



The Boys in Schools

BULLETIN

→ Practical Initiatives Addressing Boys' Needs

PRODUCED BY BOYS IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM OF THE FAMILY ACTION CENTRE

Identity | Learning | Literacy



Special

Working with Boys
Building Fine Men
Conference issue

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



Oh what a feeling! No, this is not a car ad! This is post-conference euphoria. Almost a thousand educators, over 100 boys, the fabulous Tulips Meetings Management staff and the truly awesome Boys in Schools staff are still basking in delight after the success of our 4th biennial *Working with Boys* —

Building Fine Men conference, held in Melbourne in April.

The participant evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, so we thought this edition of *The Boys in Schools Bulletin* should be dedicated to bringing some of the highlights to those of you who missed out on being there. We've organised this edition into articles on the conference themes of boys' identity, learning and literacy, choosing some stories from the conference presentations and some from schools who were unable to present.

The opening story, *From Practise to Practice*, gives you a taste of the conference in text and photos. The identity theme includes an excerpt from the inspiring address of Chris Sarra, principal of Cherbourg State School in Queensland, called *Strong and Smart* — just like the kids of Cherbourg. Dagmar Rolands tells us about a great night where dads and boys got together at her school.

Richard Fletcher's papers in the research section take up the theme of male identity and challenge current theoretical and policy directions on boys' male identity and male role models.

Programs to ensure boys get the most out of learning are discussed from different angles in two articles. Dr Bob Smith's *Boys Business* article discusses what a great vehicle music can be to enhance boys' learning and relationships. Jeff Meizzo and Mick Adams from Airds High School in Western Sydney, a BELS school, talk about the success of their whole-school approach.

Boys' literacy is unpacked by Victoria Clay, giving us a framework for successful programs. In a great example of broadening the concept of literacy to involve boys' interests and engage boys more thoroughly, Monica Wright and Doug Taylor tell us about their visual literacy program at Moonee Ponds West Primary School. Then, from New Zealand, we hear from Paul Norton about the links between boys' literacy and dads' involvement.

In the Bulletin Board, we've described many new resources and professional development opportunities to support you in your great positive work with boys. These days our problem is having too much copy for each edition, as you send in your success stories. Thanks for sending us your stories. Please don't stop. We are now well on the way to a huge body of evidence-based work on what really works for boys in schools.

Deborah Hartman

For the editorial committee



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From practise

identity, learning and literacy

The unprecedented response to the latest 'Working with Boys Building Fine Men' conference shows that boys' education is a priority for teachers and educators throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Over 960 educators gathered to witness the strengths and talents of boys from widely diverse backgrounds, the important work of teachers and youth workers having great success with boys of all ages, and the latest research on educating boys successfully. For those who missed out, here are some of the highlights.

The audience was deeply moved by the Boys' Panel, chaired by George Negus. George created a safe environment for the boys to share their views on what it's like becoming a man in the 21st century. The boys spoke in a candid and heartfelt way about family relationships, sexuality and school life, often moving people to tears and laughter.

The unstoppable and down-to-earth Celia Lashlie inspired and entertained people with her accounts of the 'Good Man' project. This project enabled Celia to talk openly with hundreds of boys from 25 boys' schools in New Zealand about what being a good man entails. She recounted the boys' views in their own words, and also touched on broader gender issues.

Dutch researcher Martine Delfos argued that boys and girls have significantly different behaviours linked to their brain development,



which has implications for how we teach them. According to Martine 'Teaching strategies should encompass boys' preference for competitive behaviour; a cognitive style orientated more towards discovery and rote memory; and a need for strong peer connections. Boys have a tendency to action, and need action in class. A variation between movement and sitting still is more important for boys than girls.'

The tenacious and straight-talking Principal of Cherbourg State School, Chris Sarra, challenged Indigenous men to understand the importance of standing up for their own children within their communities. An excerpt from his paper begins on page 4.

Keynote speaker Don Edgar stressed the need for society to teach boys and men that 'caring counts', maintaining that caring is a human quality needed not just for family life but as a crucial skill for survival in the modern workplace. 'Usually called "emotional intelligence", the

ability to care — about oneself, about others, and about the wider quality of social life — is not something to be left to women alone,' says Don. 'Boys must be given clear role models and learn that self-control, empathy, cooperation and communication skills are central to being a successful male.'

Richard Fletcher's thought-provoking address added a great deal of light to the debate around whether the



to practice

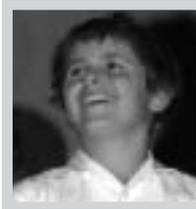


gender of a teacher is significant. (See page 35 for Richard's paper on male role models.)

The critical issue of boys' literacy was thoroughly addressed at the conference. Ken Rowe's research linked the importance of hearing to literacy acquisition and attention and showed how early literacy is crucial for boys' later school success. Victoria Clay and Chuck Marriott described literacy approaches that worked both for high achievers and for those having difficulty. While not advocating one particular methodology, they emphasised the need for approaches that enabled boys to develop basic literacy tools, including phonemic awareness as well as materials that captured their interests and were relevant to their real lives. (See page 20 for Victoria's paper on individualising literacy.)

Deborah Hartman drew on school-based research to conclude that the elements of a 'boy friendly' school culture could be identified. These include enabling boys to explore and demonstrate a positive male identity, learn in ways that suited them, and develop positive relationship skills. Schools that developed a boy-friendly culture were likely to provide excellent learning opportunities for both boys and girls, as they could celebrate, encourage and expand the strengths of both genders. Joseph Dreissen from New Zealand pursued this theme by describing the structures he has put in place as principal of a large high school.

The workshop presentations from schools highlighted the whole-school, evidence-based approaches of many schools that are successfully educating all boys as well as meeting the more specific needs of special groups of boys. Presentations from



both primary and secondary schools emphasised the variety of ways teachers can engage boys in life-long learning by drawing on their interests outside of school and utilising their preferred learning styles.

Several schools receiving funding from the federal government's Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Program presented evidence of the findings from their school projects. By systematically addressing the issues facing the boys in their schools, schools that presented at the conference are developing successful programs that are resulting in dramatic decreases in truancy, violent behaviour, and disengagement, as well as increases in literacy and more general academic success.

Successful programs come in many forms. These include using music to develop social and emotional awareness, having a two-day boys' camp at the beginning of Year 7 to develop a positive cooperative culture, and enhancing literacy through multimedia.

Pre-conference forums on Indigenous Boys' Education and Boys in Early Childhood emphasised the need to address boys' education issues from the early years and the

need for schools to work in partnerships with communities to draw on the strengths of the specific social, cultural and educational contexts of boys. The important role of fathers and other older males in the successful education of boys was examined during these forums and throughout the conference. The pre-conference workshops on the Rock and Water Program were well attended. Over 3000 teachers have been trained in this unique program which links the physical skills of karate and Tai Chi to the social, emotional and spiritual domains in order to develop self-confidence, self-control and self-awareness in the boys.

The excitement at the conference was tangible. A roving video crew of boys from Thornbury-Darrebin College in Victoria captured the participants as they focused on practical ideas to take back to their schools, the great networking opportunities and the stimulating new ideas. Teachers felt the conference confirmed that they are on the right track and were happy to see so many boys involved in showcasing boys' strengths.

A new publication, *Educating Boys: The Good News*, will link the conference themes of literacy, learning and identity through an analysis of the conference proceedings. It will be published later this year in both book and CD-ROM form.



identity



Strong and smart

The way forward for Indigenous boys

Chris Sarra delivered a very powerful message to our conference, one that made us stop and reconsider our attitudes and expectations about Indigenous boys. In this excerpt, Chris explains how they reversed academic outcomes and attendance trends while creating a positive identity for their boys.

From the outset I challenge this conference. I challenge this conference to acknowledge the ancient notions of transition from boyhood to manhood in traditional Indigenous communities. It is a very ancient tradition — and a very successful one broken only by the forces of colonisation and capitalism and modernity. I do this to challenge the notion that all Aboriginal communities are ‘basket cases’ where the government has to threaten to withhold petrol to get people to wash the children’s faces. Rather, I am seeking to remind us all that there is a store of knowledge and wisdom that should not be ignored. At the heart of this knowledge and wisdom is clear acknowledgement of the differences between men and women and boys and girls. I stress firmly, the recognition of differences does not imply a denial of equality of treatment and the restriction of access to opportunities but rather a clear expectation about the role of men and women and boys and girls.

Indigenous communities have always held that there are things that boys need to learn about being a man that they cannot learn from women. And equally there are things

that girls need to learn about being a woman that they cannot learn from men. At this point let me reiterate that my comments here do not imply a desire to roll back the gains that women have made in the twentieth century. These are the gains that I fully support.

Cherbourg School is an Aboriginal Community School, 300 km north-west of Brisbane. Cherbourg itself was formerly a mission or a reserve where Aboriginal people, from as far north as Cooktown and as far west as Corpi, were rounded up and plonked and taught to be ‘less aboriginal’. On my arrival at the school in August 1998, I discovered a school in chaos. A school staffed entirely by women apart from the one groundsman who was employed for 20 hours a week. It was a school in which children, particularly the boys, were prescribing to a negative perception of being Aboriginal. And from where did we get this perception? We got it from the society in which we live in that consists of the many individuals, like you and me, with our own perceptions and attitudes about Aboriginal people.

