



# The Boys in Schools

**BULLETIN**

→ Practical Initiatives Addressing Boys' Needs

PRODUCED BY BOYS IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM OF THE FAMILY ACTION CENTRE



## in this issue

- making music
- dismantling motors
- having fun

all in a day's work for  
boys in schools

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# The Boys in Schools BULLETIN

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## The Boys in Schools Bulletin

- Focuses on practical initiatives in schools
- Puts teachers in touch with others who are trialing new approaches to boys' education
- Supports and encourages a constructive debate on boys' education issues
- Develops materials and programs to assist teachers in their work with boys
- Provides information on new resources directed at boys

### Guidelines for contributors

*The Boys in Schools Bulletin* is a practical journal for teachers and educators. The content should motivate and inform those who work with boys and young men to try new approaches which benefit the boys, the school and the whole community (including, of course, the girls).

The sorts of questions we use when asking about initiatives are:

- Say a bit about your school: What was the initiative and who was it aimed at?
- What happened?
- What lessons did you learn?
- What advice would you give to other teachers as a result?

This doesn't have to be a formula but the information must be about what is happening with boys in schools. If you are in any doubt, have a look at previous issues of the *Bulletin*. Or contact us and talk about it:

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## Editorial



We're here already — the final edition for the year.

As the stories from schools have shown, it's been a great year for educating boys. **Spreading the boys' smiles** and **There's more than one way to be a superman** are examples of how schools and clusters are tackling the complexity of boys' issues

and planning a range of interventions. The solutions are never about one program, but about a change in school culture to include and celebrate boys' achievements while offering clear expectations and guidelines for them. The Boys in Schools Program analysis of boys' strategies show that schools getting it right for boys work with three principles: their projects are data-informed, strengths-based and solution focused. Yet, as the article on **Gender equity in schools** from the USA illustrates, our current theory, policy and ideas about gender often hold back our thinking and practice of strengths-based work when it comes to boys.

Luckily, many schools are encouraging the boys to lead the way on having a voice and on choosing a multitude of ways of expressing their male identity. **Boys ride the waves** and **High-school boys band together** show the fun and learning that can happen when boys are given scope to express themselves and develop and showcase their talents. **The FARM** and **Science weaves its own magic** let us know that it's not only the boys who can be creative. You great teachers of boys out there are also willing to step outside the square and try new approaches and programs to meet the needs of boys in real, relevant and radical ways.

Good on you. The boys appreciate it, and if you would like all your hard work recognised, please put up your hand for the National Awards for Quality Teaching and nominate your school.

The Boys in Schools Program continues to support your work with great resources, post-graduate courses and staff development programs, including on-going action learning, so check out the Bulletin Board for reviews, new resources, and up-coming events. The DVDs are great value — hear it from the boys! Next year, you can get the *Bulletin* in a CD format that you can put on your school intranet, as well as the print format. Don't forget to resubscribe before the end of the school year. And have a great break — you've earned it.

### Deborah Hartman

For the editorial committee

Our **front cover** features the fabulous artwork of Ben Hammersley, a Year 12 Art and Design student at St Stephen's School, Duncraig, WA. The painting is based on the theme of 'identity' with Ben exploring the concept of self in terms of his genealogy. Hence, the overlay of images featuring his family. The work reflects the style of Andy Warhol and Pop Art, whilst retaining a unique contemporary approach. Many thanks for sharing your work, Ben.



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#### Disclaimer

Other than the Editorial, the ideas and opinions presented in the *Boys in Schools Bulletin* are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the ideas and opinions of the Boys in Schools Program or the Family Action Centre.



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# practice



## Boys ride the waves

Reaching out to communities in Far North Queensland

In their weekly radio program, Amos Mooka, Cameron Harris and Bradley Lovie reach out to the boys at Abergowrie College, their families and communities across the north of Cape York and Torres Strait. Here they tell us in their own words what this program means to them.

Abergowrie College is near Ingham in Far North Queensland. A Catholic secondary school for boys, all but two students are boarders. In recent years Abergowrie has become increasingly recognised for its successes in taking up the educational opportunities and challenges for boys, and for Indigenous boys in particular. This year over 90% of the students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and come from all over Queensland.

In 2002, Abergowrie College was placed in the top ten schools in Australia's Best School competition. Among the tangible signs of the successes of boys from the college are the following figures: 99% of graduates from 1999–2004 are in tertiary education, apprenticeships, traineeships, and general employment; Indigenous retention rate in Year 10 to Year 12 was 87%; and Year 11 to 12 completion rate was 91%.

In 2004 our Premier, Mr Peter Beattie, wrote to us, to our parents and the staff: 'Abergowrie College is setting the pace in Indigenous

It's strange because now we are the ones saying to our guests, 'Don't worry, we'll look after you'.

education in Queensland'. That made us very proud.

At our school staff are always on the lookout for ways to get us involved in our education. The variety they offer us is exciting. The radio program we are going to tell you about is just one of these.

Each Friday at one o'clock the four of us — George, Amos, Bradley and Cameron — meet in an office to conduct our weekly radio program through 4MW Torres Strait. Despite being over 1000 kilometres from the radio station, we talk to parents, carers, and communities all over the north of Cape York and the Torres Strait. A lot of schools have an on-campus radio station. What is different about this is that we are on mainstream radio, out there in a

genuine way, running our own program. This program has been running for nearly eighteen months, and has become a way for us to communicate with families and communities of the boys here. One parent calls the program 'Our weekly newsletter'.

Last year three other boys ran the show with George Wosomo, a Year 12 student and the fourth member of our team. We were a bit envious of them and were keen to try it ourselves. The first few times were nerve-wracking. We just kept remembering, 'Look after each other'. Amos is the clown among us. He's the one who has a bit of a go at our guests and at us. After getting over our first nerves we are pretty relaxed now and just enjoy what we do. It's strange because now we are the ones saying to our guests, 'Don't worry, we'll look after you'.

In our program we reach parents, carers and communities of the boys at Abergowrie, but we also hope that what we are doing and how we do it encourages other boys here. The boys we especially think of out there are the ones either struggling to stay at school or finding school boring. We want to encourage them by showing them things can be different.



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• matter of saying  
• 'You can do it!' —  
• We ARE doing it . . .  
• and we never  
• imagined we could!

At first our show consisted of our being interviewed by Dacko, the presenter on Thursday Island. These days our show is very different. We now begin with a run down of news and events. We cover themes such as Anzac Day ceremonies, representative sports achievements, awards received by students, and reports of parent meetings.

We follow this with a feature interview. We interview scholarship winners, coaches, our deputy principal, the artists among us, and some boys just because we know they will make a good interview. Among our special guests we have had members of parliament, outstanding student achievers, boys who have been involved in other special initiatives, staff that we want to profile to families and communities, and special projects going on at the school. We always finish the show with 'Cheerios' — our chance to send special messages to individuals and groups of listeners.

The challenge is to have material for the show, not just material that interests us, but material that will keep our listeners with us; and Friday comes around very quickly. As soon as we get over one Friday we have to get thinking about the next Friday.

George is really the mainstay of our show. He has been doing the

show every Friday since the beginning — turning up on time, putting his lunch off until after the show, every week coming up with ideas to make the next show better. Actually he has shown us real leadership in his commitment and that has taught us that this show is not something any of us can turn up one week and say, 'Oh, I don't feel like it any more'. Some people might think that we are just a group of mates who do this. In fact, we are friends, but maybe this show has made us better friends. Between shows we have our own mates that we get around with. That's a good thing because we all come from different 'parts' of the school.

So what are we learning from being part of this weekly show?

The obvious lessons are persistence and responsibility. You see we can't just not turn up and not turn up on time and unprepared. We could do that. We could forget to send our brief to the station. We could go slack on our preparation, but that would have awful implications for us, for the radio station, for listeners, for the college, and for all the boys here. We have learned that taking on a commitment like this is not so difficult. Yes, there are weeks when one or more of us feels less enthusiastic than the others. That's when support for each other and understanding each other comes in.



George Wosomo (right) talking with Susoimi KetvHELL-Bon about a just-completed radio program.

We probably surprise ourselves when we think of what we have achieved.

A lot of people talk about resilience. If resilience is about being able to put disappointments behind us and keep going, then this program is great for that. Some Fridays we come off air and we all know that we didn't go as well as we usually do. Instead of letting the disappointment get on top of us, we have learned to say, 'We did our best; but we must work harder on next week's show'. Sometimes the reasons things don't go as sharply are things we can fix up. Sometimes the reasons are things we can't control. We have learned to see the difference in these. We have learned that as fearful, nervous, or anxious as we might be, getting on with the job and going past our fears really works, so that in the end what we thought would be a disaster becomes a success.

Before we took on this work none of us really wanted to work on radio. We've learned that with organisation, planning and the support of each other, the impossible can happen.

We use Standard Australian English for some of the show, but often we use our own language — the language people in the Far North and Torres Strait.

Of course this work could lead to a career or part-time opportunities for us. We know that, but it is not our

priority right now. Cameron has said he is seriously thinking, later on in life, of starting up a radio station in his remote, rural hometown. He now believes that he can contribute to his community in a real way.

We try not to be a little group that does its own thing. Always, when we are planning our next show, we think of how we can involve as many boys and staff as we can. We don't just pick out 'the best' to be our guests. Instead we dare ourselves to help speaking on radio to work for boys who might find it hard. We get a big lift when our guests finish and we can see on their faces that their self-confidence has grown, that they are leaving 'walking on air' as we have done.

Our most important learning has been a simple one. It's not just a matter of saying, 'You can do it!' — We ARE doing it . . . and we never imagined we could!

We are able to do this because we have some people who believe in us and our abilities. We have got staff that really look for ways to bring out our abilities, and can recognise our potential. And we think it has taken their believing in themselves enough to be able to let us have a go. To do something like we are doing you have to have someone at the school on staff as committed as we are, and you have to have someone at the radio station like

our friend, Dacko, who is committed as well. The management of 4MW really believes in the value of our show, not just for us, but for the listeners.

We are not saying that every school should try to have a radio program. It is not the radio program that is important. It is more important for us that we have had an experience of being adventurous, of being courageous, of being responsible, of taking the initiative, and following through with that. It has been more important that we have been able to do something worthwhile for our families and the wider community. It has been important for us that we have experienced this kind of community work and confidence building as a part of our education. It is hard for us to put into words what this work is doing for us — you might get some idea if you could be with us when we are on air.

We are going to give Amos the last word:

'Every week I feel as though I am talking directly to my family, my community, and the young fellas in the Far North and Torres Strait. Knowing they are listening makes me want to say worthwhile things to them.

'Last week my Dad called after the show. He told me he forgot the show was on when he turned on the radio the first thing he heard coming out of the radio was my voice. He said he got such a fright. I know the pride and confidence doing this show is bringing out in me, is rubbing off on my Dad, my cousins, and lots of people.'

The radio program team is made up of Year 11 students Cameron Harris from Julia Creek, Bradley Lovie from PNG and Amos Mooka from Injinoo. George Wosomo is the Year 12 student involved. He is president of the student representative council and is from Saibai Island.



## High-school boys band together

And it's music to our ears . . . well, mostly

Faced with two Year 7 classes, which included a large number of rowdy boys, Sandra Browne stepped outside her comfort zone to deliver a practical, hands-on approach to music.

Myrtleford Secondary College is a government high school situated in Myrtleford, a country town in north-eastern Victoria. There are about 220 students in Years 7 to 12. We offer a wide variety of subjects, which are supported by a dedicated staff.

*How did the music program come about?*

At the beginning of the 2005 school year all staff were invited to a 'Boys in Education' Professional Development day run by Deborah Hartman, Stephanie Tranter and Ken Bright of The University of Newcastle's Boys in Schools Program. The team highlighted the need to engage boys more in their education and with brainstorming from the teachers a number of new ideas were formed.

As I'm the resident music teacher, I wanted to create a music program that would be interesting to both boys and girls. I wanted to get boys in particular more involved in class activities. Rather than seeing music

as a time to mess about on instruments, I wanted them to use that time in a way that would create ongoing progress in class.

The program I created was aimed at two Year 7 classes who had little previous musical experience in a classroom. Both classes had a strong boy element, which meant plenty of energy, short attention spans and the ability to make lots of noise.

*What happened?*

The first step was to create an informal take-home survey asking students about their musical tastes and interests. It also asked if there were any parents who played musical instruments (particularly dads) and if they were willing to come into school and perform for the classes.

Not all surveys were returned but there were enough to get a good idea about the musical tastes and opinions of the students. Unfortunately, there were no fathers who played musical instruments to support the program.

Many students acknowledged that they liked coming to music, and both girls and boys wanted to do more hands-on activities in class rather than all-writing ones.

*How did you plan your lessons?*

Each class only has two lessons a week and therefore the classes needed to cover a number of musical subjects each week. These included theory, performance, listening, music appreciation and self-evaluation.

• **Even boys that had**  
• **no prior musical**  
• **experience were**  
• **smiling . . .**  
•

Rather than expect all the students to have their books with them each week, the students were given a folio in which to place their worksheets and finished assignments. The folio also contained a listening journal. The students were required to listen critically to music each week in class and write down their thoughts and opinions. Leaving the folios in class each week helped to make sure everyone had their books and materials to work on.

Every week started with a listening journal. The boys were not really into writing about the compulsory music I chose but they knew that the hands-on activities were to follow and wanted to get to that part of the class.

The students were then given work on drums, keyboards or guitar: instruments that everyone loved to play. Tasks were clear and finite so a result was achieved by the end of the double period of music. Each student might be working on a part of a song that was played as a class by the end of the lessons. Even boys that had no prior musical experience were smiling when the whole class played the piece we were working on during the lesson.



• **Abdul, Jack, Tom, Amber, Sarah**  
• **and Brigitte on track with their**  
• **guitar playing.**

## 'What do you mean we have to pack up?'



Rick, Teigan, Brendan, Kyle, Cody and Cassie developing their drumming skills while Tane plays the acoustic bass.



Developing their musical personalities: James, Will, Jack, Ben and Andrew.



A new band formed by the Year 7 students this year: Brigette, Tane, Cassie, Sarah and Will

Each worksheet was signed off by the teacher at the end of every class and added to the folio so all students could see how they were progressing. The signed sheets and comments I wrote to each student every week in the listening journal were used as the basis for the parent-teacher interviews later in the semester. Music theory was taught as part of the hands-on activities in class.

### *How did the classes respond?*

At times the students were so enthralled in what they were doing that I had comments like, 'What do you mean we have to pack up?', 'Can we play it again?', 'Wow, that time went fast!' This from boys I would have expected to avoid being involved and becoming ratty in class.

By the end of the semester, every student was able to play three to five chords on guitar, three chords on keyboard and could play with a degree of confidence a rock beat on the drum kit. For those students who were moving more quickly in class, I had extension work based on the class lesson for the week so that they didn't get bored or become unsettled.

### *Did you have any concerns?*

I was unsure about these Year 7 classes in the beginning as there were a number of difficult boys in the classes and I knew that if they were disruptive we would have a terrible time. The music room is rather small, and with twenty plus students in the room at a time it can feel very crowded. I divided the students into groups when playing the instruments, and these groups rotated around the class during the lessons so that all students had a go at all instruments sometime during the lesson. This helped to keep all of them involved; at some point in the class time they would be able to play on their preferred instrument.

The girls in the classes were rather quiet and shy to begin with and I was wary that they might feel

overwhelmed by some of the boys during music. Working in smaller groups allowed me to get to most students each class to give one-on-one encouragement and personal feedback.

Because I tried to make the lessons enthusiastic and exciting for the classes there was always a lot of 'noise' coming from the music room, something that worried me at times because there's a fine line between making a noise and making music.

## There's a fine line between making a noise and making music.

### *What changes did you see in their attitudes?*

By week six the students were so enthusiastic about music classes they were beating a path to the door after morning roll call. Previously, they were sometimes late to class, but this stopped once they knew what we would be doing. They were all eager to get involved.

As a result many of the students (including boys) showed a real aptitude for playing one of the instruments (keyboards, guitar, drums) and are now continuing their musical development in bands that rehearse each week in school. Some of the Year 7 students became involved in a hothouse activity where they organised a musical performance to the primary school with huge success. The Years 5 and 6 classes now want to get to high school so they can play musical instruments as well. Some of the students have even been proud to let me know that they now own their own instrument (bought by parents and grandparents).

I always felt a great sense of satisfaction watching boys and girls play with enthusiasm and with a desire to continue in music. I found

that I really needed a recess to recharge the energy levels and to mentally evaluate how the classes had gone and if it could be improved in the future.

*What lessons did you learn?*

I found that enthusiasm breeds enthusiasm. Setting an expectation of success for the students had them rising to the challenge to do well. With the boys on track, the girls were able to work without interruption and saw success in their work, too.

Many boys were, by their own admission, not good at English and maths, and liked to come to music, as it was one of the only subjects they were 'good at'. Music lessons are structured differently to other subjects and boys enjoy making music. The trick is to guide their music-making activities into a more formal approach in the classroom.

**I had to be prepared to throw away past ideas and become more creative . . .**

I learned to see lessons not as a noisy and exhausting time but as a time where many students were able to develop their creative ideas and feel proud of their achievements. The professional development program was very timely for me as it helped me to formalise some of my ideas and really think about how to best engage boys in music.

