

The Boys in Schools

BULLETIN

→ Practical Initiatives Addressing Boys' Needs

PRODUCED BY BOYS IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM OF THE FAMILY ACTION CENTRE



The UNIVERSITY
of NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Inside

Working with boys
in identity, learning
and literacy



marking a little space but complements the fatness Planet was notorious for.

My low horizon line approx $\frac{1}{2}$, and my body pose show that I stand firm, that I'm open to new things, ready to jump (no shadow is holding me back)



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From practise

Melbourne Convention Centre | Sunday 3 April to Tuesday 5 April 2005

identity, learning and literacy

I'm thrilled to invite you to the fourth Working with Boys Building Fine Men Conference: from practise to practice, and the associated forums and workshop. If you've attended our previous conferences you know how positive and practical they are. This one is no exception. The conference program highlights the incredible strengths and talents of boys from widely diverse backgrounds, the important work of teachers and youth workers having great success with boys of all ages, and the latest research on educating boys successfully. I look forward to seeing you there and hearing your stories of building fine men for the future.

Deborah Hartman
Manager, Boys in Schools
Program

Keynote speakers

Celia Lashlie

Celia worked in the prison system in New Zealand from 1985 to 1999. She was the first woman in New Zealand to work in a custodial role in a male prison. Celia recently completed the 'Good Man' project: a project commissioned to facilitate discussion within and between 25 boys schools in New Zealand with the aim of creating a working definition of what makes a good man in the 21st century.

Dr Ken Rowe

Ken is the Research Director of the 'Learning Processes & Contexts' research program at the Australian Council for Educational Research. Together with his consultant paediatrician wife (Dr Kathy Rowe at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital), Ken has a particular interest in the developmental and educational needs of boys throughout their preschool, primary and secondary years of schooling — areas in which both he and Kathy have undertaken extensive research and published widely.

Prof Kevin Wheldall

Kevin is a Professor of Education and Director of Macquarie University Special Education Centre in Sydney, a position he has held since 1990. He has researched and written extensively in the area of learning and behaviour difficulties. He is also the Director of MULTILIT and author of over 150 publications.

Other presenters include

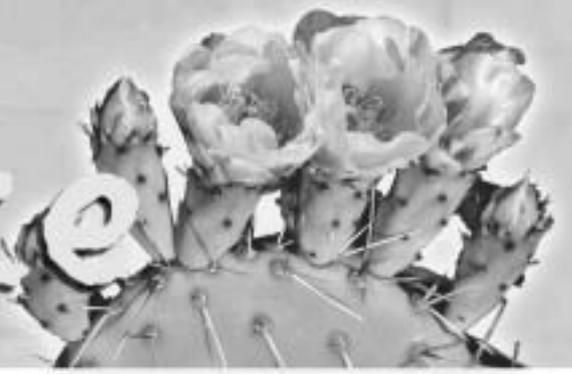
Chris Sara
Dr Alf Bamblett
Robyn Beaman
Rollo Browne
Victoria Clay

Prof Peter Cuttance
Dr Martine F Delfos
Prof Don Edgar
Richard Fletcher
Deborah Hartman

Stephen Lake
Nina Levin
Chuck Marriott
Lauk Woltring
Freerk Ykema



to practice



Concurrent sessions

Thirty-eight sessions in three streams will be offered, including:

Literate Boys: Communicating, critiquing and conciliating

Mark Murphy, St Joseph College, Ferntree Gully

A BELS (Lighthouse) project developing a shared approach to academic and social/emotional literacy across a cluster of secondary and primary schools.

Training the Tiger: Emotional Development Program

Lily Lee and Marko Turner, NSW

The eight-week Training the Tiger — Emotional Development Program targets boys in primary school with difficulties in emotional regulation, moral development and personal confidence.

The Role of the Early Childhood Sector in Strengthening Families and the Self-Esteem of Children

VAEI and Early Childhood services coordinators

Examining the important part played by the Koorie ECH services, the MACS and the Playgroups, in the communities in which they are established and how those services develop the self-esteem of Koorie children and best prepare them for the later years of schooling.

Boys 'N' Books — Challenging the Social Constructs of Boys' Attitude to Reading

Peter Hughes, Gordonvale State High School, Queensland

How the successful Boys 'N' Books Program began, the training of high school boys to be reading tutors through to implementation. Basic steps on how to convince your school community to undertake a similar program. Excellent for both primary and secondary educators.



Fathers and Schools Together (FAST) in Literacy and Learning

Stephanie Tranter, Engaging Fathers Program, Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle, NSW

Details of the FAST Project and the FAST in Literacy & Learning Resource Manual including case studies from teachers, and activities that successfully engage fathers in the literacy lives of their children.

MULTILIT for Boys: Effective instruction in reading and related skills for boys who are low-progress readers

Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Beaman, Multilit Clinic, Macquarie University, NSW

Drawing on our experience over the past ten years in developing, running and evaluating intensive, systematic and structured MULTILIT intervention programs for low progress readers, we show how boys may be helped to 'make up lost time in literacy'.



Yambirra: An attempt to heal the wounds of self-destruction

Yirrkala CEC

Coordinated, cooperative initiatives of community-based organisations, including the school, to support youth to grow into productive, resilient adults who can contribute in a positive way to the development of their community.

7 Ways to Improve Boys' Education in Your School

Joseph Driessen, Education Answers, New Zealand

The workshop gives teachers a range of practical and proven strategies to improve boys' educational achievement and participation.

Optional workshops

- Rock and Water Workshop
- Indigenous Boys to Fine Men Forum
- Working with Boys in Early Childhood Forum

4th Biennial Conference

Working with Boys Building Fine Men

Convened by the Boys in Schools Program, Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle

See back cover for registration details.

practice

★ Teaching boys with heart

Boys see their teachers as the most important influence of their school life. In her address to the APPA–NZPF Trans-Tasman conference, Deborah Hartman explored how teachers' attitudes to boys' learning can change the outcome for everybody.

When I began teaching I loved to tell the kids stories, but after a while the boys would start drumming on the desk and the longer I told the story the louder the drumming got. I realised something had to change, and that something was me.

I asked the boys what they were interested in and we started the 'Alyawarre Country Gospel Band and Video Crew' and we had a lot of fun. We took a lot of videos of cattle branding and sang a lot of songs. This didn't disadvantage the girls; in fact, they became the best singers in the band, but it was definitely the boys who led the charge out of the classroom and into some exciting areas of learning. Then I had two sons of my own and when they started school I noticed they were the same if they had to sit still for too long. So what is it with boys and learning?

Ten years ago the keyword was 'problem.' Boys were a problem, boys were causing problems, boys had problems. There wasn't very much good news about boys and education. These days we're much more positive, but that early interest in boys' education did force us to have a look at the evidence and the three big issues:

- literacy
- school completion
- boys' behaviour

In literacy the big issue was attainment levels. We measure at Years 3, 5 and 7 and now at Year 9 and we're finding there is a big difference between boys and girls in terms of literacy levels, and that gap is widening as boys get older. We're finding a disproportionate number of boys at the lower end of the reading and writing scale and the listening and speaking scale.

Early literacy makes a really big difference, especially in school completion. If kids start young and achieve literacy early they are much more likely to complete school. There is a big difference between the completion rates of girls and boys and that difference cuts across socio-economics and geography. In remote, largely Indigenous communities boys are doing much worse than girls in terms of Year 12 completions. Rural community completions are the same while in urban communities the gap is smaller, but it is still there. Across the board boys are doing worse than their sisters. Recent statistics show that this is getting worse not better.

Beyond this, health statistics show:

- boys are dying at a much greater rate than girls
- boys commit suicide at much greater rates than girls
- boys are incarcerated at much greater rates than girls

There's another thing we've noticed since we started studying these statistics, and it's not about boys — it's about teachers. There's a huge disproportion between the numbers of men and women teaching in our primary and secondary schools. The average age of teachers in Australia is about forty-seven. Where I work, at The University in Newcastle, we have 200 students just about to complete teacher education, ten of them male. This is going to have an impact on boys, not because women are not fine teachers of boys — they are — but because of what we used to call 'the hidden curriculum'. Schools are social places where boys and girls learn from what teachers do and say, from how adults interact with each other.

So what message are we sending boys if at the main learning institution they go to there is not a male in sight? What message are we

sending boys if they can't see men and women happily working together in their schooling environment, if they don't see men and women sharing power and having fun together? This isn't just a school issue, but school is one place we can influence so it's very important that we think of ways to encourage both men and women into our schools.

Recent research into boys' education has started to look at solutions to the three big issues. Ken Rowe at the Australian Council for Educational Research found that literacy and behaviour are closely linked and that literacy is a key factor. If boys are learning literacy, they're more likely to be engaged and less likely to be disruptive in class. He also discovered that it was teaching that made the difference to boys learning literacy. As Rowe puts it, 'Boys are drowning in a sea of "Blah, blah, blah".'

Kalantzis and Cope identified the discrepancy between what goes on in the lives of a lot of kids and what happens in schools. For example, boys have incredibly active literacy lives outside school but often those literacies are not valued within schools. Slade and Trent interviewed 1700 boys in South Australia and found, contrary to popular belief, that boys said teachers were the most important people in their school lives and that if teachers were interesting and were interested in them then they had a good school life. So, whenever you're tearing your hair out at the end of a long, hard term, just remember what the boys say — you are the most important thing in their school life.

For boys, more important than we ever thought, schooling is about relationships. Some schools are getting on top of this, and doing it really well. Take Kalkaringi Community Education Centre in the Northern Territory, an Indigenous school where, if you want to become a fully initiated, traditional man, you have to complete Year 10. The community and the school are

working together to say the male identity at Kalkaringi includes success at school. That is a big shift for a community to make — a pretty important school and community partnership.

Barnsley School found that boys represented ninety-seven per cent of their behavioural referrals, but a closer analysis revealed that most of those came from seven boys. So they developed a behaviour program for those boys, and found that the referrals really dropped off and the boys did a lot better. According to the deputy principal, who saw these boys all the time: 'Now I really know these boys. Now I know how hard they try. When I see them I don't think, Oh, there are my problems; I think, Oh there's Johnny, he's really doing well today. He managed to control his temper.' What changed? Yes — it was the boys' behaviour, but it was also the relationship between that Deputy Principal and his boys.

Our schools are changing from the idea that boys are the problems to a strengths-based and a solutions-based approach. They're changing their practices so they can build on the strengths that are already out there in the community and there in the boys.

While it's a complex mix, there are some elements to a boy-friendly school. The key is in realising:

- that identity does matter: boys are growing up to be men, not just people
- that our teaching and learning strategies do matter
- that if we connect and engage actively with boys they will excel and that our relationships with our boys are crucial

The schools that are doing well, put all those three together.

For boys . . .
schooling is about
relationships.



This is an edited version of Deborah Hartman's address to the

APPA–NZPF Trans-Tasman conference held in Melbourne in June. Prepared by Steve Holden and reproduced from *Professional Educator*, October 1994, vol 3, no 4, with kind permission. Links: www.austcolled.com.au

practice

★ It's me

Boys search for identity through art

Using self-portraits as a means of exploring identity helps boys free up their creative spirits, explore their feelings and produce amazing artworks. Giselle Zuchner-Mogall explains how she helped them open up.

Christ Church Grammar School is an Anglican day and boarding school for boys from Preschool to Year 12 located in Perth. Twelve hundred and fifty boys, 150 of whom are boarders, are enrolled at Christ Church. Nine hundred and thirty-five boys study in the Senior School (Years 8 to 12) and 315 attend the Preparatory School (Preschool to Year 7).

Our Year 12 students must complete three projects in their final year. They have to select one studio area for the whole year: painting, printmaking, graphic design, textiles, ceramics or sculpture.

At the start of the term Year 12s are given a brief, which they can follow but it is not compulsory. Alternately, they can negotiate their own brief individually with their teacher. Often boys who want to pursue their individual ideas, following their heart and head, take this opportunity. Allowing our young men to set their own goals within the syllabus requirements develops creative leadership. As art educators we need to respect, understand and nurture our students' uniqueness making learning personally compelling,

deeply felt and real.

At the start of term one, I presented my Year 12 class with a brief, 'Coastline', which was kick-started by our annual Art Camp. Some learners find a set brief and guided tasks comforting. They know necessary aspects are addressed and most give of their best to fulfil all criteria. The assessment criteria for the Visual Diary include organisation, discernment, visual language, art historical links and drawing skills. The mark for the studio works is based on the elements and principles of design, creativity and technical skills and processes.

Two weeks into the term, Chris Hancy asked if he could paint a self-portrait, reflecting his true identity and his thoughts about school. He'd enjoyed the three-day camp at the beach and all the exercises but felt he couldn't connect with the theme.

Initially, we discussed technical aspects like possible styles, composition and techniques. Both of us drafted a 'portrait brief' and this is what we ended up with:

STUDENT BRIEF — Year 12

STUDIO AREA: *Painting*

THEME: *'It's me'*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Complete a self-portrait in a painting technique of your choice. Explore and present one or more of the many unique facets of your life reflecting your search for identity. Size of the work is your decision.

VISUAL INQUIRY:

Record images of your life, e.g. real, dream, holiday events and/or things which are important to you. Use a variety of media.

Complete a series of self-portrait drawings making connections to relevant artists.

Take an investigative approach in media and techniques.

You might want to employ processes of repetition, distortion and re-semblage/collage to create new images.

Develop your image/design focussing on a particular area/interest of your life.

Develop final design, explore alternative compositions.

Complete a colour draft after experimentation.

STUDIO (PRODUCTION STAGES):

Employ style appropriate for your selected painting technique.

Use your selected technique in a professional fashion and observe safety rules.

Stretch canvas/watercolour paper/prepare masonite/or what you regard as suitable (your choice).

APPRECIATION (HISTORICAL LINKS):
Investigate portraits/self-portraits by artists relating to your selected painting technique & style, e.g. Realism —> Edouard Manet, Jeffery Smart; Expressionism —> van Gogh, Brett Whiteley, George Gittoes; Impressionism —> Degas; Photorealism —> Chuck Close, etc. (Note: these are only examples!)

Comment on your selected artists, compare techniques and styles, make connections to your own work.

A lengthy philosophical discussion followed. We talked about human identity — what a tricky thing it is. Our cells are constantly being renewed. Those which now make one's persona are quite different from those ten years ago. This means that the cells of our body are much younger than we are. Even though we think we are the same person, it could be an illusion to which we are connected through habit.

One of my favourite resources is Alan Fletcher's book *The Art of Looking Sideways* (Fletcher nd). He says about identity:

Many businesses confuse identity with image. Identity is composed of the signals, which help you to recognise a person or organisation, whereas the image is the impression you have of the person or organisation, and your reaction to this once you've recognised them. Image is more important because it's no good being easily recognised if you give a bad impression. On the other hand if you trade on your image then you have to be readily recognised. Nobody actually needs a sticky carbonated drink, which is why Coca Cola spent \$600 million in 1992 to make sure that you remembered not only who they are, but how they want to be perceived — young, trendy, etc.

I like stories and anecdotes. So I mentioned the lady, who sitting

next to Raymond Loewy at dinner, struck up a conversation.

'Why,' she asked, 'did you put two Xs in Exxon?'

'Why ask?' he replied.

