

I am writing in reference to your call for information regarding the standing committee's inquiry into the education of boys. I am a mother of 3 boys, aged 9, 7 and 1. I am also a teacher and have been for approximately 8 years with the Northern Territory Dept. of Education.

I have had situations with both my own son's (in particular my eldest) and also in the classroom with boys of various age ranges who have difficulty adjusting to today's classrooms and schooling as it presently stands. Many mothers and teachers have tried a variety of strategies to help their boys and their learning.

These strategies range from being referred to councillors or school psychologists by their classroom teachers due to behavioral or learning difficulties and also a large number diagnosed as ADHD, to visiting pediatricians who recommend approaches such as the food intolerance diet (with reference to Sue Dengate's book 'FED UP') or medication.

Many boys come under the umbrella of 'he lives at home with mum, dad left a while ago' and hence schools and teachers feel there is not enough attention given so these boys play up. I feel somehow we are letting them down. I have read Stephen Biddulphs 'Raising Boys' and he makes an interesting point that traditionally, boys stayed with the men and hunted while the girls and mothers played a sometimes more sedentary role. This may explain why girls can focus their attention more during sit down classroom time. Boys feel the need to run around and expend their energy, although not disregarding the fact that girls do also, but if you have a classroom full of boys at the end of the day, you would know what I mean. The classroom set-up certainly needs to be altered more so for boys I feel in order to sustain their interest. More organisation is required to somehow maintain their focus. More men in particular need to be inducted in the teaching profession to act as role models more so today because of the lack of male role figures which boys can relate to and feel they have a mentor who can empathise with growing up.

There are programs in place in schools which I am aware of and have used but need much time, energy and funding to continue. These include the Lindamood audio sensory program, on-task behavior program, the RAP program for teaching social skills and a myriad of others which schools implement. Aboriginal liaison officers are present in schools and these I feel are the way to go as far as role modelling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. There are in school Constables who are there to talk to kids and discuss whatever problems but are also good as a third party to step in and act as a mediator. The DARE program is adopted by schools to educate children about drugs, self esteem, peer group pressure, and so on. The Family Planning Unit run an excellent program for the upper school years regarding peer pressure and self esteem and the importance of not only sexuality but respect for girls and so on.

The Behavior Management unit at Moo Street Berrimah are an excellent source of information for both parents and schools in helping to educate parents and teachers about their children and run sessions for those with teenagers. The 1,2,3 Magic program is very good for setting limits for children , and social education units in schools often incorporate the whole school curriculum. Skills regarding anger management, conflict resolution , safety and self-esteem and so on all address the kinds of skills we require everyday, but somehow I feel these need to concentrate more on home related matters . Perhaps being able to get boys to talk more about how they feel would be one aspect of these skills we need to focus if we are to meet the needs of boys. Children lack the necessary language skills as it is to express themselves, but boys moreso, perhaps because of the male'macho' image.

I heard a talk back show on radio the other day with a minister who discussed that the high proportion of suicide rates were evident in the younger age group of men and AUstralia had the highest suicide rate in the world. He discussed these figures from 1966 to 1999 and stated that they mirrored the exponential graph to that of high unemployment. Consequently, what I feel needs to be addressed is the fact that boys are unable to cope more and more in todays demanding world of dissolving families and the pressure to find work in a workplace where they have not only the developed skills to find and sustain work but but also the social and personal skills by which they can use to uphold their confidence during problem solving in and out of the workplace. These are vital if suicide is to be reduced and young men can maintain a sense of worth if they lose their job and must continue to seek work elsewhere. With women marrying later, being able to support themselves and their children on their own, men may feel redundant, obsolete and this escalation of deflated self esteem is deflected onto sons and the younger male generation.

Maybe I have diverged from educating boys, but I feel that where boys miss out on in school time is being carried on into their later life. I worry about my own sons and thus this brings me to write to you about my own personal views on the matter. I'm not sure whether you can use this, but both as a mother and a teacher, I hope that the committee can further the inquiry for the benefit and changing the system more positively for boys and men in general.

Many thanks,
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