HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations

The Education of Boys

A paper prepared by David McCumstie.

University of Western Sydney honours student and boy's education researcher

But man, proud man
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep.

Shakespeare. Measure for measure. II, 2.

"Sure it's teaching, but a lot of it's mothering"

I am glad that the **social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys** in Australian schools is now considered deserving of investigation. My happiness at seeing boys issues being addressed in this standing committee, is dampened by the fact that the mere presence of this standing committee speaks, to some extent about the precarious nature of boys education. The problems facing boys in education are myriad and often intertwined. My personal interest is as teacher and researcher into education at the University of Western Sydney. I have currently been researching boy's attitudes and addressing the question:

"Why don't males choose teaching as a career?" (Investigating youth attitudes)

Why is this relevant?

While this standing committee seeks to address boys needs it cannot ignore the importance of having male teachers for the boys. While a majority of the students saw male teachers on the staff as role models, all the boys interviewed declared the advantages of having male teachers. When discussing male and female teachers John, a year twelve student, gave this broadly expressed view:

> Like, we have one teacher for example, and he's a new-age sort of guy and he can listen to you and stuff. You can talk to him about things that are happening. Bloke stuff, I guess. Whereas, a lady teacher, I wouldn't say things like that.

Connell (1989) says, **"Schools are masculinity making devices**. Schools do not simply adapt to a natural masculinity among boys...they are agents in the matter, constructing particular forms of gender and negotiating relations between them". Both the student's comments and Connell's research suggest the benefit and need for males to enter teaching. This paper will attempt to provide a **background framework** of, what could be called, "the male deficit" in primary teaching. I will then offer **an overview** of this research project, and finally propose some **findings and suggestions**.

Background Framework:

Throughout Australia male under-representation in primary education is widespread. Australian men make up less than ¼ of the primary teaching workforce and the numbers are steadily decreasing (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996). Combine this with the fact that there is a shortage of men entering universities to study teaching and that only 35% of male university applicants for teaching rated teaching as the only career choice they were considering seriously and a picture of male under-representation begins to take form (Raethel, 1995). Smith (1995) found that, in Australia, university enrolments for primary teaching women outweighed men on a ratio of 4:1. Infact, men are such a minority in primary education they verge on becoming mere 'gender tokens' in the female dominated teaching workforce (Addi & Chen, 1992).

This gender imbalance has become an issue for concern by both educators and the parents of those being educated. This is regularly reflected in the media. One newspaper article read, "Male teachers endangered species in blackboard jungle" (Jones, 1997). Public perceptions of the need for more men in primary teaching are often supported by the general belief that men are needed in teaching to fulfil the task of role modeling to the students. The male contribution to role modeling is an open debate with no conclusive evidence of the influence of male teachers in role modeling. However, public demand for male teachers has made the issue of how to entice more males into teaching an issue that cannot be ignored.

Primary teaching in Australia is "culturally coded feminine" (Smith, 1995). It is promoted as a job involving traditionally feminine attributes such as nurturing and caring for the young. However, it has a hierarchical structure favouring men but with a teaching/nurturing role favouring women (i.e. that the teaching profession has female qualities in performance and masculine authority is an enigma). Teaching is considered a second-rate profession because of its feminization (an inequality in sex representation). Men are unlikely to chose a profession characterized as female (a job that women do) and one that is also considered a second-rate choice for men (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997). Men choosing primary teaching do so often knowing that their actions are considered stepping down in social status (into something that somehow is not appropriate for males) (Raethel, 1995).

In the workplace male primary teachers in general enjoy a high position/status as a kind of rarity in a majority female environment, however, results show that men have high levels of dissatisfaction (Addi & Chen, 1992). This dissatisfaction is reflected in the way the male desire to nurture and express caring for pupils is

stifled by feelings that they may be suspected of homosexuality or paedophilia (Adams, 1997).

Current pressures for men to act as sex role-models for their students is suggested to be another reason for the under-representation of men in primary schools. This has become an added pressure as men try to work out how to best express their masculinity and what to model. This type of stress upon males to role-model, without telling them specifically what to model, is similar to the stresses people in other work places feel, when there is a shift in the job description. The pressure to be a "male" role model is suggested to cause men to exaggerate aspects of their personality to be the male role model they think people are asking for. An example is the booming and authoritative style of male behavior that men sometimes adopt (Allen, 1994).

