resulted in these boys choosing non-violent responses when they are angry... It has to be run by a male and a female and, in our case, a social worker. The reason for this is that the behaviour of most of the boys that we see is quite violent and they are often coming from situations of violence at home. It is very important that they see a man and a woman responding equally and non-violently to one another.⁹⁷

95 Ms Janelle Horton, Boys in Focus, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1033.

96 Mr John Fleming, System Director, Boys in Focus, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1034.

97 Ms Elizabeth Moleta, Member, Australian Association of Social Workers, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 490.

- 6.97 In supporting the presence of more men in schools, the Committee is not suggesting that female teachers should be displaced in favour of men or that women are not equally good teachers. The Committee agrees that the quality of the teacher is more important than the gender of the teacher — the position consistently taken by education departments, school principals and teachers' unions. However, many teachers recognise the positive effect that the right kind of men can have when they work with boys, but the emphasis is always on the right kind of men. For this reason, the Committee feels it is desirable for State and Territory education authorities to consider measures to attract more males into teaching.
- 6.98 The Committee proposes a merit based scholarship available to equal numbers of males and females who undertake teacher training. The scholarship should take the form of an annual rebate of the HECS liability of education course graduates who are subsequently employed as teachers by a recognised teaching authority. The Committee estimates that a beginning teacher with a four year Bachelor of Education degree would have received a full rebate of their HECS liability after about six to seven years of teaching. A beginning teacher with a three year Bachelor of Science degree followed by a Diploma of Education could expect to have received a full rebate of their HECS liability after about seven to eight years of teaching.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth provide a substantial number of HECS-free scholarships for equal numbers of males and females to undertake teacher training. These would be based on merit and take into account other admission criteria developed in line with Recommendation 19.

The scholarships would operate as a rebate of the HECS liability while the recipients were employed by a recognised teaching authority.

Other male role models

- 6.99 Good male role models can sometimes be found among the parents or families of students, the male ancillary staff of schools and may also come from the wider community.

If we have a low population of male teaching staff, it would be nice to have male mentors from the community working within the school. For example, our school based police officer is an excellent role model for our students. He is very proactive and

very positive in the way he deals with our kids. He goes on the camps with them. He is out there in the water and they will offload on him and they will talk to him. When they are in the middle of nowhere with him, when they are not in an office, that rapport develops. They have a role model who they go to in the school.⁹⁸

At the previous school I was at, a few years ago now, we had a program where we got some fathers who were keen to help some boys who were disengaged. They came in and worked with us in the school. They volunteered their time and would come in and talk to the boys, sit down with them, maybe kick a football with them, maybe do some reading with them. They took an interest in them. We found that made a difference.⁹⁹

6.100 The search for male role models for indigenous boys has to extend beyond teachers because there are so few indigenous male school teachers.

There are a whole range of issues around indigenous boys. It is really important to find other role models who may not even be teachers—other indigenous people, indigenous men employed as gardeners in the school. They do not have to be teachers but good role models that are paraprofessionals, tutors in the schools. You can find good role models or indigenous men that provide supporting roles to schools...

a lot of the indigenous Australian Rules football players come from the Northern Territory. If you hold workshops, there are more boys than you could ever poke a stick at coming to school on that day. But we are looking for local champions, because it is the social capital and social infrastructure that we need to build up in our indigenous communities to engage young people to stay in our schools.¹⁰⁰

6.101 Structured Workplace Learning and Enterprise Education programs can introduce students to appropriate adult role models and mentors. These programs are popular with boys and their choice of work-placements often matches them with men who do provide appropriate guidance and instruction.¹⁰¹ At Margaret River Senior High School in Western Australia

98 Ms Helen Jamieson, Principal, Woodridge State High School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 558.

99 Mr Kenneth Davies, Acting General Manager, School Services, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1260.

100 Ms Carmelita Dunne, General Manager, Indigenous Education Division, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1260.

101 Mr Rollo Browne, Consultant in Boys' Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 449.

the students undertake work-placements for a continuous fortnight during their holidays. This period is long enough to see tasks through to completion while developing an understanding of the culture of work.