I got to know the strengths and weaknesses of my students and was able to see a musical growth in all of them. Many would ask me about instrumental lessons and how they could improve their abilities. Some even suggested to me that I might like to see the songs that they themselves had written.

The students were disappointed to know that music for them only went

to the end of the first semester. Whetting their appetite for music was my aim and I hope all will chose music as an elective next year.

*What advice would you give other teachers?*

It's great to know that there are professional development programs that can help teachers with the question, 'What do I do with all those noisy boys who are often in a world of their own?' I had to be prepared to throw away past ideas and become more creative in trying to engage boys in music classes.

Having a genuine enthusiasm for my subject helped me want to see success in my classes and I was willing to look outside my view of how music could best be taught. Constant praise and positive feedback to the students really helped to develop their sense of self-worth and their desire to keep trying in class.

If something falls flat in class, it doesn't matter. Just reassess how you can best approach your subject and be prepared to think very creatively. A classically trained music teacher, I often had had to step outside my comfort zone at times to get the best for my students. Seeing a smile of success, a feeling of confidence or a student wanting to spend lunchtime practising makes it all worthwhile for me.



Some of the students are enthusiastic enough to want to be involved in more than one band. This gives them the opportunity to be part of a performing group: Andrea, Tane, Rick, Eleisha and Tom.



An all-boys band formed this year. Jack, James, Will, Abdul and Ben



Small groups of friends are actively encouraged to play the school instruments: Cody, Teigan and Sean.



Sandra Browne always wanted to be a music teacher, her desire even when she was in primary school. Sandra's biggest highlight occurred in 2003 when she was involved in musically coordinating a whole-school production, *www.procrastination*, an original work written, performed, cast, directed and starring students and teachers from Myrtleford Primary. It was the talk of the town for weeks, and a video of the show was made and purchased by many of the school community, their friends and relatives.



## The FARM

Fostering Achievement and Resilience in young Men

When Michael Woolf started tinkering with some old alternators to try to engage some of his more difficult boys, he had no idea it was the embryo of a very successful outdoor classroom.

When I started at Conder Primary it was my first year of teaching. I was a young male teacher with a rural background and a 'typical' boy's attitude. It was uncanny how some of the tougher-to-manage boys seemed to pick this up. Before I knew it these troubled young men were seeking me out to talk, and even vent some of their anger, about issues they were having in and out of class.

As the year moved forward I became increasingly disappointed that these boys were becoming less and less successful in class and more and more successful in acting-out behaviour. This is when the idea struck me — an outdoor classroom where these boys could come to learn some more practical hands-on skills, as well as develop a different attitude towards coming to school.

The ideas and the philosophy were pretty simple. My experiences on farms and in some of my labouring jobs through uni had given me plenty of ideas for activities. The aim was straightforward: to get these boys to enjoy some success at school. Surely it would follow that success in the outdoor classroom would lead to success in the regular classroom. But getting things started was not that easy.

To begin with we just had some old alternators from a friend who worked as an auto-electrician. As there was no time other than my own, I used to take a couple of boys during my release and we would muck around with these old car

● **Little did I know**  
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● **FARM'.**

parts, pulling them apart and discussing theories on what made them work. As we progressed through the term a few more boys started to come along so we needed more space and more gear. We moved out to a small, grassed area at the back of the school admin building. Little did I know that four years down the track this area would have a \$6000 fence and become what is now known as 'The FARM'.

Moving on to the present, things have really changed. Two teachers new to the school produced a document that enabled the school to get a grant based on the above philosophy. With this money we were able to build a shed and buy some tools. The hardest part was coming up with the name and how things would work. As with all 'big' things there were a few contentious issues amongst teachers involved as well as those not involved. Members

of our P&C were a little concerned that this program was rewarding 'naughty' boys for misbehaviour. The teachers involved in the program couldn't agree on how things would run (rules, consequences, etc.), and the school as a whole was trying to figure out a way to staff the program during regular school time.

So how did we fix it? Well, some of these issues are still to be solved. But as the program continued it became more and more apparent that the boys were really starting to achieve things. Their attitudes towards school were really changing and it was quite moving to see them come to school happy, with something to look forward to. Quite different to their attitudes at school 'pre-FARM'.

As this success became obvious, attitudes began to change. The parents who had voiced objections were now volunteering their time and expertise to the FARM program. As you can imagine, the workload for something like this can get really out of hand, especially when you are trying to balance it with your regular class commitments. As the teaching and parenting community became more involved and supportive, things really started moving along. We had donations of lawn mowers from a local repairer as well as old engines from the nearby mechanics. Our pumpkin crop was a 'bumper' and the boys enjoyed a lovely batch of pumpkin soup on a cold winter's day. We found some old wooden



From an attendance record that was drawing him close to the compulsory-repeating number he began to turn up at school every day.

sleepers and made some garden beds and — perhaps the most motivating activity (from the boys' perspective) — was the construction of some coasters and chopping boards that were made from beautiful red box eucalypt, burnt in our bushfires the previous summer.

I could go on and on about these activities, but it would draw attention away from what was really happening. In terms of what you might be considering for your own school, this is what really hit home for me. One particular boy who, it would be fair to say, was our school's most challenging, started to make some real progress. From an attendance record that was drawing him close to the compulsory-repeating number he began to turn up at school every day. From his only communication with teachers being grunting or swearing, he actually started to talk about his weekends and his life at home. After swearing at his teacher's assistant one day, he apologised without being asked. This boy now prefers to go to class for buddy reading — even when it is his time slot in the FARM.

The message for you as you sit reading, already contemplating what you could do, is a really simple one. We started with throwaway car parts that took ten minutes to source. The initial activities were really basic and took no expertise whatsoever. As





things started changing behaviour-wise, the easier things became to organise, simply because people wanted to get involved. So have a go. Try something easy first, and limit the numbers. Check if anyone else is keen to help (including parents and the community) and adapt as you move along.

We now have a fully functioning outdoor classroom that is staffed three hours a week. We have so many people trying to get involved that we are organising activities for next year, and most importantly there are some boys at school who actually think school is not so bad after all.



Michael Woolf started his teaching career in 2001 as a music teacher before moving onto his first class in 2002. Since then he has taught all primary grades except kindergarten, and particularly enjoys working with those students who display the most colourful behaviour. At the end of this year Michael is moving to a new school where he hopes to start a similar program. If you have any enquiries or would like some ideas or help in starting your own project, feel free to contact Michael at [michaelwoolf@aapt.net.au](mailto:michaelwoolf@aapt.net.au)



## Science weaves its own magic

A new approach to teaching Year 9 boys

Science teacher and part-time wizard Keith Smith used key findings from research about common learning styles and a preferred learning environment to ignite boys' curiosity about science. It's not all smoke and mirrors: his results speak for themselves.

As a beginning teacher it didn't take long to recognise that boys were not keeping up with the constantly improving statistics of the girls. Even in maths and science, the traditional subjects of strength for boys, the results were not comparing well. In other school-based statistics — such as truancy, suspensions and class disruptions — the boys stood out.

In late 2000 I listened to Triple J radio interviewing Richard Fletcher, who discussed a range of issues concerning boys' education. The following year Richard was a guest speaker at a conference I attended focusing on boys' educational problems and strategies to use at school and in the classroom. I gradually integrated what I'd heard, and by late 2002 our head teacher agreed to form a 'boys-only' class. The aims of the project were to improve the educational results and pleasure in learning for a science class of Year 9 boys and to demonstrate that boys will improve their educational performance when more appropriate and effective teaching and learning strategies are employed.

### Class description

The twenty-seven boys selected for the class were those who had achieved average to below-average results in Year 8 science (see Figure 1) where the highest rank out of 161 students was 60 and the lowest 128 out of 161 students (see Figure 2). They came from a wide range of socio-economic

backgrounds, and levels of motivation for completing schoolwork varied. The variation in the nature of these boys was typical to that found in most classes.

• **At first [the boys]**  
• **. . . felt singled out**  
• **and feared social**  
• **ramifications in the**  
• **playground,**  
• **especially being**  
• **seen as a 'homo'.**

When the boys first walked into the classroom they quickly noted the absence of girls. At first many protested saying, 'Where's the girls? What's going on? We want the girls.' The boys seemed unsure about the strange class arrangements, felt singled out and feared social ramifications in the playground, especially being seen as a 'homo'.

Once the class settled we discussed the problems in academic performance of boys around the western world and some of the gloomy statistics concerning boys' education. I explained the reason for forming the class, as well as the nature of the assessment procedure and close monitoring of their performance. Some boys' objection to the latter intention was not a

surprise. However, when the teaching style and learning environment was described to them, their enthusiasm lifted. By the end of that first lesson they had committed themselves to the class and the aim of the project.

The first topic we covered was electricity. A video introduced the topic, providing a source of information to build a timeline of the historical development of electricity. Then we enjoyed a series of practical lessons, where we constructed circuits, produced electricity and magnetism, investigated fuses, batteries, conductors and insulators. We finished off by building a working model of an electric engine. Two teams competed to successfully build the model. Notes were kept to a minimum and were replaced with diagrams where possible.

The next topic was 'Earthquakes and volcanoes'. Practical work was used less in this topic. Volcanic eruptions were demonstrated using chemical reactions and honeycomb. We investigated crystals in rocks, the effect of cooling rate on their size and of how convection currents moved crustal plates. Research tasks using the library and computer technology were used to assess research skills. We also simulated the investigation of an earthquake event as a classroom activity. Notes, in the form of labelled diagrams and short explanation, made up less than 30% of the required bookwork for this topic.

These units of work highlight the value of employing more active teaching and learning approaches. All topics used a significant element of practical work, and the example supplied for the 'Earthquakes and volcanoes' unit was in fact the least practical topic taught during the year.

Boys were on task, especially during practical and visually presented lessons. Off-task conversations were managed so that

boys' efforts and concentration were maximised. The boys demonstrated a productive level of effort during class time, and were given some freedom to converse with each other to minimise the need for constant correction. Notes were written for the purpose of revising for examinations and to prepare for the next practical lesson. The promise of the next practical lesson was enough incentive for most to remain focused on their class work.

## The results

For most of the boys there was a definite improvement in their application to work in science. While their results in bookwork demonstrated only a small improvement of 5% over the year, there was evidence that this was a gradual and consistent improvement. The number of boys receiving 'excellent' marks increased through the year. The boys completed work during class but

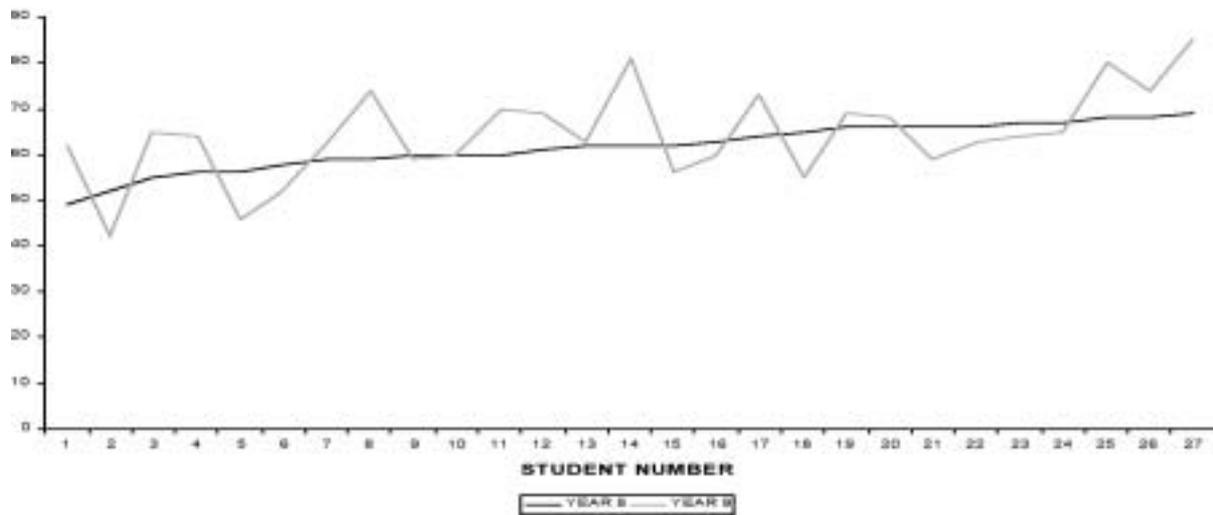


Figure 1: Assessment mark comparison, showing the boys' rank or position in Year 8, and then in Year 9.

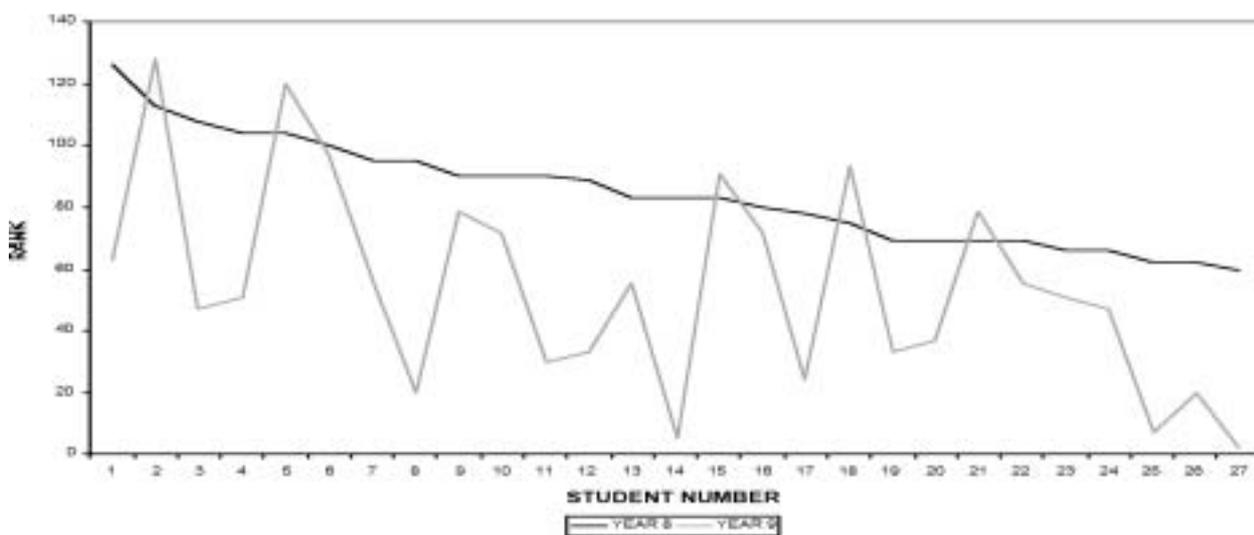


Figure 2: Rank comparison. Note: as the students rank approaches the bottom axis, the better his performance.

often failed to catch up on work missed during absences. However, the three boys who disliked school completed their work in class and handed in almost all assessment tasks on time. Class discussion on lesson-related concepts enjoyed strong participation.

When the boys' final-year results were compared with their performance in Year 8, using the same benchmarks employed to measure student achievement, more than 50% demonstrated some — if not significant — improvement in their performance (see Figure 1). However, a comparison of their rankings gave a more accurate picture of their success as well as being a fairer comparison. The level to which they improved compared to their peers doing the same topics and common assessment tasks had exceeded expectations. Eighty per cent of the boys improved their rank position; one boy improved by as much as seventy-eight ranked positions. Fifteen per cent reduced their performance, losing as much as eighteen ranked positions (see Figure 2). As a class they produced the second-best class average, and improved by an average of 31.5 ranks per student.

## Strategies used and student reactions

### Gendered classes

A boys-only class allows a teacher to focus more on the common learning styles that boys share (Butz 2003), instead of alternating this style to accommodate the learning needs of a greater variety of students. Targeting the teaching strategies that kept the boys interested improved both concept and skill acquisition and increased the productivity of lessons. The boys of this class eventually built a team spirit. As their success was reported back they encouraged each other and responded to the competition within the class.

Lee Callum, principal of Humpybong Primary School in Queensland, found gendered classes



produced fewer distractions from the opposite sex so that both genders benefit. Behaviours and attitudes to learning are more positive, and self-esteem for both genders improve in single-sex classes (Callum 2001). Gender distractions are commonly believed to peak in Years 8 and 9, and therefore influence the effectiveness of the learning outcomes achieved by both boys and girls. These points suggest that gendered classes in Years 8 and 9 would potentially provide the greatest benefit.

### Learning style

Preferred learning styles have repeatedly been shown to differ between genders. Research indicates that two-thirds of boys generally prefer logical, visual, global and hands-on approaches, whereas girls generally prefer linguistic and personal approaches. Research by Tony Butz, a teacher who conducted an independent study, verified the findings of *Boys: Getting it right*, the House of Representatives inquiry into the education of boys. The report recognised that schools predominately employ learning styles preferred by girls (Butz 2003).

With this class the teaching and learning was more practical in its nature. Lessons were 'prac'-based as often as possible. Students carried out investigations and experiments or demonstrations of concepts were provided. For example, we built model skyrockets to investigate the

To introduce a topic called 'Alchemy' I dressed as a wizard alchemist and performed controlled explosions, changing the colours of flames and solutions and turning copper coins into silver and gold.

principles of rocket functioning, as well as using concepts of Pythagoras, acceleration, azimuth and elevation to determine height, distance, speed and direction of the rocket.