For the purposes of my recently completed doctoral research, I

facilitated 30 discussions with more than 2000 people about mainstream Australia’s perceptions of Aboriginal people. At each forum I would say, ‘What are some adjectives that mainstream Australians would use to describe Aboriginal people? Remember, I’m not looking for your personal perceptions of Aboriginal people, I want to know how mainstream Australia sees Aboriginal people.’ From this point, members of the forum would present adjectives that they thought mainstream Australia had used to describe Aboriginal people, and I would note the adjectives on a whiteboard. Throughout the entire process I would note the frequency at which these adjectives would occur. On every occasion at each of the thirty forums it was considered by many that mainstream Australia’s perception of Aboriginal people is that they are ‘alcoholics’, ‘drunks’, or ‘heavy drinkers’. It was also widely accepted by many that mainstream Australia saw Aboriginal people as ‘privileged’ or in some way ‘got it good’. Now I didn’t see too many people lining up to be Aboriginal. Aboriginal people, according to many participants that I spoke with, are regarded by

mainstream Australia as 'welfare dependent', 'dole bludgers', as well as 'lazy people who won't work'. On every occasion many considered that mainstream Australia uses pejorative terms such as 'coon', 'nigger', 'boong', 'black cunts', 'black coons', 'black bastards' in relation to Aboriginal people — the types of names that I used to be called when I was at school.

In Cherbourg School there was a sense of collusion with this negative perception of being Aboriginal. We had a lot of white teachers and Aboriginal children both subscribing to and reinforcing this negative and inaccurate perception of being Aboriginal. Two status quos existed. There was a white status quo, where teachers got their pay regardless of the continuing abysmal student outcomes. These teachers were largely left unchallenged because they could always get away with blaming the community. There was also a black status quo, under which we continued to fail, and we could always blame the school for that. Many of the white teachers on staff had been there for years and they were the type of people that would say, 'My life has been transformed as a result of working on an Aboriginal community.' And this is all very nice and a romantic story for them of course, until it is made clear that nothing about the lives of the children that they were responsible for teaching was transformed.

The field of collusion that I speak about was being reflected in a range of ways. Children were failing miserably, student behaviour was extremely poor yet was being tolerated. Children were running up and down on the roof of a two-storey building, the school grounds were a mess from litter and vandalism, school attendance was extremely poor but was being tolerated. Many Aboriginal parents would send their kids to nearby Murgon because they thought that our school had a watered down curriculum, which wasn't necessarily the case. But what was true was that

we had watered down expectations of what our kids could achieve. Retention of children for the entire school day or year was extremely poor and being tolerated. Our retention at high school was pretty shocking as well.

As the principal of this school I would not tolerate such failure. As an Aboriginal person, there is no way that I would tolerate such failure. On questioning the staff about the extent of our school's failure, they would tell me, 'There are many social complexities', 'There are many cultural complexities', 'The parents don't value education', 'The children don't value education' 'The community is not supporting the school'. On every occasion the children and the community were getting the blame for our failure. At no stage did we scrutinise such dismal performance in us — the teaching staff. What is it that we are doing that is contributing to such dramatic underachievement? This is the thing that was crucial.

Clearly we had very little control over the external forces on the children's social and cultural context. We did, however, control our own context — the school and the things that happen inside the school gate. If we developed and embraced within our school a culture and society of dismal failure, then clearly that's what we were destined to return.

In Education Queensland we have this thing called 'The Principles of Effective Learning and Teaching'. One of the principles states that, 'Effective learning and teaching shapes and responds to the social and cultural context of the learner'. Accordingly, in schools it is incumbent upon us as educators to shape and respond to a child's social and cultural context — not blame it.

What frustrated and angered me the most about this tendency to externalise or blame forces other than our own, is that for a teacher in an Aboriginal community school, regardless of poor student outcomes, life goes on. They still get their pay.

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Children and adults with limited or no education really suffer in life and anybody who has read the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* will know that of all of those young Aboriginal people who died in some form of incarceration, most were illiterate and all had very limited education. So, for some Aboriginal men with limited or no education, life doesn't go on.

On reflection, my efforts here could be considered an attempt to recover or at least draw upon that ancient wisdom that I spoke of earlier. I deliberately head-hunted men from particular family groups to employ in the school, and I made it clear to them that it was time to stand up for our children. I needed their support to reassert what we believed were the proper boundaries for us as Aboriginal men and for boys as boys and for children as children. The Aboriginal men had to be Aboriginal men. The Aboriginal women had to be Aboriginal women. And the children had to be children. There was to be no confusion about this. Our efforts here were crystallised by the development of our new school vision and motto. I set out to challenge children — and to some extent challenge parents — about how they saw themselves as Aboriginal people and how that related to what was happening within the school. This was a challenge that had to be attended to, and the men in the community had to step up with me and attend to this. We spoke with lots of people within the community and we all wanted the children to be successful in life and retain a positive sense of what it really meant to be Aboriginal.

Today, the aim at Cherbourg School is the pursuit of academic outcomes that are comparable to any other school around Queensland and to develop and nurture a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in today's society. So, our school is not a place where you do nice things

and someone pats you on the top of the head. It's a place where you get power. Where you learn how to play, and win, the game of life. Cherbourg School is a place where you learn the things that mainstream Australia wants you to know and you'll also learn and be able to recognise the things that they don't want you to know.

When we talk about developing a strong and positive sense of identity, for us that means STRONG. When we talk about academic outcomes, for us that means SMART. So the new motto became STRONG AND SMART. Today, everywhere you go in our school you will see that all of the behaviour of all of the children and all of the staff hangs on being strong and smart. It is very clear.

With a new vision and a new motto, we then had to establish a team that believed it could be done; those that didn't believe it could be achieved were encouraged to move on. And I did sit in the staff room and say to staff, 'What I believe and what the community believes it that our children can leave here stronger and smarter. If you don't believe it, then you have to go. And half the staff left. I negotiated with the local district office to have more male teachers on staff, and when new staff were appointed I would be on the phone to them before they even came to the school and say, 'Look, don't come here to feel sorry for the children, or to rescue them — they don't need rescuing. Come here to work hard. I want to see effective learning and teaching — not baby sitting.'

One of the other key things that we did was to raise the profile and status of the Indigenous education workers in the school, particularly the men. We ensured that they were seen as co-teachers in the classroom, and not just people stuck in the corner and told to colour this in or go and photocopy that. Teachers on our staff had to realise that, whilst they come in with a flash degree, there was another piece of knowledge out there that they didn't

have but that Indigenous education workers from the local community did. And they had to blend those two pieces of knowledge together.

We had specific meetings, and occasionally I still do have meetings with just the Aboriginal men on staff. We do this to hold each other accountable as brothers. It's a no-bullshit forum where we get on and we talk about the real stuff. Mahatma Ghandi said, 'You have to be the change that you want to see'. So for us as men in the school we would say, 'If we want strong and smart, then we have to be strong and smart'. We owed that to each other as Aboriginal brothers, and we owe that to our children. So we couldn't go missing from work because we were slack or because we were on the charge the night before. You definitely wouldn't come to work half hungover or stinking of grog or those kinds of things because there was nothing strong and smart about that.

We had to get the children to buy into the vision. And we did this easily. You see, in our school we celebrate being Aboriginal *every* day — not just during NAIDOC week. On parade kids will sing out to me when I say, 'What are you going to be when you leave school?' And they'll sing out from the bottom of their guts, 'STRONG AND SMART!' We talk every day about what it means to be Aboriginal in a positive sense and an accurate sense.

Part of this meant getting some of the young boys in our school to wake up to themselves and understand their roles as Aboriginal boys or as young Aboriginal men. I would pull Aboriginal boys aside and say, 'Look, I don't want to see any more bullshit anymore. None of this rubbish. In our way, blackfellas' way, you will be nearly considered a young man. We will send you down the track and you will come back a man. But you are acting like a small boy at the moment. You've got to knock it off and start to act like a young man if you want to be treated like that'.

We embraced our Aboriginality and our blackness. And I should point out that, in our efforts to embrace our blackness and our own Aboriginality, we do not reject other people's whiteness.

Having kids buying into the vision that we articulated — a strong and smart, young, black and deadly vision — gave all of us enough leverage to make each other accountable. I talked about how we talked to the Aboriginal men on staff, but it also allowed me to get on to some more complex things with the kids. And it allowed me to say to them things like, 'You can't tell me that you want to be strong and smart and then act like something else. The words that come out of your mouth have to be the same as your actions. They have to say the same things. You can't tell me that you want to be "young and black and deadly" and then jack up in class because you are slack or because you are tired or whatever. You can't go missing from school because you would rather stay at home or go swimming'.

So we tackled issues like absenteeism front on. We got children to measure their own absenteeism or their own attendance. And every week I would say, 'Alright, you want to be strong and smart, let's find out how strong and smart you are. How many unexplained absences for Year 1?' And they would tell me the number — 65, 58 — without batting an eyelid. Now one child away for one whole day is one unexplained absence. So at the end of the week the class with the lowest score, I would give them a free iceblock or a packet of chips or something like that — but they had to be there at 3.00pm to collect it. And at the end of the term I would have people coming out off parade and get onto a bus that was waiting, so that everybody could see, and they would go off to have lunch at a fancy restaurant in Kingaroy (which is about 45minutes away) called Mc-something-or-other. So we used this

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strategy of just reinforcing the positive behaviour. We started that in Term 3 2000 when there were 1185 unexplained absences. In Term 4 2001, just less than 18 months later, the number of unexplained absences was 68.5. That influenced real attendance at the school to the extent that we don't give weekly prizes for attendance any more because we don't need to. Because kids are motivated by the intrinsic rewards now — of being stronger and smarter. Last term of last year we registered 93% real attendance in our school, which is not too bad in any school.

We run an Aboriginal Studies program in our school and it is crucial to have the men on deck to play a part in this. It is a key strategy in developing a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal and it is designed to nurture this within children. It is designed to get Aboriginal perceptions of being Aboriginal.