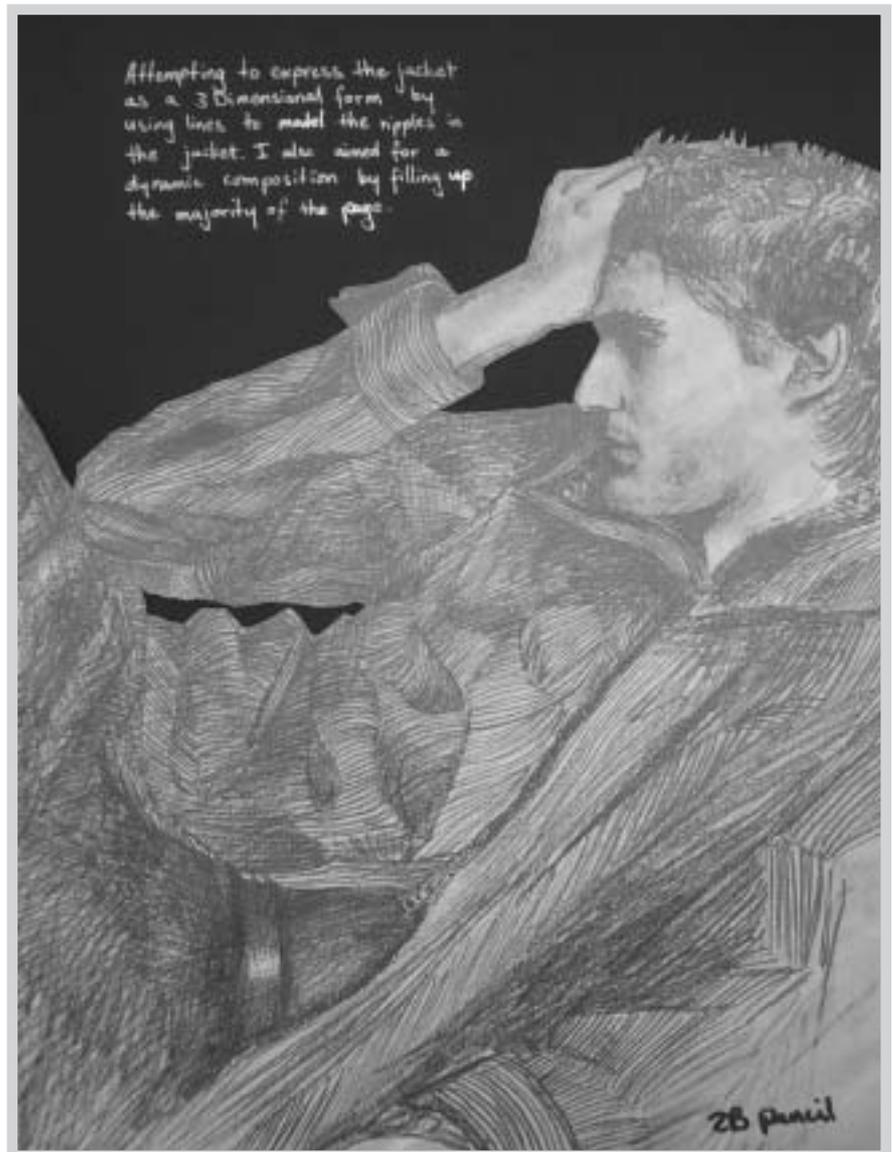
'Because,' she responded, 'I couldn't help noticing.'

'Well,' he said, 'that's the answer.'

Wouldn't most human beings like to have something like two Xs, like to be noticed? Not so much in Warhol's sense of having 15 minutes of fame but, rather, noticed and valued for what they might have to say and for what they could do.

After 29 years in the classroom one of the greatest rewards for me is when boys can't wait to take work

home. It means they identify with their work, are proud of their achievements and want to share this experience. It is so important that parents notice and value their son's work too. I find it frightening that many fathers speak less than five minutes per day with their son. Many classes I have taught over the years had 'translucent' boys, the ones who have to walk through a room several times to leave a shadow, the ones who can't catch their dreams before they fly away. Boys not only need our compassion and encouragement on their identity expedition, they deserve it too.



Extract from Chris Hancy's visual diary — pencil on watercolour, emphasis on texture and form.

Chris's response

Chris responded to the brief, which we had worked out together:

I want to paint a self-portrait exploring the question of conformity and individuality.

School reflects part of our society, makes me wear a uniform, makes me agree with certain rules, expects me to fit in the system, to conform, to contribute. What happens if I question conformity? How much room do I have to manoeuvre? Can I rebel against long established rules? Do I want to be a rebel? Is my individuality compromised by the conformity school expects? If yes — in what way?

Art allows me to express my concerns, becomes my search engine. I know I don't want to be part of the uniformed mob. I don't want to use stereotypes to depict conformity/non-conformity. The 'I don't wants' seem always easier to state . . .

In this project I will trace my character, try to depict the essence of my individuality, find out how to deal with conformity, how does it affect me? How many sides [sites? sights?] can I find?

He created numerous, superb drawings and researched (self-) portraits by Jeffery Smart, George Gittoes, Edouard Manet and Chuck Close. His Visual Diary for this project consists of 35 A3 size pages. It is an impressive documentation of a hard-working, young man who was confident and trusting enough to share his search for identity with both his peers and teacher alike. It reflects how imagination is truly a magic carpet.

Picasso once said that everything you can imagine is real, and Muhammad Ali said that the man without imagination has no wings. The essence of my role as an art educator is to help boys to ride the magic carpet, to grow wings and to take off.

I remember Chris back in Year 10: superb drawing skills, hardly talking to anybody, not showing any



Extract from Chris Hancy's visual diary — based on photographs (Chris loves break dancing), gestural ink drawings exploring movement.

emotions. Fellow students would admire his work; he might shrug his shoulders, appearing as if he couldn't care less. Today — as I write this — it's the last day for our Year 12s and Chris has taken off — with much wind under his wings.

A while ago I came across Ron Brandt's book *Powerful Learning* (1998). I don't agree with everything he writes but I experienced his ten conditions for powerful learning as meaningful and very appropriate:

1. People learn well when what

they learn is personally meaningful.

2. People learn well when what they learn is challenging and they accept the challenge.
3. People learn well when what they learn is appropriate for their developmental level.
4. People learn well when they can learn in their own way and have some degree of choice and control.
5. People learn well when they use what they already know as they construct new knowledge.

6. People learn well when they have opportunities for social interaction.
7. People learn well when they get helpful feedback.
8. People learn well when they acquire and use strategies, which themselves are learned.
9. People learn well when they experience a positive emotional climate.
10. People learn well when the learning environment supports the intended learning.

Points 1 to 3 refer to what, 4 to 8 comprise how and 9 and 10 where students learn. When planning a

new project I go through these 'commandments' asking myself:

Do I provide the ten conditions in general? Where individual adjustments become necessary is not always predictable.

A good project is similar to a top restaurant's menu. It contains stunning entrées, exciting mains and delicious desserts; offers taste platters; always has specials of the day; happily accommodates individual requests and encourages people to try new things. Some offer smörgasboards on certain days!

Customers get instant attention and are served well in a relaxed, unobtrusive and comfortable

atmosphere. They don't want to go home and surely want to come back for more.

All our Year 8 boys participate in the same general Arts program, which is run by Music, Drama and the Visual Arts. From Year 9 onwards the Arts become choice subjects. Even though most boys know each other, a self-portrait is a great exercise covering creative, technical and social aspects. The dictionary defines identity as 'who or what a person is' (*Chamber's Essential English Dictionary* 1983) and in Art a (self-) portrait is the ideal theme to visualise this.

Following is my project brief for the students:

STUDENT BRIEF — Year 9

STUDIO AREA: Painting/mixed media

PROJECT TITLE:

Let's Face It! An Unusual Self-Portrait

DUE DATE: Term 2 — Week 5

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

PERFORMANCES:

You are going to create an unusual portrait of yourself. Your work should reflect your interests, likes/dislikes and your character. Include many accessories, which can be associated with you/your personality. You are going to work on a piece of canvas, paint with acrylics, include text and objects and employ other techniques like collage, stitching, gluing and other clever things you can think of.

1. COMMUNICATING ARTS IDEAS (DRAWING & DESIGN SOLUTIONS):

V/H/S/D:

Mind map: An Unusual Self Portrait collecting ideas.

Facial proportions, drawing exercises.

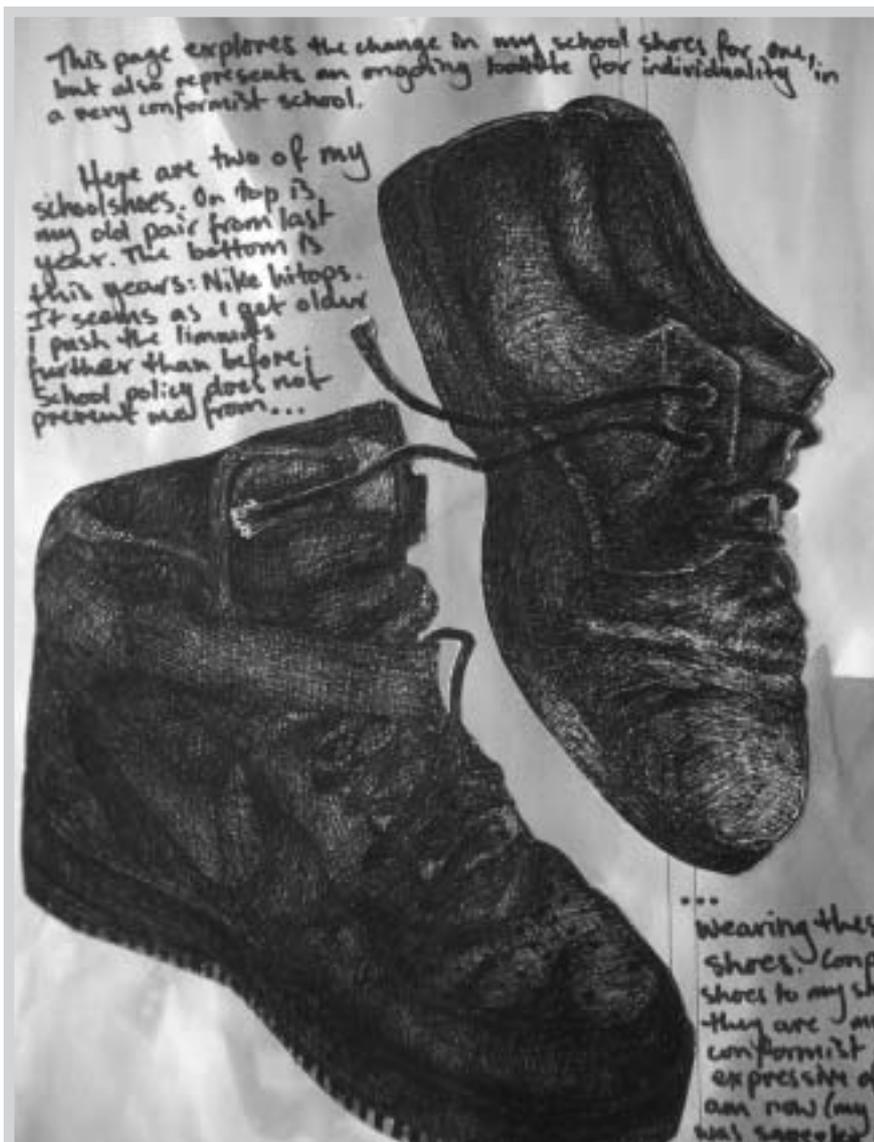
Developing a creative design plan.

2. USING ARTS SKILLS, TECHNIQUES & PROCESSES: V/H/S/D:

Create your unusual portrait according to your design plan using mixed media.

Show that you master your chosen techniques and aim for a high standard of finish.

Make work hangable like a scroll by attaching pre-cut wooden pieces and present for exhibition.



Extract from Chris Hancy's visual diary — shoe studies: school shoe and sneaker, fineliner on inked paper.

3. RESPONDING TO, REFLECTING ON & EVALUATING THE ARTS (CREATION OF ORIGINAL ART WORKS, ANNOTATION & EVALUATION)

V/H/S/D:

Explain your idea through annotations. Your portrait must show a clear emphasis on mixed media and the creative aspect.

OUTCOME PERFORMANCE

V = Very High

H = High

S = Satisfactory

D = Developing

Why did I choose the project?

My experience is that boys — especially in that age group — are very much interested in themselves and their mates . . . and this project is a menu addressing Brandt's ten conditions.

What inspired/enabled boys to open up and express their identity?

Most important for the success of the project was the class size being only twenty students. This allows enough

space for everyone and a smaller group makes it a lot easier to talk. Another 'carrier' was the unusual format. The first time they painted on a canvas, which they primed but didn't stretch: it was in the form of a scroll. The use of mixed media inspired and triggered the creative process. The option of assemblage using 'real stuff' instead of depicting it, motivated especially weaker students. They brought objects/pictures in and shared the stories, which went with them — part of their identity.

What challenges did we encounter and how we dealt with them

All the boys had fabulous ideas. Some tried to move to the 'too hard basket' when their concept required representational drawing/painting skills. They were happy to open up but felt their lack of professional skills would embarrass them in public. Boys are highly critical and very realistic. I offered them technical alternatives so they would be loyal to their ideas. They worked with solvent transfers (printing photocopied materials with turpentine using the etching press — magic and impressive!) achieving stunning results. The majority included some form of sport, one gluing half a footy onto the canvas and adding a sport shirt dipped in PVA glue, which dries rock hard and looks great. A boy with curly, blond hair, who got frustrated painting his hairstyle, brought in curved noodles and glued them on instead.

What advice would I give to other teachers contemplating a project on boys and identity?

Starting with a mind map is beneficial. I used the program 'Inspiration' so we could do it together. I put the mind map into the students' Art Conference Folder and they could add more individually. If this were not a possibility I would let the students work in pairs as they generate more



Extract from Chris Hancy's visual diary — pencil on inks, exploring foreshortening and how clothes drape around the human body.



Chris Hancy looked at Counihan's work 'Two Youths' and responded with a small etching giving his own interpretation.

ideas and the excitement of the new topic makes them less self-conscious.

Boys love competitions. The person or pair coming up with the longest list of possible media/materials gets a Mars Bar. You watch how quickly painting and collage are in the company of possibilities you've never thought of!

It is very important to know the family situation of the boys — especially when dealing with identity. A well meant comment could be devastating, like: 'Great car you've painted there. Your Dad would love that, wouldn't he!' — 'My parents split up a year ago and I live with Mum.'

Additional comments

Most students did not hesitate to include a painted version of their face, which the brief does not even stipulate. Some created a 'split'

personality: what I am and what I want to be [from surfer to superman]. The abundance of choices was great. Some boys took a little longer than others to make up their mind but own goals and own decisions are important. Our Art Department offers twice per week After-School Art where boys can come to finish off work or work on totally self-directed projects, which facilitated the process.

Bibliography

- Fletcher, A nd, *The Art of Looking Sideways*, Phaidon, p 448.
- Brandt, R 1998, *Powerful Learning*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Virginia, pp 17, 22, 24, 26, 29, 32, 36, 37, 40 & 43.
- 1983, *Chamber's Essential English Dictionary*, Harrap Publishers Ltd, Edinburgh, p 245.



Giselle has been teaching TEE Art and Art & Design part time to Year 8 to Year 12 at Christ Church Grammar School since October 1988. Apart from educating fine, young men she enjoys doing her own artwork. Gandhi said once, 'An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching.' Currently an exciting classroom aspect is to integrate IT, and her Year 9 clay animation project was great fun. Giselle's email is gzuchner-mogall@ccgs.wa.edu.au.

★ Djarrugan's College puts paid to bullying

Djarrugan College's commitment to implement the Rock and Water Program across the whole school has paid off big time as principal Jean Illingworth explains.

Situated on the Bruce Highway twenty kilometres south of Cairns, Djarrugan College is a co-ed boarding and day school with students from Year 1 to Year 13. They cater specifically for the educational needs of indigenous students although they have had a number of students from different cultural backgrounds attend the school. Currently students come from the Torres Strait Islands, Cape York communities, Cairns and Yarrabah. They have 56 boarders who live in hostels on the College campus. The main aim of the College is to enhance the educational, social, emotional and spiritual development of students. The college has a strong focus on Values Education, which supports their behaviour management strategy and promotes excellence in education with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy.