To introduce a topic called 'Alchemy' I dressed as a wizard alchemist and performed controlled explosions, changing the colours of flames and solutions and turning copper coins into silver and gold, while outlining the story of the beginning of chemistry. As well as igniting enthusiasm for the new topic, a timeline of the summarised points was produced from this lesson. The boys applauded and cheered the performance, which in turn lifted my enthusiasm. This strategy benefited the boys by keeping them on task during class time, presented the lesson concepts in a way that favoured their method of taking in and processing information, motivating interest and improving their understanding of the concepts being taught.

The boys' notes took the form of video summaries, concluding statements, labelled diagrams, graphs, tables and shorthand experiment reports. Handwriting was still being done, but less of it and in

a way that boys prefer to record, read and learn from. This freed up valuable class time to do practical lessons, problem solving, skill development or literacy tasks, rather than copy information, get bored, and interrupt the lesson progress. I knew that most of the boys did not like 'words' as they are the ones who protest the most when writing is to be done in my classes.

Consequently, they would be even less likely to read through their notes when revision was required. Research tasks were kept to answering the questions briefly but specifically, using their own words and a variety of resources. Practical demonstrations were recorded in their books as labelled diagrams, graphs or flow diagrams whenever possible.

The boys benefited from a variety of learning strategies that provided understanding through the use of visual media such as video documentaries, television programs and movies when this was appropriate. Computer programs, such as star charts and molecule model building, were used when available.

There was a positive response to open and casual discussions where

wider issues or deeper understanding of the concept or the application of the concept was required.

Discussions dealing with sensitive and social issues were more challenging, but their attitudes remained largely positive. The use of discussions offered some boys the opportunity to develop an understanding of the concepts being taught, and for others to enhance or clarify their understanding.

Like many of their peers, these boys often experience particular disadvantages in reviewing and studying for examinations as a result of having shorter attention spans and a preference for activity. The class was encouraged to adopt a method of study in preparation for exams which was shorter but regular; beginning a week before the exam spending about ten to fifteen minutes each time reading over their book work, prac reports and assignments, getting someone to ask them questions, and practising key skills covered during the topic. This was only partially successful as only some boys followed the advice.

Although this program was successful with classroom application it was limited in its ability to change attitudes to homework.

## Monitoring and feedback

I collected and graphed the progress of the results in all assessment tasks and presented these on an overhead projector for the class to see. Names were substituted with student numbers to protect individual identification. Everything was analysed and compared to their performance in Year 8. The boys appreciated this consistent feedback, giving it close attention in class. Areas requiring more effort were identified for the class as a whole to improve, and performance comparisons between previous assessments showed whether the class was making positive or negative progress. Books were marked using a systematic approach where the class was assessed consistently in completing work and doing the presentation of their work to a prescribed standard (see Figure 3). At the end of each topic this assessment sheet was attached to their books identifying work that was incomplete, missing or not done to standard. Identifying the areas where marks were lost specifically demonstrated how improvement for future topics could be achieved.

## Strength and discipline

Dr Tim Hawkes, headmaster of The Kings School in Parramatta, NSW, compares boys to bulls testing fences for weaknesses. He concluded that boys need strong boundaries as they 'generally admire strength and will fondly remember strong teachers, but will pity or scorn weak, compliant teachers' (Hawkes 2001). He reinforces the need for firm discipline. According to Terry O'Connell and his Restorative Justice model, boys have a strong sense of justice and require firm but fair discipline. Terry's model involves conferencing, where victim and offender air grievances and agree on a course of action that corrects the wrong in a fair and acceptable way. This model was used (when necessary) with the boys in working out the day-to-day issues that arose in class. If an agreement could not

Topic	Activity	Mark
<b>Presentation (Mark 4)</b>		
Title Page	Diagrams	
Maps	No Graffiti or Scribbles	
Headings Underlined	Legible Writing	
Books Glued In	Correct Spelling	
<b>Completion (Mark 6)</b>		
Experimentation	Changing copper into gold	
Diagrams	Writing of chemistry	
Diagrams	Developing an atomic model	
Diagrams	Structure of the atom: Parts 1 to 3	
Diagrams	Periodic table	
Experiment	Properties of the elements	
Exercises	Elements, compounds or mixtures	
Definitions	Elements, atoms, compounds, molecules, mixtures	
Experiment	Decomposition of elements and compounds	
Experimentation	Chemical reactivity	
Experiment	Extracting metals	
Activity	Acid and metal oxides and deposits	
Activity	Fuel and metals oil	
Experiment	Corrosion	
Flowchart	Making aluminium	
Exercises	Chemical names	
Experiment	Physical or chemical change	
Experiment	Identifying a chemical change	
Experiment	Reaction products	
Comment:	MARK	10
KEY: C - Complete I - Incomplete M - Missing U - Un tidy		

Figure 3: Feedback assessment sheet



be made then more senior staff would become involved, but this rarely happened. Consistent discipline is critical in gaining boys' acceptance, respect, and cooperation in the classroom. Providing fairness through consistency in assessment, expectations, and consequences was also employed. For example, bookwork less than half complete and assignments not completed always resulted in 'non-award' warning letters, with minimum objections from students as they were reminded regularly and expected it. Since books were marked using a systematic approach that provided consistency and allowed the student to verify the validity of their result, they accepted the consequences without objections. I have been using this marking approach successfully for the past five years in all Year 7 to Year 10 classes.

Boys will often — and perhaps by their very nature — challenge a teacher they do not like, trust or respect. If boys can 'connect' with their teacher on a more personal level by sharing common interests (such as sport, cars, bikes or hobbies, being prepared to joke and have fun in the classroom and being relaxed when opportunities allow for it) then they are more likely to take notice of the teacher and what is going on in the classroom, therefore being more active in the learning process.

### Value of subject and masculinity

In the end boys will be boys. It is only natural that most males have masculine personalities. Boys need to feel proud of being male. Richard Fletcher recognises that 'as a community we are not sure what we want from men, what we value about men. So many boys and men don't know what their place is in society anymore and they are too afraid to ask' (Fletcher 2000). He then went on to say that these issues 'are occurring throughout society', regardless of socio-economic or educational circumstance.

The value of masculinity was consistently communicated in class relating to the past, present and future. The personality characteristics of both male and female scientists that attributed to the success of their work were identified, while highlighting that masculinity and femininity — although different — complemented each other with the particular strengths each gender and individual brings to society. I challenged the negative statements about boys that are too often openly communicated. 'Boys are less mature or mature later than girls' was replaced with 'Boys mature differently to girls'. Boys are considered to be more aggressive than girls, but in what way? Boys are generally more physical in their aggression, and yet it is commonly recognised among colleagues that girls can be cruel in the way they victimise, often emotionally damaging the psychological development of the victim. Neither gender is 'more' aggressive; they just differ in their approach. I have witnessed teachers, parents and students from both genders communicating these counter-productive stereotypes. Such comments damage self-esteem and often become self-fulfilling prophecies. Perhaps the influence of these stereotypes is what the research results are really measuring rather than an inherited deficiency in male personality.

I demonstrated to the class a belief in the value of my subject to society in the past, present, and future, and the skills that boys can acquire to benefit a life of modern living and working. I taught the content with passion, enthusiasm and from a position of an authority on the subject while being honest about not knowing everything there is to know. I communicated the value that society and future employers place on the subject of science in demonstrating a person's level of skill and intellect, but this can of course be applied to any of the subjects offered at secondary schools. Endorsing the importance of your subject encourages students to take your subject more seriously. The statement, 'The teachers' mastery of content knowledge and passion for the subject . . . was a key factor in student success' (Ayres, Dinham & Sawyer 1990) supports the importance of this aspect in all educational situations.

### Motivation

All these strategies combined helped to motivate the boys to want to accomplish better results. Making lessons responsive to boys' learning styles and making at least some of the lessons spectacular, motivated the boys to be on task during class and to put more effort into homework, assessment tasks and exam preparation. Catering for the preferred learning styles of boys kept the class interested and motivated to stay on task. Making the learning environment more 'boy' friendly made them feel more comfortable. An all-boys class with the purpose of improving learning outcomes made them feel special, worthy and motivated them to want to do better. Monitoring performance and reporting it to the class visually served as a constant reminder to work on improving their results, and they were more likely to engage in learning activities as they felt more comfortable to participate.

At the end of each semester I set aside a lesson to award certificates

for excellent performance in the range of assessment tasks and overall improvement on Year 8 final results. Lollies were also given out with the awards to make it more fun. Those who received a lot of awards and lollies or produced impressive performance received a cheer from the boys as a class. The class enjoyed and responded well to the special lesson. Acknowledging achievements to some extent encouraged the boys to want to be part of the successful group in the class. One boy had a very poor work ethic during the first half of the year. When he noticed that he missed out on awards during the first awards lesson he was disappointed in his performance and himself. In the second half of the year he produced much better marks to almost equal his Year 8 final assessment result.

Parents reacted positively when they were informed about the program. Many expressed the feeling of thankfulness that 'someone wanted to do something' for their boys. Parental enthusiasm for the goals of this project would have encouraged more motivation with homework, study and class work. Encouraging self-motivation and responsibility is essential for students' progress in all pursuits including academic.

## Conclusion

Schools need to reconsider their strategies and policies when educating boys for improved performance. Grouping students for learning styles allowed me, as their teacher, to focus on the teaching strategies that maximised their engagement. This allowed the boys to use their class time more effectively, improve their motivation to learn as well as positively influence their behaviour and attitude.

The teacher's personality, his/her attitude to boys and enthusiasm for the subject area can enhance boys' willingness to respond positively, apply themselves in class and participate more meaningfully in

learning activities. A single-gender class may allow boys to be grouped more effectively to meet their learning needs and minimise possible distractions.

The boys responded well to constant visual reminders evaluating their performance, and lessons devoted to rewarding and highlighting student achievement. The most important feature of this program was its ability to improve learning outcomes by increasing engagement during lesson time and by working with the boys' learning needs.

Since completing this program I have been developing Microsoft PowerPoint presentations and using computer technology to enhance the visual learning aspect of theory lessons. The use of computer programs for interactive learning has also been incorporated into the practical strategies.

There were no significant additional costs for resources in running this program. But there does need to be a change in school organisational policy, enough willing staff to implement the strategies, and a supportive executive. A commitment to adopting a more sensitive approach to the messages we give our boys about being male and the value placed on masculinity is something all schools need to implement. The many negative attitudes expressed about boys, widely endorsed by the media and society in general, must be corrected at a school level to reduce the harm such stereotyping causes.

The wonderfully positive results for this class of boys demonstrated that boys can improve their educational performance significantly given the right stimulus. Individual teachers or whole schools can implement these strategies right now without having to wait for government policy to catch up. So let's do it for the boys.

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**Keith Smith began teaching in 1997. Shortly after moving to Wagga Wagga High School in 2001 he attended a conference where he learned the teaching strategies that were incorporated into this program. Keith chose strategies that resonated with his experience of being a man, that he judged as being complementary to his personality and teaching approach as well as being beneficial to male learning. Due to the success of his boys-only class, the boys involved elected to continue the program into 2004.**



## Spreading the boys' smiles

Making schools a better place for boys

Concerned with the slow disengagement of boys in primary school, Suzan Hirsch set out on a mission to change the way boys are taught in three Sydney schools. Here's her story.

### Why boys' education?

Excitement, anticipation and nerves usually mark the first day of the school year. The sound of children playing echoes through the grounds until the bell interrupts play, signalling the start of another academic year.

The faces of the kindergarten children show a mixture of tears and sheer excitement. Stage 1 and 2 children eagerly line up for another exciting year. Yet, year after year as the Stage 3 children line up, there is a striking difference between the faces of the boys and girls. Girls look attentively at their teachers, their eyes reflecting a desire to please. Eyes lowered, the boys barely lift their shoes off the asphalt in order to slow the process of reaching the classroom. Once in class the boys clearly still want to be on holidays, soaking up the sun and fresh air. Negative comments about school begin almost immediately.

Every year I taught Stage 3, I was able to crack this negativity, but every year I wondered why so many ten-, eleven- and twelve-year-old boys looked so miserable and seemed so unhappy to be at school. Preoccupied with this thought, one day I noticed a flyer on the staff



room table, advertising The University of Newcastle's Master's Program in Educating Boys. I felt as though this was a strong calling, and by the end of the week I had enrolled in the program. Thus started my vision to establish a happy and productive Stage 3 environment for boys at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Asquith, in Sydney's north.

### Forming a boys' education committee

Putting my studies into practice brought substantial changes in the boys' attitudes and the more attitudes changed the more I wanted to achieve them! The Master's Program in Educating Boys units were done externally, yet I felt that the lecturers were very supportive. The units were practical and allowed

me to trial wonderful new approaches with the boys to achieve positive results. Through adapting programs to suit the learning styles of my boys, providing opportunities for male role models, nurturing the 'maleness' of these boys and understanding and meeting their academic and social needs, the boys' attitudes had changed. Many parents were happily noticing the change of attitudes towards school and learning. I loved the results I was getting with the Stage 3 boys and it was evident that the parents were thankful, but it was time to embed these boys' education strategies further, outside of Asquith.

Our school consultant for the Catholic Schools Office (CSO), Trish Wilson, met with me to investigate what I had done with my Stage 3 boys. She was keen to support my desire to spread my work into other schools and make changes at a system level. Funding was provided for me to run a Boys' Education Committee, which would conduct an action learning project throughout 2005. The committee would initially involve three schools with the possibility of continuing my work at different schools next year. Stage 3 teachers Kristy Campbell, from Prouille in Wahroonga, Kevin Turner, from Lindfield's Holy Family, and Mark Fawkner, from St Patrick's, were invited to join the 2005 Boys' Education Committee. We were supported by Suzanne Cavanagh from the CSO.

### Where did we start?

My task initially was to work with the committee teachers in semester one with the aim to highlight what was done at St Patrick's in 2003 and 2004 and to provide research, statistics and information on boys' education. In April, two committee members and I attended the 'Working with Boys, Building Fine Men' conference in Melbourne. This was a great way to start our committee as it allowed us to go to keynote presentations together,

allowing us to get to know each other and also attend a variety of different workshops and then report back to each other.

Our next focus was to collect data and valuable information about the Stage 3 boys in the three schools. This was done by examining existing data, interviewing teachers and through teacher observations. Data was collected by the committee members for each of the three schools and focused on the following areas: engagement, outcomes, behaviour and options.

We were mindful to include the boys' opinions, attitudes and feelings when deciding the areas which we felt needed addressing with the boys in Stage 3. Including the boys' opinions was absolutely paramount, as we needed to have views and evidence from the boys, not just teachers' opinions. The boys were given a survey to complete, which included questions that:

- addressed their feelings towards school and subjects
- investigated stereotypes of men and women
- focused on their self-esteem
- determined the characteristics of a 'perfect teacher'
- allowed us to find out who they would like to bring to school.

Once the surveys were completed a summary of results was collated for each school. During one of our meetings we analysed and compared our summarised survey results from all three schools. We came up with the most common answers and common key issues for each category, which we felt, may need addressing through a boys'



education project. These common key issues from the attitudes survey were taken into consideration with the data collection before creating our focus areas for the 2005 boys' education project.

The survey will be administered again at the end of semester two and this data will be monitored throughout the project to document any shifts or changes throughout the action learning project. When interpreting the results throughout the project it was vital that the teachers looked at the results objectively using evidence rather than drawing assumptions. Prior knowledge or teacher assumptions about each boy cannot be used, as the results must be evidence-based and accurate. We had to assume the role of the researcher, and remain impartial.

On completing the initial semester one professional development, background information and data collection, the task was to design an action learning proposal for a project to be conducted in semester two, with the possibility of further developments next year.

### The action learning project

We had now completed all the data collection, attended the conference and held many meetings looking at research, data collected and professional development. After careful examination of the data and surveys, the possibilities for the project were endless. One of the hardest problems was my desire to make the project a mammoth task, making massive changes in all three schools quickly. Although the three schools involved are close in location, the survey results were vastly different in many aspects. Consequently, we chose the most common problem areas. Although the same key areas would be addressed it would look slightly different in each school to cater for the different boys, school culture and resources. The three key areas were:



- male role models
- stereotyping/bullying/self-esteem
- learning styles.

Throughout the project implementation, we kept our meetings scheduled regularly and e-mailed frequently. After our 2005 action learning project has been fully implemented, we will have a boys' day at Challenge Ranch, Somersby, where the boys involved in the project from all three schools will participate in a fun day. In order to prevent the boys sticking with their school peers we have paired each boy with an e-pal from one of the other schools. The boys can now get to know each other by e-mail before meeting officially in person at the boys' day. The boys have been really excited about having e-pals, and this has been a great way for the boys to practice their social, literacy and computer skills. They have also been able to reflect on their participation in all aspects of the project with one another.