I've seen so many kids come good out of it. Even those who people were quick to write off. There was one boy, who, if there was trouble he'd be one you'd first think of. He's now a qualified tradesman. We found an employer who knew him and with all our efforts he's turned into someone useful.¹⁰²

- 6.102 The community is also involved in Margaret River Senior High School in other ways. Senior citizens coach reading and maths and volunteers from the local Fire Brigade, Ambulance, Police, and State Emergency Service staff leadership programs in the school.¹⁰³ The Machismo Project, at several Sydney high schools, also drew on the community to bring a range of people into schools doing activities with boys while providing support and information. Some of the artists, performers, drug counsellors and police assumed an important role as models for boys' thinking and behaviour.¹⁰⁴

Involving fathers

- 6.103 A number of primary schools are successfully encouraging fathers (and stepfathers, grandfathers or uncles) to become involved in the school. This very effectively introduces boys and girls to a diverse range of men in a context that demonstrates that men value and want to encourage learning. Often the barriers to fathers' involvement are less real than imagined.

...teachers are often under the impression that men are not in the picture. For example, we are talking to schools and saying, 'We want to start you on this project of engaging fathers. Do you think that's a good idea?' They say, 'Oh, sure, that's a good idea.' Then they say, 'But I don't think it's going to work very well here.' We say, 'Why not?' They say, 'Well, this is not an affluent area. A lot of families do not have fathers.' After quite a bit of respectful encouragement from us, some of the schools have drawn up a list of who has a man at home—dad or de facto or part-time father—and it has turned out, to the teachers' surprise, that the number of

102 "Turning Them Into Someone Useful", *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2000, p. 8.

103 "It Takes A Village To Raise A Young Man", *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2000, p. 6.

104 Ms Marie-Anne Maakrun, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 403 & 406 and Mr Matthew Brabant, Coordinator, Resources and Education on Alcohol and Drugs for Youth, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 720.

kids who have no dad or no male figure around is very small, but in the teachers' perception it is a huge thing.¹⁰⁵

- 6.104 There is an enormous range of ways that fathers can get involved in schools and sometimes all that is required to get them there is some encouragement and an opportunity.

Dads are encouraged to serve in the canteen and we have a dozen fathers on the roster for this term. They have fathers day in the canteen where just dads are manning the canteen, but there are other days when the dads are working with the mums. Those same dads shift their time in their professions to allocate time to the canteen. I think the students really appreciate that and I know the dads get a lot out of it too.¹⁰⁶

- 6.105 Other opportunities and strategies include inviting fathers to coach sports teams¹⁰⁷, attend fathers' breakfasts, and father and son camping expeditions.¹⁰⁸ Rangeville State School in Queensland organised a father-son and a father-daughter fun day on consecutive Sundays to encourage fathers to spend time with their children.¹⁰⁹ A large proportion did so on each weekend. Barnsley Public School in Newcastle, NSW, had a father-son night which was followed later by a father-daughter night and both events were well attended.¹¹⁰ Both these ideas attest to the fact that involving fathers does not have to exclude girls.

- 6.106 Some other ways of involving fathers more directly target learning objectives like encouraging reading. Rangeville State School also invited fathers (or significant male adults) to read something of their choosing to students around 12 years of age. The father then led discussion about what he had read and the importance of reading and being literate in his life. Photos were taken on each occasion and were displayed in the room. The initiative was called Real Men Read.

Not all fathers elected to read to the class. A small percentage of them simply came in and spoke about their life and how reading, for purpose and pleasure, impacted upon it.... One father (an army helicopter pilot) even read a piece of poetry that he had

105 Mr Richard Fletcher, Manager, Men and Boys Program, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1051.

106 Mrs Carol Richmond, Principal, Roseville Public School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 667.

107 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 666 & 1155.