Our commitment to the implementation of the Rock and Water Program was total and in order to facilitate the process all staff including teachers, assistant teachers and VET trainers became involved. We believed that in order to make the program work and to optimise its effectiveness across the whole school, we needed to make Rock and Water part of what we do at this school.

Djarrugan College has drawn on the expertise of Freerk Ykema, the architect of Rock and Water, to train all staff. One three-day training



⋮ Rock and Water interaction at Djarrugan College.

course was run in 2003 and a second training course in April 2004. We have integrated Rock and Water into the curriculum across the whole school for over a year now.

The change in students has been subtle but measurable. Bullying is almost non-existent. Students who suffered from anger management problems have shown remarkable constraint using many Rock and Water strategies to 'centre' themselves and remain calm and 'focused'.

The Rock and Water Program is incorporated into our Values Education program which, in turn, has a strong relationship with our discipline policy. Although we cannot claim to be a problem-free school, we experience far fewer

behaviour-management problems than many other schools.

Rock and Water sessions in the mornings have been effective in settling agitated, upset and ADD students. The program has been instrumental in facilitating feelings of empowerment and self-control in students and as a consequence they are able to concentrate and stay focused on their schoolwork. Teasing has been minimised as have other forms of bullying and a supportive and happy culture has developed in the student population.

Visitors to the school universally comment on the friendliness and cooperation of the students. Teachers will unanimously testify to this. The Rock and Water Program has also been applied to sporting

teams who have used the strategies to 'centre' themselves, 'focus' on their goals and work as a team.

In one incident our senior girls' rugby team was experiencing difficulties with the opposition and at half-time discussed applying the strategies of Rock and Water. This resulted in an immediate turnaround and, although they still lost the game, they let the opposition know that they had come up against a worthy opponent.

Primary students are involved in Rock and Water. One young man who was in trouble for fighting explained tearfully to the dean of students that he really, really did try to use his Rock and Water 'but it didn't work!' The fact that he even attempted to use the strategies learned in Rock and Water showed quite clearly to us that, contrary to what he thought, the program actually had 'worked'.

Outdoor education and Rock and Water

Djarragun College runs an Outdoor Education Program with senior students involved in Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation. The aims and objectives of our Outdoor Education Program fit neatly with the Rock and Water Program and many strategies and values underpinning both programs are similar and interchangeable. Because all staff have been trained in Rock and Water, the language of the program has become part of our discourse. Students and staff alike understand and react to instructions to 'centre' and 'focus' and respond intelligently to behaviours from others that are not always desirable. Everyone is able to look at unacceptable behaviours in a dispassionate way because they understand why some people behave as they do. They are able to depersonalise inappropriate behaviour and language and remain above becoming involved in this behaviour.

Unedited comments from students on Rock and Water

- Rock and Water has helped me in many ways to participate and have self-confidence.
 - Doing Rock and Water made a huge difference to me, by building up my courage, respecting others around me and also building up self-confidence and how to defend myself.
- Rock and Water to me has been very interesting, as I have never done it before. What I think I have got out of Rock and Water is to not listen to people who put me down. I'm now more stronger on the inside and the out. I feel that I can accomplish anything I want out of my life and feel good about myself after doing it, and one of the most important things I've learnt is to respect others as they respect me and help them in any way I can as they would do the same back for me. Thanks!
- The teachers and I really get into the Rock and Water cause it does mean a lot to me. If you are out by yourself there maybe a group of people that want to fight you and you can just tell them that STOP I DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU ARE DOING or just stare them in their eyes, focus, centre yourself or just walk away.
- I enjoy the thirty-minute lesson as it is like a fitness class full of enthusiastic girls. It's also good because you get to work with other different girls that you don't really know well and make friends. Rock and Water also helps you in areas that you need to develop in, whether it be courage, self-defence, focus, eye contact, centring yourself, being strong, body language and many more. Something that I've learnt in Rock and Water is FOCUS. It has helped me to focus on my schoolwork, when doing activities such as sport and in centring myself.

Note: For more information on the Rock and Water Program see page 48.



When asked for her biography in a paragraph, Jean Illingworth was taken aback and now I know why. The best we can manage is a brief summary of her colourful history. In Zimbabwe Jean taught for ten years in primary and secondary schools with a variety of children from different ethnic backgrounds. She spent two years

teaching in Mozambique (now Maputo) and a year working in Namibia for a non-government organisation setting up a teacher training program with a group of San people (Bushmen).

Since emigrating from Zimbabwe in 1982, Jean initially taught in Aboriginal communities on Groote Eylandt then lectured in teacher education for Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. She spent five years as principal of Numbulwar School in South-East Arnhem Land, then a year working for the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit in TAFE. In 2001 she commenced her current position as principal of Djarragun College in the Northern Territory. Whew! Okay, so we needed two paragraphs.

Jean can be contacted on 07 4056 3555.

★ Readers' Circle

Getting boys excited about reading

Like the proverbial pebble thrown into a pond, Readers' Circle is having a far-reaching impact on boys' lives, and not just while they're at school. Jan Heyworth and Melissa King share their findings after four years of refining this teaching methodology.

Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic School at Waitara is a two-stream Catholic primary school. The school serves the two parishes of Our Lady of the Rosary, Waitara, and Queen of Peace, Normanhurst. There are currently 382 children, boys and girls, attending the school and about one-third of the children have a language other than English as their first language.

If learning is authentic and encourages deep thinking we believe this leads to learning that makes a difference in the lives of children. Readers' Circle fits these criteria and experience has shown us that it is a powerful process that can turn non-readers into people who love reading. For those children who already love reading, Readers' Circle heightens their enjoyment as they move to deeper levels of critical literacy.

This is especially evident with boys who are more frequently in the group of children who don't like reading, or who only read one particular type of book. The introduction of Readers' Circle has made a big difference in the lives of boys. For example, a boy who once only read comics moved onto reading Shakespeare, Roald Dahl, Tolkien and Harper Lee within the space of one year of participating in Readers' Circle. Stories like this one are common.

What is Readers' Circle?

Readers' Circle was introduced at our school for all children who could read independently. It is a process that is based on the work of Aidan Chambers, who observed and studied the place of talk in reading. He observed that it was natural for people to want to talk about a great book that they had read and that this experience was heightened when they found another person who had read the same book.

Chambers found that whilst conversation about books followed no particular order, it could be grouped into three categories: enthusiasms (likes and dislikes), puzzles, and patterns. These three categories form the starting point of a Readers' Circle discussion in the classroom because this is what readers talk about in the real world. In the real world readers do not read a great book and then make a story map or paint a picture of their favourite scene.

What it looks like in the classroom

The class is given a range of books from which to select. Children choose the books that most interest them and the teacher places children in groups based on this selection. In doing this, the teacher considers what other books the child has read, each child's strengths and weaknesses in relation to learning styles and each child's next step as a critical reader. There is no 'top' group or 'bottom' group because the



book choice individuals make is the most important factor in grouping. There are no 'hard' books or 'easy' books because quality literature, whether a picture book or a novel can be talked about at multiple levels of complexity.

From our experience when working with reluctant readers, who tend to be boys, it is important to make a priority of finding the right book for them. This means taking a personal interest in what is important in the life of that child and ensuring that the reluctant readers are catered for, by giving them their first choice of book. We have found that if the book is right, a non-reader can become a reader through the Readers' Circle process.

The combination of book choice, and having no 'top' or 'bottom'

group is critical to the success of Readers' Circle. Children begin the Circle already motivated to read and this only increases with the discussion. If the book is teacher imposed or children feel they are reading an 'easy' book, the teacher is battling lack of intrinsic motivation as well as issues of low self-esteem which might arise. This is particularly the case with boys who more frequently fall into the 'don't like to read' group or the 'bottom' group. Removing these criteria make a big difference for all children but especially to boys. Many teachers have discovered that by making these small changes, Readers' Circle has become more successful in their classroom.

Critical discussion

Once groups are organised, the group meets with the teacher to decide on the amount to be read. Children read independently and record their thinking. To help direct children towards critical literacy and deep thinking, teachers need an understanding of what development in critical literacy looks like. The research of Thomson (1987), cited by Michaels and Walsh (1990), outlined six developmental stages that all readers move through when responding to literature.

The teachers at OLOR have spent a lot of time investigating what constitutes development in critical literacy. The more time that we spend working in this area, the more we realise how complex and challenging it is to teach Readers' Circle well. This is an area we will continually look at and revisit through professional dialogue as there is always a place for renewed understanding and deepening of the Readers' Circle process.

Initially, when children are just beginning to think critically about books, they record their likes, dislikes, puzzles and patterns on post-it-notes. Once a week, they meet with the teacher to talk about the book, using their notes as a starting point. Early discussion will

be simple. For example, 'I liked the picture on page twenty because it was funny,' or 'I really like . . . because my favourite colour is purple too.' The teacher guides the discussion, sharing his/her own insights about the book and through questioning, guides the group to deeper thinking. Children are encouraged to add to ideas, build new ideas, make connections, agree or disagree with others and use examples to justify their opinion. As much as possible, the teacher needs to help the discussion develop as it would in the real world.

Once children are beginning to move to a more sophisticated level of thinking, a matrix can be used to help children deepen their thinking. The criteria for the matrix are based on the group discussion because it provides a scaffold to enable the children to take their next step in critical literacy. For example, reading the book *Boy Overboard* by Morris Gleitzman, children who are developing in sophistication might say things like, 'I didn't like the part where Bibi was standing on the land mine but it made me think about how lucky we are and I want to find out more about land mines,' or 'I noticed that Morris Gleitzman sometimes has paragraphs with just one word. I really like that because it makes me think more.' Comments like this tell the teacher that children are ready for a matrix to guide their thinking. An example is shown over the page in Table 1.

Using a matrix like this opens up possibilities for a discussion that can make a difference in the lives of children.

Sometimes a book does not progress as expected — children are bored or one individual is bored. If this remains the same after approximately two weeks it is better to give children the option to change books and find a book they love. If it is one child, this might mean joining another group or working one on one with the teacher, until they can join another group. The children must enjoy the



The children must enjoy the book for any real learning to take place.

book for any real learning to take place. Similarly, the teacher must enjoy the book too. A book shouldn't be offered for book selection if the teacher hasn't read and enjoyed it first.

Written response

The discussion ends by negotiating the amount to be read for next week and the children write a written response about their ideas. The written response is our current area of professional dialogue as we strive to make this a meaningful process for all children. We know that when children have real purpose and a real audience for their writing that quality learning occurs. In the early stages of implementation we saw the written response mainly as a tool for teacher assessment. Whilst the majority of children find writing the response enjoyable, for some children, many of whom are boys, the written response is laborious and they consider it a waste of time. This is making us stop and think: How can it be meaningful for everyone?

At its best, the written response becomes a personal journal where children record their thinking and are able to track their growth and development in thinking over time,

giving their writing real purpose and a real audience. More than any other learning, the growth in critical thinking that occurs during the Readers' Circle process is enormous and children enjoy watching their thinking develop and it becomes a tool for self-assessment. While it is still a tool for teacher assessment, it is also an opportunity for the teacher to give meaningful feedback and to share their own ideas and insights about the book. Giving quality feedback makes the written response authentic and meaningful for the majority of students.

As we learn more about how the brain works this knowledge is leading us to rethink the written response. While we believe that being able to transfer our thinking to writing is a life skill that is important for all to develop, our new understanding about different learning styles is telling us that the written response model as it is now, is catering predominantly for one particular kind of learner — namely the 'print-oriented' learner.

We are currently beginning to ask ourselves questions about this and beginning the professional dialogue needed to bring about change. For example, what opportunities can we

Table 1: Example of a matrix; a matrix provides a scaffold to enable children to take the next step in critical literacy

	Likes	Dislikes	Puzzles	Patterns
General	Bibi because she is a risk taker, e.g. . . .			
Quality writing	One or two words sentences or paragraphs, e.g. . . . Suspenseful writing, e.g. . . . Powerful words, e.g. . . .			Each chapter ends at a really exciting spot to make you want to read on, e.g. . . . Each chapter beginning . . . etc.
Things I am thinking more deeply about	The description on page . . . is making me think more about war because . . .	Landmines and tanks, e.g. description on page . . .	Why do some countries have different rules for girls and boys?	Fact is woven in between the story, e.g. . . .

give kinesthetic learners to think about a book kinesthetically? Can we provide opportunities for them to think deeply about books and incorporate their kinesthetic strength? Or for the auditory learner, can we provide alternatives for them to process their thinking in a way that is meaningful to them? Would it be more effective for them to record their ideas on tape instead of post-it-notes?

Our discussion so far is telling us that if we can find a way to cater for all learning styles, the process of Readers' Circle will be greatly improved for all learners, but especially for boys. Our class experience tells us that it is often boys who struggle with the written response. Giving learners more choices about how they process their developing insights, so as to cater for different learning styles we believe can only enhance the learning, and cater for everyone.

From its early beginnings our understanding about Readers' Circle has deepened and grown with each new professional discussion or new insight about how children learn. It will continue to grow and deepen as we learn more about learning. We will continually refine our teaching practice so that we can teach Readers' Circle well, but in its essence it will always be the same — a group of people who are excited about the book they are reading who gather together to talk.

References

- Chambers, A 1994, *Tell Me: Children, reading and talk*, Primary English Teaching Association, Newtown.
- Michaels, W & Walsh, M 1990, *Up & Away: Using picture books*, Oxford University Press, Australia.



Jan Heyworth has been the Principal of Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School for the past four years. She has extensive teaching experience in both Northern Territory and NSW primary schools. Throughout her career she has been involved in working with teachers in the area of professional

development, particularly in the area of literacy education. She began working with the concept of Readers' Circle ten years ago, and has presented workshops at both state and national level on Readers' Circle. She believes that being a teacher is one of the most important vocations one can have. Jan has always been passionate about literacy education with all the complexities of what it means to be a multi-literate person in the 21st century.



Melissa King has been using Readers' Circle in her classroom for the ten years she has been teaching. She has presented professional development courses and workshops on Readers' Circle for the Catholic Education Offices of Parramatta and Canberra and Catholic Schools Office of Broken Bay. She is

currently working as a learning consultant working alongside teachers at Our Lady of the Rosary, Waitara. She believes passionately that teaching can make a real difference in the lives of children when it is deep, authentic and future orientated.



What a boy wants

An accidental discovery

It's always a joy to come across inspired teachers who are really prepared to go out on a limb for what they believe. It's even more exciting when they manage to succeed in a disadvantaged school. Pauline Barker and Karen Terry's application of Individual Learning Styles not only improved boys' academic performance and classroom engagement, it motivated the teaching staff to apply the methods across the school with outstanding results.

Our school was a small secondary school in a disadvantaged suburb of Melbourne. For many schools in this type of area, the challenges included keeping students at school and engaging them with learning and our school was no different. Our charter priorities were driven by data — which clearly showed that our boys were lagging far behind our girls in key indicators such as VCE results and retention rates.

As leaders in this school with a focus on the senior students, we were passionate about engaging and empowering students to enjoy their learning experiences. Professional development experiences introduced us to the concept of Teaching to Individual Learning Styles, and inspired us to pilot these practices in our school. Our hopes were to improve the learning experiences and connectedness for all students, with particular benefits to those at the 'top' and 'bottom' of the spectrum.

We recognised early on that this program would bring particular gains to boys because of the kinesthetic/tactile teaching tools that would be developed. The school had identified a need to improve boys' scores in VCE English, and we used this to validate our program. Two years further into our journey, when we paused to take stock, we discovered that the main beneficiaries of our new approach were the boys.