### Key area one: Male role models

#### Bringing fathers to school

We could see from the data collected and the boys' surveys that there was a strong need to include male role models and fathers in all three schools. When the boys were given a

list to choose from, and asked who they would like to bring to school, all three schools recorded dad as the most popular choice. Slattery (2003) points out that researchers say that Australian fathers are spending on average just 18 seconds each day talking to their sons. Steve Biddulph (cited in Slattery 2003) added that about 30% of Australian men rarely, if ever, speak to their fathers and they are becoming estranged. These are vital statistics that we felt we had to acknowledge and recognise the sheer importance of involving male mentors in schools to enhance male image. Therefore, we asked the question: *By inviting fathers to the school and breaking down those initial barriers, will fathers participate more in their sons' school life?*

All three schools have set up a 'Father's Friday', as we did at St Patrick's last year, where all the children invite their dad or other significant male (such as an uncle, granddad, godfather etc.) to participate in a whole school day. It is anticipated that the Father's Friday will 'open the doors' to fathers in these school communities to get involved in various areas of school life. At St Patrick's it was so successful that it has become an annual event. The father/significant male spends the entire day participating in classroom activities

such as art, sport, mathematics and reading etc. with the students. Below are just a few of the many positive comments we received from guests after Father's Friday:

- 'Thank you to the Year 5 teachers for a great day but also for the idea; I don't know anyone among my colleagues and friends who have had this opportunity. I really appreciate it and so did my son.'
- 'Thank you for Father's Friday. It was a perfect day by all. I had a ball with my son. I now know why my son loves school, it's because you make it interesting and fun. Congratulations on the day!'
- 'A great concept. I would recommend this be an ongoing event for Year 5 students. Everyone I have spoken to about this day has been interested, and would like to do the same with their children.'
- 'I had a great time being part of Year 5. It was great to get the opportunity to experience some of the day-to-day class activities. I must say that it was overwhelming to see how happy and relaxed my son was in his class environment.'
- 'Everyone I have spoken to since "Father's Day" has had nothing but praise for the day. The activities we shared, both individually and as a group, were enjoyed by all involved. It's a pity that I didn't have the same opportunity with my older children! Thanks again for a great day.'
- 'I had a great day and I WOULD NOT HAVE MISSED IT FOR THE WORLD.'

Holding a day like this requires plenty of notice to be given to the fathers and guests. It is vital that a number of dates are sent home as options, and then the most popular date becomes the official Father's Friday. This event not only provided a wonderful opportunity for the fathers to spend quality time with their sons, but also broke the barrier for those who considered the

classroom as a female domain. A list of suggested ways to get involved in school life was given to the fathers at the end of the day. This experience allows the fathers and guests to see their son in a school environment and see how school has changed since they were at school.

### Positive role models to enhance attitudes to literacy

Booth (2002) aims to help readers understand the literacy lives of boys, and in turn highlights ways to help boys break the stereotype of literacy as a feminine activity, one which would jeopardise their male image. There is immense importance in involving male mentors such as fathers in literacy activities. Throughout the surveys it was evident that the Stage 3 boys rated English as their least favourite subject in all three schools. The committee felt that this was something of concern. The attitude to English is low, but overall the literacy levels/results are not a reflection of this in all three schools.

We asked ourselves the question: *By organising male role models from the community to be a part of literacy activities, can boys' attitudes to reading change positively through the use of male mentors promoting reading as a positive activity?*

Involving male role models in literacy activities has been structured differently at all three schools:

- Prouille, Wahroonga, has Anthony Hill (author) visiting and working with the boys to develop their writing and reading.
- Holy Family, Lindfield, has high-school boys promote reading through a mentor reading program with the boys.
- St Patrick's, Asquith, has Manly Sea Eagles (rugby league) players participating in guided reading sessions over five weeks.

The purpose of the research is to provide these Year 5 boys reading opportunities that involve male

mentors. Through this we are investigating the boys' attitudes to see if it will help change the existing negative attitudes towards reading. The research will examine and investigate the boys' attitudes towards reading from the start of the research project through to the end by examining participation, body language, survey results, library borrowing statistics and the like.

### Key area two: Stereotyping /bullying/ self-esteem

Church (2002) states that despite parents' and teachers' best efforts to avoid gender stereotyping, almost all children go through a stage of categorising activities and personal styles by gender. This predominantly begins to happen at the age of five or six years, as at that age they are absorbing stereotypes presented in the media and community. One of the aims of the action research project is for teachers and boys together to identify, address, examine and question the stereotypes in the media and society. Therefore our focus question for this key area was: *Will the boys' responses in the attitudes survey change at the end of the year as a result of investigating these issues while participating in boys' programs?*

In 2004 I had a group of boys that I felt needed a specific 'Personal Development and Health' (PDH) unit focusing on stereotypical images of boys and male images portrayed by the media and society. I researched, created and trialed a 'Stereotypes PDH Unit' at St Patrick's last year with great success. During term three the boys in all three schools will use the program during their 'Personal Development, Health and Physical Education' time. The committee will work hand in hand to share ideas, experiences and resources.

There are many *great* things associated with being male, and this is explored in the PDH unit. There are often common traps that men

can fall into. This unit investigates these traps and presents some ideas and suggestions about how to avoid them as well as exploring the choices they can make. Stereotyping of boys/men by society and the media is explored, allowing the boys to understand the detrimental effects of the stereotypical macho male image. Showing and recognising feelings is explored, as well as strategies for controlling anger and violence.

The aims of the Stage 3 boys' program are to:

- Raise awareness of the limitations and negative effects of gender stereotyping.
- Encourage boys to explore the positive aspects of being male, and further develop their own self-esteem.
- Promote personal development and psychological wellbeing by exposure to alternative behaviours, skills and strategies.
- Provide the opportunity to rehearse these skills and strategies within a supportive environment.

As they walked through the door at the start of this year, the boys coming into my class asked whether they were going to do the PD unit like last year's group. Apparently they knew all about it from last year's class talking about it in the playground!

As well as this PDH unit I have introduced an after-school boys' program based on the Rock and Water course designed by Freerk Ykema from the Netherlands (see page 48 of this *Bulletin* for details). This program uses physical exercises which are constantly linked with mental and social skills. Boys learn to stand stronger in many ways. In the playground and the classroom they learn to identify their limitations and possibilities, learn to communicate more effectively, learn to feel, set and defend their own boundaries and to respect others' boundaries too. The program leads from simple self-defence, boundary

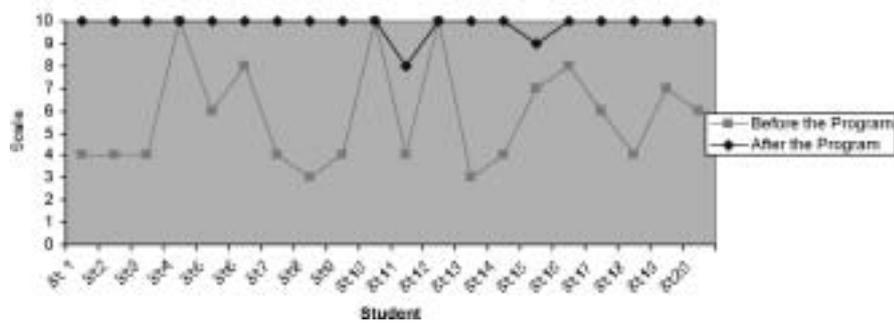


Figure 1: On a scale of 1–10 mark how confident you are at standing up to bullies.

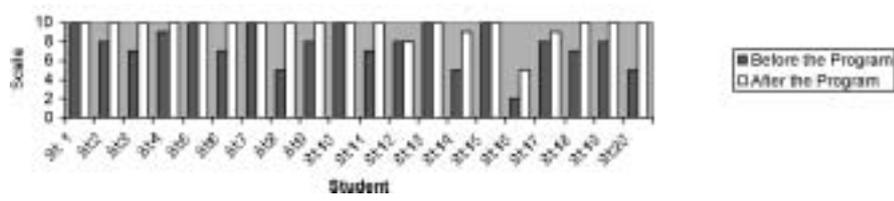


Figure 2: On a scale of 1–10 mark how happy you are with yourself.

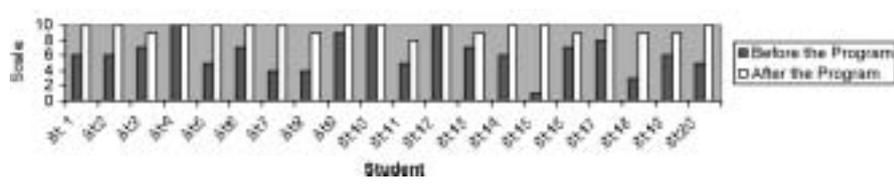


Figure 3: On a scale of 1–10 mark how confident you are at preventing or resolving fights.

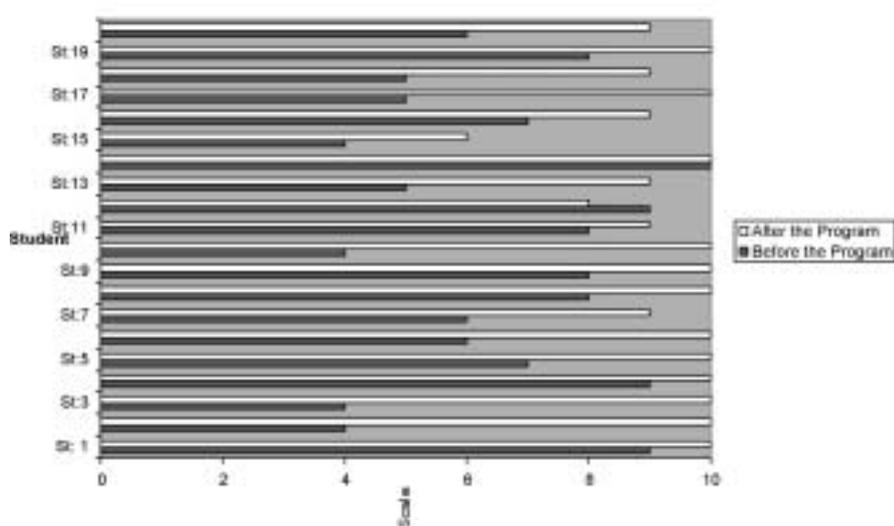


Figure 4: On a scale of 1–10 how often do you feel confident and good about yourself at school.

and communication exercises to a strong notion of self-confidence. The program offers a framework of exercises and ideas about boys and manhood to assist boys to become aware of purpose and motivation in their life. The program teaches them to use their power in a more effective way and shows them how to deal with different kinds of conflicts (the rock-and-water attitude).

I sent out a Rock and Water expression of interest form to fifty boys at St Patrick’s and received forty-two positive responses to participate in this after-school program. I was amazed, as I didn’t expect so many boys to want to stay back at school with a teacher on a Friday afternoon for one and half hours! As the eight-week program could only take twenty boys the other boys formed a waiting list for the following term.

The results of the program were amazing (see Figures 1 to 4). The parents wrote the most wonderful comments on their evaluation forms, the boys’ survey results showed improved self-confidence, abilities and skills to stand up to bullies. They truly loved the program and so did I! The exhaustion that all teachers face on a Friday afternoon was lifted when I walked into the school hall to find twenty beaming boys oozing with enthusiasm — a look that could have kept me going for hours!

**Key area three: Learning styles**

Our next aim was to work on the boys’ engagement and enjoyment of all Key Learning Areas (KLAs) as this was a common concern in both the data collection and boys’ attitude surveys. The committee is now seeing boys more engaged who are reporting in their journals that they enjoy the subjects they did not previously enjoy. These new smiles are a result of catering to each boy’s needs.

The boys in all three schools, from kindergarten to Year 6, completed a



our school consultant, Trish Wilson. Their support was vital for the success we have achieved, and will continue to achieve, for the boys in our care.

### References

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multiple intelligence (MI) survey based on Howard Gardener's Multiple Intelligence Theory to determine their 'dominant intelligence'. Each school now has a learning styles portfolio, which allows teachers to see the boys' intelligence preferences graphed.

Time was allocated for the committee to work together to create units of work, using the MI survey results as an underlying key element in the program. Existing Stage 3 programs from St Patrick's, which uses MI in all KLAs, was used as a guide. Assessment tasks must complement the approach of the program, as should homework tasks.

### Where are we heading?

The implementation of this action learning project is still in progress, and to date it is achieving fabulous results in all three schools with boys' attitudes improving towards school and learning. We are tracking the boys' progress through our reflective journals, photographs, continual student written and verbal evaluation, observations and interviews with the boys recorded on DVD, anecdotal records and parent evaluations. All the results, evidence and data we have collected collaboratively as a committee will be presented to our principals and some of the CSO staff of the Diocese of Broken Bay in November. As a

committee we will continue to collect the data and hard evidence to prove the project's successes. But the most important proof of the program's success that we as teachers need are the beaming smiles in the boys' faces, the enthusiasm in their manner, the bounce in their step, and their true passion for learning.

The opportunity that I have been given to spread these boys' smiles to other schools has been wonderful. The key has been the supportive and dedicated committee who shared the vision of making a difference to the boys we teach. Our passion was supported by the principals of the three schools: Suellen Garey, Julie Price-Randell and Kevin Bauer and



**Suzan Hirsch is a teacher and coordinator at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School in Asquith, Sydney. She is currently completing the final unit of her Master of Educational Studies specialising in Boys' Education at The University of Newcastle. Suzan will share her knowledge in the field of boys' education as a conference speaker at the 'Maximising Outcomes in Boys'**

**Education Best Practice Conference' on 24-25 November at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, where she will talk about adapting curriculum and teacher pedagogies to cater for boys K-6.**

**Suzan has a true passion for making schools a better place for boys and is happy to be contacted to assist anyone with this quest. For information about any aspects of this action learning project please contact Suzan on (02) 9477 3800 or email to: [shirsch@stpatsasquith.dbb.catholic.edu.au](mailto:shirsch@stpatsasquith.dbb.catholic.edu.au)**



# Gender equity in schools

## Findings from cognitive elicitations

Joseph Grady, Axel Aubrun with Michele Emanatian

The following article is an edited version of work originally undertaken in the USA in 2000, as part of the Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation's ongoing enterprise to promote gender equity, and more specifically as part of an effort to promote gender equity in the context of education. It was edited and reproduced here with kind permission of the authors and the foundation.

**The range and framing of views found among policy makers, academics, teachers and parents in the USA mirrors those in Australia. The report on these views provides an interesting framework for the ongoing debate about educating boys in Australia. *The Boys in Schools Bulletin* strongly advocates a strengths-based approach to educating boys (building on the strengths of the boys, teachers and community) and sees the school and classroom culture as crucial elements in providing successful education for boys. We invite you to examine your own views and to reflect on which ideas will be most helpful to you in achieving better outcomes for the boys in your school without disadvantaging the girls.**

### Introduction

We have set out here to determine how American adults concerned with education understand the nature of the relationship between gender and the school experience (as well as related identity issues such as race and class). We focus not on opinions about particular issues relating to gender and schools (some of which have been documented in previous polls and surveys), but on the more fundamental cultural models that define the key concepts associated with school and gender,

and on which the various opinions are based. A clear understanding of the public's deeply held and widely shared assumptions will be instrumental in shaping policy and practice.

### Method

The report is based on a series of twenty in-depth, one-on-one interviews — or 'elicitations' — conducted by Cultural Logic (see author profiles, page 32) with parents, educators, administrators and other adults in Massachusetts (primarily Boston and Cambridge, but also the west of the state) concerned with the issue of education. (Quotes from these interviews are reproduced in this article.) Subjects came from a range of ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds, and included a number of self-described conservatives.

'Cultural models research' (CMR) — based on cultural anthropology and cognitive linguistics — provides an unusually detailed picture of people's deeply held and usually hidden assumptions about a given topic. And unlike traditional qualitative research techniques that are typically aimed at discovering stand-alone opinions, CMR focuses on the connections between basic assumptions. Understanding these connections is the key to

understanding how people reason about a given topic, for predicting how the public will respond to new ideas, and for suggesting new ways to frame issues.

In summary, CMR is designed to provide a clear picture of strong, recurrent patterns in thinking — in this case a set of values and beliefs that underlie a distinctive understanding of the relationship between school and gender.

### Summary of findings

**Many people feel there is little or no gender inequity in the classroom — the classroom is seen as 'set apart' from society.** Simply put, gender equity in schools is not seen as an important problem by most people, even when they agree that there are gender inequities in society more generally. This may reflect the fact that an important part of the American cultural model of schools holds that they are set apart from the larger society, safe and controlled environments in which children are protected from the evils of the world.

**If gender equity in schools is a meaningful issue, it isn't reducible to 'helping girls succeed'.**

Considerations of gender equity are informed by a more basic model of 'fairness', which in this case encourages Americans to consider



the points of view of boys as well as girls.

**One important model of gender inequity holds (in its strong form) that boys are 'defective' while girls are 'disadvantaged'.**

When gender inequity is accepted by Americans, it is sometimes interpreted as the idea that boys have internal problems (intellectual deficits, attention problems, propensity toward aggression, inability to express feelings) and external advantages (prejudices in their favour) while girls are internally gifted (morally, intellectually, socially, and emotionally superior) but held back by external circumstances. An implication of this model is that boys need to be constrained while girls need to be liberated.

**An alternative to the 'defective boy' view is the 'bad fit' view.**

Many people believe that the way schools are traditionally structured seems designed to have boys fail. Boys are seen as more active and less able to adapt to the constrained setting of traditional schools, and for that reason more likely to be treated as troublemakers.