Our Aboriginal Studies program takes on issues of domestic violence and alcoholism, family connections, all of that. So that we can get young kids to understand why an uncle is on the charge so much. And we have to do that because we talk about being strong and smart in the school but we don't want to down-play or diminish who their parents are or who their uncles are. We don't need to get them to see it because sometimes it is so prominent and in your face that it is just there and it contradicts the strong and smart notion that we talk about. We want children to understand that the negative social factors that they see around them are largely the legacy of historical and sociological processes — they are not the legacy of being Aboriginal.

We had to enforce in our school a more disciplined yet challenging and supportive classroom environment. Again, the presence and the role of men in the school is crucial when we try to do this. Teachers had to get back to being

the ones who directed the agenda for the classroom — not the children. Classrooms had to get back to looking like classrooms, not like very poor babysitting facilities. The children had to learn how to function as a student would in a classroom so that they could survive in high school. Here we had to make the parameters very clear to avoid the confusion that had existed previously. At this point it is worth just reflecting on the genesis of such confusion. The Cherbourg community — like many Aboriginal communities, and indeed like many communities in general — is confronted by issues of juvenile delinquency. It is worth noting that such issues in Cherbourg do not relate to the majority of young boys, quite a minority really.

Let me sum things up here by reasserting the notion that in Aboriginal society, gender differences exist and if misunderstood could be problematic. Let me reiterate once again my fullest support for the emancipation of women and the need for that process to continue. Secondly, I'd like to consider that my views are somewhat conservative — not controversial. I seek to recover and preserve what is the best of our Indigenous past. I am opposed to libertarianism that promises much with its talk of rights and democracy yet delivers nothing to boys who are sniffing petrol, stealing cars, and needing to learn where the boundaries are.

Finally, I'm there alongside my colleagues — my Aboriginal brothers and my Aboriginal sisters at the school — totally and absolutely for our children, day in, day out. When they hurt, we at the school hurt. When they lash out, we at the school every day have to help them process their anger. When they choose to be stronger and smarter, we help them understand what this means.

Changing the culture of a school and forging a new sense of identity is a very difficult process and it is a

very emotionally draining process. Cherbourg State School was a place where attendance rates were extremely poor, academic progress was extremely poor and self-pride and dignity was not observable. Yet within three years the team — including the Aboriginal men that stand beside me still today — transformed this school into one where children are hungry to learn, children take pride in themselves and their school, where children respect their elders, where children value the positive and sophisticated aspects of what it truly means to be Aboriginal. We now have a school where children act like Aborigines and not like delinquents — where the rate of unexplained absenteeism was improved by 94% within 18 months, where real absenteeism has dropped from 37% to 7%, where the number of children failing state-wide diagnostic tests has fallen from 100% to 42% within two years.

At Cherbourg School we aim to nurture a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in today's society. They will be strong. We aim to generate good academic outcomes that are comparable to other schools around Queensland. They will be smart.



Chris Sarra's career in education has spanned several government departments and the University of Southern Queensland. He's pretty strong and smart himself, with a string of credits and awards including 'Regional Local Hero Award', 'Queenslander of the Year', QUT's 2004 Chancellor's Outstanding Alumnus winner, a Deadly's Award for services to Indigenous education and being named one of the *Bulletin's* top 10 Australian educators.

Until recently Chris was the principal of Cherbourg State School where he pursued his main passion: more positive and productive educational outcomes for Indigenous children. Today he is the director of the newly established Cherbourg Institute for Leadership in Indigenous Education.



Boys' night out

Father and son events prove beneficial for everyone

Dagmar Rolands describes how their Men and Boys Nights are helping to involve dads more with their children and their school communities.

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Mount Crosby State School is located in the western outskirts of Brisbane in the West Moreton Education District. A dormitory area for both Ipswich and Brisbane, the school community consists of established residential areas and acreage properties. The district has low unemployment, with a large percentage employed in professional fields. Over 500 students attend the school, with a further 50 in the preschool. A very small percentage of students come from ESL or ATSI backgrounds. There are very few transient students and attendance is excellent. Over the past two years the school

community has been reviewing the academic, social and engagement levels of boys across the school, but in particular in the middle school. Engagement with schooling has shown to 'dropoff' in the middle years. As part of a response to this, and in light of current research into boy's education, an initiative to invite dads to participate with their sons in the school has begun.

Being mindful that activities needed to be provided out of regular school times, we introduced our Men and Boys Nights. All the male teachers in the school were encouraged to plan the activities to present on the night. (This was a real learning experience for me, as the



men prepare and plan in a significantly different style, much more 'She'll be right on the night'!

The first of these took place on a very chilly June evening. It involved the Year 6 and Year 7 boys with a significant male in their lives. Invitations had been sent to all 72 boys, and approximately 45 pairs arrived. The evening kicked off with a barbecue followed by a rotational program of three activities involving movement, construction and problem solving. During the evening a photo of each pair was taken as they solved the challenges then sent home the following day as a photo memory of the event.

The evening was great fun. Many of the dads said that they seldom got to talk to other dads and that they often didn't get time to spend with just the one child. By the end of the first evening a large number of boys and their dads were asking for more such evenings.

We have subsequently run a second evening along the same lines for the Year 4 and Year 5 boys. This too was very well patronised and a number of dads came up at the end of the evening offering suggestions for future evenings. Personally, I have greatly enjoyed the challenge of getting this up and running and the love and laughter that occurred on the night made all the hitches well worth the effort.

Whilst this was established as a middle-school initiative we have had enquiries from parents in the lower school as to when their night will be!



Dagmar Rolands is the Learning Support Teacher at Mount Crosby State School. Dagmar's postgraduate qualifications include a Graduate Certificate of Educational Studies (specialising in educating boys) from The University of Newcastle, and a Graduate Diploma in Resource Teaching. For 15 years Dagmar has worked with special needs students in mainstream settings. Because many of these students are boys, and as a mother of a growing young man, Dagmar is keenly interested in making learning an interesting and enjoyable activity in which boys want to participate.

BOYS in learning S



A boys' own adventure story

Improving outcomes for disadvantaged boys

The Airs' community has all the indicators of social disadvantage. That's one reason why the local high school's success is so astounding. With two awards under its belt and inclusion in the Lighthouse program, Airs High School is giving its 'at risk' boys a fighting chance. In their conference workshop, Michael Adams and Jeff Miezio outlined how the program developed.

Airs High School's Boys' Own Program is a welfare initiative aimed at improving the self-concept of boys and the engagement of boys in schooling. The program was initiated in 2000 by the then Head Teacher English, Brad Mitchell, and Mick Adams, an English/History teacher. Mick and Jeff Miezio, Head Teacher PDHPE, have since refined and extended the program. In 2004 Boys' Own was introduced, through a mentoring program, into the four feeder primary schools — Briar Road, John Warby, Woodlands Road and Bradbury. The program has had enormous success within the high school and has been recognised beyond the school as a winner of *The Australian's* Best Schools Programs Award in 2003, the 2004 Reddell Award, and by Airs High School's inclusion as one of the Federal Government's Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools (BELS).

Context

The schools

Airs High School is a co-educational comprehensive servicing one of NSW's most disadvantaged communities. In the early 1990s the school had a reputation for being one of the most violent and difficult schools in the public education system. Of the 600 students, about 55% are males. There are large Pacific Islander and Aboriginal populations and students from over 40 different cultural backgrounds. Most of our students come from the predominantly housing commission suburb of Airs, and there is a Support Unit of 70 IM ('intellectually mild') and IO ('intellectually moderate') students. John Warby and Briar Road also draw from the estate, though Bradbury and Woodlands Road draw from more affluent areas.

The boys and their community

Airs is an almost exclusively housing commission suburb of Campbelltown on Sydney's south-western fringe. It is an area of severe

socioeconomic disadvantage with an unemployment rate of 30%, a large number of people surviving on disability pensions or other government benefits, and with 40% of families earning less than \$200 a week. It is statistically Sydney's poorest suburb. Half of Airs families are single parent. In the vast majority of these families the sole parent is the mother. Many students live with grandparents or other relatives. By any measure, most of our students could be classed as 'at risk'.

The statistics are damning in themselves; however, the subtle discrimination our students suffer because of where they live and the stigma attached to the area is equally damaging. Our students are labelled as 'hosos' and treated appallingly by the wider society. The suburb is poorly resourced and many services — from taxis to pizza deliveries — are denied to residents as the area is seen as too dangerous. Boys, in particular, complain about the excessive and unfair attention of police and security guards and get

most upset when they are told to 'Get back to Airds and stay there'.

The suburb's design reinforces the negative perceptions. Houses are designed backing on to each other, the idea being to create communal common areas between residences. The effect of this design, however, is to create a large number of narrow alleyways that have become centres of violence and drug abuse. The high school is situated opposite Briar Road Primary School and one of the state's maximum-security juvenile detention centres. The implied natural progression is extremely demoralizing. Students therefore come to school feeling very negative about themselves and society, and having little faith in their ability to succeed or take control of their future.

There are positives about the community. It is a very open community, and the proximity of the Georges River bushland provides escape and a healthy outdoor environment for our students. The school has always been viewed as an oasis; overall, however, the community is dysfunctional with violence commonplace, significant drug and alcohol problems and high levels of child abuse and neglect caused by the stresses of poverty.

The values behind the program

It is not news that the educational outcomes for boys are far below those of girls. Airds, in 2000, was no different in that respect to any other school. Our retention rate for boys was very poor and our suspension rates high (the second highest in the state, numbering well into the hundreds each year). Our attendance rate was also well below average. For boys in a disadvantaged community like Airds, the effect of failure at school is acute. Many end up unemployed (the unemployment rate for Airds is 30% but the youth unemployment rate is higher); many end up in legal trouble and the incarceration rate is high. They are frequently the victims and perpetrators of violence and are easy

targets of the prejudices of others, particularly if they have an ethnic background. Disempowered, those who do get a job are frequently the victims of unscrupulous and exploitative employers. The challenge was to address the needs of boys and re-engage them into formal schooling and the learning process.

