

*Standing Committee on Employment Education and
Workplace Relations*

The Education Of Boys

Brief Response by a NSW Teacher of Literacy

Ron Gough

36 Condie Crs NORTH NOWRA NSW 2541

The following is comment made as a result of personal observation, experience and reading. The focus is on The Literacy Education of boys

THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND

My qualifications include a Diploma In Teaching (Primary Teaching) 1974 and a Diploma in Educational Studies (Reading and Language) 1983. Since then I have completed various staff developments and TAFE courses including statements of Attainment in Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom 1990, Working With People With Disabilities 1996, Adult Literacy Teaching (ALT) 1997, and Adult Numeracy Teaching (ANT) 1998

I have been a teacher of literacy for twenty five years. My experience has included eight years in NSW country one-teacher schools and four years as an infants teacher in larger schools. I have also taught literacy to high school age children on a private tutoring basis. Since 1987 I have been a literacy/numeracy teacher with the Illawarra Institute of Technology (TAFE) Nowra Campus

I am also a member of a local men's' group and have an interest in issues relating to men and boys. I have had articles and comment published in the magazine Certified Male Edited by Peter Vogel

BOYS LITERACY NEEDS AND THEIR SOCIALISATION SKILLS IN THE EARLY AND MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING

It is widely known that boys are far more likely to have problems with reading and writing than girls. There has been a considerable gap for many years and the gap is widening.

It has been my observation that the infant school is where the foundations of literacy learning are laid . If a boy fails to pick up the basics of reading and writing in the early years then it is possible for him to drift right through his entire years of schooling unable to read and write sufficiently well to meet his personal and employment needs.

A boy is more likely to have special literacy needs if
as a person

- * he is psychologically damaged
- * he has physical problems such as eye sight or hearing loss

at school

- * he has trouble sitting still in his chair
- * he is diagnosed as been hyper active and is put onto medication
- * the teacher uses teaching methods which expect that all the children of the same age can read and write at the same level
- * strict teacher emphasis on "correctness" which can lead to boys unwilling to have a go at reading or spelling for fear of making mistakes.
- * limited teaching methods (a wide range is required)
- * over emphasis on the teaching of phonics (a range of methods is required, especially those which focus on meaning)

at home

- * he comes from a poor socio-economic background
- * he comes from a poor socio-economic suburb. Dr Brian Cambourne of Wollongong University (an expert in the teaching of reading and writing) has stated that you can often find the greatest concentrations of children with literacy needs by simply looking at postcodes.
- * he does not see his parents reading and writing and so there is no positive role modelling of adults reading and writing
- * there are few books or writing materials available
- * there is little parental support or encouragement for schooling or homework
- * his father does not live in the home
- * he comes from a cultural minority
- * he is an only child

It is important that the social needs of boys are also taken into consideration when planning programs to assist boys at school.

THE STRATEGIES WHICH SCHOOLS HAVE ADOPTED TO IMPROVE BOYS' LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL

It is important to target boys who need help with their literacy and give them the help required. Such an approach is already receiving funding in Victoria and is achieving "Astonishing Results"¹Schools are currently trying to achieve this in many ways including the following;

Identifying the boys in need.

They are identified by

- * teacher observation Teachers know who these boys are.

The need for intervention is confirmed by

- * school counsellors
- * current state wide basic skills testing.

2 Physical Testing This is done by the school nurse or by the family doctor on advise from the school. Eye sight , hearing and general health checks are carried out.

3. Parent Helpers and Community Volunteers Volunteers come to many schools to help with reading. Materials and books are organised by the teacher so that the volunteer has an easy task such as just listening to the boy read

4. Specialist Teacher Intervention Trained Resource teachers take boys out of the classroom for extra help on a small group or one to one basis.

5 Peer Tutoring Trained senior students help younger students with their reading and writing.

HOW THE SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES DEVELOPED BY SCHOOLS MAY BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE OR MORE BROADLY IMPLEMENTED

! Identifying the boys in need More school counsellors may be needed to help with

¹Arndt p34

the identification of boys in need of help and also to monitor special programs

2 Physical Testing More regular health checks should be carried out by school nurses; especially to young students as identified by teachers

3. Parent Helpers and Community Volunteers Special recruiting drives need to be organised by the schools. Also training sessions for the volunteers could be organised. These sessions could be run by the school staff . Or a TAFE Adult Literacy Officer (ALO) could be called upon to train these volunteers. ALOs already do such training of volunteers to teach adults in the community who have literacy needs. Such a program is currently taking place between Vincentia High School and Nowra TAFE in NSW

4. Teacher Intervention More teachers need to be employed to act as specialist literacy teachers. They should be able to withdraw individuals or small groups of boys from their regular class for extra teaching. All schools should have access to such teacher support, and especially infants schools

5 Peer Tutoring The training of senior students can be organised by existing teachers at the high school or a TAFE ALO could be involved. The use of a TAFE ALO to train senior students is already being trailed between various TAFE colleges in NSW. One example of such a co-operative venture already exists between Moss Vale TAFE and Goulburn High School in NSW.

It is also important to inform the parents of the benefits of peer tutoring to not only the boys in need but also to the parents of the boys giving the tutoring. Some parents will feel that the time of the older boy is being wasted and that he should be carrying on with other learning. But there are huge social benefits to the boys giving the tutoring. Many schools, now have social mentoring programs between older and younger students. Literacy learning/teachng can be an extension of that.

FURTHER ISSUES

The Issue of Special Gender Funding

According to Peter Hill a professor of education at Melbourne University, it is likely that the issue of raising funding for the needs of boys' literacy could raise opposition if it is felt that funding might be taken away from programs for girls' education and needs. To avoid such a debate it might be more acceptable to all interested bodies if the funding was made available to all children in need of literacy support. "It's better to target low achievers and pick up disproportionately more boys in the process."²

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²Arndt p34