**People are sometimes conflicted on the issue of gender equity in the classroom because of a clash between 'public discourse' and 'lived experience' on this issue.** Many people seem to experience something like 'double-think', simultaneously believing that girls are discriminated against (a model that is prominent in public discourse), and that teachers and the school setting favour girls in a number of ways (a view that is often more consistent with their personal experience).

**There are two conflicting ideas of the ideal classroom: one emphasising individual students and teachers, and one emphasising the 'culture' of the classroom.**

The first view leads to a foregrounding of public policy issues such as the importance of 'individualised instruction', with an emphasis on taking account of differences between students and between teachers and students. The second places the emphasis on a shared classroom culture rather than on the individual qualities of teachers and students.

**Key elements of social/emotional experience are seen as playing a critical role in academic success.**

While laypeople sometimes fall back on a simplistic separation between academic performance and other aspects of a child's personal experience in school, they more often demonstrate an awareness of the strong causal connection between these two domains.

**The issue of gender equity plays out differently at different age/grade levels.**

When people think of 'school,' they tend to think first of elementary school — a space that is largely protected from the dangers of the larger world, including its gender and racial inequities. According to this model, high school, by contrast, is much less separate from the influences and problems of the larger society.

**Most people believe that there are important differences in how teachers should communicate with different individual children, but not different groups (e.g. ethnicities).**

An important part of the American model of education is the idea that teachers must tailor communication to individual children. There is little emphasis on the importance of tailoring the communication process to different groups — perhaps due to the contradiction with the idea that one purpose of school is to forge a common identity.

**People have a consumer model of education: it's mostly about getting the best quality and best advantage for their own kids.**

People feel that ideally their kids will be engaged and excited by school. But the bottom line is that the school system should ensure that their children will have all the advantages that other kids have.

**Findings related to specific language.**

In addition to findings about relevant American models of education, the interviews revealed consistent attitudes towards two phrases that are prominent in the public discourse on education:

*Gender equity*

This phrase is not easily understood by most people, and when discussed in terms of the specific disadvantages faced by girls, it sometimes leads to resistance.

*Individualised education*

While this term conjures an ideal which most people support, it often has utopian connotations, amounting to an idea that is wonderful but impractical.

**Discussion of findings**

**Many people feel there is little or no gender inequity in the classroom — the classroom is seen as set apart from society.**

While it is widely acknowledged that

women do not enjoy the same degree of opportunity for success in society as men, subjects do not necessarily agree that this disparity extends to the classroom. The majority of subjects feel that gender inequity in the classroom is probably inconsequential, and that where it does exist it is the product of a particular teacher or school rather than a systemic problem.

In effect, the classroom is often seen as a sort of (permeable) bubble, set apart from the outside world. Social and political issues that affect society as a whole are largely absent from most people's view of the prototypical classroom.

This is not to say that the classroom is thought of as entirely free of society's inequalities and prejudices; some negative aspects of society do 'leak' into the classroom — e.g. some teachers are certainly racists (usually in subtle ways); class, family situations, and economic status do affect students' experience and success in school, and so forth.

While teachers are the most obvious agents who bring aspects of society into the classroom, students themselves also carry in some baggage from the outside world. In particular, the child's family experience — whether the child comes from an encouraging family or not, the degree to which the family is engaged in the child's education, etc. — is an important aspect of the outside world that has an impact in the classroom. In addition, negative messages that children have internalised from the media — e.g. that girls are not as capable as boys in certain areas — are also perceived as finding their way into the school experience.

Another sense in which schools represent a 'bubble' is that they are often seen as having resisted historical change. That is, many laypeople do not feel that schools or the school experience have changed much over the decades.

(Not surprisingly, experts tend to see the situation differently from

most non-specialists. They tend to be aware of gender-based differences in boys' and girls' experiences in school, though this awareness can take several different forms, as we discuss in sections below.)

The strategic implication of this finding is that it cannot be assumed that the public will be moved by a campaign built on redressing inequities. For most people, the inequities simply are not there.

*Some kids, their families for whatever reasons don't have book bags. But you're supposed to have book bags . . . does the child feel already that they don't have a commitment from home for their education?*

**If gender equity in schools is a meaningful issue, it isn't reducible to 'helping girls succeed'.**

Considerations of gender equity are informed by a more basic model of 'fairness', which in this case encourages Americans to consider the points of both girls and boys.

Almost no one felt girls were disadvantaged in the classroom (but see attention issue, below). In fact, from early on, school is felt to be a better fit for most girls than most boys (see below). It's boys who have troubles with school: trouble sitting still, reading, expressing themselves, following rules, quelling aggressiveness and competitiveness. Even through their teen years, when children of both genders are concerned with image, girls fit schools more naturally. The dominant, shared cultural model of girls predispose them for compliance and success in the classroom, whereas the comparable model of boys does not.

Attention from teachers is an important issue, however. Many people feel that boys get more attention than girls (often for inappropriate reasons), with the result that girls are relatively neglected. On the other hand, others believe girls get a disproportionately large amount of teacher attention, based on the fact that girls are better

students and thus that teachers prefer them.

*The fact that boys acting up get more of your attention . . . much more than their share of teacher's time.*

*I do think that boys, because of their greater aggressiveness for whatever reason, tend to take and get more of the attention in schools.*

The most easily accepted conception of gender equity is closer to 'gender-blindness,' than to 'affirmative action for girls.' A gender-blind education would be one in which teachers (and school policies) would work toward distributing attention and support fairly; toward implementing an unbiased curriculum; toward teaching mutual respect and tolerance; toward up-ending expectations of success or failure in certain areas according to gender (girls in math and science; boys in expressing themselves or 'behaving'). If schools were gender-blind, everyone would be able to achieve their full potential, without biases and preconceptions getting in the way.

Though the model of racial and class equity is less salient in people's minds, the evidence suggests that a similar kind of reasoning would apply to these kinds of equity as well — which indicates a specific challenge for efforts to communicate the importance of cultural diversity, for example.

*Boys couldn't play a violin, and girls couldn't hit a home run. I think kids do that to each other as soon as they get exposed to TV and social stuff.*

*Girls have an image, but it's an image where you're not supposed to be acting out in school, and you know, you're there to learn*

*Boys . . . feel that they have this image that they have to keep up, and like, well, I don't want to be like oh sits there and he's all into his books, and he's nerdy, and you know and all this*

*and you got this other one that wants to be the class clown, because he like I said he doesn't know how to reach out and ask for help.*

**One important model of gender inequity holds (in its strong form) that boys are 'defective' while girls are 'disadvantaged'.**

While most people are hardly aware of the idea that there could be significant gender inequity in schools, or else feel that there are unnecessary pressures on both boys and girls to conform to stereotyped expectations, there is also a view, held by a smaller but vocal group, that gender inequity is important and asymmetrical. In effect, this group believes that boys suffer from internal inadequacies (and are advantaged by external circumstances), while girls are largely the direct or indirect victims of external circumstances (including boys' behaviour).

In its extreme form, this 'disadvantaged girls/defective boys' model casts boys as defective and even immoral. According to this model, boys are inferior to girls in various ways, and a noxious influence, and it is important to gain greater control over them in the classroom.

*I think girls are more intelligent. You know . . . it's just my bias. But that's what I think. . . . Girls have more ability to speak . . . express themselves, to think, to organise information, to keep everything on track, keep the group together . . . If I have a group of all boys, it will be difficult for that group. They will have chaos and mayhem.*

According to this view, the greatest problems facing girls are largely imposed by their surroundings (unlike boys' problems, which belong to their nature as boys). They suffer particularly from not receiving enough attention, and from not being held to the same high standards — i.e. from being expected to perform more poorly.

The appropriate remedies implied by this view would seem to involve greater control of boys, by various means. 'Strict fathering,' for instance, in the sense discussed by George Lakoff in his book *Moral Politics*, involves behaviour management through forceful discipline. And an option often brought up in the context of boys' 'problematic' behaviour, though not by subjects in this study, is the hyperactivity drug Ritalin.

*[Boys] always want to show which one is the toughest, or if there is a new student the other students like to show which one controls the classroom. One of them must start something just to let the new student know that they are in control.*

There are, of course, much milder or partial forms of this view — for instance, many people express the idea that girls are more focused and capable in school, or that boys get into trouble more, without going so far as to imply that boys are 'bad.'

Interestingly, this view is encountered more often among education professionals than among other adults. While this may be because their greater experience tells them that there are real differences between boys and girls in school — differences which the public at large is much less aware of — a caveat is still warranted: framing boys' difficulties in school (which are very well documented and quantified) as consequences of innate shortcomings is not necessarily justified (see below).

**An alternative to the 'defective boy' view is the 'bad fit' view.**

Many people believe on some level that school is not very natural for kids in general. The setting works against many of children's natural tendencies rather than playing to their strengths, and it takes a great deal of effort and skill on the part of all concerned to make the system work well. (Very good schools, of course, can actually feel like natural

places for kids, but this is more the exception than the rule.)

One way in which this question of naturalness comes up is that avoiding boredom and ‘keeping kids interested’ play very salient roles in people’s understanding of the classroom experience. Even though many people think of kids as having a natural desire to learn, they may feel that the typical classroom environment stifles rather than harnesses this instinct. One metaphor for this view is that kids are something like fires that need stoking (rather than, for example, plants that grow on their own with only a minimum of attention).

People are particularly likely to feel that it is difficult or even unnatural for most boys to do the things that are expected of students — sit still, be obedient, etc. Rather than seeing this as a moral (or any other kind of) failing on boys’ parts, this view frames the problem as one of fit between boys and a particular environment. There is significant support for the idea that school, particularly in the earliest grades, is a better fit for girls than for boys.

*Boys . . . like eleven to twelve . . . they’re just all over the place with their testosterone . . . if they were . . . doing the physical stuff . . . they could blow off some of this excess energy they have, so they could focus better on their education.*

*It’s harder for young boys to concentrate and sit still and work on tasks and be more physically passive, and cooperate and collaborate and do group things.*

This view would suggest solutions very different from the ones following from the ‘defective boy’ model — in this case, the solutions would be more about changing environments so that they offer boys more of what they need, which could include, for example, opportunities for physical movement. Note that this is not a suggestion that schools abdicate their role in helping instill



responsibility and self-control in children. Rather, it is a more positive framing of boys, which offers the possibility of working with their strengths rather than against them. The notion of ‘working with the grain’ may be a fertile angle to explore.

An interesting question raised by the study is whether the set of standards that make up ‘school morality’ is more like ‘feminine’ than ‘masculine’ morality — i.e. do expectations in school (and definitions of who is ‘good’) fit better with feminine than masculine behavioural tendencies? While some aspects of school — particularly, competition in later grades — seem to play to stereotypical masculine strengths, many others are easier for girls to adapt to, with the result that girls are judged as ‘better’, not only in the sense of competence, but often in the sense that they are better people.

*On the whole most girls can tolerate the imprisonment of the old fashioned classroom that boys at a young age have trouble tolerating.*

*Well I think this open classroom worked very well. Because there’s a lot of movement, and there’s a lot of*



*physical freedom. You're not free to disrupt, but you're free to move, you're free to make reasonable noise. You're free to move about . . . But a kid like that in another classroom is labelled disruptive, and tied up and put away.*

**People are sometimes conflicted on the issue of gender equity in the classroom because of a clash between 'public discourse' and 'lived experience' on this issue.**

It is not uncommon for people to express conflicting views, sometimes only moments apart, on the difference between boys' and girls' experiences in the classroom. Consider this statement, in which the subject seems to contradict himself within the space of a single sentence:

*I think [girls] identify with the teachers more, and the teachers are paying more attention to the girl students, which is great, because you know, you hear about girls being . . . left out and left behind, which I think is a shame because they're ALL our kids.*

On the one hand the subject is saying that teachers pay more attention to girls, and on the other hand that girls are being 'left out'. Are girls being neglected or not? This person, like many people, seems simultaneously to hold two conflicting views.

In previous research, the authors' research group Cultural Logic has identified a pattern, which we refer to as 'togglng'; individuals hold conflicting models and move back and forth between them at different moments. Typically, this togglng reflects two different sources of input: specifically, ideas that come from various forms of public discourse, such as the media, versus impressions based on the individual's own lived experience. For instance, Americans tend to toggle between the view that teenagers are reckless, selfish and alien (a stereotype propagated in public discourse) and a view more based on their personal experience

with teenagers, in which teens are more like less experienced, less confident versions of themselves (Aubrun & Grady 2000).

In the case of boys and girls in school, some people appear to have one model based on certain strains in public discourse (what 'you hear about' in the media, for instance) and another based on more direct knowledge, such as their own children's experience. Various forms of the 'disadvantaged girls' or 'defective boys' model have gained currency in public discourse, even though individuals may not have discerned the pattern in their own encounters with classrooms. As a result, people may experience something like 'double-think', simultaneously believing that girls are discriminated against (public discourse), and that teachers and the school setting favour girls in a number of ways (personal experience).

Note that this is not to say that one view or the other is right. We have already argued that the 'defective boys' model may lead to unfortunate consequences, but the point here is that there is an opportunity to affect public discourse, and therefore to help resolve a contradiction in people's minds.

Interestingly, as we have noted, experts have a greater tendency to think in terms of the 'disadvantaged girls' model than laypeople. There may be more than one explanation for this discrepancy: experts are aware of facts about education that the public doesn't know about; and/or experts are more conversant with the theories and the models that are played out in public (including expert) discourse, and are used to dealing with these models explicitly in their professional lives.

**There are two conflicting ideas of the ideal classroom: one emphasising individual students and teachers and the other emphasising the 'culture' of the classroom.**

The American model of school includes two alternative ways of thinking about the shape that the ideal classroom would take — the opposition between what could be called the ‘teacher–student’ perspective and the ‘classroom culture’ perspective. These aren’t so much distinct opinions as distinct ways of understanding aspects of the classroom experience.

The first of these models — which is closer to ‘top-of-mind’ understanding — emphasises better relationships between the teacher and the individual students. Teachers who are as aware as possible of the strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds and needs of each student could, in principle, create educational plans that would be ideally suited to their students. The term ‘individualised education’ is an expression of this version of the ideal, and most people find it quite appealing (if impractical — see our discussion below). Nearly everyone is ready to say, when asked, that a teacher should try as hard as possible to take the needs of the individual child into account in creating an instructional plan. This view springs from an understanding of education as primarily being about communication of knowledge from teacher to student. A simple diagram of the key causal relationship in the classroom would look like this:

Teacher → Student experience

The other model of ideal classrooms — more implicit, but very common nonetheless — emphasises the culture of the classroom: the organic network of relationships and interactions among teacher and students, and especially among the students themselves. When people think about the culture of the classroom they are thinking about how it feels to be in class from day to day — for instance, is the atmosphere studious, energetic, passive, fearful? Teachers facilitate the classroom culture, and so their

skills (as well as their personalities and attitudes) are still quite important, but this understanding of the class highlights a different set of skills. The emphasis here is less on their ability to explain concepts, for instance, than on their ability to create an atmosphere of comfort and respect:

Teacher → Classroom culture → Student experience

The teacher–student perspective is more explicit, a view to which more people are likely to assent when questioned, probably in part because of the strength of individualism in American culture in general; students are thought of as unique individuals with individual purposes and trajectories in the classroom. But most people do directly or indirectly comment on the importance of the shared reality of the classroom, and focusing on this aspect of school has substantial advantages. For one, it has the potential to liberate teachers from the daunting challenge of finding the ideal way of reaching each student; if they create the right atmosphere, there are benefits for everyone. This approach addresses the common concern that ‘individualised education’ is more of an ideal than a practical reality.

There is some overlap between the individualised-instruction/classroom-culture opposition and the very familiar opposition between a ‘regimented’ classroom, where students sit quietly and absorb information dispensed by teachers, and a ‘free’ classroom, where students are more active, both in the sense of physical movement and with respect to their role in their own education. The former model is more closely related to Lakoff’s ‘strict father’ model — teachers instruct, push, discipline and punish their students. The latter is more closely related to Lakoff’s ‘nurturant parent’ model — teachers encourage their students, give them freedom to explore their own ways of learning,

and take some cues from them in setting the agenda for class. People certainly differ with regard to which of these two models they regard as more ideal. On the other hand, some are inconsistent about which is better, and the regimented model seems to be more of a prototype in most people’s minds. As a consequence, the regimented classroom represents an image, which they fall back on as a default from time to time, even if they strongly support the idea of active classrooms (that is, there is ‘togglng’ on this issue).

*[The] ideal classroom is one where the children feel that it’s their classroom, and that they’re in control of the learning. That the teacher is a resource for them. That there is no teacher’s desk at the front of the room or anywhere, really. The classroom is a cooperative classroom, and the learning is organised to build that learning community.*

*Individual attention to individual students is absolutely important, but that everybody’s individual attention can be everybody’s learning opportunity. So, we could, you know, share in that way.*

**Key elements of social/emotional experience are seen as playing a critical role in academic success.**

While laypeople sometimes fall back on a simplistic separation between academic performance and other aspects of a child’s personal experience in school, they more often demonstrate an awareness of the strong causal connection between these two domains. These key concepts, associated with the social realm, show up in discussions of all aspects of gender equity.