At Airds we take a philosophical approach to effecting change based on a simple principle: you must focus your efforts and resources on the things you have the power to change. Much of the recent boys' education debate is focused on things such as lighting and windows, colour of walls, types of seats, space in the classroom and so on. Yet these are things, at a struggling comprehensive high school, that are beyond our capacity to address (enough seats for each student would be nice) and the huge expense would dwarf any gain. The dysfunctional home and community have a far greater impact on our boys' performances than the types of chair they sit on but, again, we can have a minimal impact on this. We can, however, affect the way our boys view themselves and their school.

We believe that:

- For learners to be successful they have to feel good about themselves.
- For people to feel good about themselves they have to experience success.
- If, as is the case for many boys, the traditional classroom and school has been a place of failure, then educators must look at other opportunities to create possibilities for success.

In addition we believe that it is important for schools to provide positive and successful role models. The absence of positive male role models in many boys' lives has been highlighted time and again. Schools must therefore do what they can to fill the void.

These ideas are simple, yet putting the ideas into practice took a lot of planning, trial and error and failures before the development of today's Boys' Own Program. The simplicity of these aims, however, is also the key to the program's success and the reason for its adaptability and applicability into a variety of educational settings.

Boys' Own in action

The initial project in 2000 targeted 30 selected boys from years 7 to 9 and consisted of two components: a self-directed project to be completed individually or in groups over a period of time, and outdoor activities to be used as a reward upon completing the project. Boys were encouraged to work with male mentors in the community on the project. The project aimed to re-engage boys with school and the outdoor activities to provide life-skills. Both components were designed to improve boys' self-esteem by allowing them to experience success. A reward evening was central to this. The entire project was voluntary and students could drop out at any time if they wished. Few did.

The initial successes of the program exceeded all expectations. There was a dramatic improvement in the behaviour and engagement of the boys involved, and some parents even noted massive improvements at home. The Boys' Own Program was born.

One-off successes are comparatively easy. The challenge now was to make Boys' Own part of the Airds culture and to extend the influence of the project. Over the next few years we refined and extended the project. From 30 targeted students in 2000, in 2003 70 students were involved. In 2004 we were able to offer the program to all mainstream boys in years 7 to 9, and to some higher functioning support students. Over half the boys have registered projects, including most of those we would have specifically targeted.

How the program works

The program presently consists of five components:

1. The project

Individually, or in groups of two to four, the boys undertake a self-directed task that involves creating a finished 'product' in one particular area. The main areas are mechanical/ automotive, computing, creative arts, performance and outdoor improvement, but students may negotiate to focus on other areas. Boys are also encouraged to work with male mentors from the community — fathers, uncles, older brothers, etc — or student mentors at school. For many students, especially those from dysfunctional home environments, this is the first time they ever complete a self-directed, structured project over a period of time. Many require a lot of assistance to remain focused, so each boy is teamed up with a teacher-mentor at school to assist them and to help them evaluate their progress towards achieving wider school goals. Students are introduced to the project during Term 1. They must register their project by the end of that term and complete the project by the end of Term 3.

2. Reflection diary

The boys complete a planning booklet and reflection diary to try to encourage them to generalise the experience and reflect upon their own progress at school. The diary must be completed by the end of Term 2.

3. The workshops

A series of two-hour workshops are conducted with boys from each year group. The five topics covered in 2004 were: goal setting; male roles, role models and self-image, sexuality, sexism and homophobia; personal best; rights and responsibilities — at home, school and in the community; and anti-violence and anger management.

The workshops allow boys to express themselves freely about the issues raised.

4. Celebration, reward excursions and outdoor adventures

Students who successfully complete the project and the workshops must present their task to an audience at a special presentation night attended by staff, community representatives and parents, and are acknowledged at a whole-school assembly. These students are then invited to attend:

- one canyoning expedition with their year group
- the three-day 'Boys' Own Camp' held at the end of the year

In addition, a reward excursion is held at the end of each of terms 1, 2 and 3 for those students who meet interim targets. Failure to meet one of these targets does not mean students cannot successfully complete the project.

The philosophy behind the canyons expedition is to challenge the boys in an unfamiliar environment and draw lessons from their experiences. The camp is a reward for their efforts where boys direct their own activities and the consequences of decisions are debriefed and reflected upon. The camp also provides excellent opportunities for relationship building. Some students are invited on extended wilderness camping expeditions during the holidays.

Uniting Church Pastor and Youth Worker, Phil Matthews, assists with this aspect of the program and provides an outstanding non-teacher mentor for the boys. Having learnt to read late in life and having had a variety of interesting life experiences, he relates well to some of our most difficult and disadvantaged students.

5. Student mentors

Year 10 and Year 11 students who have previously completed the project are trained as Mentor Training Camp. In 2004 30 boys

were trained as mentors. They then introduce the program to groups of Year 5 and Year 6 boys in the four cluster primary schools and conduct a series of workshops.

Embarrassingly, they prove to be far better teachers than either of us! A reward camp involving all four primary schools and the mentors is the culmination of this aspect of the project. In 2004 150 primary students were involved in the program, with each school modifying the Airds High School program to meet their individual needs.

The school and the classroom

All our activities are designed to improve the engagement of boys in the classroom. This is achieved through the setting up of metaphors on the outdoor experiences that have wide applicability, the continuous debriefing and reflection and through simply building positive and trusting relationships. Building up of teamwork skills is also an important element, and teachers who use a lot of group work have achieved some excellent outcomes with some of our Boys' Own boys. It is remarkable at Airds that even our worst students — who often feel very negative about themselves and their community — are very proud of their school. Programs such as Boys' Own, that allow them to experience success, enable them to do this.

The impact

The stats

Teaching at Airds is a real team effort and our teachers run a huge variety of programs. The whole-school focus on quality classroom teaching and learning and on the concept of 'personal best', which pervades everything we do, has led to a rejuvenation in the school. It is therefore hard to quantify the effectiveness of an individual program or the efforts of a particular staff member or team. Nonetheless, the impact of the Boys' Own Program has been immense. Airds, once one

of the worst, now has the best retention rate for boys in the district and state-average attendance rates. We have experienced over a 75% decline in suspensions since 1999. More importantly, the number of suspensions for violence has reduced remarkably. It was not infrequent for teachers to be assaulted at school. The police were called to the school periodically. Such incidents have virtually ceased. But the biggest indicator of success is the attitude of the boys themselves. From thirty targeted students in 2000, this year the course has been offered to all years 7 to 9 boys and nearly half of the boys in years 7 to 9 have registered projects already. That is, they have volunteered to do extra schoolwork.

The lessons

Assessment and applicability

Too often in the boys' education debate a negative picture is painted of boys, and the focus is on negatives such as boys' supposed poor ability at literacy. They argue that the greater literacy focus in certain subjects disadvantages boys. This devalues boys and their potential. At Airds our focus with boys and all our students is on the positive. We thus create self-belief and push all students to achieve their 'personal best.' We therefore do not have some of the problems other schools complain of with their boys. Boys make up over half of our Advanced English classes and dominate Music and Art. Conversely, girls achieve success in Technics classes.

The main resources required for this or similar programs to be implemented are time and dedicated staff. At Airds, due to the poverty of our community, we also have to subsidise our students to ensure they can participate. The simplicity of the basic premise makes the program very adaptable. At Airds we have used Boys' Own as a basis for a similar program for girls and have demonstrated that the program can work well in primary schools.

Indeed, due to the structures of primary schools, it seems to work even better and the local schools are looking at replicating some aspects of our mentoring program for their students. Thus, the Boys' Own could be implemented with minimal disruption into most educational environments.

We cannot change the socio-economic circumstances of our students and we will continue to have comparatively high suspension rates and comparatively poor results. Boys' Own and similar programs make a huge difference, however, and give our students a fighting chance. We have proved at Airds High School, and continue to prove, that teachers can make a significant difference. The lessons we teach do not always have an immediate impact, but every day at Airds we are creating a better future for our students. Our Boys' Own Adventure Story has been a challenging and rewarding experience and, with the expansion into our feeder schools, we look forward with excitement to the next chapter.

Jeff Miezio

I began my public education teaching career at Airds High school in 1988 as a PDHPE classroom teacher. In 1998 I was appointed Head Teacher PDHPE. I have always had an interest in boys' education, from both a professional and personal point of view (I have three boys of my own). In 2000 I was actively involved in the initial Boys' Own Program and from 2001 took on the role of one of the Boys' Own Program Coordinators. I also live locally and am actively involved in coaching soccer teams in the local competition.

Mick Adams

I have been teaching at Airds High School since 1996 when I started my career as an English/ History teacher. I initiated an Outdoor Education Program shortly after I arrived, which proved to be particularly successful in improving the outcomes of some of our most disadvantaged boys. In 2000, I teamed up with the then Head Teacher English, Brad Mitchell, to develop the Boys' Own Project. This has since been refined and extended. I am presently Head Teacher Literacy and my work in improving the outcomes of disadvantaged students was recognised through a National Excellence in Teaching Awards in 2005.



Boys Business

Tuning into boys in the middle years using music and the arts

Over the past five years, Robert Smith has developed and refined Boys Business in schools throughout the Northern Territory, with the help of many passionate and dedicated teachers. At the April conference 'Doctor Bob' ran a Boys Business workshop in which he shared his findings and launched the publication of the Boys Business package.

Boys Business is a music program that you don't have to be musical to teach. Although it uses music as its vehicle, it's not about creating a Vienna Boys Choir. It's more about developing boys' collaborative, creative and independent abilities.

Through music, dance and related games and activities boys are reaffirmed in classroom, school and life settings. By focusing on boys' behaviour and motivation, Boys Business appeals to boys who would never normally join the choir. The activities encourage cooperation but also let the boys' creativity and wild spirits roam free. Most importantly they are fun and can be taught by teachers who may be 'musically-challenged'.