108 Mr Andrew Mullins, Head Master, Redfield College, *Submission No. 80*, p. 23.

109 Ms Deborah Mulligan, *Submission No. 90*, p. 3.

110 "Seventy Six Fathers Came Along With Their Sons", *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2001, p. 2.

written himself. He then went on to discuss the cathartic effect writing can have if you suffer undue grief.¹¹¹

6.107 This idea may successfully be applied to younger students as reading to young children is less stressful, and may be more beneficial, for the child than listening to them read aloud.¹¹²

6.108 Eagleby State School in Queensland trains parents and community members as teacher aids to assist with its literacy programs in addition to providing other programs for parents, during and after school hours, to assist them to support their children's learning at home.¹¹³ These types of programs can provide excellent opportunities for some fathers, and grandfathers to be actively involved in school.

6.109 Coleambally Central School in NSW sometimes employs speaker-phone and mobile phone technology to involve fathers in discussions with, and about, their sons when they can't actually be present.

Our aim this year has been to have a father or father figure at every meeting with any of our targeted kids. And that means any positive meeting or any negative meeting, any behaviour meeting. Sometimes the father's not physically present. Sometimes he's on the end of a bad phone out on the farm...and we're in the office with the kid and a speaker phone. The speaker phone is a way of us saying well there is a meeting on and the dad's here.¹¹⁴

6.110 For some boys the father is in contact with the school on a weekly basis to jointly involve them with aspects of a boy's Individual Education Plan (IEP), homework or work experience. The same school finds father figures for some students when appropriate. It finds them among members of staff, the bush fire brigade, APEX, Lions and the local churches.¹¹⁵

6.111 This section is a sample of ideas on involving fathers in schools and is not meant to be an exhaustive list of possibilities. What these ideas show is that it can be done, perhaps more easily than most people think. Another conclusion that can be drawn from some of the examples is that fathers are

111 Ms Deborah Mulligan, *Submission No. 90*, p. 2.

112 "Perspective: Should dads be in the school listening to boys reading?", *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2000, p. 2.

113 Mr Kevin Leathewaite, Principal, Eagleby State School, QLD, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 531 & 538, and see Ms Patricia Wilson, Deputy Principal, Eagleby State School, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 541.

114 Ms Cheryl Hallinan, Principal, Coleambally Central School, "Broadening Boys' Options", *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, 1999, p. 8.

115 Ms Cheryl Hallinan, Principal, Coleambally Central School, "Broadening Boys' Options", *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*, 1999, p. 8.

just as keen to support their daughters as they are to support their sons and girls don't necessarily have to be excluded. Both boys and girls will benefit from the involvement and encouragement of their fathers as well as their mothers.

- 6.112 Finally, promoting programs to involve fathers in school is not a real or implied criticism of mothers, single mothers or women teachers. It is simply recognition that men can bring something different in addition to what is there and that their presence can be beneficial.

We asked field workers to go and talk to the single women they worked with and ask them two questions: 'Do you have a boy at school? Does he need a man around?... If they said, 'Yes, we've got a boy at school,' then they were asked by female field workers, 'Do you think he needs a man around for things?' Sometimes they said, 'No. We've had violent relationships. We've seen plenty of men. We don't want to see any more.' But that was not the main response. The main response was, 'Yes.' They were then asked, 'What do you want him for?' They had a whole list of specific things. This was not about their love life; this was not about them needing a man. The focus was on the child, and that is the appropriate question: what does the child need? If you stick with that focus you can get out of that general debate about, 'Are you attacking single mums or are you trying to value fathers?'¹¹⁶

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that education authorities use their websites and in-service workshops to promote successful strategies being used by schools to involve fathers and other men from the community as positive male role models.

Conclusion

- 6.113 The quality of the relationships between students, teachers and parents is crucial to achieving optimal educational outcomes for all students and this seems to be particularly so for boys. This chapter has considered a range of school structures, strategies and ideas that support the establishment and maintenance of good teacher/student relationships and develop

116 Mr Richard Fletcher, Manager, Men and Boys Program, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 1057.

connections between schools and parents, particularly fathers who traditionally have had limited involvement. There is no 'one size fits all approach' and each school will have to adapt ideas and strategies to meet their students' needs and the school's particular circumstances. While the focus has been on building better relationships to support boys' engagement with learning the Committee believes that these approaches have value for all students.