The Dunn and Dunn model

The Dunn and Dunn model of teaching to preferred learning styles identifies twenty-three elements of preference. Without becoming too technical, Ken and Rita Dunn state that if student learning preferences can be met when learning new or difficult material it will significantly improve connectedness, engagement, classroom behaviour, and performance. Researchers have found a strong correlation between teaching that is directed towards students' individual learning preferences, and an increase in student results. The Dunn and Dunn model is supported by over thirty years of research, mainly completed in the USA and in New Zealand.

We had a preference for this model over others, because the Dunn and Dunn model provides a whole range of entrance points to implementing changes. These include changing teaching practices, as well as environmental factors and student study habits.

We found that the disengaged boys at our school were largely 'global' learners — they had a preference for knowing the whole picture ('top-down processing') and breaking it into its component parts, preferred kinesthetic/tactile learning experiences, preferred to work at their own pace and have a choice in how they present learning outcomes. Many of our boys were informal learners — most preferred to work

while sprawled on the floor, in a comfortable armchair, or in a beanbag. They disliked auditory intake — a method of teaching still supported by the majority of teachers in the system despite the fact that only twenty-five per cent of people are auditory dominant (visual learners thirty-five per cent, and kinesthetic forty per cent).

Finding the money

In the under-resourced world of education in a disadvantaged suburb, we needed money to pilot our program. We knew that the school administration would not contribute resources to whole-school change without proven benefits to student learning. Our belief would not be enough.

Karen's background in student welfare gave us knowledge of available funding through the School Focused Youth Service. We put together a research proposal, obtaining permission from the Curriculum Committee to use our own VCE Psychology and English classes as pilot groups. In its wisdom, the Curriculum Committee were concerned that the pilot groups would have an advantage over students in other classes, and insisted that we implement the program across all the English groups.

This was a leadership challenge indeed, as the other English teachers had never heard of Learning Style

Preferences, and were naturally reluctant to change their teaching practices without informed data. We all operate within a teaching 'comfort zone' based on what has worked for us in the past, and on our natural personalities — and stepping out of this zone is a challenge for anyone.

The \$5000 we obtained from the generous School Focused Youth Service bought us the services of a consultant, testing materials, and materials to produce teaching tools. This funding was also used to set up a 'Learning Styles Classroom' with bean bags, dictaphones, headphones, corrals, painted light and dark areas and couches. We had minimal time release to initially meet with the consultant but most of the planning and preparation was done outside of school hours — sometimes with a glass of wine . . . or two . . . or three . . . to lubricate the creative cogs.

Who to target?

We decided to pilot at the VCE level for a few reasons. Firstly, with other major school responsibilities we were both limited to teaching at the senior end of the school. Secondly, the VCE had always been a 'no go' zone — people saw the externally imposed curriculum structure as too limiting and closed to any innovative learning and teaching practices. We wanted to demonstrate that it was possible. Thirdly, in a school with a large number of challenging students we knew teachers would be reluctant to introduce new teaching practices into 'difficult' junior classes. There was a mental attitude that classes were so difficult, anything other than rigid, structured teaching would result in anarchy. Although we were, and are, convinced that the answer to the difficult classroom was in engaging students, we knew we had to get our staff on side.

Implementing the 'new' teaching methodologies

Many of the 'new' teaching

methodologies weren't new at all. They were strategies we knew were 'best practice' anyway, with a few novel approaches. The major benefits came from the testing we completed with the whole Year 12 cohort. A simple fifteen-minute questionnaire resulted in a Learning Styles profile for each student. Through our Tracking (mentoring) program, teachers explained the profiles to each student and helped them develop strategies for study that matched their learning styles. Parents were invited to a barbecue where they shared their child's learning profile, and learned about the pilot program.

From the word 'go', students were fascinated with the concept that they all learned in individual and unique ways. It's strange how adolescents will concentrate and absorb information when the subject is themselves! An immediate side effect was that all of a sudden students were talking 'Learning Style Preferences' — and using this language when discussing their learning in other classrooms.

Other staff became curious about the ins and outs of the Dunn and Dunn model, and although the whole teaching staff had been given an overview of the pilot, we suddenly had a staff hungry for further information so that they could keep up with their students. A rare opportunity was given us to take over a whole curriculum day to train staff in the theory and practices of Learning Style Preferences. All teachers were then informed by their classroom profiles.

The Learning Styles classroom had once been a dingy locker bay that no-one wanted. The new, bright 'hippy' classroom was initially feared, with staff predicting student riots when they were given the option of using beanbags and couches. However, once the program was established, the timetabler had a fight on his hands with many staff requesting the nice, bright, versatile classroom.



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So what was different inside the classroom?

The environmental changes meant that teachers could choose to instruct students in the formal instruction area, and then give them the option of meeting their environmental preferences via beanbags, couches, individual study corrals, light and dark areas, group tables, headphones (for either silence or background noise), intake of water and/or healthy foods while working. We loosened up on allowing students out of their seats. They WERE allowed to wander to the bin, and some of the more restless boys were permitted to take short breaks where they did a lap of the courtyard before returning to their work.

It is worth noting that students were only permitted to meet their learning preferences IF they produced better work than when their preferences weren't met; the meeting of their preferences did not interfere with anyone else's learning; rules of respect in the classroom were maintained.

Catering to the needs of different learners

As teachers, we learned to introduce the 'big picture' for the global learners, and build concepts in a stepwise approach for the analytic learners. We learned to put an overview on the board to begin (analytic/visual learners). Knowing our classroom Learning Styles profile empowered us to plan lessons, and break our class into sections. For example, visual learners should read information first and THEN discuss it. Auditory learners need to hear the teacher explanation, then go away and read about it. Kinesthetic learners need to act out something they have heard or read, or physically join together cut up paragraphs to produce a piece of text. Visual learners need to be permitted to read ahead of the rest of the class and allowances needed to be made for this.

Design of teaching tools and units

was a huge task, but a worthwhile one. We decided to do a couple of units in this first year, and gradually build up our repertoire. We developed Contract Activity Packages (CAPs) for the global learners, and Programmed Learning Sequences (PLSs) for our analytic learners. The PLS provided structure and immediate feedback for students, and the CAPs offered choice and creativity. Both types of presentation have the same knowledge and skill base. We designed electroboards, flip chutes, peg circles, floor games, card games, and jigsaws for our kinaesthetic learners, and taught our students mind mapping. We learned to place those (unavoidable in Year 12!) notes on large sheets of paper around the room, so the kinaesthetic students had to move to take notes.

Our assessments changed drastically — even for the SACs. There is nothing in the Study Designs that state that students can't meet the learning outcomes of SACs on audiotape, via poster, through writing and performing songs or . . . whatever! Limitations are only in your imagination. The development of these assessment methods was particularly useful for our Special Provision students, and complemented the 'Thinking Curriculum' methodologies being implemented across the school.

The proof is in the pudding

Our aim in this pilot was to get results we could share with the school community, and we did. The mean results for the Psychology class increased significantly on the previous year. The English results demonstrated similar significant gains. What we noticed straight away, however, was that the most powerful gains were for the boys.

By meeting the needs of this largely global, informal, tactile/kinesthetic group, we had empowered them to become aware of their own learning processes, and to take control of these.



It works on low achievers . . .

Brendan seriously considered leaving school every year from the year he turned fifteen. For some reason, probably his mates, he stuck it out. He was a low achiever, a struggler who just wanted to 'get his VCE'. His past history was one of disengagement, acting out and failure. Brendan was a global/kinesthetic learner. It was difficult to connect Brendan to the texts he had to study in English. He loathed reading, and found the formal essay writing constrictive and difficult. When he was exposed to the themes and ideas found in the Year 12 texts via mind maps, film, and talking books, he showed some improvement. However, when he was given the options regarding assessment and demonstration of learning outcomes, he excelled. Brendan produced complex board games based on the text that demonstrated understandings and interpretations that he had been unable to do in other ways. Being permitted to work sitting in a beanbag, eliminated the restless behaviour teachers had complained of in the past. All of a sudden English was his favourite subject. Brendan said, 'If it wasn't for the

way we did English this year, I wouldn't have got my VCE.' Brendan is now gainfully employed.

It works on high achievers . . .

Andrew was a high-achieving student — he achieved an ENTER way over 90. There were never any concerns about Andrew doing well, but extending and challenging him was a concern. When his father became terminally ill halfway through the year, maintaining his motivation and high levels of performance did become an issue. Andrew was an analytic learner who preferred to work individually in a highly structured and formal setting. He had an extremely strong preference for visual learning, and used mind mapping highly successfully as a revision tool. Andrew embraced the range of activities and assessment options available to him, and stated that he found English and Psychology dynamic and interesting subjects. These were the two subjects (coincidentally!) that he received his highest scores in. Andrew is studying law.

Peter was a highly gifted student, who greatly underachieved. He had not 'passed' a year since primary school, or handed in a completed piece of work, despite an IQ that clearly placed him in the gifted range. His learning style preferences were clearly auditory. In the current system, this is usually an advantage for students, but Peter's cognitive processes operated so quickly that his ideas spilled out much more quickly than his ability to write them down. He also had difficulties with fine motor skills, and only ever managed to produce written work in Information Technology where he could use the keyboard. Knowing his Learning Styles preferences, we provided Peter with a dictaphone. We taught him mind mapping as a quick tool for recording information delivered in class, and for recording his own 'spillage' of information. A mind map enabled him to narrow

down his ideas to the important and relevant ones. The dictaphone enabled him to work at a pace that suited his quick thinking, but he also benefited from hearing himself speak aloud the thoughts that he had. Over time, we trained him to type from his dictaphone so that he could produce a written record. He was granted Special Provision in his examinations because the school could demonstrate a history of supporting his particular learning needs, and he was permitted to use this method in his examinations. He is now working in the Information Technology industry after gaining a coveted traineeship.

It even works on those disruptive boys . . .

Another English class was dominated by a group of disenchanted boys whose lack of concentration and engagement was a distraction, and any class discussion was unproductive. The introduction of some simple kinesthetic activities with a competitive component turned this class around. The turning point occurred when 'theme dice' were brought into the classroom. These consist of two dice — one with six of the themes found in a text, one with the key words (who, what, where, when, why, how). Students roll the dice, are required to form a question with the resulting combination of words, and then conduct a one-minute discussion. Boys rolled the dice with gusto, and were quite competitive in the discussions they conducted. A scribe drew mind maps on the board as the discussions were conducted. Lessons became student-directed, and students frequently requested this method as the year went on.

There are many such stories. If these successes are possible when students are empowered and have their learning needs met in VCE, imagine what is possible when these needs are met from the beginning of their schooling. The school recognised our findings were

Table 1: Alternative activities according to perceptual preference

Visual	Auditory	Tactile	Kinesthetic
Mind maps	Music	Dice	People search
Colourful overheads	Storytelling	Puzzle cards	Mime
Cartoons	Interviews	Flip chutes	Role play
Interactive computer software	Surveys	Memory cards	Ball toss/silent ball
Definition word search	Telephone gossip	Wrap arounds	Mock TV show
Venn diagrams	Twenty questions	Puppets	Activity stations
Crosswords/word searches	News reporter	Electroboards	Floor games
Graphs, charts	Group work	Peg circles	Court trial
Posters	Reading aloud	Bingo	Design a machine
Print material	Circle of knowledge	Jigsaws	Conduct a campaign
Video/DVD	Make a song/rhyme, rap, poem	Models	Perform a videotape
Models	Make a talking book	Story box	Charades
Story box	Talk through writing	Diorama	Pick a box
PowerPoint	Debate	Make a scrapbook	Research study
Time lines	Commentate a slide show	Make a collage	
Diorama	Oral presentation	Post-it notes to create timelines and jigsawing activities	
Make a collage	Create different endings		
Handouts	Brainstorming		
Mapping			
Photograph			
Book jacket design			
Illustrated report			
Using symbols only, create a ...			



valuable, and applicable to the rest of the school. We now had some evidence to show teachers that a focus on the student as a learner is a very powerful tool for engagement.

The sweet taste of success

After the first year:

- Professional Learning teams were formed at Year 7 and VCE to further implement the methodologies across the school.
- Two more Learning Styles classrooms were developed.
- The Learning Styles program gained its own budget.
- Staff were given further professional development.
- We assisted Key Learning Area coordinators to rewrite units of work using the CAP and PLS models.
- We presented workshops on Learning Styles preferences for a number of other schools and conferences — spreading the good word!
- We further developed our own expertise and repertoire of teaching tools.

Our conclusions:

- Students at the top and bottom of the scale benefit from having their learning preferences met when learning new or difficult material, and the 'middle band' of students adapt to most forms of teaching.
- Boys in particular benefit from this methodology.
- Personalising the learning relationship and engaging in a meaningful dialogue with students about their learning empowers them to take control over their learning processes.
- Boys in particular benefit from this, as it focuses on their 'personal best' and legitimises their particular behaviours (restlessness, needs for 'hands on', competition, a need for movement) as unique learning preferences rather than problematic or distracting

classroom management issues.

- The Dunn and Dunn model is particularly useful as it enables teachers to implement elements of the framework according to their comfort zones.
- The model of implementation that we used endorses the strategy of sharing best practice and celebrating success. Collegiate teaching is the most exciting and powerful framework for embedding new pedagogies in a school community.

And finally, anything that engages teachers in reflective practices and shares the learning experiences amongst students, teachers and parents will engage, empower and promote the enjoyment of education. The best teachers are learners as well.

Reference

Dunn, R & Dunn, K 1993, *Teaching of Secondary Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles*, Allyn & Bacon, Boston.



Pauline Barker taught at the school discussed in this article for sixteen years. At the end of 2003, she took up a leadership position at a school in Melbourne's outer west and continues to be passionate about empowering students through their Learning Styles preferences.



Karen Terry finished her eighteen-year stint, and took a leadership role at a school in Melbourne's leafy north. She maintains her enthusiasm and commitment to teaching to individual student Learning Styles.

The two continue to regularly share a bottle of wine and great philosophical discussion about teaching and learning. In 2003 they formed 'The 3Es of Learning', with the aim of sharing Learning Styles methodologies with other education professionals. They are in the process of designing a Learning Styles Assessment tool, which is continually being tested on willing, but Learning Styles-weary children. They are happy to travel to other schools and forums to share their experiences and showcase some of the teaching tools that can be developed.

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★ Let's hear it from them

Mentors in the making

Remember when school assemblies meant the deputy head reading the riot act? A New Zealand primary school has turned that notion on its head. Their assemblies are scripted and staged by teams of boys, who will no doubt use these skills to great effect in their futures. Principal Geoff Burgess tells us how.

Saint Kentigern School is a Presbyterian primary school with a roll of 500 boys in the suburb of Remuera, Auckland, New Zealand. The school is noted for its highly inclusive culture and its emphasis on family involvement. A Values program entitled the Saint Kentigern Way is the cornerstone of their themed and integrated approach to developing character and positive attitudes in the student body. Their website, www.saintkentigern.com, offers a window into the Remuera campus.

When appointing a head boy some years ago, the twelve-year-old leader elect confided that as a Year 2 pupil he had admired the head boy of the time and secretly set his sights on emulating that boy's exemplary behaviour. It was one of those special moments when, as a principal you get a privileged insight as to what is really important to your students. My head boy elect had just identified his mentor.

The power of mentorship is well known and often exercised in schools. We may set up relationships, which will offer support to a young student and an opportunity for older boys to exercise empathy and responsibility. In New Zealand the ManAlive organisation offers Big Buddies to boys whose families are devoid of male role models and Celia Lashlie's Good Man project is based on the importance of positive role models for boys.



Older boys take on a number of mentoring roles at St Kentigern's.



Let's hear it from them ...

Comments from the prefects about their assemblies:

- Well, I get very confident from doing a big presentation.
- It really helped me develop my organisation skills.
- The biggest challenge is getting up on stage and talking to everyone, but I think that I've have improved my public speaking so much from last year.
- The night before my first assembly I got really nervous and anxious but once you're up on stage you forget your fear and go with the flow.
- I was worried with my first assembly, but once you have done it once, it's easy.
- We have had heaps of positive responses from other boys and staff — they really make it worthwhile.

