Boys just can't be boys!

As a Senior Secondary College teacher in the late 80's and early 90's in Tasmania, I remember the concerted emphasis on promoting gender equity in schools and the Girls in Education movement. Awareness programs proliferated, GE issues were given prominence, curriculum was sifted through and 'corrected', policies made and adopted, and progress made. However, it was my belief that the intention of gender equity programs never really hit the mark or achieved long-lasting success.

What tended to result from the GE phase was resentment from those who asked, 'what about the boys?' and spirited defensive reactions from teachers and departmental personnel defending education programs for girls. Open competition tended to occur. Clearly, specialised gender equity programs for both sexes should have been and must be seen as complementary approaches to broader social problems.

In *The GEN* - The Gender Equity Network (DEETA) publication - one teacher mused over the issue of Gender Equity:

> *'On reflecting on my observations of the interactions between girls and boys at school, it seems to me that the failure to address the needs of boys in a way that is consistent with the needs of girls is having negative consequences for boys, for girls and the development of society that has gender equity as the norm.'*

Further on the same teacher said:

> *'…What remains clear to me is the ongoing need to ensure girls' needs are met in schools…what remains less clear is,' What do we do about the boys?'*
> *(The GEN/4)*

Nothing strange here.

Commonsense and good educational advice I would think.

The interesting thing however is that this was written in April 1994!

Until more recently - with the introduction of more criterion based assessment processes and the need for the practical demonstration of things such as teamwork, working co-operatively, working in groups, developing empathy and so on - the earlier GE movement tended to produce an imbalance in programs at the institutional level.

For example, girls have been encouraged to develop a growing sense of their rights and the skills to help them to access those rights. However, there wasn't the same officially sanctioned pressure on boys to change their behaviour correspondingly. I think it is fair to say there wasn't and probably still isn't much support for those boys who were developing non-stereotyped behaviour patterns.

Whilst girls have been encouraged and supported to be more assertive and to develop leadership skills, boys have not been getting to the same extent, the same encouragement to be better listeners, more self aware, more sensitive or more nurturing.

This perceived imbalance in programs provided at the institutional level has tended to have a counter-productive outcome: girls are placed in the traditional role of being responsible for the nature of their interactions with male peers. For example, the girls who have undergone a change process which challenges the status quo of traditional sex roles find that, because many of their male peers have not been through a corresponding and complementary change process, they are often left to fight the battle themselves with their male peers. If this observation is correct, doesn't it to some extent set girls up for failure, and sends a lot of conflicting messages and pressures?

The clear message in this assessment is that unless complementary work is carried out with boys, strategies for girls will never be completely successful. That is not for one moment to deny the crucial importance of girls' education, gender equity, concern about women's issues etc., nor is it acceptance of the charge that such a movement was an effort to have women and girls gain power over men and boys. Indeed, these issues are about women and girls having power over their own lives so that all of society may benefit:

> *"Women's issues are a human issue. They are not the domain of one gender or the other. Society will be better off when women and girls develop power over themselves and their directions, i.e. change their behaviour, aspirations and expectations about life. '*

(Gwen Sands, Sunshine Beach State School, QLD, April 1994, The GEN/4).

What has also emerged from this approach is the move away from achieving equality for women within a masculine framework. The focus has increasingly moved to the identification of the strengths of both male and female patterns, so that these strengths are seen to have intrinsic value without gender classification. The removal of these barriers will ensure that each individual has the broadest possible range of options and choices throughout life.

I am reminded of a Women-in Engineering project of some years ago, which highlighted the creation of a more gender inclusive curriculum in engineering. An associated brochure pointed out that not only did the profession need to become more representative of the society it served but the qualities the industry needed – such as communication skills, teamwork and creativity – are those which women are encouraged to develop. Are these not strengths with intrinsic value, regardless of gender classification?

As the introductory remarks testify, the issue of *boys in education* has been around for a considerable amount of time. It has been tackled in research internationally, nationally and in various States, most notably, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland.

The mid- 1990's was a fertile time both in output and enthusiasm. The Commonwealth particularly came on board during this time with research and development.

Following a review by the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, the middle school years were identified as a priority of the Teaching Accord in 1993. Around 1995, the middle years were given some priority within the national Professional Development Program. Concern about boys in education largely stimulated and underlined this middle years movement.

In the Preface to the three volume work of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association, *From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling,* (ACT,1996.Vol.I p.vi) it says:

> *'There is increasing evidence to suggest that not all students are achieving their potential within the traditional structure of primary and secondary education. A common theme emerging from recent research is the need for the middle years to be viewed as a designated stage of schooling that is more responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents. The focus is now on developing a new philosophy or culture of schooling, which will fully engage young people, rather than the 'bricks and mortar' issues associated with creating middle schools.'*

The references cited by the ACSA study are numerous and enlightening. So too were its key findings, many of which are as relevant now as then. Indeed, many have been rebadged and/or expanded on by more recent contributions on the issue such as in the work of Peter W. Hill and V. Jean Russell of the Centre for Applied Educational Research at the University of Melbourne.

The ACSA *Key Findings* (Vol.I.p.5) are worth reviewing because they underpin the result of a great deal of research and consultation, and have formed the basis of various further 'trials' throughout Australia.

- <u>Holistic approach</u> - seen as an effective means of addressing what was termed, *student alienation.* Discrete changes to the curriculum, pedagogy, organisation or educational environment were not regarded as conducive to sustained improvement.

- <u>Teacher teaming</u> - it proved most effective in situations where arrangements had been negotiated carefully in advance and where ongoing forms of internal and external means of support were provided for those involved.

- <u>Teacher research</u> - an empowering experience for the willing. It was work intensive and time consuming. The quality and outcomes appeared to be influenced by the nature and extent of training and support provided for those involved.

- <u>Genuine consultation</u> - between students and teachers enhanced student learning as well as teacher effectiveness. Both did not always have the necessary expertise to facilitate effective consultation and break the old communication 'cultures'.