**Expectation** is an issue that applies to the classroom as well as to other areas of life. Just as parents should expect the most from their children, teachers are seen as needing to be available to lend additional support to kids having trouble reaching their full potential.

**Attention** is a social factor that has obvious and critical importance in equity issues: the lack of attention can undermine the fairest, highest expectations. In an ideal learning environment the teacher is not spread too thin. She or he provides support and helps to motivate so that all students can learn. Teacher attention unevenly distributed effectively undercuts a favourable student/teacher ratio for those fortunate enough to have one.

People see children's **comfort** level as a critical component of their success in school. School is seen as an intimidating place on a variety of levels. Children are required to function publicly under various adult demands, in an environment which may be radically unlike their home life. One important purpose of schooling is socialisation. (Many people mention this as the principal argument against home schooling, for example. This presents an interesting contradiction to their preference for teaching that comes as close as possible to a one-on-one relationship.) School is seen as a good social environment — the place — for children to learn how to work together, which is the argument that counters the frequent observation that boys and girls are distracting to each other.

Furthermore, mutual **respect** is seen as a critical element in a comfortable classroom environment.

**The issue of gender equity plays out differently at different age/grade levels.**

When people think of 'school', they tend to think first of elementary (primary) school — perhaps prototypically of the fourth and fifth grades.

It is important to keep in mind that some aspects of the cultural model of school do not apply equally well to high school as to elementary school. In particular, the idea that school is a kind of 'bubble', existing within society but not quite

of it (see above) is less prominent in the case of high school. High-school students are older — more like the adults who make up the larger society. In some ways, a high school is more like a workplace, where one expects issues of gender inequities to crop up. In addition, as students become teenagers, issues of sexual harassment — as well as issues of ethnic and gender identity and orientation — become more salient, all of which contributes to a lessening of the 'bubble' model of school.

**Most people believe that there are important differences in how teachers should communicate with different individual children, but not different groups (e.g. ethnicities).**

There is near unanimity that teachers should tailor communication to individual kids. Many people go beyond that, believing that a teacher should get to know each child: their strengths, weaknesses, family background.

Most people are unaware of, or wary of, considering possible differences in communication style among different ethnic, racial, or gender groups. Yet a minority of people feel quite strongly that for some children the gap between the school atmosphere and their home life is a chasm.

Some evidence suggests that the lack of emphasis on tailoring the communication process to different groups is due to the fact that it contradicts the powerful cultural model of the classroom where a common (American) identity is forged. The ideal classroom culture (see above), in which the teacher knows the students and the students develop in a social environment of respect and cooperation, is seen as reducing differences between children, including differences based on race, class, and family circumstances.

**People have a consumer model of education: it's mostly about**

**getting the best quality and best advantage for their own kids.**

Beneath their stated reasons for supporting public schools — people are quick to share such mantra-like statements as 'kids are our future' or 'it's the fundamental responsibility of a society' to educate its young — parents tend to have a consumer model of education. Their concern is first and foremost with getting the best quality for their own kids. More than anything else, they want their kids to learn. For example, parents feel cheated when kids are passed before they've learned the requisite amount. Ideally their kids will be engaged and excited by school; but the bottom line is that the school system should ensure that their children will have all the advantages that other kids have ('everyone should have pretty much equal chance').

Quality is the key issue in this consumer perspective on education. Education is about individual achievement, benefit, and advancement. Self-betterment through education and hard work is one of the lynchpins of American individualism. Its outcome is expected to be personal gain, epitomised by upward social mobility.

Interestingly, many people articulate a more communitarian vision of education, with a parental role more active than mere passive consumer. Yet when pressed, most interviewees see 'parental involvement' as nothing more than monitoring their children's homework completion. The more fundamental (if less directly expressed) consumer view is evident in the overriding concern with quality. Some education consumers actively 'shop around' for the best schools and even relocate to give their kids access to the best districts.

Specific skills — especially literacy — are important to people. Parents think, 'Is my kid learning to read?' before they think about whether there is gender equity. It follows that tying gender equity to 'quality'

issues should be effective. For example, for the people who believe that teacher attention is unfairly distributed by gender (with potential neglect of girls versus boys, or vice versa), this link should be drawn out.

## Conclusion

This report has explored the public's 'mental map' of the relationship between gender and the school experience, and described ways in which perceptions of the issues go beyond the simple thesis that one sex or the other is specifically disadvantaged by current conditions in the classroom. Most people are aware of and accept the fact that serious inequities (based on gender, race, and class) exist in American society, they draw a strong distinction between the larger world and the classroom. Indeed, most people are either barely aware of the role of gender in defining students' experience, or feel that the problems are more symmetrical: there is a set of stereotypical gender-based expectations that constrains both boys and girls and diminishes their experience; and by its current nature, schools often provide a poor fit for boys and girls, in different and specific ways (and more so for boys). A minority view that girls in particular are short-changed in the classroom seems to be tied to some unwarranted and potentially damaging framings of boys.

In the brief discussions below we summarise differences in thinking across two salient fault lines: laypeople versus experts (i.e. individuals with a close involvement in decision-making about education) and conservatives versus liberals (as we define these below).

### Expert versus laypeople

Naturally, experts in education are more knowledgeable than the public at large about conditions in the classroom. As a result, they are more aware than the rest of the population of differences between boys' and girls' experiences in



school. On the positive side, this means that they tend to be ready to think about solutions, and to have already given the issues a fair amount of thought. In some ways, though, they may prove to be a tougher audience for campaigns about gender in schools, whatever the content might be. This is because experts are more likely to be comfortable with particular theories already — for example, the commitment to the 'disadvantaged girls/defective boys' model which we encountered among some professionals appears to correspond with particular trends in public discourse on the issues — and more likely to adopt an authoritative stance towards the issues.

There are two more points to note about experts. Firstly, they are more likely to be open to the possibility of tailoring educational practice to particular groups (e.g. ethnic groups) of students, and therefore more open to tying gender issues to identity issues more broadly. Secondly, that the consumer model of education ('What quality of education is my kid getting?') is less appealing to them than it is to others in the community. This second point means that experts should, overall, be more open than the public as a whole to messages that seem less directly tied to bottom-line issues like test scores.

## Conservatives versus liberals

Two caveats are required here. The first is that the population we discussed these issues with does not represent an accurate cross-section of adults in Boston, Cambridge and Western Massachusetts — adults who are concerned enough to commit time to talking about education are, to an extent, a self-selecting group. And in fact, self-described conservatives are not as well represented in our sample as self-described liberals. On the other hand, and as predicted by cultural model analysis, the division between political conservatives and liberals is less significant than a division between ‘cultural’ conservatives and liberals. That is to say, people’s implicit understandings of daily life do not always correspond with their explicit theories of how society should be organised (as reflected in how they vote).

The most general conclusion from a comparison between conservatives and liberals is that the distinctions do not fall out in the simple ways one might expect. First, the idea of traditional sex roles seems to play no role in most people’s current thinking — the idea that conservatives, for example, are less interested in girls’ education than in boys’ is probably false, outside of certain restricted populations (some religious fundamentalists, for example). The individualistic consumer model favoured by conservatives is clearly compatible with some forms of gender equity — conservatives have daughters and think of them as consumers who deserve the best.

But there are differences between the groups. For example, cultural conservatives favour regimented classrooms, while progressives are more likely to favour free classrooms. More directly relevant to gender issues, cultural conservatives seem less likely to support the idea that each student’s cultural background must be taken into account in the classroom, instead favouring the idea that schools,

among all our institutions, should most exemplify the American notion of the ‘melting pot’. As a consequence, conservatives are probably not predisposed to respond positively to a campaign based on tying gender to other identity issues.

The good news is that these starting differences will not necessarily lead to schisms on particular issues. To take just one example, conservatives’ reliance on the ‘melting pot’ assumption can lead them to a ‘culture of the classroom’ view, which jibes in various ways with many liberals’ belief in an ‘organic’ model of the classroom. In short, both conservatives and liberals are potentially open to a number of messages, depending on how the issues are framed.

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# There's more than one way to be a superman

## Establishing a whole-school approach

St Clair High School has taken a long and complex journey to dramatically increase their boys' self-esteem and enjoyment of education. A committed team of teachers used many different strategies involving school, family and community to examine the whole picture of identity, learning and relationships. While maintaining a focus on boys and important male role models this outstanding project takes into account the girls and women in their lives as well as. Here the team shares its experience.

### Developing a shared ethos

Making boys aware that principal adults in their lives do care about them, and that we all value their learning and development, has been at the forefront of our thinking, planning and evaluative scope.

Role models and versions of masculinity can be diverse and equally inspirational. Demonstrating to the boys that relationships — with their dads or father-figures, their teachers, their friends and their family — are critical for success has also steered our approach.

We wholeheartedly believe in the potential of our boys and seek to help each boy identify his own 'trigger' something that will enable him to actively pursue the fullness of his own identity in a way that is both healthy and balanced.

We maintain that boys' needs must be nourished and nurtured through an extended program of challenge, engagement and interaction. Completely accepting boys, but also providing them with

the freedom to grow and change, is critical. Celebration of their 'maleness' is something we have strived to embrace at every turn. The profile and importance of boys is at the forefront of all we do.

Embracing the values of our community, yet allowing our boys to take calculated risks of endeavour (in a stereotypical outer-western Sydney suburban, rugby league-based heartland) has been enlightening and immensely rewarding. We are helping and challenging each boy to grasp his identity as a young man.

### Professional development and school self-evaluation

We created the Boys' Education Team (BET) as a starting point at St Clair High School; we ran a ruler over every facet of school life. Initially we looked at:

- the composition of our own staff: three females to every male
- the composition of the existing student leadership forums (school captaincy, SRC, prefects, etc.)
- suspensions, including the type of suspension
- truancy rates and lateness data
- graffiti in toilets (how much, what sort, when)
- toilet and out-of-class stats
- merit award recipients
- subject selection trends

- presentation-night award winners
- ELLA, SNAP, SC and HSC results
- boys in reading groups
- boys as mentors
- boys in sporting teams.

We increased staff awareness through development days, conferences, publishing news articles, role plays, surveys of their attitudes to boys, focus groups, weekly reminders/quotes, and through videos about our boys created by students.

Films about our boys were particularly enlightening — and entertaining. The truthfulness and personal nature of hearing the boys speak about their experiences at our school impacted positively.

By raising awareness and encouraging dialogue we opened a number of eyes to the way we had inadvertently endorsed unhealthy trends for boys in our school. Discussion at staff meetings, executive meetings, executive conferences and a specially convened staff discussion forum — all led by BET members — alerted us to the need for a paradigm shift. We instituted a Quality of School Life Department of Education and Training Survey, which revealed some intriguing data. Year 8 boys in particular were noticeable in their shift towards disengagement, displaying poor attitudes to school,



## How to start from scratch

There are many elements to establishing successful boys' initiatives. These are some that we found useful in the beginning — or that we have learnt from experience.

First of all, find staff that inspire students and inspire other staff members. Work with them in your Boys' Education Team.

Hold a staff professional development discussion forum on issues pertaining to boys in your school — hear the concerns and work as a team on strategies to address these concerns. Hear the initial 'problem focus'. You will be inundated with all manner of people happy to articulate 'what is wrong with boys'. This can both inform and frustrate and may provide a good start, but get beyond this so it does not anchor thinking and cultivate despair. Look for ideas and remain outward-looking for more possibilities and better opportunities with your boys. What are other schools doing?

Decide on how you'll address the boys' program conundrum: a whole-of-school approach can mean biting off more than you can chew; we chose to create a 'bridge' for a critical mass of boys. Address this question: Are we looking at classroom improvement first, or are we seeking to build self-esteem and connectedness before approaching the classroom improvement side?

A whole-school approach means you will look for possibilities for your most troubled boys (e.g. careers adviser support, external agencies that offer support programs for these boys, mentor arrangements with senior boys) and look for possibilities in the areas of gifted and talented education for your most gifted. Is the critical mass of 'middle' boys being catered for in your school, or are you 'relying' on them to magically perform and feel connected? Listen to the concerns about girls and what your co-educational school is doing for your girls. This is somewhat inevitable, but perhaps the focus needs to be different for this and the school welfare staff may jump on board once they see the success and profile of your team.

Invite some well-chosen speakers and experts (perhaps gender equity unit or systemic consultants, or perhaps a successful principal of a nearby boys' high school or a positive, 'solutions-focused' university type) to address your staff. But before you do, ask them this: 'What ideas can you bring to the staff to better assist their management — and instruction — of boys?' If they cannot answer this, look elsewhere. There is no greater impediment for your initiative and direction than a poor speaker or one who lamely suggests 'there are no answers' or mysteriously avoids the issue with 'you hold the answers'. Instead, look for the revered and inspirational staff members enjoying success with boys at your school and have them articulate what it is they are doing well.

Are we going to set up boys-only classes? Why? Is the secret to these boys' ultimate success the explicit teaching of literacy or simply the group focus you seek to engender without some obvious distractions for adolescent males? Or is it good teaching? Any boys-only class success should be documented (subject matter, approach, boundaries, innovations, expectations), as it is not always repeatable for all staff.

Articulate a shared vision and targets with annual measures to work towards. Spread the work to involve the team and have them responsible for sections and smaller projects. Meet regularly to chat and debrief so that everyone is aware of the progress and developments. Keep your principal informed at all times. Maintain a team ethos that is participative and collaborative at all times. When this falters, so does your boys' education program. Look to get involved in boys' education conferences, seminars, funded programs, links programs, etc. Celebrate successes. Have evaluative meetings, share films with staff and have an annual dinner!

Listening to boys' ideas and embracing their suggestions has been instrumental in our practice. While our approach stemmed from ideas we had gleaned, researched, explored and refined, the suggestions emerging from our boys and our evaluation of them has altered our delivery, and will into the future.

their teachers and their involvement in school life. This provided a key starting point for our manageable, challenging and achievable focus: Year 8 boys. Importantly, this data showed the team the need to focus on particular areas and convinced staff of the need to act and support the initiatives and direction.

At the same time our focus shifted to exploring what other schools were doing, arranging visits and reading about their achievements through our subscription to *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*. We also implemented an annual St Clair High School 'Welfare Conference' and conducted a 'Gender Strategy Conference'. Professional learning support for in-services, conferences and training in the Rock and Water course were undertaken once our 'plan of attack' was confirmed.

Nowadays, all BET members involved in the delivery of our program are granted staff-release days when hosting events or taking an excursion. They never have to approach peers for favours. The commitment of the principal and the school to our boys is rock solid. It engenders willing involvement and endorses popular involvement in the eyes of faculty supervisors.

• **Year 8 boys in particular were noticeable in their shift towards disengagement, displaying poor attitudes to school, their teachers and their involvement in school life.**



St Clair boys at Aussie Stadium.

### **Critical business: Establishing your boys' education leadership team**

As a first step, recruit driven, energetic, passionate staff members — and especially those who are informal leaders in the school. Later, open up involvement to the whole staff, perhaps including formal, like-minded leaders. Look for popular staff with the students who are dedicated and enthusiastic. In the words of the song *The Middle* by Jimmy Eat World:

*Just do your best, do everything you can  
And don't you worry what the bitter  
hearts are gonna say.  
It just takes some time . . .  
You're in the middle of the ride  
Everything, everything will be just fine  
Everything, everything will be all right.*

Our BET consists of a diversity of role models, male and female. The team is a unified band of driven staff, most of whom hold leadership positions in the school (year advisers, head teachers and deputy principal), and includes expert classroom teachers who are perceived as personal leaders in the school. Their passion for improving social and educational outcomes for our boys is a vital symbolic way of signalling our value of boys. They show boys that it is worthwhile and honourable to strive for excellence in character growth, academic achievement and social interaction.

Importantly, with significant female staff leaders involved as well, we are showing our boys that the way we value, regard and learn from female leaders in our lives is also critical. It is essential that dynamic female leaders are involved to show the male teachers that boys are worth the effort and to inspire the female teachers who may feel less empowered. Strong females who demonstrate love, compassion, care and — most importantly — consistency and standards are the most respected and most valuable for your boys. The 'blokey bloke' may not be the only role model you are after for the boys at your school, so be wise in the mix of males and male credibility on your team.

### **So what do we do for our boys?**

We deliver a broad range of events and experiences to assist our boys with their behaviour, elevate their self-esteem and enhance their motivation and engagement at school.

The scope of our focus is predominantly — but not exclusively — on our lower-secondary boys. Our targeted skills include strengthening teamwork abilities, English curriculum development, literacy, primary school links, parental involvement, leadership opportunities, celebration of achievement, staff professional development . . . making boys'

## St Clair High School Boys' Strategy 2005

### Year 8 Boys' Education Focus

- Rock and Water program (two pastoral care/roll-call groups)
- *Daily Telegraph* subscription for all boys
- Rock and Water enterprise education, e.g. chocolate sales, enterprise initiatives to fund excursions
- Year 8 Rock and Water barbecue/parent information night
- Boys/girls gender assemblies
- Recognition ceremonies: Celebration of boys' achievement
- Rock and Water Manly Surf School excursion
- Rock and Water group — Wentworth Falls walk
- Rock and Water excursions
- 'Dads and Lads': Year 8/9 Father's Day barbecue breakfast
- Sydney Tower etiquette excursion/Penrith
- Oxi-gen Mind & Body fitness visits
- Boys' parent reading program
- Year 8 mentor program (Year 12 leaders)
- Mamre House links
- Rock and Water sleep-over excursion at Manly Oceanarium/  
Rock and Water program on Manly Beach the next day
- School presentation night: Celebration of boys' achievement

education a comprehensive focus of the school.