While these mentor relationships can arise naturally or be seeded for specific purposes, the challenge for school administrators is to promote a mentor culture which maximises the opportunities for mentorship to grow. At Saint Kentigern School we asked the question, 'How can the leadership team of prefects be given a more public role as mentors to the other students?'

It was decided to offer one of the three weekly assemblies to the prefect team, giving them the responsibility for managing the whole event. The only requirements were that they amplify an aspect of the school's current Value theme, e.g. courage, and include appropriate Bible readings and prayers. The boys accepted this challenge with high spirits and split their twelve-man team into groups of three to spread the tasks of planning and preparation.

Right from the outset they managed their presentations with real professionalism and we noticed how easily they engaged the assembled Year 1 to Year 8 boys. Their communication skills were directly in sync with their audience and they made excellent use of the twin-screen data show projection

system in our hall to show still and video images from around the school and beyond. Not only did this innovation reduce the workload of some staff, we noticed that the impact of their messages appeared to have a longer shelf life than many of our own!

Since beginning the prefect assemblies in April 2003 the boys have evolved the way they operate to achieve maximum impact. They have reduced their assembly teams to just two members, spreading the workload, and have made a special effort to vary their presentations. Some have invited guests to present on their behalf while others have

used drama, music and dance to good effect.

Prior to this innovation our prefect team had a much more ritualistic function in the public gatherings of the school, conducting readings and prayers and giving the odd announcements. They now have a real voice and they are using it with skill and passion to mentor the younger boys towards manhood.

While I am delighted with the start that we have made I believe that it is just that: the beginning of a journey that will open our eyes to the leadership potential of our senior students.



Geoff Burgess, has held the position of principal at Saint Kentigern School for eleven years. Prior to that he was headmaster of Southwell School in Hamilton and St Andrews College Preparatory School in Christchurch.

As a musician in a previous life he appreciated the need for passion and creativity in the lives of children and is driven to ensure adequate pathways for these catalysts to flourish in Saint Kentigern School. His own mentors have played a significant role in shaping the sort of person he is still trying to become and it is this knowledge that has prompted the search for effective mentorship models.

Geoff can be contacted on gburgess@sks.school.nz.

★ There's no such thing as bad weather

— only bad clothes

Imagine a preschool where children spend the entire day outdoors. Now imagine that same preschool during a Norwegian winter. Surprisingly, these nature-based preschools are enjoying increasing popularity in Norway, as well as attracting more male workers into the early childhood field. Craig d'Arcy talked to the *Bulletin* about his recent field trip to check out this amazing venture.

During my stay in Norway I visited a childcare centre called Batbarnehaugen, which has a two to three year old group that use a traditional house and two nature groups of three to five year olds that share the outdoor area. Batbarnehaugen has a massive outdoor area that is unlike any preschool in Australia. A vast green area filled with trees and hills. I'm not sure of the exact size but it would be a few acres. They even own an area down near the water where there is a jetty on a big lake. The only sheltered area I saw were two small wooden huts that are called *grillhytte* — traditional Norwegian huts.

The children use these for shelter very occasionally throughout the day when perhaps the staff would read a story or have a music group with the children, or if the children want to sleep. There is a fire in the middle to keep them warm with reindeer skins around the seats. The other hut is used to store their bags, clothes and lunch. Other than that, they're totally outdoors.

There is no equipment to speak of and the children basically just roam over this large area of land and play whatever takes their fancy. What I saw when I went down a big hill were another couple of traditional huts used by the other nature preschool group. These huts had grass growing on the roof to insulate the hut, which is apparently what the Vikings used to do! The children

have their own fish-smoking oven nearby, too, which they make use of regularly.

The day that I visited, the children went out on their boat. It's a lifeboat from a ship so it is very safe. We walked with the children down to the jetty and they put on their life jackets and hopped on the boat. They were going out fishing for the rest of the day. The weather was windy and about three degrees. It was quite amazing to see.

What are some of the safety issues compared to Australia?

The children are basically allowed to explore. There are no safety regulations as such. I saw children

with small knives whittling wood, which is a traditional past-time they encourage the children to learn. There was also a fire to keep the children warm that they could sit around.

What do the children get out of these 'nature preschools'?

There were two 'nature groups' of three to five year old children with fourteen children in each group. I saw no conflicts between the children during my visit. The teachers also mentioned that there is very little conflict between the children because they're free. There is less likelihood of spreading germs than in a confined environment so



• A traditional underground insulated hut used for storage and shelter at the preschool.

there is less illness, and the children are healthier overall. And active — they can climb trees, they can throw rocks, they can interact with nature. So preschool is a bit of an adventure where they can explore.

I also noticed that the group was very well bonded and seemed to get along quite well. There were mainly boys in the group I observed and the staff said that the parents liked their boys going to this sort of environment.

A Norwegian saying, ‘There’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes’, is the philosophy behind the nature-based preschools.

Through their interaction with the environment the children gain an appreciation of nature and an appreciation of looking after the environment. As it happens, parents from higher socioeconomic groups send their children to these preschools because they want their children to appreciate nature and experience the natural environment. They believe that children have a better experience in this type of setting.

What was the role of the staff?

There is a lot of male involvement in the nature preschools. Across the board in Norway around seven per cent of preschool staff are males. In nature preschools about thirty-six per cent of the staff are males.

There were nine men at the preschool out of a total of eighteen staff. They felt that they weren’t necessarily in a supervisory role and I noticed that they were more part of the group. Rather than directing the children, they were following the children’s leads. For example, if the children want to climb a tree the staff join in with what the children are doing. What they have found is that children do find (and respect) their own level of skill. They provoke discussions and ask questions but most importantly take the child’s lead. It was quite amazing to see this all taking place outdoors.



⋮ Picturesque: The playground in a nature preschool, Norway.



⋮ Children in their preschool’s boat, on their daily exploration to visit the surrounding islands and catch fish for lunch.

What impressed you most about these preschools?

What I reflected on was the similarity between what they do with the children in this nature preschool and what I do with my own kids at home. I take them bushwalking and encourage them to explore different natural environments. I believe that this is really healthy for young children to do. A lot of young kids don’t get that opportunity. This type of activity seems vastly different from many activities Australian children participate in at their preschools. For

● In nature preschools
● about 36% of the
● staff are males.

example, our safety regulations require that nothing outside be over 50 cm high without soft-fall, which doesn't provide a challenge for any child really. So, the nature preschools challenge children to really develop their skills.

Another benefit of this type of preschool is that you don't need much equipment. You use what is there in nature and the children tend to be very intuitive to how to use and interact with the natural environment.

I think there are a lot of benefits for the children as well as the staff. When not burdened with regulations and with a freer environment the children and the staff really flourish.

It was incredible to see the kids go out on the boat. People in Australia would be quite horrified at the thought of sending three to five year olds out on a boat! There were three staff, fourteen children. All the children put on their life jackets and the staff were trained in first aid. Being a lifeboat it was quite safe and was fully enclosed. The children on that particular day were going out fishing. They were going out to an island where they would spend the rest of the day fishing, then bring the fish back to eat. The boys in particular liked that aspect of adventure and exploration and being very active.

What were the children like?

The children were really quite open and friendly and recognised me as someone new. They wanted to know where I was from and when they heard me speak they laughed and tried to guess what language I was speaking — they were speaking to me in German and Norwegian. It was quite interesting to see the children being very open and confident and not afraid to come up and say, 'Where are you from? Who are you?' And to show me what they were doing.

I realise that we can't put everything I saw into Australian preschools but I think some of the



••• **A shelter with an open fire in the centre and reindeer skins laid out for the younger children to sleep on.**

philosophy and ideas around being outdoors and in nature is very inspiring. I really believe it tunes into meeting the needs of boys in particular.

The local Asker council funded the setup of this nature preschool as well as a 'Men in Preschool' group that has been operating for about ten years. They are really active in promoting early childhood to men

as a career option and a lot of men are taking it on. Up to thirty-six per cent of staff in these nature preschools are men. I think this is a model that could help us get more men involved in early childhood centres in Australia.



Craig d'Arcy holds a degree in early childhood teaching and has extensive experience working in the early childhood field. He has worked in a variety of settings and roles, including long day care centres, training adults in childcare, and as a resource and support worker promoting diversity in childcare. He has established a

successful Males in Early Childhood Network Group in the Newcastle area. He works in the Engaging Fathers Project in the role of community worker, early childhood, at the Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle.

With a mechanical engineer father and a builder brother, he wanted a career that offered variety and to do something that could make a positive difference in young children's lives by offering a masculine identity. He is also a father of four children.

He has a particular professional interest in working with marginalised groups in the community and ensuring that they are meaningfully included in early childhood services.



Children run wild

Natur- og friluftsbarnhager In Norway

During the last ten years many day care centres in the natural environment have been established in Norway. Following is an extract from a research paper carried out by Karen Marie Eid Kaarby from Oslo University College's Faculty of Education examining the effect nature has on children's play.

Natur- og friluftsbarnhager

Day care centres outside in the natural environment use nature as the primary pedagogical tool and inspiration. They may be situated near a forest or nature area in residential areas, or the centres can bus the children to the forest or the wild environment. The management and the national curriculum are generally similar for both outdoor- and indoor-based day care centres. The outdoor day care centres are organised in different ways, but they all use the outdoor environment as the foundation for pedagogical work. According to their programs two different areas seem to be common as focused areas. The first one is that of developing knowledge about the environment and experience of the wilderness. The second one is to focus physical activity and motor development by using the wild environment for play (Lysklett et al. 2003).

Gained experiences from the natur- og friluftsbarnhager

Just a few research projects have been done on day care centres in the natural environment (Lysklett et al. 2003). Klepsvik (1995) summarises experiences from projects in a lot of nature- og friluftsbarnhager. The key experiences were:

- the children's play is more creative, the children are playing better
- the noise is less than indoor

- lesser conflicts between the children
- more flexibility during the day which the adults perceived as an atmosphere of peace
- less illness among both children and adults
- the children are more curious about nature
- the children have better endurance, strength and body control
- the adults are more engaged and involved in the children's play

My research project observing children playing outdoor

My research project is based on a qualitative approach (Sparkes 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson 1992; Repstad 1993). During autumn 2003 I visited two groups in two different day care centres that spent most of the day outdoor in the forest. I stayed with them for twelve days from late August in the early autumn to December in the early winter, and I spent the time together with the children and the staff from the moment they left the day care centre until they returned.

The first few times I just watched the children's play and sometimes played together with them. I wrote some notes, and finished my log later on. I videotaped the children's play when they accepted my taping. The tape was transcribed and analysed together with the log. First I tried to observe the whole group because I wanted to get a general

idea of how the children behaved. Then I kept on observing different groups of children in their play or different features which I observed as popular.

Both of the day care centres alternated different camps. The only facility at the camp was the fireplace. Some camps were nearby, and some nearly an hour's walk or a short bus journey away. I stayed with the groups both at new camps and camps with which they were familiar. My observations have been discussed with and confirmed by the staff and my colleagues.

How did the children play?

Coming to a new camp the children used time to get to know their surroundings. When they had explored the area, some were very focused on their favourite place for play. The different camps had different natural features, like different woodland, a grassy field, a lot of cliffs and real big rocks.

Coming to the camp, some children started to play immediately and some stayed with the staff at the camp. The latter group could find a knife and start whittling or help building the bonfire. They preferred to stay near the staff, and it seemed like some of them did not want to be a part of a play. They acted in the same way whether they knew that particular camp or not.

Because of the bonfire, one of the staff always stayed by the fire. One of the day care centres also prepared a hot meal for the children on the

fire every day at noon. Those that did not stay close to the staff, where either focused on where to play and had made arrangements for the play before they arrived at the camp, or they went around looking for facilities and playmates before starting to really play.

Physical activity or physical activity play (Pellegrini & Smith 1998) was prominent most of the time. I saw a lot of activities, which were repeated and repeated in the context of play like exercise play (Pellegrini & Smith 1998). The activities could be:

- climbing up very steep hillsides and sliding down again
- climbing up and jumping down from big rocks or small cliffs
- climbing in trees
- throwing a javelin or a cone
- shooting with a bow and arrows
- rolling on the ground
- balancing on stones, fallen trees, etc.
- whittling a stick

I will argue that all these activities were based on what the environment afforded and the functional significance of the outdoors (Gibson 1979; Heft 1988). Children are aware of how steep a slope must be to be able to slide down, and they explore different ways of sliding down according to their fear.

When climbing they find their own ways up, fitting their strength, height and skills to the task. They intuitively examine what the nature affords them, and they stop climbing when it becomes too dangerous for them. When watching three boys and a girl in a very tall tree, I realised that only one of them was comfortable with climbing to the top while the others found their branch and stopped. In this tree the focus was on climbing, but in other trees the climbing was a part of a role-play. All the elements listed above were also seen as a part of role-play.

The environment with its natural features also constituted the scene

for role-playing. Some girls played in a way that took a while for me to understand. They moved around through shrubs, crossing rock-strewn slopes, up and down hillsides while speeding up and down, often fleeing. Sometimes they went to and from a shrub or a shelter under a tree. They were mother and daughters, a mouse or a cat family moving around looking for something to eat, running away from a threat or whatever the dramatic adviser (always one of the children) told them to do. On their trips they sought the natural features that could give different challenges. The girl in front perceived what the environment would 'afford' her do. Sometimes her way of moving was too complicated for some of those who followed, but they never mentioned or commented on the behaviour. The play had the elements of running effectively around and dealing with obstacles. I observed this kind of play in both centres. In one of them this play belonged to a group of girls, but sometimes boys were involved. In the other one, both boys and girls participated almost all the time.

Some boys play had a different content. They were pirates, workers on a spacecraft, car drivers, Robin Hood or Harry Potter. Their play was more vigorous and their movements more dynamic. Often they also carried sticks with them, and sometimes there was an element of fight, either verbal or physical. I never saw them participate in the mother and child play, and they never allowed girls to participate in their play. The advanced climbers found their spacecraft or their castle in the top of a tree suitable for climbing. Big branches afforded opportunities for sitting, balancing, swinging and rocking and all these elements were found in the play. Another element was the fight, and even a fight can take place in a tree if the tree is suitable. There were different fights in the trees I watched. Sometimes a child who was out of the play tried to fight



••• The Norwegian landscape is the backdrop for Norway's nature preschools.

himself into the play, sometimes the players disagreed and started a fight and sometimes the fight was a real attack from another group. The fights were very much verbal and as soon as the intruder was a real danger, they surrendered, climbed down, or negotiated a solution.

The elements in nature were used in different ways. The shrubs and the trees were houses, cars, garages, spacecraft, castles and so on. Details such as light switches, door openings, rocket launchers, steering wheels, etc. were always found and used by the children in their play. Stones, which afforded stepping from stone to stone, could function as an entrance for a house, and the element of stepping from stone to stone became an important element of a mother and child play. A windfall could be a scene for a role-play. Like staying in trees, staying at windfalls demanded balance and strength. The windfall gave opportunities for those who did not want to be so quiet during a part of the role-play. If the tree or the windfall afforded, some were balancing, hanging, swinging or turning somersaults when the dramatic adviser told them to be in a car, at a plane or at school. They played their individual exercise play parallel, but in the role-play.

Another distinctive play was the number of expeditions that went out to discover something. In the autumn the spiders webs were easy to find and they were attractive to some of the boys who challenged

themselves kissing the spiders webs. Other exciting features were small caves, and stories were made about who might have lived there. A dead mouse, a cocoon, a snail roused from its winter sleep in a warm hand, are all examples found and brought back to the camp to be shown to the staff and discussed. In December the puddles froze, and trying to move on them or jump into them was very exciting.