- <u>Student participation</u> - helped students to develop skills that were valued within and beyond the school community. Active citizenship skills were learned across the curriculum. Not all teachers **and** students welcomed the shift in power associated with the implementation of more democratic processes.

- <u>Time and space</u> - using time and space in creative ways increased the range of learning opportunities for students and the capacity for teachers to be more effective. Internal and external constraints often militated against using time and space in non-traditional ways. *The role of the*

principal emerged as a critical factor in advocating, negotiating and supporting greater organisational flexibility within the whole school.

- <u>Practical activities</u> - engaged learning related to real-life problems and situations. Generating products beyond the teacher also increased levels of engagement. The potential for 'hands on' activities to become an end rather than a means or process to an end sometimes realised.

- <u>Varied approaches</u> - providing greater choice and responsibility for the way in which students undertook and demonstrated their learning, tended to reduce adolescent criticism of the routine, boring and uninteresting aspects of schooling.

- <u>Pastoral care</u> - embedding pastoral care issues within the curriculum helped ensure that the intellectual and social needs of young adolescents were addressed simultaneously. By reducing the number of teachers with whom students interacted on a regular basis, higher levels of rapport, trust and learning were achieved. Interest in the personal achievements of students as distinct from measures of comparative 'ability' appeared to result in more engaged teaching and learning.

- <u>Parent and community participation</u> - in the education of young adolescents this provided encouragement for students and teachers. Participation seemed to be most effective when emphasis was on practical forms of support.

More recently, Peter W. Hill and V. Jean Russell in *Systemic, whole-school reform of the middle years of schooling (1999)* have restated the important need to systemically and systematically tackle the long-standing unresolved problems in education associated with provision for students in early adolescence. They cite the findings of the Victorian Quality Schools Project (VQSP) to reinforce their search for urgency and resolution.

Not surprisingly but starkly, the study demonstrated:

The mapping of student learning progress across the compulsory years of schooling revealed that there was virtually no growth during the middle years in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Reading progress plateaued in Years 5 to 8 for most students, while for the lowest 25 per cent there is an actual decline in achievement, particularly in the first year of high school (Year 7).

What was evident and reinforces earlier studies is that under achievement is greater among boys than girls and that under achievement persists for longer.

The VQSP also demonstrated the developmental pattern of student attitudes to school throughout the compulsory years, placed alongside their pattern of learning, provides supporting evidence:

A marked decline in students' enjoyment of schooling in the middle years can be seen in the results shown in Attitude to school K-11, with some slight improvement beginning to emerge only toward the end of the compulsory schooling years (K-10).

Boys are consistently and significantly more negative than girls in their attitudes to school and signs of a tentative improvement in their attitude are not found until about 12 months later than for girls.

What is clear is that early leaving or 'dropping' out is one of the most serious and extreme consequences of disengagement in and from the schooling process.

Alienation is the term often associated with disengagement either actively (from truancy to anger and resentment towards school) or passively through responses such as switching off and simply failing to learn.

Hill and Russell cite numerous studies to support their contention that:

For schools to achieve and sustain the engagement of young adolescents in learning, it is essential they provide the approaches, opportunities and experiences that enable young people to accomplish the developmental tasks they face, within their own social context, as a result of their expanding physical, social, emotional and cognitive capacities.

Hill and Russell point out many strategies and practices adopted as a means of achieving middle school reform. They conclude, the take-up of these proposals has been somewhat piecemeal, localised and short-lived, with most time and energy being directed towards implementing single, specific strategies, typically through 'add-on' projects.

Hill and Russell suggest the momentum for comprehensive reform of the middle years of schooling is such that:

*The time is ripe for a **<u>concerted national effort to develop an agenda for systemic, whole-school reform in the middle years.</u>***

The authors recommend a set of 'strategic intentions' to guide reform efforts at a national level. These include:

- Securing the curriculum essentials
- Managing the transitions
- Transforming teaching and learning
- Creating outward-looking learning communities
- Tooling up for reform

Hill and Russell argue the reform of the middle years calls for a response that goes beyond add-on programs. They argue a shift to whole-school 'designs' that represent deliberate attempts to transform the entire ecology of schooling.

They are predicted on the notion that in order to bring about quantum improvements in learning outcomes:

- Each of the critical elements of schools and of school systems needs to be identified
- Those aspects that need to change in order for them to operate effectively and in alignment with all the other elements need to be attended to
- And each element needs to redesigned accordingly

A set of nine general design elements – hypothesised to be fixed elements in all schools – have been used to inform the work of 12 schools in what has been termed the Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD) – a joint initiative of the Victorian Department of Education and the Centre for Applied Educational Research at The University of Melbourne.

The nine design elements have been used with MYRAD as the conceptual basis for approaching the task of developing specific programs and whole-school designs targeted at the middle years of schooling.

The nine elements' … *are highly connected and interdependent, however, and thus change in any one of the nine elements can be expected to entail change in the others' (Hill & Russell, p13).*

The nine design elements are:

1. Beliefs and understandings
2. Standards and targets
3. Monitoring and assessment
4. Classroom teaching strategies
5. Professional learning teams
6. School and class organisation
7. Intervention and special assistance
8. Home/school/community links
9. Leadership and co-ordination

Hill and Russell propose a course of action to translate strategic intentions into action at the school level. They suggest reform will proceed broadly in three overlapping phases, with schools and systems operating simultaneously at different points on a change continuum.

Phase one is to end the old paradigm. This will evolve as piecemeal responses come and go but a groundswell of dissatisfaction with traditional patterns of provision finally takes hold. Hill and Russell believe this evolution has grown into a veritable movement. The new paradigm they argue is already in existence in the old. We need to learn from the piecemeal endeavours of other pioneering educationists and schools – to put more of the pieces of the jig-saw together.

They conclude however:

' … few, if any schools have managed to implement all of the changes necessary to create and sustain a comprehensive, new model of provisions'.

Phase two is the successful implementation of a new, school-wide middle school model. Teams of expert educators from within and without school systems initiate projects to develop specific design for school-wide reform focusing on the middle years. These are to be field tested in a number of volunteer schools (secondary and associated 'feeder' primary schools) with close monitoring by third parties . Considerable additional support should be available to make fundamental changes. On-going and rigorous monitoring and refining by independent third parties will be necessary to generate the momentum of the third phase.