Guiding principles

Music — as a vehicle for social, intellectual and affective learning — has incalculable educational potency. Boys involved in the Boys' Business program are encouraged through music and related activities to perform in ways appropriate to and in support of enhancing their social, physiological and psychological development.

Learning in music challenges boys to combine the cognitive and psychomotor competencies of both sides of their bodies and thus the opposite hemispheres of their brains. This involves, among other things, proficient use of the corpus callosum, the conduit that connects the left and right cerebral

hemispheres (Carter 1998). That this is physically larger in females than in males may explain the greater capacity for girls and women to multi-task and their generally more effective use of language (Blum 1997).

The argument goes that, with a less efficient corpus callosum linking hemispheres, boys and men tend to default to one — the left hemisphere — and thus find multi-tasking very challenging. Learning in music may begin to address this challenge.

Boys Business encourages calculated 'risk taking', shared with teachers, musicians, support staff and boys. We, the involved teachers and adults, are also learners in the process. In turn, we are encouraged to reflect on our own strengths, both in the areas of life skills and in our specialist learning-area competencies. We use these to engage the boys with whom we share time in education and in our lives beyond school.

An evolutionary hypothesis for aspects of gender difference in modern humans proposes that males, as hunters, needed to be more singularly focused if they were to succeed in pursuing animals (Geary 1998). Fact or fiction, the theory does offer some credence to the notion of males as systemisers and females as empathisers (Baron-Cohen 2003).

Ask a group of boys what girls do during recess and they'll probably tell you they talk or 'gossip'. These

characteristics, that even boys recognise, are outward manifestations of evolving 'empathisers'. Girls will tell you that boys like running around 'doing things', like 'kicking balls'. What boys tend not to do is engage in conversation at a higher empathetic level. Kicking a ball in a game is a serious challenge. Talking complicates things. They might have to *listen*, and listening is a physiologically complicated process! Watch a group of boys in a skate park. How much conversation is there?

Many boys can survive — even thrive — for significantly sustained periods of time as 'loners' if and when they are focused on a particular task. Baron-Cohen draws attention to male academics that function much of the time in this way as 'high performance autistics', whose personal communication skills are to all intents and purposes non-existent (Baron-Cohen 2003).

When we invite boys to sing in the Boys' Business program it is exactly that, an 'invitation'. Choice and enjoyment go hand in hand. People must want to make music, not have someone attempting to exercise control over their engagement. Because we do not police their singing it may take time before all participate. However, because they make the choice we can be certain that when they do join in, it will be happily and with conviction. This offers an illustrative



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● challenge. Talking
● complicates things.

insight into the ways in which many boys operate collaboratively.

If only one determinant was needed to justify the role and importance of music in education it might well be that there is new evidence that sharing music releases 'happiness' endorphins (Hawkes 1992). No matter how we feel when we begin, within seconds of bursting into the predictable opening echo songs with which we introduce every session, smiles light up all of our faces and our energy levels suddenly and almost inexplicably skyrocket! Perhaps this is 'happiness', that raw and simple human emotion, but the idea that a physical chemically promoted communication has taken place does have a certain appeal . . . !

Anticipated learning outcomes

As a result of applying the Boys' Business concepts and strategies teachers and educators ought to have an increased awareness of:

- Physiological, social and cultural attributes characteristic of development in middle years boys
- Ways in which these can impact on the manner in which boys function, and offer explanations for performance and behaviour
- The need to work positively, empathically and democratically with middle years boys
- Teaching and learning strategies based on activities grounded in music and a range of related learning areas, which support and affirm middle years boys in

learning environments

- A range of outcomes and their indicators, appropriate to middle years boys.

Activities in the workshop

When boys arrive from elsewhere for a session they bring all sorts of baggage with them. One strategy for 'purging' any negative baggage is to have a garbage bin (real or imaginary) adjacent to the room entrance. As each boy enters he role-plays dumping his 'bad baggage' in the bin. If during the running of the session other negative performance is indicated — depicted as 'poison finger' — the boy is encouraged to return to the bin and role-play removing the potential 'bad baggage'.

Predictable session beginnings 1

Boys are, to a large extent, creatures of habit — aren't we all? In one school we might always begin activities by singing the same echo songs in exactly the same sequence. Echo songs are a deliberate choice because they provide lyrics aurally and the song's leader models song production.

Predictable session beginnings 2

In another school the beginning might be, for example, to have the boys settle on the floor and encourage each to identify one satisfying positive that happened during the day, prior to their arrival. Most activities are conducted in an open space — singing and conversing on the floor, games and other physical activities standing as

When I trained as a teacher in the early 1960s, lecturers insisted that unless our entry to a new classroom was accompanied by a willingness to resort to corporal punishment we were doomed to unruly classes, and thus to failure as teachers. I resorted to the strap once. Afterwards I felt so overwhelmingly ashamed and humiliated that I had inflicted unnecessary physical pain on a boy that I vowed never to do so again. Thus, in over forty years in education in many different cultural settings, I haven't. Admiration, respect and compassion underpin my relationships with children. Boys Business grows from this ethos. If the program persuades others of the always-positive outcomes of such an approach then I believe I have succeeded.

Dr Robert G Smith

the event requires. All responses are accepted — critical constructive observations are only made where these might be dubious.

Singing

Given that my strength is in sharing music with boys my personal inclination is to engage boys with songs they enjoy for the first significant minutes of each session. Consider that this might be different for you. What else might you consider running with them? The songs we sing after the echo songs share, in common, a sense of fun and energy, usually with strongly masculine rhythmic and musical characteristics, and words that often affirm being male.

Self-esteem songs

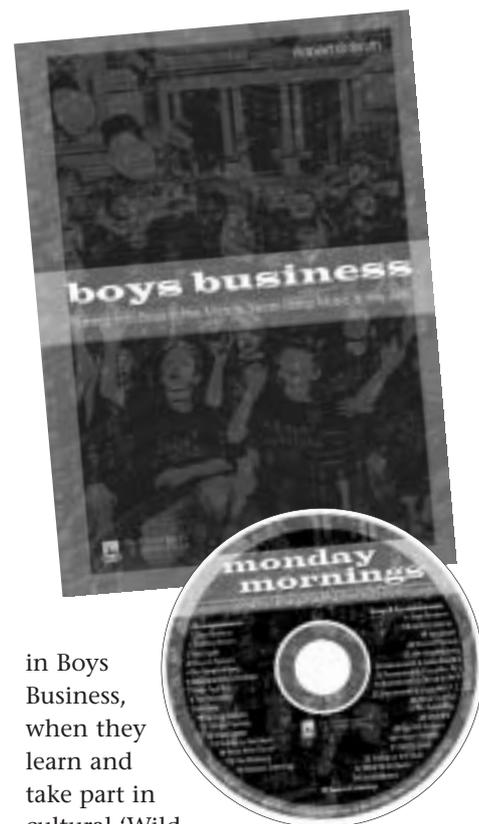
There are huge numbers of great songs out there already being sung by males — and others — at footie games and other sports events. The English group Queen recorded some of the best.

Game songs

I number here cumulative songs, like the Irish 'Rattlin' Bog', and 'I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly'. These challenge boys to remember long sequences of words and phrases — great stuff to encourage aspects of literacy. In fact, everything we do directly or indirectly supports literacy acquisition, even if we do tell boys we are inviting to join the group that we will never expect them to read or write a word while they take part. Aural literacy and emotional literacy are the great strengths of participation in Boys Business!

Macho chants and activities

Bly reminds us that males are males because each of us is driven by our 'Wild Man' (Bly 1992). All cultures share this common attribute, manifested in many ways. Our contention is not that the Wild Man be constrained but allowed 'out' in controlled settings. We do this when boys engage with contact sports and,



in Boys Business, when they learn and take part in cultural 'Wild Man' activities such as the Maori haka, the Balinese kecak or the Fijian meke.

Songs that 'protest' — as against 'Protest Songs'

It seems most of us has a need to kick off the 'oppressor'. There are a number of songs that allow us to do this without actually physically engaging with the oppressor and also, more importantly, give a more reasonable perspective to our relationships with others.

Learning in and about music

Then there are songs and activities that encourage the acquisition of concepts related to music and other curriculum areas. There are songs, for example, where the pitch conspicuously climbs or falls. There are songs where a note is held as a drone (or 'pedal') while the music moves around it. There are songs that have no end, or are unresolved. There are songs and activities that demonstrate genre, such as procedural text. Boys are also conscious of and interested in the rhythmic and related characteristics of contemporary songs, such as reggae and rap.

Circle games and activities

We tend to introduce our games in a kind of 'bell curve'. We start with songs that are relatively calm, move to the more energetic, then move back to calmer activities: games conducted in a circle empower all. Because of the structure of a circle everybody is equally placed. The boys will share a number of circle games, sitting, then standing.

Other games and activities

Obviously it is important that all boys — and teachers — feel safe when they engage with more energetic games. The varieties of games we share have that prerequisite and still allow boys to burn physical, emotional and intellectual energy in safe and affirming ways. While a few might be seen as competitive, a guiding principle of Boys Business remains that there are no losers — every boy ought to be able to leave every session believing he is yet again a winner, taking this positive affirmation back into other classrooms, home and the world outside.

Closing every session

While we try to run Boys Business sessions immediately before a school break — obviously so that we don't release highly energised young males back into classroom spaces — nevertheless, because they are going to interact with others outside the session we run them through 'warm downs'. There is nothing particularly radical about the strategy. The boys lie on their backs on the floor, where they are out of range of other boys, are encouraged to relax, close their eyes and listen to the instructions that follow. Then follows a routine where boys flex and then relax various parts of their bodies. When a sustained quiet has settled on the group we dismiss them. This involves farewells and shared thanks. The adults present select a (different) boy to praise for some aspects of the session. He thanks that adult and, in turn offers a

compliment to another boy. As each boy goes through this routine he is allowed to leave.