The question begs, 'Do men do anything different in primary education?' While men are proportionally more prevalent in the higher grades of primary and school administration, it is not clear that men are there in those numbers because of a unique male "talent" or whether social pressures are moving men in these directions. If men don't provide any singularly male benefits to teaching the question has been asked "Why then do we need males in primary teaching?" As an aside, it is interesting to note that in this day and age it is alright to ask if men are needed at all but few people are asking if women are needed. Besides the obvious issue of the right to equal representation in all areas of life, role-modeling is popularly seen to be an important role and reason for men in primary teaching (Allen, 1994). While the importance of role modeling for children is still undecided it appears that role stereotyping is restricting access for men in primary teaching.

Reskin (1988) found that men were more inclined to be dissatisfied with working under a female principal than with a male. With female principalships on the increase this factor may become an increasingly important factor in the under-representation of males in primary education. Addi and Chen (1992) state that men find the phenomena of female principalship difficult to deal with as this is a non-conventional relationship with authority for our society. They continued, saying, that Men also feel less empowered under female principals than women teachers do. Thus, female principalship may be a factor contributing to male teacher under-representation.

Research with adolescents' shows that male under-representation may have origins that stem from childhood experiences. DeCorse and Vogtle (1997) have found that adolescents don't want to work in jobs associated with opposite gender for reasons of negative attitudes and poor self-efficacy. In the same study they found that school boys are systematically prevented from merging

schooling with personal life because methods and motives of schooling are feminine. This may contribute (in part) to male under-representation.

In conclusion, the research literature indicates, firstly, that men <u>are</u> under-represented in the primary teaching profession in Australia. This established, issues relating to the minority role of male teacher's and the associated feminization of primary teaching, appears to have a negative effect upon the willingness of males to participate in primary teaching. Connected with the issue of feminization is the disincentive men find in the low public status of primary teaching. This reflects itself in the level of pay primary teachers receive, the way teaching is viewed by society as "women's work", and the way primary teaching is perceived to be a second-rate career choice for males. Literature reflects these characteristics and that male teachers have a generally lower job satisfaction than females. Secondary sources claim that this is a disincentive that may effect men's willingness to participate in the teaching profession. Finally, it is claimed that men are disassociated from their comfort zone and particularly the traditional relationships of authority when faced with working for a female principal.

An Overview of the Research Project:

This research project was undertaken from May-July 2000. Current figures place the number of males in teaching at 20%. The number of males in teaching positions is lower than this, however, as men are over represented in school executive positions. It is common to find primary schools that have only one male teacher on staff. Sadly, university enrollments reflect this situation. At the university of Western Sydney, male primary teacher enrollments in 1998 were at 15%. This study sets out to examine and identify some of attitudes of year 12 students to teaching as a career.

For this study, five boys were chosen from a school in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. In depth qualitative interviewing techniques were used to achieve a rich appreciation of the boys lived experiences.

Findings of the Research Project:

The findings of this research project are <u>not complete</u> and the final analysis is not yet fully developed. This project aims at completion in November 2000. However, for the benefit of the Standing Committee some of the 'draft findings' of this study will be explored in the following section. The research has revealed to this point, six 6) main themes that have evolved:

1. Issues about teaching in general.
2. Issues about males in teaching.

3. Jobs and career choices.
4. Perceptions of role modeling.
5. The importance of sport.
6. Masculinity in school.

Many of these issues are interwoven and impact and interact with and on one another. Rather than the image of seven separate categories the metaphor of seven intertwined threads provides a more realistic image of the complexity of these issues and their inter-relatedness. To the naked eye, the seven threads blend and meld together to provide a unified colour or pattern. If the analogy were taken further, you would have to test the fabric and indeed the threads for faults before any comment on durability could be made. Thus, in a way we will examine these same seven threads for durability and flaws.

In this research project the discussions with boys about <u>teaching in general</u> were focused upon two main topics: 1) what makes a good teacher of boys; 2) boys attitudes to teaching as a career. When asked what qualities make a good teacher, John replied:

> Personality. Gotta have personality, to communicate. Sort of,
> gotta be on the level of the students…[when] they're more on
> your level you can communicate with them. [It] makes you kind of
> want to work, in a way.