During phase three – large-scale systemic reform of the middle years – schools are given options about which model they will adopt and the time scale over which they will implement reforms. Importantly,

changes in pre- and in-service education and training and to structures for supporting schools will take place at the same time.

'This results in a new kind of educational professional who specialises in the education of young adolescents…a renewed emphasis is placed on the instructional leadership and change management roles of principals and others in leadership positions in schools'. (Peter Hill & V. Jean Russell p.21).

Pressure for reform of the middle years is somewhat unusual in that it has largely come from within the education sector. External pressures have not caused the need for reform so much as contributed to the need.

The Boys in Education issue is intimately linked with reform of the middle years. Boys form the largest proportion of students at risk. There is extensive evidence from studies that characteristics of alienation are more commonly demonstrated by young male adolescents: eg., truancy; habitual lateness; dislike of teachers; resentment towards school; disruptive behaviour in class; delinquent behaviour; substance abuse; unsafe sexual practices, and self-harm.

Richard Fletcher, manager of the Men & Boys Program at New Castle University has carried out extensive studies into the issue of boys in education. Fletcher's studies highlight the need in schools to tackle the issue of boys in education. He argues that boys' schools that focused primarily on academic and sporting success were crying out for help as their students floundered academically and socially.

Fletcher's view is that boys are vulnerable to school systems which emphasise academic and sporting success at the expense of relationships.

'Boys disengage from learning and disengage from life, becoming restless, aggressive, distracted and socially at risk'.

Like many other commentators on this issue, Fletcher believes the issues affecting boys are the same all over Australia – and they are slipping behind academically. With literacy, the decline starts as young as Grade 3. By the time they are 16 years old they are three times more likely than girls to die. Fletcher's contention is girls are different and have developed different coping mechanisms and better social skills.

Leading educationalist Professor Richard Teese of the University of Melbourne has produced some startling and disturbing results based on the 1994 VCE results in Victoria. In an *Age* article

(5 August, 2000) Caroline Milburn presented some of Teese's soon to be published book, *Academic Success and Social Power.*

Teese has uncovered the statistical fact that huge numbers of boys and girls in Melbourne's poorer suburbs failed VCE English and Maths:

'In the working class north-east of Melbourne, more than half of all boys in government schools fail the easiest Year 12 maths subject...It is a failure rate more than double that of their government peers in the city's weather inner-eastern suburbs-and nearly 10 times the failure rate of boys in non-Catholic private schools.

Student failure is an entrenched and growing problem in Australia's government schools. It is also largely hidden...' (C Milburn, Age 5 August 2000).

Teese also contends that results today would not statistically alter from those of 1994. He argues that the facts have to be acknowledged openly and tackled. Instead of a denuded government school system which is seeing a steady drift of students to the private system, federal and state governments must recommit to public education, especially in disadvantaged areas.

But, all is not lost, according to educationalists such as Teese and Peter Hill.

They say that failing students can be rescued if education departments focus on underperforming schools and intervene to provide specialist help.

'We cannot have a knowledge-based economy and an ignorant population...If we tolerate high levels of failure we can't build such an economy and we expose kids to dependence and intellectual poverty. They've got no ideas and they can't steer themselves through an increasingly complex society. We want people to be thinkers' (R Teese, Age 5 August 2000).

Peter Hill's studies have shown that in a recent survey of literacy outcomes for 36,000 Victorian students, 7% of Year 7 students had a reading level of Year 2 students! If, as Rex Stoessiger claims in *Reading Between The Lines*, literacy is the springboard for learning, then many boys will not only not swim, but sink without trace in our schools except as alienated and disengaged learners – assuming they remain in schools at all.

Stoessiger claims that despite all the resources being directed at literacy throughout Australia, there have been so few gains in literacy levels and so much criticism of the literacy performance of studnets because the programs have simply not been directed at the specific needs of the predominant target group – boys.

Stoessiger offers suggestions for the reasons why boys do so poorly in literacy testing:

- Current constructions of masculinity don't include literacy. Stoessiger argues that many boys could be excused for not seeing literacy as a male activity. The male role models simply aren't there and what literacy tasks they might perform are often 'hidden' at work. Stoessiger points out that about 80% of primary school teachers are female, and they, along with mothers are the prime literacy teachers. Similarly, most secondary English teachers are also female and the proportion is growing.

'Boys need literate male role models. Boys need to see men reading and writing. They need to see them reading the range of material relevant to schools. They need to see men writing for a variety of purposes. They need men to demonstrate to them how they use literacy in their working lives'.

Stoessiger suggests that because boys develop slowly they are seen to fail as literacy learners. He quotes a school principal as saying:

Perhaps we set boys up for failure in literacy. They come to us with less skills so they obviously don't do as well as girls. Despite our best intentions to not make comparisons they soon discover that reading and writing is hard for them but easy for many girls. They develop a view that literacy is not for them. They see themselves as failures, and this view becomes self fulfilling.

Stoessiger joins others in generalising that boys' preferred learning styles don't suit literacy learning. They report that: boys prefer being outside; boys prefer and are better at physical activities; boys are less acquiescent in closed learning environments than girls; boys are better at practical tasks; boys like to move around rather than sit still; boys are more competitive rather than co-operative; boys prefer short term activities; boys respond better to tasks with clear and achievable goals; younger boys are better at gross motor tasks rather than using fine motor skills.

This 'activist' view of boys, literacy and learning is complemented by the belief that the ability to learn by sitting quietly, concentrating on mental activities and working co-operatively using fine motor skills would seem to be essential for learning to read and write easily. These are not boys' strengths according to this school of thinking.

There is a view that gender and literacy are related. In effect, masculinity and literacy are incompatible. Part of this perception is that boys are not as practised in talking, or writing, about feelings. Males are trained to suppress their feelings and this has serious consequences for most men. A side effect is to make reading and writing more difficult for males. The argument is that if you are busy being trained to deny your emotions to yourself how can you possibly be expected to read let alone write about them.