Editor's note

The success of Doctor Bob's Boys Business has spread beyond the Northern Territory, with teaching workshops being held in other states and in New Zealand. The Boys in Schools Program has included these workshops in its last two Working with Boys Building Fine men conferences. We have been so impressed with the impact of Boys Business on boys and teachers that we have published the Boys Business package, which includes the theoretical background, module outlines, games, activities, CD-ROM and sheet music required to run the program. Cost is \$88.00 (incl. GST). For ordering details see inside back cover. Dr Bob's workshops are also included in the Boys in Schools Seminar Program (see page 44).

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BOYS literacy

★ The three R's of literacy

Real, relevant and radical

Literacy success depends on seeing our students as individuals and understanding their individual ideas of identity and their individual learning needs. Victoria Clay explains.

The idea of literacy as a set of technical skills to be mastered has expanded to include the notion of literacy as a social practice, which is conducted in a social setting and has social as well as technical aims (Cairney & Ruge 1998). This is not to say that explicit and systematic teaching of the 'nuts and bolts' of reading is not important. On the contrary, for young boys and non-

readers this is essential yet, if boys are to develop a love of literature and critical literacy skills and the writing, speaking, listening and viewing skills necessary to communicate their opinions and thoughts effectively, they need to remain engaged and motivated to achieve at school. For some boys this is not an area of difficulty, but for many boys a new approach is needed.

Research about a boy's identity and his use of literacy to explore that identity — investigated by Smith and Wilhelm (2002) and Blair and Sanford (2003) — shows that boys use literacy to interact with their peers through shared interests; computers and video games are a good example. This kind of research views literacy as having a social purpose. It places an emphasis on



PHOTO: JULIE HASTIE

critical literacy or the ability to assess and analyse underlying values or viewpoints in any text, which in turn has an impact on the structure of a boy's learning and the type of learning activities he may undertake in the classroom.

Ever changing and expanding technologies have allowed us to expand our repertoire of communication. The current generation of students in schools has a far more diverse and sophisticated view of information and communication technologies than in the past. This is not to say that print is becoming redundant, but 'rather that it has lost its privilege and status as providing the only form of literacy essential in communication.' (Healy 2004 p 5) All students use a broad range of text types to communicate and express themselves in their lives outside school and it's 'no longer defensible to plan around the exclusive centrality of print and the linguistic element of communication' (Healy 2004 p 5). As Cope and Kalantzis (2000) see it, literacy is multimodal — audio, visual, spatial, gestural and linguistic. When you incorporate a multiliteracy approach into the classroom there's likely to be a pedagogical shift. This shift must acknowledge the cultural and societal changes in a boy's life outside school, and the impact such changes have on the formation of his identity and the relationships he develops.

The curriculum in most states and territories is now quite explicit about the need for teachers to broaden their understanding of what constitutes literacy and to take a multiliteracy approach to their lessons. It's acknowledged that by incorporating boys' interests and learning styles into approaches to literacy at school it's possible to make literacy more relevant to boys in schools. There's a growing recognition at a departmental level that in order for schools to best equip students for their personal, social and working lives beyond the school gate there must be

pedagogical changes. Since students are rapidly changing, schools and teachers have to work hard to catch up, particularly with regard to the education of boys.

Thomas Newkirk, the author of *Misreading Masculinity* (2002), and others who have undertaken research interviews with boys (Smith & Wilhelm 2002, Trent & Slade 2002), hear the same message from boys regarding their education. In a nutshell, school is often viewed at best as dull, tolerable at best, irrelevant and boring. In response, most teachers readily agree that a

● **Literacy is**
 ● **multimodal —**
 ● **audio, visual,**
 ● **spatial, gestural**
 ● **and linguistic.**

new approach is essential if boys are to be better motivated and more engaged in classroom teaching and learning activities. If we are to assist boys to develop their full capacities in literacies, we certainly need to help them develop basic technical skills. What's worrying, however, are findings that many boys — whether they are competent readers or not — are disengaging from school literacy programs. (Love & Hamston 2001) To teach boys effectively, teachers must develop an understanding of how and why boys are most likely to be engaged with literacies.

A learning framework for boys

The work I've done with Deborah Hartman has been aimed at creating connections between research findings and classroom practices. It's work in which we've developed a practical model and framework that operationalises research. Additionally, we've researched and developed resources for use by

teachers to assist them to investigate boys' literacy interests within their own classes.

Deborah Hartman has developed a model (see Table 1 overleaf) to show the interaction of key elements necessary to successfully develop a boys' education strategy. In essence, the model shows that to best support a boy's learning it's necessary to engage and motivate him in the everyday teaching and learning activities of his classroom. This results in a positive acknowledgement of a boy's identity and will assist him in the development of positive relationships with peers and teachers, which in turn promotes successful learning.

While the level of literacy attainment of boys is a source of ongoing debate (Alloway et al. 2002, Rowe & Rowe 2000), the model proposed above throws new light on the debate by taking a holistic approach to boys' education. Issues of engaging and motivating boys in literacy can be related to the relationships boys have with their teachers. Incorporating literacy materials with which boys are familiar and which relate to their lives outside school are important to a boy's sense of himself as a literate learner, which is part of his identity.

The boys' learning framework overleaf — based on the work of Clay and Hartman (2004) and the research of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Smith and Wilhelm (2002) and Blair and Sanford (2003) — operationalises the Hartman model. By identifying common elements in the researchers' work, we've constructed a framework that teachers can use to critique their classroom practices.

The common elements can be distilled to five key indicators:

- personal interest
- immediate experience
- clear goals
- competence
- control

These elements form the essence

Table 1: Model showing the interaction of key elements necessary to successfully develop a boys' education strategy

FOCUS AREA	IMPLICATIONS	STRATEGIES
<p>Personal interest What does this boy like to do? What type of literacy interests him? What is his learning style?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link boy's and/or family interests to literacy materials • Incorporate non-traditional literacy materials into literacy lessons • Look at student needs — educational/ social/ emotional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey class and/or individuals for boy's interests • How does he use reading and writing to pursue those interests? • What aspect of your teaching area interests him the most? • What would he like to do more of in your classroom?
<p>Immediate experience How can this boy use this literacy experience and/or task in his life?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link content to real world experiences of the boy • Link activities to real world experiences of the boy • Utilise boy's view of the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge prior learning and work from there • Build in reflection on learning and group processes • Use of multiple literacies • Use concept maps, timelines, graphic outlines and organisers • Encourage students to make and confirm predictions • Make links to the real world explicit
<p>Clear goals What do I have to do? How will I know when I've achieved it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be explicit about curriculum requirements in all key learning areas • Students set their own goals for units of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use concrete language — what will this look like when I've finished? How long? How many examples? • Assist students in setting their own goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – for a unit of work – for a reading task • Goal setting — What I'd like to find out. What I need to find out. • Students determine parameters for quality work
<p>Competence Build in success for the student. Celebrate student achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback linked to curriculum requirements • Feedback linked to students' personal goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastery approach • Breaking tasks into smaller steps • Build in assessment and feedback procedures • Tangible rewards • Constructive feedback
<p>Control <i>Choice</i> How will the student exercise control over his learning? <i>Fun</i> <i>Purpose</i> Why are we doing this? What is it linked to?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Content (linked to interests) – Type of activity – Mode of presentation – Work grouping • Generated by involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry process — Is it active? Does it fit this boy's learning style? • Teach group processes and use them. Demonstrate necessary social skills • Allow choices in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Units of work — contracts/independent work units – Work groupings — alone/pairs/groups – Method of presentation — oral/written/visual /technological – Method of assessment — see multiple intelligences • Authentic tasks linked to real world and interests • Who is the audience for the task – teacher, peers, parents?

What's worrying, however, are findings that many boys, whether they are competent readers or not, are disengaging from school literacy programs.



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engage him in learning and motivate him to keep trying even when an area of learning presents difficulties, no matter what his literacy attainment levels might be.

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★ A skateboard hero, a murder and fake chicken nuggets

Engaging boys in critical literacy in Year 4/5

Faced with classes of boys with short attention spans and literacy difficulties, two enterprising teachers devised a project that not only excited and enriched the boys learning, but won the best-practice prize for literacy excellence in the Western region of Victoria. Monica Wright and Doug Taylor from Moonee Ponds West Primary explain how they managed such great results.

What was happening in your classes that made you create the critical literacy project?

D: At the end of 2003 our classes were two-thirds boys and we were concerned about literacy levels. In my class five children were described as having academic special needs with learning difficulties in literacy. Four of those were boys. I also had several other boys that couldn't sit still and some were quite immature for their age. About ten out of twelve of my boys presented challenging behaviour. We really wanted to create a project that they could engage in, that wasn't entirely focused on reading and writing.

M: I had 17 boys in my class and nine girls. Many of those boys had special learning needs in literacy and had been described by other teachers as 'difficult', so I was quite concerned about how I was going to engage them. They were highly energetic boys, some with ADD behaviours, and therefore easily distracted. I needed a high level of engagement and something that was highly kinaesthetic as well — something that would allow them to handle equipment and electronics, use computers and cameras and get some immediate results. They were impatient and wanted immediate feedback on what they had done.



What made you choose a visual project?

M: Doug and I were both teaching 4/5s so we planned to do a fair amount of team-teaching together. We chose visual and television because we could create a highly engaging project that didn't appear to need high levels of literacy. It's also a medium that greatly influences children and is a springboard for writing and expressing their thoughts and experience.

Were your 'difficult' boys resistant to group work?