The student's rapport with the teacher was viewed by all boys interviewed as a motivational characteristic. Other comments on what makes a good teacher included: "good general knowledge"; "good people skills"; "kind, able to have fun". Associated with much of this is their belief that communication skills are fundamental to effective teaching.

The other aspect in their discussion about teachers is the boy's attitude to teaching as a career. It appears the boy's concept of masculinity and "appropriate" male career choices was a prominent factor in considering primary teaching as a career. When asked if he considered primary teaching 'a good choice for a guy', Jack said:

> Being tough is what it bases itself all around. Being a primary school
> teacher isn't really seen as having a tough job. [It's] like wiping
> noses and putting Band-Aids on scraped knees. It isn't really a
> masculine activity.

In their attitudes the boys expressed a view-point that suggest they perceive masculinity as having only a very narrow form of "correct" expression. Caring for young kids in a primary teaching environment did not seem to fit with this

restrictive definition of masculinity. Jack views it more as a woman's job when he says, "Primary school is more like mothering kids". Interestingly, this view that there was only a narrow path to "appropriate" male career choices contradicts the example of their own lives. Their own lives bear witness to the presence of multiple masculinities. Multiple forms of "correct" male expression. Most of the boys interviewed came from differing peer groups and expressed their masculinity differently from one another. This contradiction may cause conflict between peer groups and also within the individual. As I have shown in the previous section, other research has found a similar restricted view-point about men in teaching. To see this attitude being reflected strongly in Australian school boys as they consider career paths suggests that much needs to be done in the area of the boys concept of masculinity before effective redress can be done to the male deficit in primary teaching.

The next section to be examined is the boy's attitudes to male teachers. This contrasts markedly with their rather negative attitudes to teaching as a career. Connell (1996), in his work on boys in education, clearly points to the need for male role models in primary schools. However, if there is any doubt as to the importance of balancing out the inequity in the primary teaching gender landscape, then the boys should be allowed to speak for themselves. Below is a selection of quotes from interviews in which the boys were asked about their attitudes to male and female teachers.

> "You basically can't talk the same way with a woman as you do to a man." (Fred)

> "[Having a male teacher] boosts your morale." (Jack)

> "In a male teacher classroom you can act more like you do in the playground. I mean you can't tell dirty jokes in a female teachers class, can you?" (Jack)

> "I prefer male to female teachers as you can talk sport with them." (Reggie)

> "I think men are more lenient. I think females can snap a lot easier." (Andre)

> "Male teachers are better at discipline." (Reggie)

This sample of boy's comments shows a distinctive preference for male teachers. The benefit which male teachers have in being of the same sex as the boys appears to pay dividends in classroom communication and relationship building. This does not exclude females from these things, however, the boys displayed a

clear partiality for male teachers stating that, "being on the same level with the teacher often counts a lot" (Jack).

The next broad category that the boys discussed was their <u>thoughts about jobs</u>. All the boys discussed different and varied careers they were hoping to pursue in the following year. These ranged broadly from specialty I.T. jobs such as computer software development, to primary teaching, plumbing and green-keeping. However, a number of commonalties within this varied group stood out. Firstly, in their desire to have a job the boys expressed concerns about being ridiculed or viewed as less of a man by not being employed. Fred succinctly expressed these concerns when he said, "I don't want no-one to call me a dole-bludger".

The boys considered two aspects of choosing a career very important: interest; and, money. When asked about how he visualized the ideal job Jack responded:

> [Its got to be] something that you enjoy I think, the most. Of course, there's being highly paid as well. As long as you're satisfied with the job and you like it, then you know…that's it.

It would seem that the major factor when the boys considered jobs was satisfaction. While this takes numerous forms, for most of these boys satisfaction meant a job they could enjoy and gain a reasonable income. However, the concept of 'a reasonable income' varied considerably. While Andre was willing to consider teaching, John viewed the income as too low and saw plumbing as involving a more satisfying level of income and less further study. John said:

> I want to do an apprenticeship next year. I don't want to go to university. I could have left in year 10 and I wish I'd made up my mind then…[It's important] to turn an income, make your own way. Can't really live without an income.