This of course leads to the conclusion that literacy, like masculinity, is a social construction. For educationalists Nola Alloway and Pam Gilbert of James Cook University (1998) the so-called literacy problem with boys is much more complex than using the 'mere male' explanation. Or indeed, arguing that there is a need for more male teachers of literacy or a need for more masculine reading materials in early year classrooms.

Alloway and Gilbert in *Everying is Dangerous: Working with the 'Boys and Literacy' Agenda (October 1998)* argue that there are a number of dangers in how we view and tackle the issue of boys and literacy. There is, in their view:

- Danger of seeing the issues as just a matter of gender;
- Danger of working on boy's issues at the expense of girls – the competing victims syndrome - and of attempting to 'masculinise' the literacy classroom;
- Danger of seeing masculinity as fixed/given/immutable rather than as a social construction;
- Danger of assuming that 'literacy'- like 'masculinity' – is not a social construction, and that boys' literacy 'problems' are individual rather than social ones.

Alloway and Gilbert (1998 p5) suggest there is a '*…potentially abrasive interaction between; the social and pedagogical production of students as literate subjects; institutional attempts at regulating students at school; and the ways that boys take themselves up as masculine subjects'*.

Alloway and Gilbert offer four conclusions as possible aids to practically addressing the issue of boys and literacy.

1.   Boys are more likely to participate and achieve in school literacy work if they don't see participation and achievement in such work as being in conflict with desirable constructions of masculinity.

2. Successful literacy classrooms provide such understandings and opportunities for all students by making critical readings of constructions of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic class focal points for classroom literacy work.

3. Such classrooms are also those in which teacher/student power is distributed more evenly, allowing students to be recognised and valued, and their knowledge and skills enfranchised and respected. *This is important for all students but, given the connection between power and dominant forms of masculinity, it may be critical for boys.*

4. In order to improve boy's literacy performance, teachers will need to focus on:

- unravelling masculinity and culture
- unravelling literacy as social and cultural practices
- the connections and interplay between gender, culture and literacy
- using knowledge of the relationship between gender, culture and literacy to
- further inform a range of best practice

Rex Stoessiger's conclusions are not so much at odds with the views of Alloway and Gilbert as a blueprint for putting these views into practice. I'm not sure the latter would agree with the emphasis however!

Stoessiger believes we have to be aware that boys see learning as feminine unless it is a pathway to action. He argues schools, teachers and parents need to recognise boys' literacy for the equity issue it is – requiring positive programs rather than remediation.

Stoessiger argues the lesson from the successful work with girls and mathematics, girls and technology and similar programs is that positive discrimination can work. Stoessiger concludes:

I believe that improvements in boy's literacy will come from programs which take a positive approach to boys' literacy, targeting it as an equity issue and developing positive discrimination approaches which see boys as valuable and empowering.

The importance of the peer group in the world of young males is the focus of interesting work by Dr Chris Hickey of Deakin University and Lindsay Fitzclarence from the University of South Australia.

The authors of *Peering at the Individual: Problems with trying to teach young males not to be like their peers* argue the anti-social and risk-taking behaviours of boys are best addressed in the context of their peer group relations. It is their contention that far greater understanding of the function and importance of the peer group is necessary in order to intervene to influence young peoples' attitudes and practices in relation to risk taking and anti-social behaviours. Male suicide deaths outnumber female deaths by a ratio of four to one and between 1989 and 1998, drug related deaths for young males increased from 3 to 8.5 per 100,000, while the corresponding rate for females increased marginally from 2.2 to 2.4 per 1000,000.

Hickey and Fitzclarence advocate what they call 'conversational flow, designed to work with, rather than in opposition to, peer groups. This is an interactive program of communication whereby young males may have the opportunity to speak, to be heard and to be supported **in the context of their peer groups**:

' *to give expression to the personal and collective knowledges and investments that exist for young males in the context of their peer groups.*'

These types of interactive programs **using male role models** are designed to encourage boys to consider it acceptable – not weak - to take honest note of their own feelings and beliefs.

Throughout Australia there are supporters of single sex schools to tackle the issues of boys in education. There is a view that such schools are and should be an option for students and their families. Social interaction with the opposite sex can take place where and when appropriate and, in the case of boys, greater emphasis can be placed on the humanities. There is widespread evidence to suggest the take-up rate by boys of the humanities is much less in co-educational schools. Indeed, the problem for some boys to 'shrivel up' emotionally in early adolescence is a point taken up in the work of Dr Adrian Jones of Latrobe University.

In the south of my home State of Tasmania there is one single sex **public** school for girls (Ogilvie High School) and one single sex public school for boys (New Town High School). These campuses exist in close proximity to each other and although historically separated, their school communities have insisted they remain single sex schools.

In a 1995 publication, *Addressing the needs of adolescent boys*, the New Town high School outlined its philosophy, values and practices in relation to boys in education.

In 'Co-educational Settings', the paper states:

Whilst this work was prepared for a boys only environment, most of it is considered appropriate to co-educational environments. However, co-education provides some difficulties in this regard of a special nature: a) although a broad curriculum is offered, how do you get boys to 'select' non-traditional areas? and b), as co-ed boys construct their masculinity in relation to the opposite sex, how do you eliminate/ reduce the 'performance' factor?

The Newtown High report lists the *Needs of Boys* as:

- A notion of masculinity which is empowering
- An understanding of the experience of womanhood and how gender is constructed
- Educational experiences which are stimulating and challenging, yet which value all learners and learning areas
- Positive senior and peer role models
- The capacity to balance all areas of their lives
- A respect for their own physical and mental well being.

'Addressing the needs of adolescent boys' sets out both the rationale and some comprehensive strategies to satisfy what it believes are the ***needs*** of boys in education. I would like to highlight one of these ***needs*** and how the school tackles this:

A need - A notion of masculinity which is empowering:

1. A positive environment must exist where leadership, success, acceptance of praise, acceptance of authority and respect for tradition are permissible within the peer culture.