The last type of play entailed games like chase and catch, hide-and-seeK and singing. Most of these forms of play the children started themselves, but once during the day the adults could start a game and very often the whole group entered the game. Different variants of chase-and-catch and hide-and-seeK games were popular, and sometimes the children started those plays on their own. The rules of these games are not easy for everyone to accept, and the adults were often needed to negotiate and help the children find solutions. Singing games were also popular, and a certain part was often experienced as being especially fun. This part could be repeated a lot of times. The ground with its elements of vegetation and rocks made those plays more challenging than if they were played on a flat ground, and relates to the impact that outdoors can have on children's play.

To conclude my findings the physical activity play was the prominent part of the activity. The children were more or less in physical activity all the time, and they were more active in December than in the end of August, probably because of the temperature. The key elements of the exercise play were functions of the different features in the outdoors, and the play had different characteristics according to the different aspects. Where elements as good climbing trees, windfalls, steep hillsides and dense bushes were available, these elements were included in nearly all the role-play. Some boys never participated in what they looked upon as the girls play, and the girls

seldom participated in the very vigorous fighting games such as Robin Hood or pirates. Physical skills and body control seemed to determine whether they took part in the play more than age (Kaarby 2004).

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Calm in the eye of the storm

A boys-only class that's changing behaviour

Philip Debenham has the unenviable job of teaching fourteen boys with behavioural problems. Here he describes the changes in boys' behaviour that have made his job so rewarding.

Firstly, can you tell us about your school?

Telarah Public School is located in the Hunter Valley, NSW. The catchment group is a mid to lower socioeconomic group, mostly white Anglo Saxon. There is a reasonable amount of unemployment in the area as well as parents with low paid jobs.

What is the boys-only initiative and why was it developed?

In 2002 the Year 2 and Year 3 boys were a mixed bag. Some had behavioural problems, some emotional problems but the thing they had in common was a learning difficulty, particularly in literacy. We felt there may have been something blocking their development other than their basic intelligence, such as attitudinal, emotional or behavioural problems. The common thread with all the boys was that they all suffered from 'The Classroom Syndrome' where they feel like they're the bottom of the heap and can't achieve. Therefore, the standard classroom wasn't a good place for them. The initiative aimed to place them in a less threatening environment, where they could improve their performance.

I talked to a couple of teachers at other schools and also the behavioural head at District Office. We spoke with people at Woodberry School where they had a boys-only class about how it worked, how they structured it, what were their aim, how they were successful, whether they thought it was a worthwhile

idea for our group. We decided it was worth a try and chose a group of boys from Year 2 and Year 3.

How did the staff initially react when you were presenting this idea to them?

The staff were positive. They could see there was a need to do something. Although we had behaviour issues which impinged upon everybody, that was not the reason for the class. It was more literacy specific, an academic need. We aimed to improve the academic performance, develop students' self-esteem and hoped that would flow on to the behaviour in the playground as well as other places. The third and fourth grade teachers were also happy because it took a load off their class sizes. They thought it would make their year a bit easier but they were very positive about how it might help the boys and how it might help the whole school in general. I don't think there was anyone that objected to it. A couple of people raised their concerns — intelligent concerns, such as what would happen the year after and what if it doesn't work.

I imagine presenting the information to the boys' parents would have required some sensitivity?

The principal dealt with the parents, who received the information very well. All of the parents of the fourteen boys were supportive. Two of them questioned how it was going to be structured and so on,

but they weren't against the idea. The other twelve were quite positive. Throughout the year different parents have questioned a few things, quite sensibly of course. All of the boys are still in the class except for one child whose family moved. Parents were all very positive at the interviews that we had at the end of term one.

What about the attitude within the student body and the culture that can be associated with a segregated group of boys?

That was a concern of mine at the start. I was never really sure how I was going to handle that. There was that element of 'Phil's kids' as they were called for a while and a mentality like, 'they're lumped together, we'll pick on them' hinted at early on, but it certainly doesn't exist now. Most of it was in jest from the staff and from the other kids. I think basically the playground itself has accepted the boys being in that one class.

Is it very open as to why the boys are in that class?

I have always been open with the boys and I'm always open with the other kids who ask me why they're all together. It is about helping these boys who have special needs to lift their performance in literacy to the point where we think they should be. I give that story to any other class and I tell other teachers to say the same thing. I don't think anyone hides anything.

Have there been any changes in the behaviour of the boys?

There have been a few changes — and all of them positive. I am really quite impressed with how it has worked. We don't have any hard data yet, but anecdotally, teachers are commenting that the boys from my room are now much easier to approach on an issue in the playground. They are more prepared to talk: 'cool down, calm down' going through all of those stop/think/do approaches. It is a two-way thing. It's not just me educating the boys in my room but also me educating the teachers on ways of dealing with those boys and helping them to avoid the blow ups that can occur when you are a playground teacher trying to solve a violent situation.

The number of violent situations has certainly dropped. Some of my boys used to fight among themselves all the time. It was almost their standard morning greeting! The teachers in charge of the welfare/discipline system who deal with playground behaviour and follow up on fights have noted that particularly this term (so it has taken a while) the number of visits from boys in my room to the planning room has dropped off dramatically.

They're much calmer than they used to be and much easier to calm down too in the classroom (which is one of the achievements I was looking at). If they have had a bad outside session that's fine, we try to forget it, move inside and be calm. They're a lot better at that now than they used to be. The transition period from playground to classroom is very positive.

Have you used any particular strategies to help them cope better with their emotions?

I use ideas from about ten different programs. The District Office Behavioural Education teacher gave me a lot of help in the first term. He took them through some PD lessons three times a week, mostly based on the stop/think/do and Rock and



Water strategies. He was using a mixed bag, but his push with the boys was to empower them by giving them the language that they need to talk about these things. He would talk about the power structure, anger management and those sorts of things, then I would follow it up (and am still following it up). So the boys are very good at discussing how to deal with a potentially violent situation.



What have you learnt through this process, Phil?

Even though I was an experienced teacher and had a lot of different classes over the years, this was another learning curve again. It has taught me that the most valuable thing to pass on to others is the ability to stay calm. It's one thing to say how to be calm, but transferring that to the boys is not so easy. In fact, I was just talking with them about it an hour ago — about the cyclic nature of conversations. If I get angry, you get angry, then I get angrier, and you get angrier. If boys do the wrong thing, you keep calm, they'll calm down and you will get resolution. That is what this year has taught me — how to really respect the power of being calm and keeping control.

Have you noticed your relationship with the boys has changed?

Yes it has. Obviously at the start of the year there was a lot of ironing out and setting the boundaries as there is with any class. With this class it was a bit more time consuming but by this stage of the year it is no different to any other class. I am at the point where I'm treating them as fellow human beings and not as school children anymore. Not all the time, but I

actually have the chance to talk to them one to one, have jokes and learn about them as people. And I give a bit of myself at that stage of the year when it is a lot easier to control them. With some of the worst behaved boys in the class — the ones that can really blow up — I have found a key word or a key gesture that works with them and I can control situations more easily. I think one of the big problems occurs when they go into the depressed, sad routine and by this time of the year I've learnt how to get them out fairly quickly, nine times out of ten.

How do you do that?

With each boy it's different and you have got to find the trigger that works. Often whatever is bothering them is usually something from home. I try to get their minds off that and back to what is going on in the class. For some boys if I just play a serious staring game with them I can crack them up and get them to forget what it was they were thinking about. One of the boys is particularly good at mimicking himself. We play games where we'll say, 'You are brilliant when you do that cranky routine because you didn't get what you wanted.' He knows what I'm talking about and will go into that cranky routine just to show us what it is like. Later when he gets in his cranky routine seriously, I mimic him, then he just smiles, cracks up and gets on with his work.

So for each boy it is different and I experiment and play around. When something works one day — I don't forget it.

Are there some things that worked particularly well and others that definitely you wouldn't do again?

There is never only one magic answer. The best system is the one that evolves slowly out of practice, using trial and error to see what happens. For example, at the start of the year I was given a lot of good ideas for sanction-reward systems and I tried them and dropped them,

and tried them and dropped them and finally came up with a very simple one which is working fine now. Next year, if I had a different class or a different make-up I might have to find a different way to do it.

Can you give some examples of ways you would interact with the boys in the classroom?

I learn about boys' personalities through play acting/role-playing, discussion, and simply sitting back and watching. We'll sit around and discuss each other as well. For example, if a boy is going off I try to get everyone to watch rather than copy by saying, 'Hey, watch this! Watch him.' If I can get a few boys to watch the temper tantrum when that person calms down we'll often sit, and have a chat about it with the person. You get to hear what peers see in the behaviour, which teaches you a fair bit about what boys think too.

I also listen to what they're telling me about their home life and about what they do on the weekend. That teaches me about what they're interested in and also some of the not so pleasant sides of their lives. These boys love to talk! Their news time is quite interesting. In fact, one of the most amazing things about the room is that they will ALL keep quiet and listen to even the most boring piece of news from one of the other boys. News can sometimes go for half an hour because everyone wants to speak. It's a close community in a way and the boys respect the right of each other to have that time. The other boys sit there and listen and usually ask a fairly sensible question at the end of it.

The one common thread of all these boys was the classroom phobia. They make comments like, 'I've sat in a class since Kindergarten being at the bottom of the heap.' 'I can't write without making mistakes.' 'I can't read without making mistakes.' 'Everyone else is better than me.' That's where I see most of these boys' problems and it's

often not an intelligence problem. When we do schoolwork of a mainstream class style they've got to be continually encouraged and reminded: It is okay to make mistakes; love what you do; everything that you do is moving forward; never worry about what someone else does; only worry about you and whether you are getting better. Hammering home those things ALL the time and creating a situation where there isn't any failure at all.

Now, whether that's going to stay when they go back into a mainstream class, I don't know. Once again they'll be in that situation where they're feeling uncomfortable, whereas in my room they all have similar problems and move on quite well. Currently, it is spinning around in my head — how can I start to shape them for next year if they go back into mainstream classes?

It is the self-esteem that is important and it comes from believing in yourself, and stop judging yourself so harshly on how you perform in a classroom.

What would you say is one of the most rewarding things?

To turn around some boys that are VERY down on themselves is a long-term process and this is only a short step but that is probably the most rewarding aspect.

What advice you would give to other teachers who are thinking about implementing a boys-only class?

The first thing I would say to people is don't create one unless there is a need for it. Take a good look — a heads-together session with as many people as possible to talk about whether there is a real need. We have just enough to form the class. You really need enough numbers to make it work. Fourteen was a pretty good number to work with. Secondly, if you do form a class choose a teacher who is enthusiastic about it and wants to give it a go. It

is a fairly high energy job! So you need someone who is prepared to keep on the go most of the time because you don't get many breaks.

Do you think being a male has any influence on running a boys-only class?

I think it comes back to individual personalities rather than gender. However, there is an argument as to whether these boys have enough good male role models and maybe that argument alone is enough to say it does need to be a male teacher.

Philip Debenham has been teaching for twenty years in large, regional schools spending the last three and a half at Telarah Public School. Philip believes that people remember the way things are done rather than what's done, so places great importance on how he approaches his students. 'If we handle our kids in the right way, we can make their day.' He can be contacted on 02 4932 8477.

Frogs and snails and puppy dogs' tails

Just what are boys brains made of?

Advances in the neurological study of the brain are providing teachers with information which could change the way they work with boys. Researchers can now watch the brain at work and map how it develops which, according to Michael Nagel, is providing a better understanding of how students learn.

This is a very exciting time to be an educator. In the last decade, neurology, and education have begun to merge boundaries and provide important insights into the workings of the human brain. Most of these new understandings have been derived from medical and technological advances which now allow researchers to actually watch the brain at work and map out how it develops (Abbott & Ryan 1999). For teachers and parents these advances provide opportunities to better understand a part of our anatomy that serves as the foundation for learning. For the benefit of all students, advances in understanding the workings of the brain provide important insights into how learning might actually take place, what motivates young people and what drives their behaviour. Moreover, research also suggests that the physiology and functioning of boys' and girls' brains differs substantially and that educators would do well to develop their understanding in this area in order to provide an educational environment of quality and equality (Gurian 2001; Halpern 2000; Karges-Bone 1998). In order to better

understand these insights, a brief anatomical introduction regarding the brain and how it develops is necessary.

The human brain, that gelatinous mass of grey matter sitting between the ears, is one of the most complex objects we know. Consisting predominantly of three layers or regions, this part of our anatomy has long been a mystery with regards to how it functions and develops. However, with advances in technology, researchers have been able to identify and theorise how the brain works and matures. In layperson's terms, the brain stem or region closest to the spine is where fight-or-flight and survival responses are activated. The limbic system or central part of the brain harbours our memories and processes emotions. Finally, the uppermost regions or cortices have been recognised as the regions where thinking and consciousness exists (Hardiman 2003; Wolfe 2001).

In regards to maturation and development we also know that the brain goes through a number of stages whereby it constantly remodels and restructures itself, with most of this occurring during

adolescence. Terms such as 'pruning' and 'plasticity' are often used to describe how the brain matures and evolves along a road towards improved efficiency (Giedd et al. 1999). Amidst all of this restructuring, it appears that the brain actually matures from the bottom up and around to the front which indicates that the brain stem and limbic system reach maturity sooner than the cortices above them (Giedd et al. 1999; Gurian 2001). This is very important for educators and parents alike for it suggests that the regions of the brain responsible for survival and emotion are in full swing before the regions responsible for logical and moral reasoning can follow suit. Place all of these new insights at the intersection of differences between male and female brains and those involved with working with students of all ages would do well to become familiar with what might be going on in the heads of the young people they work with, especially in the context of 'boys and schooling'.

Before embarking on the importance of understanding how a male brain works and the significance of this in contemporary

schools, it is important to note that, from a neurological standpoint, approaches to learning and behaviour in schools are often disadvantageous for both boys and girls due to educators' limited understanding of how the brain functions. Arguably, it will become increasingly incumbent upon teachers and teacher educators to develop their understanding and pedagogic technique in relation to contemporary neurological research. That is not to say that all educators will need to become experts in neurology, but they will need to look seriously at what the neurological sciences can add to their craft. This would bode well for a profession that has predominantly based its assertions on learning and behaviour through the domain of behavioural and developmental psychology. Those who continue to aspire to the works of Piaget and Skinner, beware!

With the advent of medical technology, education, in itself, is at an interesting evolutionary stage in terms of pedagogy and understanding how the brain operates. Some might suggest that this is yet another, in a long line of, passing fads. However, it is difficult to deny the common sense notion that the more we know about how the brain works and develops the better our understanding of behaviour and learning in an educational context; a growing list of the intricacies surrounding the male brain offer an excellent example of how we might enhance 'schooling for boys' by keeping the brain in mind.

Boys are in trouble! There is a great deal of contemporary educational and popular literature emphasising the plight of boys in Western society at large and in schools in general. Couple this with a growing list of statistics indicating the problems encompassing boyhood, government commissions and reports reinforcing those statistics and the expansive list of experts working in this important



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area and it would be naïve to think that being a boy is anything but easy. Interestingly, and from a historical perspective, boys have always been in trouble. From Plato's assertion that 'of all the animals, boys are the most manageable' to the time honoured aphorism suggesting that boys are made from 'frogs and snails and puppy dog tails' to modern day descriptions of delinquency, boys have seemingly always been problematic, especially in educational contexts. Perhaps then, the problem is not of a boys making or make-up per se, but rather is the product of what little we know about how a male brain actually influences behaviour and learning. One of the most immediate and relevant examples of negative perceptions of boy behaviour in an educational context

is evident when teachers deal with a male preoccupation with movement.