M: Not resistant — they just didn't understand the expectations of the group-work task. One boy has Asperger's, so his social skills are not like others and we have to explicitly teach him and others group-work skills. For example, what does it look

like, sound like, feel like when you negotiate with others or when you include others in a group? He needed to understand that the reason you form a group is to work toward a particular outcome or produce some sort of work. Quite a few of them have difficulty understanding that the social aspect is not the only reason you work as a group. It does take explicit teaching but throughout the year they develop the skills.

Do you insist they stay in the same group throughout the term?

M: No, I tend to randomise it so that they work with a lot of different people. That encourages them to work together as a class group rather than creating cliques. I talk about a gender balance to get a mix of ideas and trying to work with new people. These days they tend to choose people they know they work well with. Great friends chose not to work in the same group together. They made the independent decision that they wouldn't work well together.

As you were planning this project, what were the outcomes you hoped to see at the end of Term 1?

M: We wanted them to understand that all texts position people, whether they are visual, historical or the media. There is no such thing as straight factual text, there is always a



view point or perspective. We were talking specifically about how various elements of a visual text make you feel. What did that sound make you feel? What did it remind you of? What did you connect it with? When else have you felt like that?

D: On one level it was about tolerance and another level about noticing their own responses and checking whether they were being manipulated.

M: We wanted them to develop their independent thinking and evaluate whether they are making value judgements based on cultural stereotypes or whether they really feel a particular way. Do they actually agree with what is being presented to them or do they have a different viewpoint, and why?

Tell us about the projects.

M: Ours was a whole-class project — a ten-minute film. They decided on roles within that. There were camera operators, sound crew and scriptwriters. Everyone was involved in shared writing of news stories prior to the script. We also had a male journalist show us how to write a news story.

D: They loved that — it got them excited about writing the story. A lot of the questions were boy-related stuff, so the journalist actually wrote a news story about

Tony Hawke (a professional skateboarder) visiting the local skate park so they could see what it would sound like.

M: He modelled the idea that you don't start off with, 'On Monday this happened . . .' You start with the most exciting part: 'Tony Hawke at local skate park on weekend'. The non-writers were engaged by seeing a respected guy from the community saying, 'I write, and I love writing and this is how I go about it', and being able to learn the techniques by writing real stories.

Did you discuss in detail afterwards what your journalist had said?

M: He came in for an hour and they asked a lot of questions. We did the model writing then we had a follow-up session where we talked about how a journalist works and how they find out their news. I had a press release and they used a couple of lines to create, embellish and make this story. It was very interesting and they got quite excited. We talked about demographics as well and how different news programs are aimed at different audiences.

What happened next?

M: Once we had researched the demographic, my kids decided they wanted to aim the program at young people up to 25, so they talked about the sorts of stories that young

people would be interested in. We came up with three different ideas and broke into writing teams. We wrote a few different stories then read them together as a class, edited them and amalgamated some of the ideas. Next they broke into teams to do storyboards, camera angles, what they wanted their news story to look like, and we watched a lot of news stories to look at how they cut from the news desk.

You have three storyboarding groups, with 30% of the boys with challenged attention spans, how did they go?

M: Those particular boys (though it's not always the case) tend to be rather artistic and love to draw. My husband has a production company and they do a lot of storyboarding, so I had some great drawings that they've done for short films. Storyboarding shows how the story is told from different angles and how you can sketch the different angles and show how the story is going to progress. The kids were quite inspired by that. They broke up into little groups and worked on pictures for storyboards. They also understood that unless they storyboarded it really carefully, the cameraperson wouldn't know how they wanted that story to look, so it was also about communicating with the cameraperson.

How did you get ready to shoot?

M: We put together a production-planning document about the different scenes. I would get out the data projector, connect it to my computer and project it up on to the white board and then we would plan out: 'In this scene, this person is involved, we need these props, we need this set up, this person will be directing this scene, this person will be filming, these actors will be needed to do this . . .' I had an assistant director in my class who led a lot of that discussion with me, so she would help and I would type it in. As they talked we would get it all written down so everyone could

see it. We even decided we didn't have to film everything in sequence. We filmed everything that needed to be filmed in one location and then move to the next and film everything there.

Were there arguments about who would take what role and whose turn it was on the camera?

D: I was actually surprised — I would have thought that there'd be fighting over roles but in my class there was none of that. They each decided they could do particular things and it really worked out.

M: That's how it worked in my class too. Some kids really wanted to be behind the scenes doing the sound or camera work. Only about three kids really didn't want to be in front of the camera. A lot of kids had dual roles — so they would be in front of the camera for one scene but then they might be doing the sound for a different scene, but they worked it out quite seamlessly.

What were the stories you ended up choosing?

D: We chose three stories in my class aimed at the kids' demographic, which was early high school. One was about smoking and drinking alcohol down the back of the oval. Another about what kids bring to school in their lunch boxes. In the third film, Guy Sebastian did a concert at the school and was tragically murdered. It was around the time when Guy Sebastian was on *Australian Idol* and they wanted to do something about Guy! They didn't have access to a wig and they were thinking, 'How are we going to do it? No one really looks like Guy, what can we do?' So they ended up doing a chalk outline highlighting his afro then squirted tomato sauce on the ground!

M: My three stories included one on bullying, a skating story on Tony Hawke with skate music and boys skating around. The third story was about fake chicken nuggets. It was

around the time when the media was reporting that there's only about 25% meat in meat pies and all those ads came out from McDonalds saying they had real chicken in their nuggets. The story exposed a scandal about Happy Land's nuggets not being real chicken. The outcome was that the company agreed to review their age-old chicken nugget recipe.

At what point did you get them to evaluate how they were going?

M: There were evaluations all the way through. We would stop every now and then to look at what we'd done and how it was going. We'd talk about what was going well and what they thought needed changing or maybe what needed more work. We watched the rushes of the filming and did lots of takes. Then we would pick out the best one and say, 'Are we happy with that?' If they weren't we had to go back and re-film.

What was one of the things that worked extremely well the first time?

M: All the stuff on camera angle, visual cropping and looking at light and sound. That whole sequence of lessons worked really well.

D: It was obvious how much they were absorbing and learning from the understanding they were gaining from doing those exercises, especially the framing and cropping of pictures. The whole evaluation of the news and how the news is edited. The news story we looked at was about the raids when that GBH drug was killing people all over the place.

M: There were some great teaching moments where the kids would go, 'Oh wow! I've never even thought of that!' They were able to explain how visually you can position someone else, or who was marginalised by the picture, who was left out and why.

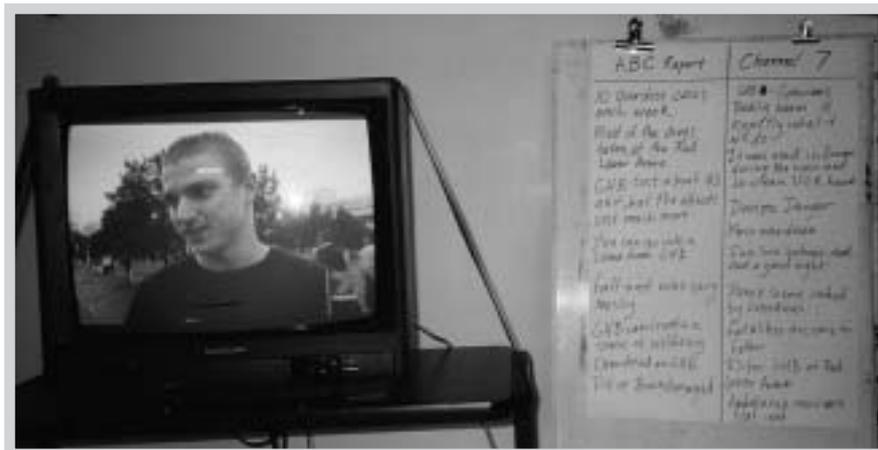
Were some of your less-engaged boys beginning to articulate in ways that were pleasing?

M: Yes. I was really surprised with a couple of them. When we looked at the pictures of the Redfern riots, we were talking about where the photographer had stood to take the picture. One boy in my class who I sometimes have to prod to talk, suddenly looked up and said, 'He is standing right behind the police! He is standing with the police!' And I said, 'What do you think that means? What is your impression of that?' 'Well he is WITH the police, so that's like they're the good guys.' I was thinking that was a really interesting take on it when someone else said, 'I hadn't even thought of that'. They really started to think for themselves.

D: Mine would have been when we were looking at the language. I typed up a script of the two news stories (they were only about 30–60 seconds long). We compared an ABC and Channel 7 report in small groups. One of the boys who usually doesn't really want to say much was bursting to share what he had found. He said, 'The writing of the ABC — they are just telling you things whereas the Channel 7 language makes things sound worse than they really are by using big words and that sort of thing'. That was a moment when I realised he had really got it and so had the other kids.

M: We did some work where we turned the sound down and just looked at the visuals. We also switched that around, and just listened to the sound in another session and compared what information you get. They realised you get heaps of information from the visual and you make all these decisions from what you see. In a news report, Channel 7 showed a shot with all these drugs and money changing hands. The conversation went something like:

'Do you reckon the drug dealer



stood there for them to film him making drug deals?'

'Nuh, probably not.'

'Did you think anything of it when you looked at it?'

'We just thought it was a drug dealer.'

'Do you think it actually was?'

'No. It couldn't have been — he wouldn't have agreed to be filmed.'

'Why do you think Channel 7 included this image?'

'Because it makes it look really exciting and it makes it look like there are really terrible things going on at these raves'.

Were there any surprises with the boys' engagement?