#### **Rock and Water program (including *Daily Telegraph* subscription for all boys)**

A key part of our boys' strategy is the development of two Year 8 roll-call groupings where the boys explore a program of events and ideas. It is anticipated that this structure will grow into Year 9 so that an ongoing support network is sustained in the critical at-risk years. They participate in the Rock and Water program, following a program of self-development, self-esteem, leadership and conflict resolution.

We have four teachers trained in the delivery of this program. Use of training materials, group discussion, video, songs and physical interaction, helps build group harmony, self-confidence and a keen awareness of themselves and others. The boys also participate in a mandatory DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) program, which is incorporated in and around these

activities.

Year 8 boys of diverse backgrounds, abilities, leadership levels and needs are selected each year via year advisers and staff surveys from what might be described as the 'middle' boys within the year. Earlier anecdotal and factual research tells us that it is during Year 8 that our boys will benefit most from reinforcing and developing positive skills for life. This program offers teachers a new way to interact with boys through physical/social teaching by constantly linking physical exercise with mental and social skills. Simple self-defence, boundary and communication exercises lead to a strong notion of self-confidence. A framework of exercises and ideas about boys and manhood assist boys to become aware of purpose and motivation in their life.

Our Year 8 students participate in the Rock and Water program with their teacher/mentor every morning in pastoral care/roll-call groups of boys only. This critical mass of good, yet often unrewarded, boys is selected because of the need for additional attention, support and leadership opportunities.

We set ourselves the following indicators of success for the program:

- Increases in merit awards will be a key measure gauged by comparing current achievement to past achievement records.
- Reductions in truancy and suspension rates (particularly concerning violence) are quantifiable measures that will be scrutinised to measure improvement in behaviour across the school. Internal school disciplinary measures (notification sheets) will also be examined by frequency and content to determine if behaviour change is sustained and effective.
- Improved daily attendance patterns through the roll call/pastoral care dynamic of our Rock and Water program will point to



TOP TO BOTTOM: On the flying fox; Boys Links days; Barbecue duty.

- improved connectedness and motivation.
- Close monitoring of term reports will give a clear indicator of student success or decline — hence engagement.
- In our unitised curriculum subject selection patterns and their diversity will be monitored and supported through mentor assistance, a useful tool to assess student engagement.
- Successful school community enterprise education ventures will demonstrate their success through fundraising and the degree of student motivation and initiative.
- In addition, parents will be interviewed to ascertain from their point of view how their students from the Rock and Water program are managing at home and at school.

■ Demonstrable and quantifiable outcomes in boys' education will be gathered through surveying the attitudes and views of the students participating in the program itself. Their self-evaluation will focus on goal setting as the year commences and achievement through reflection.

Through this process we establish the Rock and Water program as a bridge for Year 8 boys to cross in our school life. Over time, we are building into the fabric of the school stronger leaders and boys with wonderful responsibility and confidence whose broad influence is positive on others.

To initiate the program we explain what Rock and Water entails. The boys are invited to participate and let our staff team know their intention. A parent information session and barbecue is conducted in term one with the combined understanding reinforcing a positive link and reinforcement between school and home.

Since 2003, St Clair High School has hosted NSW Rock and Water training to access the wisdom of our peers. Equally, the school now conducts three Rock and Water days for our Year 8 boys (one per term) to further reinforce the benefits of this program.

Feedback data from the boys in this group reveals they are learning how to act in situations of confrontation and deal with situations more successfully and are able to better negotiate and resolve differences because of their improved knowledge and skills. They enjoy the engagement and privileges of being involved in the program. Their sense of group identity is strong.

### Curriculum initiatives

St Clair High School has a Unitised Vertical Curriculum, which we believe allows for broad and genuine student choice concerning their patterns of study. Within the Year 7 to Year 10 curriculum, boys at our

school are continually refining their curriculum direction and enjoying windows of opportunity in their learning — the direction of which they own. They can try a diversity of subjects and non-traditional male subjects (e.g. Food Technology) in a non-threatening manner, without necessarily 'locking in' to a set pattern of elective subjects. Those wishing to explore areas of interest in greater depth are permitted to do so. A balancing of interests is thus facilitated. Indeed, this curriculum structure provides for a mixture of ability levels, allowing them to integrate with students of similar ability levels irrespective of their year cohorts. Under this structure, single-sex classes can be offered to specifically cater for boys' needs, interests and abilities, as has been done in the area of English at this school.

● **Year 12 students in the boys-only Standard English class (2003) improved noticeably on school assessment tasks, moving up the final HSC-ranked list to unprecedented heights.**

A specifically formed senior English class has been part of the school — but only since the identified need existed. It is taken by an experienced, committed staff member. Year 12 students in the boys-only Standard English class (2003) improved noticeably on school assessment tasks, moving up



Our boys at the Sydney Cricket Ground tour, in the players' dugouts.

the final HSC-ranked list to unprecedented heights. Each of these boys readily conceded that they would have been floundering in senior English but for this class. As a general level of indication, the majority of boys were performing in excess of their teacher's initial estimation. Teachers in turn were struck by the intensity of their focus and energy in English classes leading up to and beyond their HSC examinations. The boys' perception of their own progress through written evaluations included the following comments:

- 'I don't feel intimidated in English by girls any more.'
- 'It makes me feel I can express myself freely.'
- 'My English results have never looked better.'
- 'My best subject in Year 12 . . . makes you feel safe.'
- 'I have improved in my results.'
- 'We have advanced in marks and listened more.'
- 'Being with my friends has not stopped me learning.'
- 'I recommend it.'
- 'I am paying more attention in class.'
- 'There is no tension between the students and the teacher.'
- 'I learned a lot in this class.'

- 'I have improved a lot in English.'
- 'Now English is my favourite subject.'
- 'It was enjoyable, we learned in a totally different way.'

The HSC results for these students were outstanding when compared against their performance in Year 10.

A similar trend was evident in the Year 8/9 'Boys to Men' English class. The comments spoke of:

- The class being 'really mature'.
- 'We got to state our opinions.'
- 'We actually talked with the teacher.'
- 'I could talk about stuff without being embarrassed.'
- 'Everyone was involved and had a go.'

Student engagement, care for work and completion of activities were impressive. Again, teacher qualities were identified along with a suitable reading and interest level of the chosen text for study, both of which appealed to the boys. Initiatives like the Year 8/9 'Boys to Men' English classes (2001–05) have seen boys' classroom engagement, care for work and completion of activities as far more impressive than work outside of this class. Connecting boys with suitable reading and making it accessible under the guidance of a vibrant teacher has shown potential for wider application.

#### Other broader program initiatives

As a school we have undertaken to better cater for the needs and learning styles of boys:

- Boys' English classes have been established.
- Extensive staff development has occurred with external experts.
- Film-making by boys has taken place.
- Primary School Boys Links days have been set up.
- Artistic abilities, music recording and editing opportunities have been provided; enterprise and

fundraising initiatives have been accessed.

- Boys' excursions to Manly Beach Surf School have been conducted.
- Boys' assemblies, male leadership opportunities and Australian Business Week boys' teams have shown the young men of St Clair High School that they *can* achieve and that they *can* do this cooperatively and productively.

Group-based activities have developed a sense of unity and solidarity among the boys in our school. Set along side a new and thriving girls' program, we have found the combination has sparked great interest in our boys and our community. Their involvement and support has been enthusiastic because they have seen themselves being valued.

Group identity has enabled success in each aspect of our approach and has been galvanised by our partnership with fathers of our boys as well. By challenging the high school stereotype of 'female involvement only' in school life, we have made it clear to fathers within our school community that the achievement of common goals through partnerships with them is critical. There is a depth of meaning and connection which is embraced and celebrated.

Enterprise education (e.g. chocolate sales and other enterprise initiatives) are used to fund excursions and experiences for the boys. This is both educationally challenging and a help for parents.

#### *Primary School Boys Links Day*

This annual day familiarises boys from our feeder primary schools with their chosen school and their peer support leaders for the following year. Equally it gives our Year 9 mentors developing, planning and resourcing skills as well as providing leadership opportunities.

The day consists of events planned by Year 9 male mentors: Technology Challenge (computer-based tasks), Quiz Challenge (general knowledge),

Sporting Challenge (throwing, shooting hoops, running, pass the ball) and Teamwork Challenge (team stilts walk, card house construction, egg drop, straw tower construction). The older boys are responsible for delivering and organising the day — including a barbecue to complete the day — and making a film about the day. This is a significant day of relationship building and self-confidence promotion.

#### *High Ropes course*

Boys attend an externally provided High Ropes challenge course, where students negotiate, problem solve and demonstrate courage and determination to achieve goals on the high apparatus. The feedback on the High Ropes is always outstanding. Students spoke of social benefits dear to them. Comments included:

- 'The challenge was immense.'
- 'I learned not to be scared and that you can overcome your fears.'
- 'I learned to control my fears by confronting them.'
- 'I learned that everyone has different levels.'

## St Clair High School Boys' Strategy 2005

### Year 9 Boys' Education Focus

- Boys/girls gender assemblies
- Recognition ceremonies: Celebration of boys' achievement
- High Ropes course, Mamre House/lawn bowls, etiquette excursion
- City cultural excursion: 'The Long Walk'
- 'Dads and Lads': Year 8/9 Father's Day barbecue breakfast
- Primary School Boys Links Day: Year 9 boys as hosts and leaders
- Boys to Men: English units
- Lighting crew, recycling leaders, paper distribution, flag bearers, paper distribution, garden team
- ABW/school leadership access
- School presentation night: Celebration of boys' achievement

### Year 10 Boys' Education Focus

- St Clair High School guest speaker day: Ex-students/role models
- Boys' English classes

■ 'I learned how to trust yourself and others.'

The experience is always extremely positive about the support, mateship and camaraderie enacted by our boys. The respect earned on the back of courage and accomplishment is a tremendous eye-opener for students and staff alike.

#### *City cultural tour*

The city cultural tour is a rich cultural experience for young men who often have not visited places such as the NSW Parliament House, St Mary's Cathedral, the Domain, the Art Gallery and the Opera House. This day of learning historical information takes the boys to places and landmarks they may never have encountered. There is a great sense of occasion — entering a cathedral for the first time, for example. Their positive reaction, their subsequent discussion of the experience — with staff in general, not just the accompanying staff member — always demonstrates a rich appreciation and new found knowledge. We intentionally take the boys through a part of Oxford Street on their way to the Sydney Cricket Ground to confront homophobic tendencies and discuss these with them.

#### *Guest speaker day*

Ex-students, mates of staff, husbands of staff members (from traditionally masculine careers and from the arts and less traditional areas) are invited to address our boys on what lessons they have learned in life and how school and their teachers helped them grow as an individual.

The feedback on the guest speaker day is very positive, with many Year 10 students speaking of their fears being eased. The notions of going for your goals, following your passions, pursuing what you enjoy, persevering till you triumph, focusing on your goals and working hard at getting them, aiming high and striving to achieve, are common themes and wholesome messages

received annually. The barbecue lunch and the additional effort made to enhance the future options of many of our boys are appreciated, motivating boys who would otherwise remain stagnant.

#### *'Dads and Lads': Year 8/9 Father's Day barbecue breakfast*

The annual Dads and Lads barbecue breakfast caters for up to 100 fathers, uncles or grandfathers from boys in Year 8 and 9. Boys without resident fathers are more welcome than anyone, and this is reiterated in our gender assemblies leading up to the day. Tens of boys arrive at 6.00 am to work the barbecue and serve the fathers. The boys show great enthusiasm and pride in the link they make between dad and school. Fathers' comments on the day and about the school's innovation and care for their son always makes this tremendously successful. The relationships which have developed between boys, staff and their dads have altered our school culture for the better, sparking interest from parents, community, staff and media. The boys themselves are happier and more connected with the school. They feel wanted, valued and are making a more positive outlook work for them at our school. A strong staff interactive presence on the day also confirms the positive vibe and reinforces to the parents that their sons are in good hands.

#### *Surf School/Manly Oceanarium or Taronga Zoo sleep-over camp*

The Rock and Water group annually attend the Manly Surf School at least once, sometimes twice, a year and experience something they have typically never had the opportunity of doing: surfing. Our desire to place our boys into situations requiring them to problem solve, to listen, to respect rules and instructors and extend their life experiences is very much encapsulated in this experience. The sleep-over is a reward and bonding experience for them all. Boys also oversee the construction of films to record this

event, which are later shared with the school at school assemblies. In working with boys, we try to remember the words of the Five for Fighting song *Superman*:

*I can't stand to fly  
I'm not that naive  
I'm just out to find  
The better part of me  
I'm more than a bird  
I'm more than a plane  
I'm more than some pretty face beside  
a train  
And it's not easy to be me*

#### *Recognition ceremonies/school presentation night — celebration of boys' achievements*

Greater numbers of boys receiving awards at the term school presentation evening is a further measure that not only speaks of improved motivation and engagement, but in itself provides a positive role model to the remainder of the school's male population. This is shifting noticeably in recent years as the benefits of our whole-school approach take hold.

#### *Whole-school boys'/girls' gender assemblies*

These are now part of the school meeting schedules. Issues pertaining to both gender groups are raised separately. These may include health issues (contraception, sexually transmitted diseases), hygiene/toilet issues, or legal issues over certain topics (e.g. sexual discrimination, date rape) or inspirational visits from guest speakers. High expectations, congratulations and positive messages dominate these assemblies.

#### *Rock and Water group: Wentworth Falls walk*

Again, this is a group-building activity outside normal comfort zones that challenges boys physically and emotionally. The teamwork and group-bonding benefits from this experience are outstanding.



*Rock and Water group: Sydney Tower etiquette/dining excursion*

Student etiquette and manners are refined and taught on this visit, during which students benefit from the experience and the expertise of industry experts. A group lunch completes an outstanding day.

*Year 9 lawn bowls etiquette day*

This takes boys from their comfort zones and impresses the values of respect and listening to older citizen mentors from the local bowling club.

*Year 8 boys' technology reading program*

Parent readers voluntarily assist boys struggling with their reading in a reading program centred around technology. Readings include boys' favourite websites, not just books.

*Year 8 to Year 12 boys' mentor program*

This highly successful program operates in senior students' free periods with ten Year 8 boys. Students are assigned a mentor and meet once each week to check on progress, attitude, behaviour and outlook. Once a week a physical 'boxercise'/fitness regime is

undertaken as a group circuit arrangement (skipping, sprints, star jumps, push-ups, sit-ups, 'boxing the pads' session), stretching the younger boys to their limits and challenging them to greater personal bests. Camaraderie, encouragement and celebration are obvious when male senior mentors reflect over a pizza lunch.

*Boys' Australian Business Week International Challenge*

Annually, our Australian Business Week (ABW) program provides for a boys-only team to pit their skill against other mixed teams. The leadership and teamwork required is a rewarding challenge and motivation alike.

*Boys' peer support, peer mediation and peer reading programs*

Over time, our boys are becoming vital in these areas of responsibility and leadership across the school. Where formerly they did not engage closely with these programs, their current involvement is a strength of each program.

Our focus has been on uplifting engagement and connection with

Teamwork and spirit at the Manly Surf Carnival.

the school. Enhancing self-esteem and attitudes to the school and what it is offering are essential initial steps. From here the challenge of curriculum areas awaits for our school.

*Educated with money  
He's well dressed — not funny  
And not much to say in most conversations  
But he'll foot the bill in most situations  
'cause he pays for everything.  
Girls don't like boys, girls like cars and money.  
Boys will laugh at girls when they're not funny.  
Boys and Girls, Good Charlotte*

## What successes/changes are occurring?

There are many benefits stemming from what we are undertaking. Boys are seeing greater opportunities to become involved in school life, and are connecting with what the school offers them. Further:

- Boys are showing greater willingness to be peer support leaders, peer reading tutors and peer mediators. They take leadership roles in the school, representing the school in the Salvos Red Shield Door Appeal or Red Cross 'Vampire Shield' Donations.
- More boys are receiving recognition — merit awards, school prizes and senior scholarships — than ever before.
- We are being approached by boys with initiatives: 'Can we . . . ?'
- There is NO graffiti in the boys' toilets or change rooms — a symbolic measure of boys feeling more positively about the school.
- There are boy school captains and vice captains as a permanent structural change in school leadership.
- Boys are becoming technology providers and instructors/leaders throughout the school, showing staff and other students the way forward in film making, Internet

- maintenance and website design.
- Greater trust, honesty and application — less anger and grief — are being exhibited.
- Suspension rates of boys have dropped and continue to drop.
- Fewer boys are out of class or visiting toilets in class time. Stats are kept!
- Less problems of a behavioural nature in Year 8, 9 and 10 are occurring.
- Boys' attendance remains significantly better than girls' — including lateness to school.
- Staff-parent improvements are discernable — surveys are indicating this improved trend.
- School profile/positive publicity surrounding our boys is escalating, building an affirmation of our work and student success.
- TORCH Test/ELLA/SC/HSC results have improved.
- Films devised by our boys are celebrating the stories and sharing the successes among our whole school community.