Boys need to move! The physiology of their brains says as much. Researchers are discovering very real biological factors that tend to make boys more impulsive, fidgety and at times, less than efficient classroom learners. Moreover, when they are sedentary, boys tend to occupy greater physical space when they are learning; they spread out and often appear to be annoying others as they strive to meet their own individual biological and neurological needs. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to consider the brain's complicity in the above observations rather than attributing the actions of boys as purely behavioural and controllable. Serotonin, testosterone and spatial learning tendencies provide a foundation for beginning to understand what might be happening in the mind and body of a boy.

Testosterone, as many well know, is typically identified as the sex hormone that drives the male body and while it promotes bone growth, muscle mass and lowers the male voice, it has also been linked with aggressive behaviour, and difficulties in efficiently processing emotion (Hawkes 2001). Both males and females have testosterone, however, males have a far greater amount of this important neuro-chemical and will receive as many as five to eight surges of it daily from around age ten onward to adulthood. The full ramifications of the role of testosterone are still only beginning to be understood, but one thing does appear certain — testosterone is complicit in a boy's inability to remain sedentary for too long a time and a male's behaviour and moods are 'very dependant on the interplay of hormones and the brain' (Gurian 2001, p 18). Of course, it goes without saying that learning experiences and environmental stimuli that vigorously engage a boy's attention span will assist in counteracting some of the effects of

testosterone. Unfortunately for teachers, there are other factors at play which make this a difficult feat to achieve on a consistent basis. One of those factors is the neurotransmitter, serotonin.

Serotonin is a type of neurotransmitter (chemical messenger) that facilitates communication between the brain and body and is generally linked with processing emotions and acting as a calming mechanism (Gurian 2001; Nagel 2003; The Society for Neuroscience 2002; Strauch 2003). It also assists in regulating body temperature, sensory perception and the onset of sleep (Carlson 2000). Researchers associate high serotonin levels with high self-esteem and smoothly controlled muscle movements while lower levels have been linked with irritability, impulsivity, aggression and in extreme cases, violence and suicidal behaviours (McEwen & Seeman 2003; Mann 1997; Sylwester 2003). What is interesting in the context of this article, and education overall, is that the male brain secretes far less serotonin than the female brain, generally resulting in males being more impulsive and fidgety (Gurian 2001, 2002). Think of all the boys who just can't seem to sit still in classrooms everywhere and you can understand why that might be the case. It is also interesting to note that serotonin levels appear to impact on attention deficit and other movement-related school behavioural maladies typically diagnosed and associated with a school's male population.

Another interesting factor worthy of consideration and related to boys, their brains and movement lies in the notion that males, and the ways that their spatial brains operate, tend to learn better by doing rather than by listening or watching. Moreover, the younger the male, the more physical space they tend to use when they learn (Karges-Bone 1998). Consequently, as they strive to understand or perform various tasks, boys also tend to spread out and

move about and can, quite naturally, find themselves invading another student's physical and personal space. A teacher who is unaware of the neurological necessity of boys to use space or in the midst of an undersized and overly populated classroom could innocently assume the behaviours she sees are those of boys being impolite or out of control.

A final point of consideration regarding movement is that while schools tend to appear to be places of movement and action, much of a school day is spent with the expectation that students will be sitting down to 'learn'. How often do we encounter curriculum plans or daily strategies that facilitate and provide for movement other than in the subject area of physical education or during serendipitous moments or lunch breaks? It also seems that while girls do not need to move around as much in a learning environment, research suggests that movement appears to stimulate learning and unites all brain levels while engaging both the right and left brain hemispheres of all young learners (Hardiman 2003; Sylwester 1997; Wolfe 2001). Therefore, planning for and accommodating movement can not only stimulate both male and female brains but could also be used to manage and relieve the impulsive and fidgety behaviour noted above. This is surely food for thought as educational bureaucracies struggle with how best to work with boys and how to enhance learning environments for all children.

Movement is but one small example of how contemporary neurological research is informing our understanding of the brain and how neurology can be used in an educational context. Cognition, maturation, the role and processing of emotions, motivation, relationships, and the behavioural tendencies of children are all being looked at through the combination of neurological and educational lenses. Considering that, from a

neurological standpoint, much of what we know about how the brain operates and develops has only been discovered in the last decade, there does appear to be an infinite number of possibilities for enhancing how we work with the young minds of children. From early childhood contexts to those who work with adolescents and beyond, education stands to become a field where our understanding of teaching, learning and indeed humanity is bound only by our reluctance to embrace what science is beginning to offer. For that reason and as stated from the onset, this is indeed an exciting time to be working with young minds.

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About boys

The core of the matter

From her research into brain function, Dr Martine Delfos concludes that we can enhance boys learning by taking into account their preferred ways of responding to classic stimuli but to also keep in mind that, for children in general, school is primarily a place to meet peers. Our teaching strategies should therefore encompass boys' preference for competitive behaviour; a cognitive style oriented more towards discovery and rote-memory; and a need for strong peer connections.

Gender differences

There are important differences between men and women that are not only expressed in their physical appearance. Subtle brain differences can make people behave very differently. Clearly biological and evolutionary factors explain why men and women are different, however, the similarities between them are even more striking. In my work on the differences between men and women I put forward arguments on a biological and evolutionary level for these similarities, which could free up our thinking about gender roles.

Human beings are born extremely vulnerable and must be taken care of for many years. The maturation of our brain takes some twenty-five years to reach mature functioning and continues to mature even longer. No species takes that long to mature and to adopt adult functioning, so the roles of men and women needed to be interchangeable to ensure the survival of the species. The dimorphism of the two sexes, however, has resulted in a more refined species. Consequently, the differences are the baseline and the similarities the second layer. I will not go into this further, as it is beyond the scope of this article; however, one of the results of my research is that men and women

know interchangeable behaviour, but that they are basically attached in their behaviour to their fundamental role. This leads to the concept of preference behaviour (Delfos 2004a). Men and women can display similar behaviour, but when they are confronted with a fundamental situation they tend to display different behaviour. The most fundamental situation is the confrontation with danger and the emotion of anxiety that goes along with it. In these situations men and women display their preference behaviour. In this context danger not only constitutes a physical threat but also a cognition, a most prevalent danger in these times. For instance, 'Will I be able to pass my exam and will my parents be proud of me?' This type of danger and anxiety may appear on a daily basis.

Anxiety as a basic motive

It is often anxiety that causes babies to cry during the first months of life. The child is anxious, experiences a need that is not satisfied but does not possess sufficient means of communicating his wishes to those looking after him. Even Watson (1924), who was convinced that all behaviour was learnt behaviour, even love, considered anxiety as an innately present basic emotion.

In autistic people, especially children, anxiety is quicker to

emerge (Delfos 2004b); but the older the autistic child, the more s/he understands how things work. Also, those around the child understand the child's anxiety better and are better able to respond. Autism involves a fundamental problem with social interaction and thus a problem with human nature itself. Autistic people therefore have much anxiety because they cannot easily evaluate social interaction. But even for non-autistic people social interaction is quite complicated and can generate much anxiety. Anxiety diminishes with the increase in possibilities of communication (Delfos 2000), at least if the parents and carers respond to the child's needs.

Anxiety is a basic emotion, and is an important drive for behaviour. Men and women react differently to anxiety. The response to anxiety can be active or passive, to take action or not to take action. In its extreme form it may lead to aggression or withdrawn, anxious behaviour, even depression. Anxiety is indelibly linked with aggression and depression. To clarify this connection, I outline below the anxiety scheme presented in detail in Delfos (2004a, 2004c) where the consequences of anxiety for psychosomatic diseases are presented in a psychosomatic model.

Anxiety and stress

Anxiety and stress are interrelated. Stress is in fact a form of 'danger', by which we mean both a physical and a psychological threat. Table 1 outlines the various forms of danger, with examples.

In reaction to danger, the brain gives a signal to produce hormones, triggering a chain reaction in the body. Anxiety, aggression (here we mean specifically physical aggression) and depression can be brought together in a single hormonal model, at the same time illustrating the differences between men and women with regard to anxiety, aggression and depression (Delfos 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). The model is reproduced in Figure 1.

Danger may entail a physical threat but also a negative thought. Danger activates the stress system (HPA: hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical system) and makes the body produce stress hormones, including adrenalin. A number of physical processes are set in motion, enabling the person concerned to take action. The heartbeat accelerates, causing the blood to be pumped faster through the body and oxygen to be carried faster to the muscles to fight or take flight, and to the head to stimulate thinking. Respiration intensifies to get more oxygen into the lungs. The pupils dilate to be able to take in more visual information. The body is brought into a general state of arousal, enabling it to face the danger through the fight-or-flight response (Selye 1976).

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the model in detail, but important to stress that men and boys tend to react to anxiety by taking action, possibly evolving into hyperactivity in boys, sometimes into aggression; and that women and girls tend to react with not taking action resulting in the possibility of depression. The difference in production of adrenergic hormones especially adrenalin (very easy and quick to be produced by the body) and

Table 1: Forms of danger

Form	Example
External direct physical danger	Someone who is about to hit me
External indirect physical danger	A fire breaking out
Internal direct physical danger	A sudden pain in my body
Internal indirect physical danger	A symptom such as fever
External direct psychological danger	Someone who threatens me verbally or pressure exerted by another person (stress)
External indirect psychological danger	Arachnophobia
Internal direct psychological danger	A negative thought emerging
Internal indirect psychological danger	Pressure I experience myself (stress)

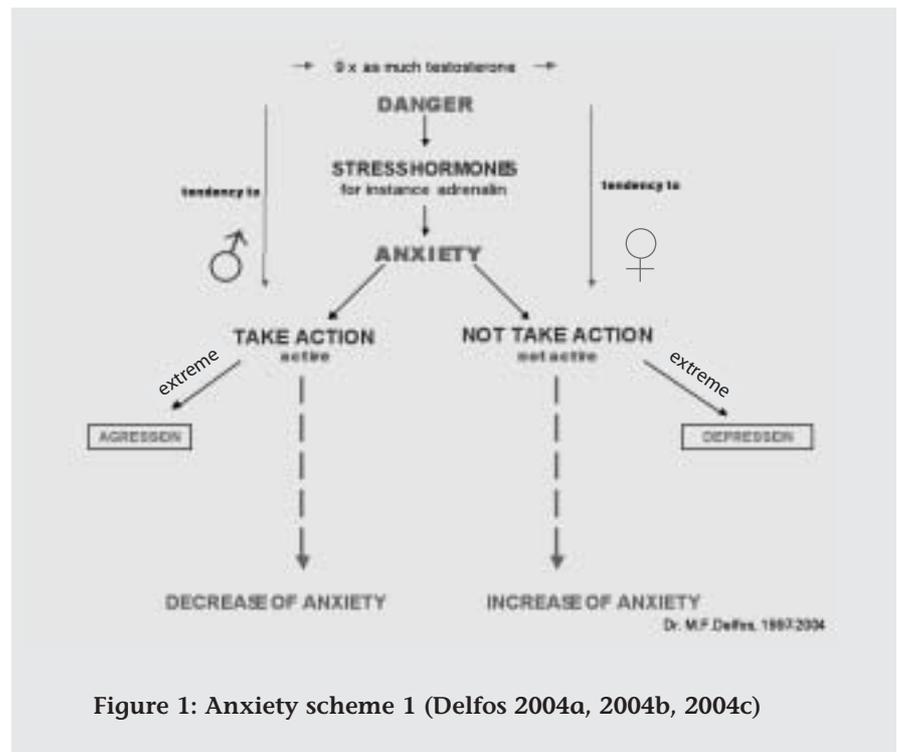


Figure 1: Anxiety scheme 1 (Delfos 2004a, 2004b, 2004c)

androgens, especially testosterone (easy to access in male bodies as it is bound to proteins in the blood and quite difficult to produce for female bodies) makes quite a difference in behaviour.

It is not that men do not experience anxiety in the face of danger, but often they are more effective in facing it because they take action. The point is that the emotion of anxiety is coupled to the production of hormones like adrenalin. Taking action 'uses'

adrenalin, and as a consequence diminishes the anxiety.

If there is good balance between testosterone and adrenalin (T/A), it is possible to take action. If both are at a high level, aggression may occur. If we have not enough testosterone for the amount of adrenalin, we cannot move into action and depression can develop. If adrenalin is not translated into action, it may become harmful to the body. Psychosomatic symptoms may be the result of this process. For

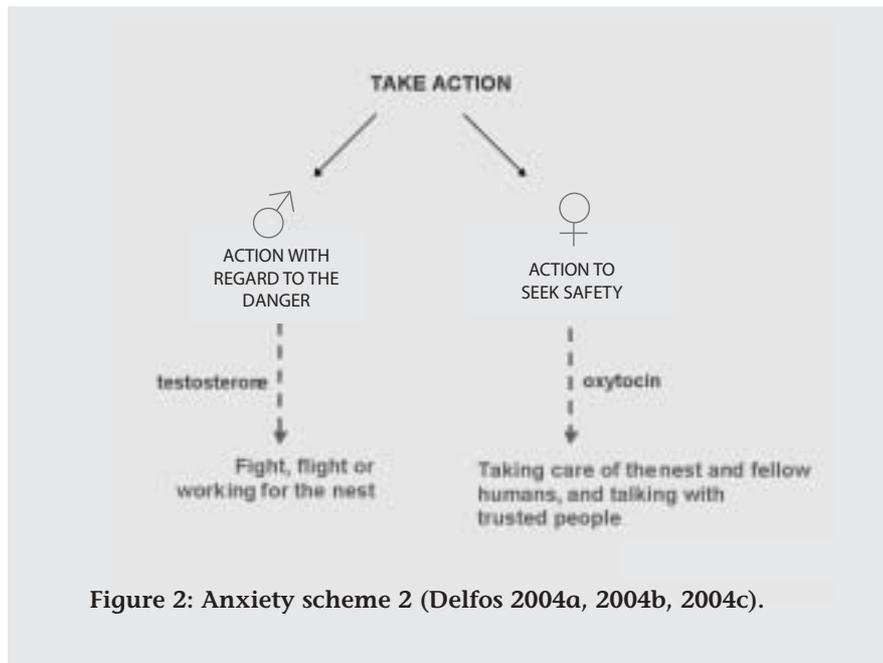


Figure 2: Anxiety scheme 2 (Delfos 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

the psychosomatic component of anxiety–aggression–depression, see the psychosomatic model (Delfos 2004a, 2004c).

Obviously, the action we take does not always solve everything. The most effective approach is, of course, any action that actually reduces the danger. Nevertheless, bringing about some reduction of anxiety through physical activity is positive in itself, even if only to boost our flow of thoughts.

Since aggression, which is linked to testosterone (Van der Dennen 1992; Delfos 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) can be viewed as the most extreme form of action in the face of danger, it is not surprising that problems of aggression occur significantly more often in men. Men are not less fearful as such but are often more effective in dissolving their fear because they tend to move into action. On average, men are much more solution-oriented than women. Because men act, they experience less anxiety and for shorter periods. In fact, they have an effective method of getting rid of feelings of anxiety. Women are less inclined to act and as a result feel more anxiety and for longer. The most extreme form of inaction is depression. Someone with depression is listless and can hardly be persuaded to

move. Women therefore have depressive symptoms much more frequently than men.

In terms of action, there is a difference between men and women. Men have a stronger tendency toward action, to deal with the danger and they initiate physical activity sooner. Women, on the other hand, have a greater tendency to act by seeking security and help when faced with danger. Under the influence of the oxytocin hormone, women will be more inclined to look after the nest, the children or the housework and talk to their female friends (Taylor et al. 2000). See Figure 2 above for the difference in action in men and women facing danger and stress.

If we take the consequence of this difference in action between men and women seriously, we can better understand a number of problems between the sexes. We often see this pattern (working versus talking) arising when men and women are in stressful situations. The most painful among these is possibly the loss of a child, probably the strongest grief known to humans. The risk of divorce is particularly serious in this situation (75%). The cause of the divorce is the different way in which the man and the woman respond to the pain of the loss of their child.