Likewise, when considering jobs we would be amiss if we did not mention one other aspect surrounding job satisfaction that it has emerged in the interviews. So far we have identified the importance of enjoyment and income in the boys choices of jobs. Another reason why these boys are not choosing primary teaching is that primary teaching is 'culturally coded feminine' and therefore either not considered seriously by most males or considered not a masculine career path. This was reflected in comments such as these that Jack makes:

> It [primary teaching] clashes with your maleness. Imagine having a beer with your mates and saying, 'Oh, a kid at school, I had to wipe his nose today'. Because, stereotypically, females are seen as doing

a lot of that sort of stuff…you know, mothering kids. That's how it works, I think.

Sure it's teaching, but a lot of it's mothering.

The next area of discussion that emerged in the interviews was <u>the value of role modeling</u>. Quite what constitutes a role model and how they act as role models is unclear. However, many parents want male teachers as a role model for their boys. In Steve Dinham's Teacher 2000 Project the wife of a male teacher "lamented the lack of male primary teachers". With so many single parent families this trend is likely to increase. The need for role models in the younger grades is also evident in West's research. In this, West talks to a man about being a boy who grew up without a father. The boy, Dean, gets some fathering from his mother who is "sort of both" and from his uncles. He also recalls being mentored by his physical education teacher. West believes that the boy can find "a substitute". He also remarks that "a boy needs men in order to become a man". Regardless of this, it appears that role modeling is valuable in a boy's development. In my research most of the value of male teachers can be seen in the boys praise for their male teachers. Fred gives us insight into the relationship building between male teacher and student that occurs:

> The majority of the coaches are men and you get to know many of the teachers as coaches. The kids get to know them better than they would a female teacher. You can talk to them about how the footy went over the weekend and all that.

The boys developing sense of masculinity is deeply embedded in all the other issues that I have raised so far. Issues about primary teaching, male teachers, career choices and role modeling are all influenced by the boys concepts of masculinity and their own emerging masculinity. To add to this list, the boy's concept of their masculinity is tightly connected to sport. Likewise, the boys peer groups are also tied to sport affiliations. One boy, Fred is a successful cricket player and general sports enthusiast. When asked why he played sport, he replied:

> For me, I play sport, and I reckon if you play sport people look up to you more. It is different if you are someone who doesn't play sport, they probably say something different to me. All my friends play sport. I play it, so they look up to me, I guess.

This sentiment was emphasized by some of the other successful sports players who were interviewed. However, Jack was not a successful sportsman and offered another perspective:

This school values sport like nothing else. It's the Holy Grail, I think.

Sometimes you get annoyed, the fact that everything is so centered around sport. You get the impression sometimes that all the funding is going into sport. It's being concentrated on…It's being treated so seriously. I guess sport is a subject but they give it really high priority over everything else. It's something that annoys me at times.

Both Fred's and Jack's comments emphasize the importance of sport in their school culture. The physical, and in this case sport, has been the vehicle in which the boys gained respect, established pecking orders and built upon their sense of male identity. When challenged to consider if sport was how you prove yourself Jack fought back by replying:

Oh, I disagree with that, there are many facets of your life. I mean, sport may prove your physical self but not your whole self, no way.

Jack's words talk of the multiple masculinities that are evident in this school. The way Fred has molded aspects of his masculinity around sport and Jack around his interest in computers and cars is evidence of this. However, social pressures in the school culture speak a different language. They tell of a belief in 'true' manly masculinity being found in a much more limited vision of manhood. This conflict I believe, is something that needs to be addressed in the personal development component of the P.D.H.P.E. syllabus. It sends mixed messages to our boys. It may also lead to feelings of inadequacy and failure in being a man. **Likewise, a limited perspective on 'appropriate' masculine behavior may be behind a lack of desire for males to enter primary teaching**. From the interviews it appears that certain behaviors are considered 'unmanly'. Jack confirms this when he says, "Men don't want to do nurturing and caring. No, not at all. Especially infants". West (1996) in his research on boys and men points to the sense Australian males have of needing to prove their masculinity. If primary teaching with its attributes of caring and nurturing is labeled 'un-manly', and if masculinity is thought of as something we prove, then there is little wonder so few men are entering teaching. The issue of proving your masculinity also needs to be addressed at the school level (K-12).

END

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