

7 Janet Street
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27 July 2000

Re: Inquiry into the education of boys in Australian schools

As the mother of a 16 year old girl and a 12 year old boy, I am very pleased that attention is being given to the education of boys. Most people would agree that, in general, boys and girls learn differently, take different risks, explore life differently and mature at different ages. Yet, I have been amazed to see, as my son moves through the education system, how many teachers seem to be overwhelmed and professionally under-skilled in the management of 'real' boys. There appears to be little by way of 'best practice' other than dreaded sticker reward systems and escalating punishment.

It seems to me that teaching techniques and 'desired' school cultures have evolved to suit introverted, attentive and compliant students - usually girls, but boys with similar personality traits are sought out and endorsed as role models by the school system. In boys, these traits are rewarded by smooth (if mediocre) passage through each academic year and an absence of stress-filled telephone calls to parents.

But some boys are not built to behave and learn as honorary girls.

These are the extroverted, in-your-face, full of energy, enthusiasm, adventure and devilment boys of Saturday matinee fame. These trouble seeking missiles strike deep into the hearts of modern day teachers (who were probably themselves compliant, introverted students). For many teachers, these boys are a personal affront, their extroversion and fearlessness, rather than being valued, are interpreted as defiance to be rigidly handled with righteous indignation.

Parents of these boys are caught in the bind between supporting the teachers, coping with the guilt of having given birth to an extrovert, and loving and affirming their son, while hoping in their hearts that no one will be able to quelch the fire for life that burns so brightly in their boy.

Good luck with the Inquiry, which I hope will spark professional debate and identify some best practice strategies, so that all our children, can reach their full potential.

Please put me on your mailing list.

Yours sincerely

Frances Bradshaw (Mrs)