Women blame men for ‘escaping’ into their work and not talking with them about their child. Women do not sufficiently realise that working is a strategy for the man to alleviate his pain about the loss, just as talking fulfils the same function for women. These are two solutions to the problem, rather than one, and the two pieces together can solve the puzzle. The same pattern can be observed when a partner dies, for instance. Men who are widowed tend to concentrate on their work and neglect their family; women tend to focus on their family and neglect their work (Worden 1996).

Fight and flight can be seen as two basic responses to stress, two coping mechanisms mainly found in men. Because of their physical predominance and orientation, they have a stronger tendency towards a physical response to stress. Women tend to respond less physically and their reactions to stress are therefore more social and psychological in nature: tend and befriend.

In my work I go beyond this and discovered that fight-or-flight are the male reactions to danger, but that women in fact have two strategies (Delfos 2004a) The two basic responses of women are being nice and being a victim: the nice-or-victim response. Both are strategies protecting against attack. One does not attack victims or people who are nice. In the animal kingdom, we observe this for instance in the case of a puppy which, when taken for a walk, may meet a larger dog. The puppy presses itself against the ground to indicate that it is the smaller, inferior one and the larger dog need not attack it. Women’s most common coping mechanisms are therefore ‘nice’ or ‘victim’ (Delfos 2004a).

These strategies used by men and women in the face of danger and stress are exhibited equally in boys and girls. The most important problems for boys at the end of primary school are behavioural; with girls the most frequent problem is a tummy ache, a psychosomatic

reaction. It is important to keep this in mind when we are talking about boys and girls and the way they learn at school and react to problems. Boys tend to externalise their problems (outward directed, aggressive behaviour), girls tend to internalise (inwardly directed, anxious and timid behaviour) as Achenbach (1978) showed us so clearly. Many children with the (false) diagnosis ADHD are boys that react with energy and hyperactivity to a problematic surrounding, for instance the divorce of their parents (Delfos 2004c) and have no maturation (ADHD) problem as such. The externalised behaviour as a reaction to problems can also lead to an evaluation of social inadequate behaviour and fosters diagnosis as PDD-NOS whereas it is only a boy reacting in a 'sane' way to an 'insane' situation (Delfos 2004b).

This difference in externalising and internalising behaviour already shows us that boys need an educational surrounding with more possibilities to express their energy and their discomfort. In thinking about learning strategies we should take into account that boys have a tendency to act and that teaching programs with more action and experimenting in them would be more appropriate for boys.

Still there are more elements to take into account. Another one is the cognitive style of boys.

Cognitive style

As humankind is born as a very fragile and vulnerable species, babies have a lengthy experience of being dependent on others for their security, food and so on. They form an imprint of helplessness, or aidant (Delfos 2004a), that they need other people to feel secure. So, from the beginning boys and girls are driven by behaviour to ensure their security.

From their fundamental being these drives differ in the behaviour it fosters. Boys seek their security through competitive action, trying to get a good place in the hierarchy.

When they are young they do this by fighting and you can see how important it is by the price they pay. They are willing to accept bleeding noses and bruises in order to discover their place in the hierarchy and climb one step higher. When they become adults the competition in order to secure their place in the hierarchy continues with cars and salaries.

For girls the situation is different. They know very soon that they cannot compete on a physical level and they choose another strategy. For them the first strategy is to be liked. They feel secure when people like them, because they know that normally you do not attack someone you like. The problem is that the other person is not supposed to know that girls are displaying behaviour in order to be liked, because then it is considered hypocritical. In their most important virtue, being kind to others, women have a double agenda: they need to be liked. As they grow tired of this strategy, being kind all the time and putting their own interests on a second level, women choose a second strategy: victim. Once again, they know the rule is that you do not attack a victim. So they feel safe from the danger of being attacked. Here too, the reason is hidden from the other person lest it be considered fake. For girls and women it is very difficult to attain security. Being liked is very unstable and takes a lot of energy and constant evaluation, whereas competition can end in a fairly clear conclusion.

So, competition is a basic strategy for boys and men to seek security. As it is a fundamental strategy it means that in school, boys need competition in order to feel stimulated and know their place in the hierarchy: fight being the first strategy for boys and men. When fight is not possible or too dangerous, the boy and man can take recourse to flight. In school we encounter this in the strategy of not doing their homework and playing truant.

For girls the first strategy, being liked, leads to doing her homework and to paying attention in class. When they cannot live up to expectations, girls have recourse to the victim strategy and ask for help. As a matter of fact girls do well at school at every level, also university, because of their strategies. Already Heymans (1932) researched male and female capacities in universities.

. . . of all capacities and characteristics that can be considered as conditions or signals of scientific qualities, only general knowledge, zeal, perseverance and patience, regular class attendance, docility, orderliness and accuracy in studying and a good memory are more often observed in female than in male students; with respect to accuracy with quantitative research no considerable differences are being observed, whereas on all other aspects men are in favour (Heymans 1932, p 140).

Girls tend to have good school results through non-specific factors, which we could call 'learning conditions'.

The strategy of girls is more often to please the teacher, whereas that of boys is more to compete with the teacher. We have to take that into account when developing teaching programs for boys.

Another aspect of cognitive style, beside the non-specific factors and the urge toward action, is the tendency of boys to experiment and to understand the working of something.

We have known this for a long time; boys are more interested in objects and girls are more interested in human relations. But the research of Connellan and her group made it very clear: from the first day after birth, boys tend to look longer at objects and girls tend to look longer at faces (Connellan et al. 2001).

We see boys' tendencies to discover the meaning of material at work when six years olds are given modelling clay to play with as they

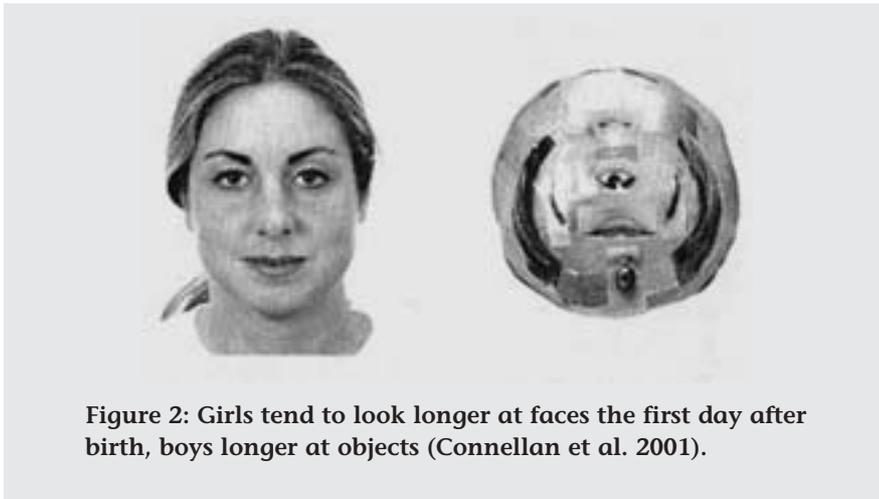


Figure 2: Girls tend to look longer at faces the first day after birth, boys longer at objects (Connellan et al. 2001).

please. Boys soon prick the clay and smear it on the table while girls make puppets and trees. Boys want to discover the characteristics of the material and as a result will be able to use it in very different functions years later, whereas girls will tend to cling to the use they were taught.

Trying to discover the workings of something is an important cognitive style of boys, and therefore teaching should incorporate experiments and discovery as important learning mechanisms.

Learning strategies of boys and girls

The learning strategies and educational surroundings of boys and girls as a result of the aspects we considered above could be very different. Boys have a tendency to action, and need action in class. A variation between movement and sitting still is more important for boys than for girls.

In order to stimulate their progress boys need to compete and struggle their way through the class hierarchy. Their cognitive style is more oriented to discovering the workings of a subject and they are less oriented toward pleasing the teacher. Their thinking is more competition-driven, whereas the thinking of girls is more security-driven. Educational campaigns about venereal diseases show how this applies. Girls and boys are different in the way they respond to slogans. If we want girls and boys to think

about safe sex we should formulate different slogans:

Security-driven, more girls and women:

If you don't want to get a disease you shouldn't have unsafe sex.

If you cannot really trust yourself or your partner you either be honest about it and use condoms, or withhold from intercourse.

Competition-driven, more boys and men:

Would you use condoms if intercourse would give you acne?

A real man uses condoms, even when it is not necessary.

Boys, more often than girls, develop idiosyncratic learning strategies. This is especially true for autistic children. Autism can be considered as the more extreme male brain (Asperger 1944/1987; Baron-Cohen 2003; Delfos 2004a, 2004b). Autistic children develop their learning strategies by themselves. Their learning strategies are different from other children because they are not developed through contact, and consequently not from what they learn at school. People with an autistic disorder use different strategies to call up things from the memory than non-autistic people. They do not use categories to organise facts or to remember them better (Bowler, Matthews & Gardiner 1997). It is as if they just store facts. 'Remembering' occurs automatically, without being based on a strategy.

This form of remembering can be seen with young children. Berversdorf and Hughes (2000) indicate that facts are not remembered within a context, but as loose data. They indicate that neurally this can be expected in the brain, because the brain cells in certain areas (for example the hippocampus) with autistic people show fewer branches and fewer connections with each other.

In general boys have a better rote memory and girls have a better short memory. Men collect facts, women are more oriented to the relations between facts (Delfos 2004a, 2004b). In teaching one should be alert to these differences. An exam based on rote memory will generate much better results with boys than an exam based on relations between the facts.

Separated or mixed education

All these aspects of difference in learning by boys and girls could easily lead to the idea of single-sex education. Much research shows the benefit of single-sex education, but mostly the benefit is for girls. In fact, boys probably do better in languages in co-education classes, whereas girls do better in mathematics in single-sex schools (Van de Gaer, Pustjens, Van Damme & de Munter 2004). However, simply, single-sex classes in co-educational schools can help girls perform better but does not challenge the problematic male macho culture and may even exacerbate the situation if you do not change the curriculum to adapt more the learning needs of boys (Jackson 2002). Girls have higher real career aspirations when educated in single-sex schools (Watson, Quatman & Edler 2002).

Single-sex education in single-sex schools seems to improve the results of both boys and girls. However, the results suggest that this effect can only be effectuated when differential teaching styles are developed (Younger & Warrington 2002).

So the question is not whether one should choose single-sex or mixed-

sex education, but how teaching styles can be adopted to learning strategies of boys and girls.

In co-education, single-sex classes together with mixed-sex classes can help boys and girls to perform better together with learning to live together. Still, we should not underestimate the effect boys have on girls. Girls sense less belonging in co-educational schools. We should take account of this. Their feeling of security seems less developed in mixed-sex schools. This is important because boys and girls do not attend school to learn something, but first of all to meet peers! So, in order for school to be effective in teaching and social education the interrelations of boys and girls should be given ample attention.

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Martine Delfos is a researcher in children's behaviour and learning. Since 1975 she has worked as a psychologist/therapist/diagnostician with multiply traumatised children, young people and adults. Martine has a broad scientific specialisation encompassing aggression disorders, autism and eating disorders. Her scientific expertise is especially on the construction of models of human behaviour. She has lectured and published widely on gender differences, behavioural problems, communication, autism, trauma and abuse. As a researcher she is committed to developing biopsychological models directly applicable to work with boys and girls.

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bulletin board

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What would you say are the best bits about the program?

Too many to mention. This is my third Master's, and it is by far the best resourced and certainly the best supported. An absolute joy to be involved in thanks to the tremendous support received from Deb and her team. (Just give me more time in each day!) Everything I learn impacts directly on the boys in my classroom. I have seen a marked difference in not just what I teach, but the way I teach and how they react with me and engage with learning.

I am seeing boys through new eyes. Before, they were just 'creatures to be endured' — well, maybe that's a bit strong, but you get the drift. But now, I have an ongoing love affair with them. I understand them and would happily take boys-only classes.

What do you find most challenging about the program?

Just getting the study done is challenging. Work a minimum of 65 to 70 hours a week at my job (LOVE teaching and it's the only life I have), and trying to fit in study as well is an ongoing juggling act — like trying to do a jigsaw on the back of a ute travelling 100 km per hour down a rutted country road!

What is something you have put into practice from having done the course?

I have changed pretty much everything. I teach in a totally different way to what I did three years ago.

What is something you have learned as a result of your studies in Educating Boys?

Crumbs — what haven't I learned? Probably I have learned the most about myself as a teacher and the misconceptions I had about boys and their learning.

Course details

The program offers flexibility for busy teachers. At least three courses are offered each semester and students can begin either semester one or two. On completion of the **Graduate Certificate** graduates can apply to continue to complete the **Master's** program. To complete the Graduate Certificate students must successfully complete a total of 40 credit points made up of one core course and three electives. Graduates can apply to continue on to the Master's program. For the Master's program, students need to complete 80 credit points.

The program is full-fee paying, with payment of the fees directly to The University of Newcastle. Costs are likely to be \$750 (inc. GST) per course. There is also a general service charge. Course fees may be a legitimate tax deduction.

More information is available at

www.newcastle.edu.au/courseinfo/handbook.htm

or contact Michelle Gifford on 02 4921 8739 or

email Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au

Boys in Schools Program



bulletin board

Do you want a whole-school approach for Rock and Water?

The Boys in Schools Program and Gadaku Institute now offer a one-day introductory Rock and Water workshop

One-day introductory

The Boys in Schools Program can now offer one-day introductory workshops around Australia with our newly qualified instructors who have been trained extensively by Freerk Ykema.

The one-day workshop provides a survey of the entire course focusing on the first four lessons of the program which include standing strong physically and mentally, introduction to the Rock and Water attitude (in physical and verbal confrontation), Rock and Water in the schoolyard and in relationships (What kind of friend am I? Too rocky, too watery?) It will also include breathing exercises, exercises for boundary awareness and body language

This is a great way to familiarise many staff with the Rock and Water principles in your school/organisation. Maximum of 30 participants per workshop.

Total cost: \$2300.00 (inc GST) plus any travel and sundry expenses. Price includes 15 starter manuals, one basic exercise video, one perspective theory book, and is presented by our qualified instructors.

Three-day course

The Rock and Water Course offers teachers a new way to interact with boys in relationship to their physical and social development, though the program can also be taught to girls.

Physical exercises are constantly linked with mental and social skills. In this way the program leads from simple self-



defence, boundary and communication exercises to a strong notion of self-confidence.

The program offers a framework of exercises and thoughts about boys and manhood to assist boys to become aware of purpose and motivation in their lives.

Topics include: intuition, body language, mental power, empathic feeling, positive thinking and positive visualising. Discussion topics in the three-day course include bullying, sexual harassment, homophobia, goals in life, desires and following an inner compass.

New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory

All NSW, ACT, NT tours and one-day introductory workshops are organised by the **Boys in Schools Program**.

For registration and information contact:

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Fax: 02 4921 8686

Email: Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au

Newcastle 2–4 March

Sydney 7–9 March

Canberra 10–12 March

Darwin 15 March (one-day introductory)

Darwin 17–19 March

Western Australia

Perth 6–8 April

Wesley College

Susan Laughton

Email: slaughton@wesley.wa.edu.au

Ph: 08 9368 8047

Victoria

Melbourne 3 April (one-day introductory)

Boys in Schools Program

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Melbourne 28–30 April

De La Salle College

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Queensland

Mackay 14–16 April

Beaconsfield Primary School

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Fax: 07 4969 2255

Cairns 18–20 April

Djarragun College

Vimal Shankaran

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Ph: 07 4056 3555

Coolool 21–23 April

Coolool High School

Liz Mortimer

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Ph: 07 5448 1555

Toowoomba 3–5 May

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