2. Boys must be taught to value empathy, sharing, nurturing and a sense of community, as well as the traditional values of strength, loyalty, leadership and the ability to operate independently.

3. An expanded sense of masculinity must be developed which leads to both personal and communal physical and emotional fulfilment based on 'wholesome' values.

4. Competition is a necessary personal and social element which should be encouraged where appropriate, but boys must learn not to rely solely on any single aspect of success for their self worth.

5. An expanded sense of masculinity would value social and emotional aspects of a boy's life.

6. Boys need conflict resolution skills. Violence must be explicitly rejected.

7. Boys must learn to be accountable for their actions.

8. Boys must learn to use their sexuality in a positive and appropriate way.

In terms of strategies to satisfy this need and achieve the objects associated with it (1- 8), the school has outlined a comprehensive set of guidelines. For example, to achieve 'need' 1, A NOTION OF MASCULINITY WHICH IS EMPOWERING:

1. **A positive environment must exist where leadership, success, acceptance of praise, acceptance of authority and respect for tradition are permissible within the peer culture**.

a) Opportunities for leadership – Prefects, Student Council, Peer Support Leaders, Camps, monitors, cross age tutoring, Sports Captains, student clubs, student tribunal, the use of 'cool' students to modify cultures.

b) Recognising all forms of success – (improvement, excellence, consistency)
ONYA awards, Prefects, sporting, academic, cultural (inside and outside the school), Records of Development, badges, certificates, assemblies, recognition through newsletters and bulletins, speech/presentation nights etc.

c) The nature of authority must be 'respectable', firm, consistent, fair, humanitarian, constructive rather than punitive, must teach boys the consequences of their actions, must model the behaviours designed in students. Must stand up to scrutiny as being reasonable, existence of grievance procedures for staff and students.

The study recognised that the six major themes in the education of boys that emerged as 'needs' (see above):

'... *are possibly contentious and must certainly be considered as linked to each other and not as distinct as they may initially appear. Despite these difficulties, each one provides a useful 'lens' to scrutinise schools and their programs.'*

Psychologist Steve Biddulph, an early pioneer of boys' issues, has been a strong advocate of an educational program and strategy he dubbed, the Cotswold Experiment. In effect this is the separation of boys and girls at an English secondary school for one subject only - English – with dramatic improvements in boys' results, and behaviour.

As the brainchild of Marian Cox, Head of the English Department at the Cotswold School in Leicestershire, England, the experiment saw benefits that went far beyond just English scores. Behaviour, concentration, and reading levels all improved significantly. Cox explained to Biddulph that boys at the school found they could relax and express themselves more without girls present, and girls reported the same. According to Biddulph the Cotswold experiment does three important things.

- It acknowledges that boys generally have slower development of language skills.

- It takes account of the dynamic by which boys, feeling verbally outclassed by the girls in expressive subjects, often become 'hoonish' and macho as a defence mechanism, spoiling the class for themselves and for the girls.

- By specifically targeting English, it tackles the key life skills of self expression self-awareness and communication – the very things men traditionally lack. These are the skills that make boys into better fathers, partners, and workmates – which most girls and women long for.

Biddulph quite rightly points out that segregated classes and curricula are not risk free - there is always a danger of reintroducing stereotypes.

'However, as usual, this comes down to the skill and maturity of the teacher – being able to encourage a wide range of ways of being a boy, or a girl.'

Biddulph assesses the 'experiment' as encouraging.

- When separated, the girls and boys seemed able to relax and drop the old roles.
- This gives teachers a chance to draw out more of the real child, without the role-playing that passes for lots of school behaviour.

He concludes that once experiencing this 'richness of being', boys are less likely to return to being the '… gruff, cool automatons that so exasperate their parents by the early teens!'

'Boys in these programs actually became more expressive, creative, linguistically skilled – in short more human, and more equipped for life. Girls continued as they have through the last decade, to become more assertive, analytical, and exuberant. In short, everybody wins.'

I have included in the Appendix (A) a detailed study of a similar 'experiment' conducted at a local high school in my electorate of Braddon, on the North West Coast of Tasmania. The conclusions are neither as effusive as Biddulph's nor as optimistic. But they do however offer an honest, 'warts and all' assessment of a comprehensive single-sex trial program that can be tested and replicated..

The Ulverstone High School Trial aimed to:

- experiment with the manner in which teachers teach boys and girls English in Grade 8

- observe whether gender affects learning in Maths, Science, SOSE and English. Can grouping adolescents into single-sex classes lead to improved learning?

Whilst in these classes, teachers set out to address two related issues:

- increase understanding of how gender is constructed

- increase awareness and understanding of harassment

$2.6 billion per year!

Disengagement from learning and schooling can have serious personal, social and financial implications. In its worst forms it results in an alienation which is difficult to overcome. Sadly, for the individual and the nation the effects are often long-term. Tragically, for some it is fatal.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1999) *The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving,* Sydney estimates the cost s involved with early school leavers '… *once aggregated, represent a total of $2.6 billion per year.'*

In anyone's language this is staggering and nothing short of a national disgrace. It is a national problem requiring a national effort.

Many of the symptoms and no doubt many of the solutions rest in the early school years:

'This level of cost impresses upon all of us the importance of taking action to minimise early school leaving – to reform our cultures of schooling, and as Tom Bentley has recently argued so eloquently, to take learning beyond the classroom.'

Tom Bentley (1999) in *Learning Beyond the Classroom* is an educationalist who seeks to make 'lifelong learning' the culture of education (and the nation):

The way that education is organised encourages an artificial distinction between knowing and doing. This is also a historical divide …(but) the distinction between formal, theoretical knowledge and practical skills is being eroded by the fact that the systems by which we organise life increasingly incorporate technology which can process information, ' the action of knowledge upon knowledge.'

Our systems, particularly our schools, must adapt to this environment, and according to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, adapt quickly.

Boys make up the greatest proportion of early school leavers.

Are they turned off learning or turned off school?