*I'm only a man in a silly red sheet  
Digging for kryptonite on this one way street  
I'm only a man in a phoney red sheet  
Looking for special things inside of me, inside of me  
Inside of me, yeah inside of me, inside of me  
Superman, Five For Fighting*

At St Clair High School, the energy and passion for boys and their improved outcomes has seen the school continue to seek improvement, to be innovative and to keep challenging and testing itself, finding a different way . . . a better way.



The St Clair's Boys' Education Development Team is led by Principal Tim McCallum and includes Rebecca Davies, Alison Randall, Wayne Trott, Kathy Whitaker, Rod Cheal, Chris Pendergast, Narend Vasram, Landon Dowson, Andrew Pesle and Vicki Grace.

# bulletin board

## 2005 National Awards for Quality Schooling

— celebrating the teaching profession

- Do you want to be recognised for the great work you are doing with boys? Then these awards could be for you.
- Don't just sit there. Write up your application now. Your school deserves to be recognised.

The National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership invites nominations for awards that recognise and reward outstanding achievements by teachers, principals, support staff and schools.

A total of eighty-eight awards from a prize pool of over \$1 million will be given in the following categories:

- **Excellence by a Teacher**
- **Excellence by a Principal**
- **Excellence by School Support Staff**
- **Excellence in School Improvement (for teams of teachers, individual schools and clusters of schools)**

In 2005, prizes to individual teachers, principals and support staff will be accompanied by funding to their school to foster professional collaboration and development.

Take the opportunity to nominate someone in your school — or your whole school — for making an exceptional contribution to outcomes for students.

The awards are open to government and non-government schools and staff at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels.

Visit [www.niqtsl.edu.au](http://www.niqtsl.edu.au) for information about the award categories, prize money, how to apply, and selection criteria or contact the Awards Coordinator on **Freecall 1800 131 323**.

Applications close on Friday 21 October 2005.

*Please pass this information on to colleagues, parents and other key members of your school community.*

## Challenging Boys

— do you have something to say?

The theme for New Zealand's second biennial conference on Boys in Education is 'Challenging Boys'.

Boys can be a challenge to educate at times, but they also need to have challenge in their schooling and lives. The conference speakers will explore both these aspects of the theme. The conference theme will be set from the start with a Maori challenge, *haka* and welcome.

Massey University's Auckland campus is situated 15 minutes north of the centre of Auckland and the Harbour Bridge. It is a new, growing campus with top

facilities and ample parking. There is a variety of accommodation available within twenty minutes of the campus, from university halls of residence to top hotels and motels.

The conference is being held straight after Easter 2006, a great opportunity to incorporate a bit of a holiday and sight-seeing with the conference.

Program organiser Michael Irwin, from the College of Education at Massey



University, wants to hear from anyone interested in presenting a seminar at the conference. Contact him on email **M.R.Irwin@massey.ac.nz**

For any enquiries or to register your interest contact:

Email **albevents@massey.ac.nz**

Website

**<http://boys.conference.massey.ac.nz>**

## Review

### *Like It Is* and *Being Me*

The teaching of self-esteem, resilience and encouraging students to have a future orientation has always been problematic for teachers. Class discussion and work sheets will only get you so far. The ABC has produced a series of eight twenty-minute videos for primary and secondary students that will help teachers come to grips with the thorny topics of connectedness and belonging, dealing with change, and risk taking.

*Like It Is* (for secondary students) and *Being Me* (middle to upper primary) examine and explore the social-emotional issues that young people face today.

Topics dealt with by *Like It Is* cover the key aspects of resilience and its development: having and keeping both platonic and romantic friends; belonging; risk-taking; managing stress and change in life; promoting a strong self-concept. Each program covers a different topic using a music video-clip style and incorporating realistic scenarios (acted by young people) and interviews with young people at school.

*Being Me* is for middle to upper primary students and covers similar topics at a developmentally appropriate level. Topics include identify and self-esteem, making and keeping friends, belonging, coping with change, risk-taking and responsibility. There is information for students provided by an adult presenter, and this is interspersed with interviews with ten to twelve-year-olds as well as short pieces from the children spoken directly to camera. The pieces to camera provide an excellent point of contact for the younger audience.

There are excellent teacher notes for each program,, providing synopsis and plenty of pre- and post-viewing suggestions for class activities. While a lot of the activities revolve around class discussions, an effort has been made to include activities that use a variety of learning styles, which should be more helpful for boys (who are often not inclined towards lengthy discussions about emotional topics) in particular.

**[Videos that] . . . help teachers come to grips with the thorny topics of connectedness and belonging, dealing with change and risk-taking.**



Both series are well researched and thoughtful, and draw on the latest research and developments in the areas of psychology, mental health and wellbeing. Websites pertinent to each topic are provided to allow for individual or class follow-up. This can be particularly important for vulnerable students who may not feel comfortable about speaking up in class, but who could benefit from the information and support offered on the *beyondblue*, *HEADROOM* and *goodgrief* websites.

Both series will fit well within any of the personal development curricula in use around the country today. There is a balance of gender and ethnic origins in the programs, which should assist with engagement. While cynicism from older students is always evident when viewing these types of programs, the programs are structured in a way that would allow for stopping and starting the tape, providing short grabs as starting points rather than viewing the program as a whole. (Although twenty minutes is an excellent length and the programs are bright and appealing.)

Overall, the series provides excellent stimuli and starting points for meaningful work around the social-emotional issues facing young people today.

More information about the programs available at [www.abc.net.au/programsales/](http://www.abc.net.au/programsales/)

*Being Me* (2004 ABC Education TV) and *Like It Is* (2003 ABC Education TV) are available from ABC Online Sales.

*Reviewed by Victoria Clay, Team Leader, School and Community Partnerships, at the Family Action Centre of The University of Newcastle.*

## What we can do for you!



The Boys in Schools Program is a not-for-profit program. We provide research, support programs and resources to educators throughout Australia in order to showcase boys' strengths and their creative talents, and assist schools to harness boys' irrepressible energy and humour in positive ways. Fees from our professional development activities and sales of resources help us to continue this work.

### Staff development workshops and seminars

What's all the fuss about boys? What is behind boys' behaviour? How do boys love to learn? What motivates boys to read?

The Boys in Schools seminar program offers answers to the above through a range of personal and professional staff development activities for teachers, school leaders and parent representatives.

Seminars will cover three key areas that have been identified as crucial in successfully addressing boys' educational issues: **identity, relationships** (including behaviour) and **learning**.

#### The staff development activities:

- can be full-day or half-day workshops
- are tailored to the needs of your school
- offer a strengths-based approach to engaging boys and promoting a positive male identity
- place an emphasis on interaction and drawing out staff experience and expertise
- develop practical strategies that can be implemented at both a classroom and a whole-school level.

#### Seminar topics include:

- An introduction to boys' education issues
- Planning for a whole-school approach to boys' education
- Effective teaching and assessment strategies for boys' learning styles
- Effective behaviour strategies for boys
- Boys and literacies
- Engaging fathers in educating boys
- Increasing social-emotional skills
- Rock and Water (one-day workshop)
- Boys Business: Tuning into boys in the middle years using music and the arts



## Boys Education, Better Outcomes Project — BEBOP

To take your school further on the journey to improve boys' educational outcomes you can become part of BEBOP. The project enables schools and/or groups or clusters of schools to systematically develop their approaches to boys' education over a twelve- to eighteen-month period, supported by research staff from the Boys in Schools Program at The University of Newcastle. It involves a series of professional development seminars in school-identified priority issues in educating boys, coupled with supported school-based action research tasks for school staff. Topics for seminars and action research projects are negotiated individually with schools and/or clusters.

Involvement in the project enables schools to:

- identify and prioritise their school-based boys' education issues (e.g. boys' literacy, self-esteem, behaviour)
- gather school-based information and develop boys' education benchmarks
- develop and implement effective strategies for teaching, assessment, behaviour and welfare of boys
- develop effective school-based structures for enhancing boys' outcomes in parallel to outcomes for girls
- document school-based approaches through comprehensive policy and strategy documents and case studies
- evaluate, monitor and adapt school-based boys' education strategies and programs.

### The BEBOP process

#### 1. Consultation visits from the Boys in Schools team of specialist researchers/practitioners

Up to four visits per BEBOP project (over twelve to eighteen months). Each visit consists of two days of workshops or individual consultations conducted by the Boys in Schools team of specialist researchers/practitioners.

#### 2. Research and preparation

Each staff development workshop and project topic is carefully researched by the Boys in Schools team to provide the latest information on the topic, including theoretical perspectives and some case studies of successful programs operating in schools.

#### 3. Action research assistance between consultation visits

Once a school or cluster commits to the BEBOP process, specialist project staff are allocated to a cluster depending on the topics selected. Any participant can email or call project staff to discuss their project and seek advice and support. Our research team can seek out new information to send projects, conduct analysis on school data, or act as a 'critical friend', offering trouble-shooting advice on project processes or content.

#### 4. An efficiently administered project

Projects are well managed and communication between projects and the Boys in Schools team is smooth and efficient.

### What does a school or cluster have to do to ensure a successful BEBOP project?

- Commit to the process and allocate time to it (particularly teacher release time).
- Select relevant topics and organise workshops and visits by Boys in Schools staff.
- Set up and support teams of interested teachers.
- Set up meeting structures and stick to them.
- Appoint a school leader who is responsible for keeping the process going.
- Regularly contact Boys in Schools staff.



## Specialised Seminars

The Boys in Schools team also conduct specialised seminars in:

- Boys and Literacy
- Resilience Enhancement
- Fathers and Schools Together (FAST)
- Taking a strengths approach with boys in your class



## Our Postgraduate Program

Interested in postgraduate study in boys' education?

We offer Graduate Certificate and Master's level programs specialising in educating boys. These programs are the first in Australia for practising teachers who wish to develop their professional expertise in educating boys in primary, secondary, single-sex or co-educational schools.

### Course details

The program offers flexibility for busy teachers. At least three courses are offered each semester and students can begin in semester one or two. On completion of the Graduate Certificate graduates can apply to continue to complete the Masters program. To complete the Graduate Certificate students must successfully complete a total of forty 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 eighty credit points.

The program is full-fee paying, with payment of the fees directly to the university. 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](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/courseinfo/handbook.htm)

or

contact Leah Pringle on 02 4921 8739

or

email [Leah.Pringle@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Leah.Pringle@newcastle.edu.au)

Boys in Schools Program



# bulletin board

## Rock and Water

### Workshops? Courses? Conferences?

The choice is yours . . .



### Inaugural Rock and Water Conference

Newcastle, 16 October 2006

Do you want to find out more about Rock and Water? Then attend our inaugural Australia-wide Rock and Water Conference. The focus throughout the conference will be Rock and Water in primary, secondary and youth organisations. Freerk Ykema and Deborah Hartman will be keynote speakers along with sixteen concurrent sessions focusing on successful implementation and evaluation stories. A one-day Introductory workshop will be held on the 15 October and a three-day training workshop on the 17–19 October. Please send an email to express your interest in attending or presenting to [Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au)

### One-day introductory

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 school yard 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 thirty participants per workshop. Total cost: \$2300.00 (inc GST) plus any travel and sundry expenses. Price includes fifteen starter manuals, one basic exercise video and one perspective theory book and is presented by our qualified instructors (extra participants \$77.00 each).

### 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 fourteen exercises and thoughts about boys and manhood to assist boys to become aware of purpose and motivation in their life. 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. Cost for the three-day workshop is \$685.00 (inc GST).

### Workshops still available for the October/November 2005 Tour

#### New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory

All NSW and ACT courses are organised by the Family Action Centre.

For registration and information contact:  
Michelle Gifford at the Family Action Centre,  
The University of Newcastle  
Phone: 02 4921 6830  
Fax: 02 4921 8686  
Email: [Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au)

**Wagga Wagga**  
(Wagga Wagga High School)  
12–14 October

**Murwillumbah**  
(Murwillumbah High School)  
31 October– 2 November

**Canberra**  
(Queanbeyan Public School)  
7–9 November

**Balgowlah**  
(Balgowlah Boys High School)  
One-day introductory  
11 November

**Newcastle** (Swansea High School)  
17–19 November

#### Western Australia

**Panawonica** (Panawonica Primary)  
21–23 October  
Anne Mead 08 9184 1172  
[Anne.Mead@eddept.wa.edu.au](mailto:Anne.Mead@eddept.wa.edu.au)

**Perth** (Wesley College)  
26–28 October  
Susan Laughton 08 9368 8047  
[slaughton@wesley.wa.edu.au](mailto:slaughton@wesley.wa.edu.au)

#### Victoria

**Melbourne** (Parade College)  
3–5 October  
Bernadette Linnehan  
03 9468 3300  
[belinehan@parade.vic.edu.au](mailto:belinehan@parade.vic.edu.au)

#### New Zealand

**Christchurch**  
23–25 November  
Chuck Marriot +64 3 358 7414  
[rockandwaternz@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rockandwaternz@xtra.co.nz)

### Dates for February–March 2006

(other states to be finalised)

For registration and information contact:  
Michelle Gifford at the Family Action  
Centre, The University of Newcastle

Phone: 02 4921 6830

Fax: 02 4921 8686

Email: [Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au)

Tasmania 23–25 February

Toowoomba 1–3 March

Balgowlah (Sydney) 6–8 March

Wollongong 9–11 March

Canberra 13–15 March

Kempsey 20–22 March

Newcastle 27–29 March



# New Resources

from the Family Action Centre

## To make your job easier . . .



### Boys' World — LEARNING, LITERACY, AND IDENTITY OF BOYS IN SCHOOLS

Hear what the boys have to say from Thornbury Darebin Secondary College. A straight from the hip, honest and informative DVD about how boys view learning, literacy and identity. The film is based around kids interviewing their peers (primary and secondary) about their vision of an ideal school. It has received critical acclaim from educators around Australia.

An excellent resource for staff development or classroom use. Presented at the Boys to Fine Men Conference in April, 2005, the delegates had only one question . . . 'Where can we get a copy?'

*Produced by Make It Happen, distributed by The Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle*

PRICE **\$55.00** Order Code: BoysWorld



### What Kids Want . . . STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Excursions, experiments, 'real life' experiences and a more equal relationship with their teachers are some of the things children want from their schools according to a short film made with the help of Year 11 media students at Thornbury Darebin Secondary College.

The film, based around kids interviewing their peers (primary and secondary) about their vision of an ideal school, received critical acclaim from educators around Australia.

Interviewers found that kids want teachers to be able to 'teach us, but to be able to talk to us as well' and to adjust their methods to match the way different kids learn.

Find out the views of boys and girls in the middle years. How do they think? What do they want? An excellent resource for staff development or classroom use.

*Produced by Make It Happen, distributed by The Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle*

PRICE **\$55.00** Order Code: WhatKidsWant



### 6 Pack of Strengths — MINI PACK

You asked for it so here it is — the **Mini Pack** to compliment the original *6 Pack of Strengths*. A versatile option for classroom teachers. Following the levelled rewards system of the *6 Pack of Strengths*, the *Mini Pack* gives educators a fun and easy way to recognise and reward students from Year 5 to Year 8. Why not buy a *Mini Pack* for individual classes and one complete set of the *6 Pack of Strengths* for each year level?

The **Mini Pack** contains:

- a classroom wall poster as a visual reminder of strengths-based actions
- 320 colour-coded Spotting Strengths stickers, which are all about noticing the great things kids do every day
- a booklet to help with suggestions on how the reward system can work in your classroom.

PRICE **\$77.00** Order Code: 6MiniPack



### 6 Pack of Strengths —STICKERS TOP-UP PACK

If you've enjoyed using the *6 Pack of Strengths* in your classroom but have run out of stickers — no problem! The **Stickers Top-Up Pack** has arrived. Replenish your *6 Pack of Strengths* supply of stickers **now!**

- 320 colour-coded Spotting Strengths stickers, which are all about noticing the great things kids do every day.

PRICE **\$27.50** Order Code: 6TOPUP

### Re-subscribe for Boys In Schools Bulletin 2006

## —NOW!

Subscribe now to the **Boys In Schools Bulletin** for 2006 and choose from the options of printed format or the **new** CD-ROM format.

Why not purchase a combination of the two — printed format for the school library and a CD-ROM format for your school intranet?

Due to increasing production expenses, the cost of the *Boys in Schools Bulletin* printed format for 2006 will increase by 10%. However, if you subscribe early (before 16 December), you will receive a free gift for your school.

#### 2006 Subscription

<b>Single Set</b>	
Printed Format	\$56.90 = 3 issues/year
<b>Single Set</b>	
CD Format	\$30.35 = 3 issues/year
<b>Combo Set</b>	
Printed copy & CD	\$80.00 = 3 issues/year
<b>School Set</b>	
Printed Format	\$139.15 = 3 x 3 issues/year

*\*Make up your own combination to satisfy the needs of your school*

**Note:** All prices include GST + postage & handling

For ordering details see inside back cover