

'Warrawong'
Attunga, 2345
Ph: (02) 6769 5644 (H)
(02) 6778 4204 (W)
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SUBMISSION- BOYS IN EDUCATION

My submission on the Education of Boys is based on a specific emphasis dealing with education in rural Australia (NSW) where I have taught for the greater part of the last twenty years. Currently, I am employed as a Head Teacher -English/History and I am engaged in teaching across all ability levels from years 7-12 (Co-educational). During my teaching career I have developed a personal interest and acquired expertise in educational issues affecting boys. I have enclosed the following: a case study of Uralla Central School, a conference paper on *Boys in Education* and this outline of some important areas for consideration.

SCHOOLS - Four phases in improving the educational outcomes for boys.

1. Awareness- School leaders wishing to address concerns need to equip themselves with quality research which is directly relevant to their learning community, and this must then be passed on to parents, students and teachers in order to promote an informed debate. School leaders can draw on case studies dealing with innovative and successful programs involving boys in education such as those compiled by Richard Fletcher of the University of Newcastle.
2. Action plans- These need to be developed according to the specific needs of each school, rather than the vague implementation of a policy directive from a distant bureaucracy.
3. Implementation- Any plan should be implemented in stages but the most important feature is that a plan should be multi-faceted. For example, a program to improve literacy levels in a school is unlikely to be successful if the overall learning culture is dysfunctional, marked by poor attendance and characterised by disruptive behaviour both in and out of the classroom.
4. Evaluation- Regular evaluation is essential in order to provide encouragement in areas of improvement as well as pointing towards areas where a new approach is needed.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Resources and government policies are of little value unless you can reach the school leaders and convince them of the need to improve a school culture. People at the coalface in education are being *changed* out of existence so they will want to see reasons and value in changes being proposed.
- Welfare policies in schools need to be examined and updated. Schools often give lip service to anti- bullying campaigns and the need to promote pro-social values. School discipline procedures tend to be reactive and apply frequently after an incident. Rarely do schools seek to improve the overall work ethic of students and rigidly enforce a hands off policy when it comes to bullying. That is, any student who is violent and

aggressive resulting in them touching another student should be automatically suspended from school.

- Self-esteem needs to be promoted at every level of school life. The development of self esteem can include the following: presentations from positive role models involving motivation and goal setting, courses in basic etiquette and grooming, promotion of public speaking, along with rewarding the drama student as well as the football star at school assemblies and through the local media.
- Literacy needs to be promoted across the school and should not be regarded as something *done* in the English faculty. Teachers need to be comfortable with a variety of learning styles and conscious of the issues relating to boys in education. Teachers are expected to program their teaching to incorporate numerous policies and Gender Equity is but one of many. Schools have had to cope with new School Certificates and new Higher School Certificates. Everything is important but it is understandable that issues such as Middle Schooling or Boys and literacy get moved to the background. Probably the single greatest challenge facing educational leaders is the provision of appropriate training and development that will nurture and promote teachers' ability to promote literacy across the curriculum in more meaningful and measurable ways.
- Parental attitudes to learning are overwhelmingly the most significant variables affecting boys and literacy. Parents who read to their sons, who value learning, ideas and creativity are less likely to be part of the brigade who lament that their son is performing badly at school. Perhaps literature being prepared for schools should also be adapted and targeted at parents. Do mum and dad model reading at home or do they model watching the television?
- Encouraging boys to enjoy reading is crucial if literacy levels are to improve. Stimulating reading material is in short supply in most country schools. Penguin put out a series of graded classics, and it is a pity that most schools are either not aware of their existence or they may not be able to afford them in sufficient numbers; along with other quality reading material.

Problems are exacerbated when school budgets are already stretched simply supplying standard and or mandatory texts. Schools often make do with what they have in the storeroom, which may mean issuing so-called "boys" books, which appeal to the lowest common denominator. Not only do they reinforce stereotypes with themes of violence and foul language but the most basic vocabulary imaginable often accompany them.

The establishment of databases, which contain lists of quality books (containing a variety of subjects and themes) and suggested reading ages, would partly address this need. Leading bookstores know and recommend popular, quality teenage fiction and non-fiction. Librarians, classroom teachers and students have a mountain of material they could recommend if given the opportunity. There is a need to push and regularly update a bibliography of teenage fiction simply to remove much of the guesswork and risks for would be purchasers.

CONCLUSION

Rural students in particular face a greater prospect of being marginalised in our society if they possess poor literacy skills, low-level social skills and a poor work ethic especially when compounded by low self-esteem. Peers, teachers, parents and the community often set lower expectations for boys in communities which have lost basic services and are witnessing a gradual decline in traditional manual employment. Girls seemed to have faced their bleak employment realities in an earlier generation. They knew that if they wanted a career rather than the traditional role of wife and mother they would have to leave their small town in order to do so. Their male peers could stay if they wanted to work in the mine, mill or abattoir etc but now those towns do not have a mine, mill or abattoir. Rather than adapt to the changing employment landscape it is easy to become disenchanted and not see any point in trying at school.

Rural students need to have the confidence to move beyond their communities in search of continuing education and wider employment bases. Boys need to be motivated and given reasons for learning throughout their education so that they can make the appropriate subject choices, which will enable them to access careers in the expanding service sectors. Schools may need to change but there has to be a message of hope coming from all levels of society. Reinforce the message that ninety percent of the population is employed! Rather than the message of despair reducing educational challenges to a nightmare world of boys being depicted as a problem.

This outline offers a broad platform for addressing *THE EDUCATION OF BOYS*. I would be happy to address the committee in person in order to elaborate on many of the successful initiatives I have been involved in at a school level. I wish to acknowledge the work, ideas and commitment of Sue Brown -Head Teacher, Science- Uralla Central School.

Bill Campbell -2000-07-10