Shouldn't the two be synonymous – a partnership and process dedicated to achieving a series of mutually dependent outcomes?

All developing countries are moving to merge or integrate their provisions of general and vocational education. The needs of the global knowledge-based economy require people with generic transferable skill and strongly developed personal and social competencies.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum argues:

'The pace of change to occupations and enterprises is no longer adequately served by providing a fixed basket of skill and qualifications acquired in a hierarchical set of institutions.'

A great deal of research is being done into *boys in education*. A great deal of research is being trialed as well. There are various 'models' available and a large number of practical resources to help schools and educational communities tackle the issue(s). For example I would cite the excellent work of the MYRAD project in Victoria and the Key Findings and Recommendations of the ACSA project, *From Alienation to Engagement (1996)* as just two invaluable resources.

In addition, the Dusseldorp Skills Forum presented a discussion paper on the issue of early school leavers in October 1999 titled, *Why Australia Needs a National Youth Commitment*. This highly informative paper tackles the issue of changing pathways into adulthood and its social and economic environs. Although it deals more with the 'exiting' side of (boys in) schooling, its emphasis on practical commitment to youth has strong connections to the issue of boys in education. I recently witnessed a successful example of a Youth Commitment Program in action in Whittlesea City, Victoria. Many of the reasons for early leaving can be fed into the school system further (back) down the line, with particular emphasis on locating and assisting at risk students. A detailed investigation of this program would be very beneficial to many educators.

Many of the suggestions and views outlined in this submission bear consideration and testing. They acted as a catalyst for me in my quest to understand why so many boys tended to turn off school, and turn off so early. I am convinced they are not turned off learning. Indeed, I hold the opposite to be true. I think they are turned off by the ways learning is structured or perhaps more accurately, the way structures turn off learning.

- Why wouldn't young people, full of energy, enthusiasm and inquiry want to learn?
- Are they challenged enough by what they learn?
- Are standards and expectations in fact too low?
- Is mediocrity anticipated and expected?
- When does the fun in learning become a chore?
- Why?
- Do our school structures, methodologies, and curricula reflect the world in which young people live, play, learn and yes, even work?
- Should our schools reflect society, or as one principal recently put it to me, be better than society?

In concluding, I have probably done no more than restate the so-called problem or issue of ' *What about the boys?*' in education. I do know that the substantial middle school movement is dedicated to answering this call and the idea of developing a systemic, holistic, integrated approach at local, regional, state and national levels will have beneficial outcomes. It has to.

I am convinced that national investment in attracting dedicated, highly trained and motivated teachers (back) into the teaching-learning profession is critical. Education afterall is about communication and communities – in short, people. The fundamental social and capital stock in education has been allowed to depreciate for too long. If education was viewed as a business, many a CEO's head would have rolled by now! We need to reinvest in a dynamic, energetic and indispensable resource – our teachers. We need new ones to work along side our experienced teachers. The latter need genuine, system-wide support to further develop their stock of professional skills and expertise and to re-energise.

Recently, the Melbourne *Age* (9 August, 2000) ran an interesting supplement by Lisa Kearns titled, *Boys will be Boys*. It was particularly interesting to me because the title actually set off a long held suspicion of mine: that **boys** actually **can't be boys** in education!

My suspicion has been beautifully captured in an article by Kerry Cue in the *Herald-Sun* of 15 August, 2000. Cue writes:

The BIG issue in education these days is boys. It should be, for the education system doesn't suit all boys. And I know why. It has a lot to do with Newton's first law of motion: a body will remain at rest! (boys asleep) or in a state of uniform motion (boys awake) in a straight line unless acted upon by an external force (school).

Cue et. al., suggest that traditionally, most boys are required to spend most of their school day 'silent and seated' - states of mind and body that are antithetical to being boys.

By the time they reach secondary school '*…when the hormones hit, these boys are truly the young warriors of the tribe. And school doesn't suit them. School suits the accountants of the tribe …the young warriors of the tribe don't want to sit and write and talk. They want to do something.'*

There is a view that in education we ignore the saying, 'boys will be boys'. Further, that in the main, boys can't be boys:

' *We want them to sit and communicate like girls. But it doesn't always work.'* (K.Cue, 2000).

I think this contention needs to be tested. It is a widespread contention and if true, its implications would be profound. It doesn't merely centre on methodologies and curricula but structures, organisation, and the importance of space and design. If it can be refuted as 'myth' then this alone would make the exercise worthwhile. I know the perception will not go away.

Finally, we often say that our young people are our future. This is true but, as Jack Dusseldorp said on October 27, 1999, *'...(this) strikes me as being a little self-interested. Surely what we really need to acknowledge is the converse: the future belongs to our young people.'*

Appendix A

Single-sex Trial Program in 1999 at Ulverstone High School

A Report by trial coordinators, Craig White and Helen Plaister.

Ulverstone High School is a co-educational public high school located on the North West Coast of Tasmania. The student population is around 450 students from years 7-10. Students enter from local primary schools and continue years 11 & 12 at either of two public senior secondary colleges.

The co-ordinators' report is as follows and is reproduced with the permission of the Principal and Staff of Ulverstone High School.

The aims of this trial were:

1. To experiment with the manner in which we teach boys and girls 'English' in Grade 8. This has meant trialing texts suited to the development level and interest of each group.

2. To observe whether gender (being a boy or girl) affects learning in Maths, Science, SOSE and English. Can grouping adolescents into single-sex classes lead to improved learning?

Whilst in these classes teachers have been able to address two related issues:

3. To increase understanding of how gender is constructed.

4. To increase awareness and understanding of harassment.

The following discusses the work completed and the observations for each aim.

Specific Literacy Programs for Girls and Boys

Units tried because this is a Girl's Class

1. *So Much to Tell You* - a study of biographies

We shared the novel <u>So Much To Tell You</u> - written by John Marsden who, as a male, writes about girls in a boarding school. That concept alone proved to be quite fascinating. In the novel, the relationship develops between the badly disfigured new girl in the school who is so traumatised that she cannot speak - and the girls in their familiar school situation. Maria's father caused the disfigurement and their relationship is carefully unfolded in the telling of the story. The novel is in the form of a diary and gives an excellent insight into relationships between the student in a new environment, Maria's misgivings and lack of confidence about herself, and the relationships daughters have with fathers.

- The absence of boys eliminated any embarrassment when daughters in the class were discussing their own relationships with their dads - manipulation females are capable of,

and of course the feminine wiles used to "get our own way every time." This was very much a trusting situation and because we didn't have the boys, no explanations were required when discussing the 'intrigues of the female'.

- The follow up biographical writings were excellent especially as some in the class delved deep within themselves and disclosed special relationships within their own families. Some students had lost their dads and the sensitivity with which that was discussed will always remain quite special.

2.   The novel and film, *'Playing Beattie Bow'*

- This is quite a challenging piece of literature. The girls dealt with this very well because it allows role-play. Feeling less inhibited in a single sex class they were very willing to try and always experiment. Some singing was a highlight.

The novel is of historical value being set in the Rocks area of Sydney, N.S.W. The plot time warps through the eyes of Abigail (from a single parent family) from the 20_{th} Century to the 1800's. The link is Beattie Bow who provides the access into the 1800's through the game "Playing Beattie Bow' and a lace dress. Abigail meets the Victorian era head on and the dilemmas she faces are intriguing as she tries to explain how things work in the 20_{th} Century.

- The novel allowed us to study in-depth point of view, simile and metaphor, which then took us into the realms of song and poetry.

- The comparative studies of behaviours and values in the Victorian era and our own proved to be an interesting concept to deal with. The issue of 'manners' proved to be a great discussion.

3.   *Different Stow, Different Cinderella*

Lastly, but by no means less importantly, was 'romance'. This is probably timely because let's face it, it is where most of the girls' heads are at Grade 8 — Term 3!

- The technique used to discuss this was the use of fairy tales, in particular, Cinderella which has been made into a quirky film called Ever After. This stars Angelica Hustori as the most amazing stepmother and an appearance is made by Leonardo Di Vinci who the girls thought might even be the fairy godmother.

- There is an unspoken awareness in females that romance needs at times to be 'oohed and aahed' at. I am sure the enjoyment gained throughout this unit was made even more valuable because of that implicit understanding. Girls don't have to say anything and in a classroom of girls it was delightful. I am not suggesting boys are not romantic but it is that verbal put down in a sensitive situation that they just can't resist and it does spoil a teaching moment.

- The follow-up work on *A Different Kind of Cinderella* and *Breaking the Stereotypes* allowed us to use story and film to analyse in-depth director Andy Tennants' work with *Ever After.*

The Boys

Language Work

Every Monday for approximately 30 minutes we practised spelling or looked at an aspect of language use. This has included explanation and practice of the following:

- use of apostrophes
- avoiding commonly misused words such as 'there, their and they're'
- an understanding of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs
- an awareness of common grammatical errors such as incorrect noun-verb agreement
- an ability to identify and correct sentence run~ons
- an awareness of how to write sentences in a variety of ways and continued practice organising writing into paragraphs etc..

Part of this language work has involved reading sessions with a group of Grade 1 and 2's at the nearby Ulverstone Primary School.

Reading Sessions

All the current research into boys' issues identifies a disinterest amongst many boys in reading for pleasure, particularly fiction texts. Therefore, a major goal has been to get all boys 'willing' to read during the allotted two reading sessions.

During these times we have:

- read snippets of books, read whole stories (authors' and students'), shown certain books and discussed them - those I have liked and those that others might enjoy but I haven't. This has been an attempt to tempt boys into books and to amuse them!

- asked boys to read parts of books or to tell us about their reading; this has led to some boys reading texts enjoyed by others.

- set about matching a book with a boy. There was a range of interests, ability levels and personalities in the class and this meant trying to find a book that would suit an individual. In two cases a group of three boys read the same book after my recommendation and seeing others reading and talking about the book

- taken in a different box of books, changed every three weeks, to expose boys to a range of stories.

Results of Literacy and Numeracy Tests

 This program needed to be monitored through formal testing. As a result of discussions with an ACER consultant a decision was made to use PAT Maths 3a and 3b tests, and English 12 and 13 literacy tests. The girls' and boys' classes were tested at the beginning and end of the year.

 NOTE: The expected class range of progress between 12 and 13 is 3.0. The range of individual progress is between 0-9.

GIRLS

ACER PAT Maths Results			Progress in English 12&13 Literacy Results		
3a	**3b**	**Progress**	**12**	**13**	**Progress**
18	20	+2	66	72	+6
9	14	+5	48	55	+7
28	33	+5	45	46	+1
09	12	+3	49	46	-3
08	12	+4	63	62	-1
28	32	+4	67	60	-7
21	22	+1	46	43	-3
23	27	+4	47	44	-3
24	20	-4	49	46	-3
25	23	-2	46	52	+8
23	29	+6	54	62	+8
28	32	+4	53	64	+11
36	39	+3	5.5	64	+9
.30	28	-2	47	54	+7
13	18	+5	25	40	+15
17	17	Same	45	41	-4
13	13	Same	52	65	+13
18	28	+10	50	53	+3
22	2.3	+1	54	55	+1
20	27	+7	58	62	+4
21	23	+2	35	33	-2

AV20.29   AV23.43   AV3.14   AV50.19   AV53.28 AV3.19

Note Av: average for the group

3a: First test administered   12:   First test administered

3b: Second test administered   13:   Second test administered

BOYS

ACER PAT Maths Results			Progress in English 12&13 Literacy Result		
3a	**3b**	**Progress**	**12**	**13**	**Progress**
31	33	+2	51	47	-4
9	16	+7	51	56	+5
23	29	+6	59	68	+9
26	31	+5	67	68	+1
19	23	+4	45	57	+12
15	11	-4	52	49	-3
16	22	+6	45	48	+3
25	25	Same	50	65	+15
21	37	+16	46	53	+7
21	27	+6	59	56	-3
26	23	-3	45	48	+3
24	23	-1	51	63	+12
38	39	+1	42	57	+15
32	34	+2	41	41	Same
12	24	+12	54	55	+10
34	33	-1	42	57	+13
33	39	+6			
21	33	+12			
13	14	+1			
15	25	+10			
13	19	+6			
19	22	+3			

AV22.1   AV26.45 AV4.35   AV47.76   AV53 AV5.24

Note Av: average for the group

3a: First test administered   12: First test administered

3b: Second test administered   13: Second test administered

Comparative Table of Literacy Results

	Girls	Boys
12	50.2	47.8
13	53.3	53
Progress	3.1	5.2

The expected rate of progress between these two tests is 3.0.

Comparative Table of Numeracy Results

	Girls	Boys
3a	20.3	22.1
3b	23.4	26.5
Progress	3.1	4.4

No expected progress is contained within the PAT Maths manual. However, when testing the tests the following was found: for 3a the average for the sample was 24.6, whilst the average for 3b was 24.0.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Conclusions for each of the aims outlined at the beginning of this report.

The Literacy Programs

Based on the testing conducted with the two classes, the boys' class achieved greater progress in numeracy and literacy, followed by the girls' class.

- The literacy testing shows that at the beginning of the year the girls' class scored 2.4 points higher than the boys.

- The girls' progress over 1999 was in the expected range of *3*.

- The boys' progress was more than the expected. A progress of 5.2 points was recorded; the boys out performed the girls by 2.8 points. At the end of the year the girls' class finished .3 points higher than the boys.

Learning in Single Sex Classes

The boys' numeracy results were higher than the girls on both tests.

- In terms of progress in 1999 the boys improved 1.3 points more than the girls.

- Girls were within the tested range for the test 3b, whilst the boys were *2.5* points higher.

2. The four teachers involved in the program believe that single sex groupings in the subject areas of Maths, SOSE, Science and English **do not** necessarily lead to improved results.

In the area of Science the girls appeared to have greater access to equipment with the absence of boys. They were actively involved in practicals. The boys reacted positively to the hands-on aspects of Science. Even though some girls and boys noted feeling more comfortable during the Human Development unit, the teachers believe that having girls present assists some boys in dealing *with* certain topics. There is no evidence that Science results improved because of single sex groupings.

The SOSE teachers believe that there is no advantage in having single sex groupings for SOSE. With the school adopting critical thinking as a priority and given subject content, a boy's and girl's view is important in developing understanding of topics. Boys and girls quite often offer differing perspectives on topics and it is valuable to be exposed to both in this subject.

In the area of English, the two teachers feel strongly that they were able to provide worthwhile experiences to students because they were separated into single-sex groups. However, they don't believe the testing results support the placing of all Grade 8's into single sex classes for English in the future.

The following reasons are offered for this conclusion:

- The girls' progress was not outside the expected range of achievement.
- Even though the boys' progress was higher than the expected range some possible variables could help explain this:

  - the boys readily accepted being in a single sex group, whereas some girls took until early Term 2 to accept and then work with the two female teachers. Research shows that when a group is willingly involved in research and believe they are likely to improve they quite often do; this is called the *Hawthorn effect*. I believe that the boys' willingness to work with the two male teachers from the outset established a sound work ethic and this accounts for some of the improvement in English and Maths.

  - The small sample size for boys for the literacy testing may be responsible for the higher achievement.

<u>Discussions on Gender</u>

Teachers specifically incorporated into the teaching of English discussions on gender issues - re the unit outlines at the beginning of the report. The National Gender Framework recommends schools incorporate gender discussions. This model offers one way of doing that at a time when students are thinking increasingly about their identity.

Anti-Harassment Work

The program co-ordinators conducted some very basic work on harassment. The School's Partnership Agreement has as one of its goals an awareness and reduction of harassment within the school. This trial offers one way to do this. However, in no way have we delivered a comprehensive approach to dealing with the issue. In fact 3 boys were suspended on two occasions for various forms of harassment. Within the girls' class there were instances of harassment involving tactics such as ostracizing, spreading rumours and verbal taunting. However, at the end of this trial these students have been involved in discussions on harassment and have a basic understanding of its meaning, forms and how the school deals with it

Recommendations

1. The first recommendation contains a number of aspects dealing with the teaching of literacy. They are:

    a) In 2000 Grade 8 English classes should be paired to allow two teachers to be responsible for students' literacy development. This suggestion will allow the grouping of students into single sex groups, on occasions, to allow teachers to conduct units similar in purpose to those already trialed in 1999.

        This has been the most successful aspect of the program: taking the best part and incorporating it into future teaching ensures this year's trail is not a 'one hit wonder'.

        Other groupings are possible. Perhaps a capable group of students could be grouped and taught essay-writing skills. The further advantage to this suggestion is that it enables two teachers to discuss student learning.

    b) That the English Department conduct the following professional development in 2000 as discussed in late 1999:

        - The creation of a subject plan for the teaching of English, particularly in Grade 7 and 8. This should be driven by the key learning areas of literacy, critical thinking, and social development and information technology. A component of this plan should outline writing conventions that should be taught and practised during Grade 7 and 8.

        - Occasional evening sessions to be held to discuss adolescent fiction. This would assist teachers in their efforts to encourage the enjoyment of reading. Our librarian should be the central figure co-ordinating and distributing books.

2.   Grade 8"s to have a grade team similar to Grade 7's.

           Students would have two teachers for two subjects, possibly basics. Most parents
           believed this arrangement allowed students to develop closer ties with teachers, and
           that teachers could provide parents with a more accurate picture of their child's progress.
           There are other benefits: teachers are required to take more responsibility for the
           management of welfare and behaviour and this can lead to these issues being resolved
           with parents and students rather than the problem being passed on: and a team approach
           to a grade allows for a wider input into the education of children (something that occurred
           with the single sex classes).

3.   That Grade 7 & 8 teams consider establishing parent meetings similar to those used in this
           trial. This partnership has ensured open communication between school and parents. I also
           speculate that this link is in part responsible for some of the success of this trial.