M: The boy with Asperger's, who sometimes has trouble understanding social appropriateness, ended up being a reporter on the scene, which was quite a big task. He turned out to be brilliant! He was really articulate and just turned it on as soon as the camera was on him. In one of the bullying stories, every time one of the bully kids tried to tell his story about how he had been bullied, he would end up killing himself laughing, so we got brilliant bloopers! When we showed it at the parent night his parents said, 'I've never seen him smile so much'. He really enjoyed himself and when the staff saw it they said the same thing about him smiling. That was big stuff.

D: One boy, who was not the

outgoing type, was very reserved whenever he was in front of the class. He didn't really know how to express himself. He turned out to be one of the reporters on the scene as well. As soon as he got the microphone in front of him and the camera was turned on, it was absolutely amazing — his intonation and speech changed as if he was professionally trained. At the parent night, nine out of ten commented how fantastic he was as a newsreader and how expressive he was. His parents were blown away. 'We take him somewhere and he doesn't do anything. He will just sit in the corner and won't say anything. He doesn't step up for anything.' It wasn't just his parents — the whole class and everyone else's parents were impressed seeing him on a big wide screen projector. He was chuffed about the whole thing.

Tell us about some of the moments that didn't work so well?

D: Because we only had one DVD burner in the school, I uploaded everything on to this one computer before I went away on camp expecting to burn it on to the DVD when I returned. While I was away the computer crashed so I basically lost half of the material. They had to re-do the whole thing. That was a monumental stuff up!

How did the students cope with the loss of their work?

D: I said, 'Guys, I'm really sorry — this is what's happened'. They were

like, 'Oh well we've got to do it again'. So we spent probably a whole two-thirds of a day re-shooting. The thing they were most disappointed about was losing all the bloopers. Because we had done all these takes beforehand, they didn't stuff it up when we re-shot everything! So they lost 90% of their bloopers and that was the only thing they were worried about. It really did strike me just how resilient these kids are.

What else have you learned about running this program that you might do differently?

D: We underestimated how much time it would take. We finished all the filming within the term but we originally planned to have them edit it. There were some people whose roles were going to be the editors. When it became apparent that we wouldn't have time, they agreed to take on other roles. In the end we stayed back till 6.30pm getting it all right.

M: We went through the rushes with the kids so they picked out the takes and had ownership in that regard. But that would be my biggest disappointment — I would have liked them to edit it. This time we are doing film making again and I have included time for editing.

What about the way you structured the project over six to eight weeks prior to this edit job?

M: We did a lot of preliminary before we even wrote any stories. I think next time we might do some of the preliminaries, then write the stories, then do a bit more preliminary, then the storyboards. That breaks it up a bit more so we get to the actual filming a bit quicker. We can produce some film, do more work on it, then do a bit more filming. That way the filming can inform what we are doing rather than being the very last part. The kids probably would have preferred doing some filming along the way.

Could you make a comment about the kids' levels of tolerance for each other?

M: They definitely learnt that they all had different skills and abilities and that it was OK if one kid wasn't that good at operating the camera, because he was really good at, say, doing the set design. They developed tolerance in that way, but also around the minority groups they read about in the paper.

To what extent did this unit assist to develop confidence in kids who weren't performing in traditional reading and writing?

M: The shared writing class allowed kids who were of a higher ability to support those who weren't. In our third term, we did a unit where they ran a handball tournament. Part of that was writing a newsletter. We had journalists reporting, photographers taking pictures and every week we produced a newsletter with stats and news stories the kids had written about the game. Kids who ordinarily wouldn't choose to volunteer for that sort of thing were doing it because they knew how to write a news story. They could even do solo writing, and because it was a short piece they could write it in a session and quickly get it edited. They also used the computer and imported a photo and stats and things.

How important has your working relationship been in this project?

M: Invaluable. You need someone else to be able to say, 'I don't know why this camera is doing this!', 'How do I import this in?', 'I don't know what I'm doing wrong'. You need to work with someone with varied skills. Doug and I have fairly different skills.

D: Monica is a literary, artistic type of person, whereas I'm a science and technology type person and can work out if there is something wrong with the computer or camera. Any questions about structure of the news stories and that sort of thing I ask Monica.



M: The kids have also learnt through us that it's OK not to always be totally au fait with everything. You can have a fiddle with a program and work it out. And if we can't manage, the kids will say, 'Mmmm, I'm not sure why this is not working — should we go and ask Doug?' And I'll say, 'Yes! Let's ask Doug'.

Was there anything else that you would suggest to teachers thinking about doing this?

D: You need tripods, microphones, extension leads, microphone stands — all those critical things that we didn't have. That's what our award money enabled us to purchase. We initially had to borrow bits and pieces from wherever we could. We only had one camera, which we had to share. Also, with the editing side, using compatible and easy to use software (I had never used iMovies before or Macintosh computers). iMovie is extremely easy to use, but you also need those support people within the school if you can't figure it out. If you can't edit all the creative work so that it looks good and is coherent, then it really isn't going to work out.

Were there any other spin-offs in terms of general behaviour?

M: My class was really connected with each other because they had worked so hard on this project together. Out in the playground they played whole-class games all the time. Parents visiting the classroom would comment on how much the kids respected each other, how good they were to each other, how they supported each other, how they helped each other with their work. It was fantastic the way they worked together. Obviously we talked a lot throughout the term about the importance of teamwork to make the project happen. The kids really developed these skills throughout the project and since then it's been really easy to do tasks with them.

D: The kids were working as a team for a collective goal. Several boys,

who wouldn't normally have worked with one another, started different friendship groups when they were out in the playground. Our kids in general, with the exception of maybe one or two, are very well behaved and responsible. So we didn't really expect a very big change, but their behaviour outside of the class did change.

M: One of the things that has been really great in the feedback from parents is how much their children look forward to coming to school, particularly a lot of the boys' parents. At the beginning of the year one of the parents said to me, 'What have you said to my son?' I said, 'We've talked about what I expect from everyone this term, what we are going to do, and how we are going to do it'. And she said, 'Well he is all fired up. I've never seen him like that'.

How did you complete the project?

M: We held a screening night for parents. We felt that gave it a real purpose. We sent about three letters home to make sure that everybody

knew about it. We did a shared writing task to write the letters, deciding what we should ask, how we should word it, negotiating which night would be the best. Then we had a whole day of planning it, setting up the library, placing the chairs so people would be able to see, all of that organisational stuff.

D: The students had to direct the parents and friends this way or that, there were arrows all over the school.

M: We had kids cutting up vegetables and making up platters of food to feed the parents, we popped lots of popcorn and put it in little paper bags. The library was a shocker after it was all over!! We were running around trying to get a vacuum cleaner before the librarian came in the morning — it was all very good fun.



Monica Wright has over ten years' experience working with young people in various capacities, such as teacher, counsellor and behaviour therapist. She has been teaching for three years at Moonee Ponds West Primary, since graduating from Deakin University with a postgraduate Bachelor of Primary and Secondary Teaching.

Monica is passionate about innovative curriculum design and strives to provide authentic teaching programs that are engaging, offer real-life experiences and create an intrinsic motivation to learn. Information communication technology is a major feature of Monica's program.



Since this interview, Doug has moved on to teach at EtonHouse International School, Suzhou, China. Doug believes all learning should be student-centred. By catering for individual needs and learning styles in a differentiated curriculum, he focuses heavily on reinforcing the importance of students taking responsibility for their own

learning. Additionally, he believes the provision of a positive, immersive learning environment promotes resilience, respect and support, and enhances student engagement and learning.



Read, feed, speed

One way to get dads into school

Paul Norton has developed a dads' event, which is a hit with everybody involved. As he explains, it forms just a part of Fendalton's comprehensive strategy to involve fathers in their children's school life.

How it started

As far as I can remember, my dad never came to see me at school in all of my eleven schooling years. Don't get me wrong, he was, and is, a great dad but I wished he could have seen me at school. I guess in the early seventies schools were not dad-friendly, and in some respects they still aren't.

After attending the Boys to Fine Men conference in Newcastle in March 2003, I was especially inspired by Ian Lillico and what he was doing with boys in his school. Listening to him and others got me excited about the possibility of seeing if we could get more dads into the school where I teach and to engage boys in their learning. We often talk about getting positive role models into schools, especially for boys, and I could think of no better role models than their own fathers or 'other significant males'(OSMs) — that is, older brothers, step-dads, Grandads, uncles etc. They are not removed from the boys as sports stars, performers or even authors are, but they have a unique relationship with their sons and daughters that other role models will never have.

Our school, Fendalton Open-air School, in Christchurch, New Zealand, has a role of about 540 years 0 to 6 students. We are a state co-ed school but are also a Decile10 school, meaning we are higher on the socioeconomic scale. This does tend to mean we have some very busy parents, especially dads. When I first came to the school I was one

of two male teachers out of a teaching staff of twenty. So our need was to get dads (and other OSMs) into school to inspire, encourage and support their sons, and daughters.

Plan of attack

I decided we needed a plan of attack to get dads into our school. Knowing our dads were very busy, we had to have a few prerequisites:

- Give dads plenty of warning (well, give mums plenty of warning so they could 'encourage' their partners!) of the event coming up — at least a month in advance.
- Make it over a lunchtime break and preferably on a Friday, as this seemed the most convenient time.
- Make sure the task involved wasn't too embarrassing and that other

dads would be there for moral support.

- Make sure food was involved.
- Make sure some form of sport and/or competition was involved — *but* nothing too serious where scores would be kept.
- Get the boys (and girls) enthused about inviting their dads.
- Get mums involved in some way (cooking the BBQ!)?
- Make sure boys/girls who didn't have a dad could invite some OSM or could join in anyway.
- Have a neat name for it.
- Try and get some sort of literacy focus involved.

In the end, I came up with the idea of 'Read, Feed, Speed — Dads' Day Out'. The concept essentially was really very simple — invite dads and OSMs into school to:



■ Read 12.00–12.30pm

They could either read to/with the years 0 to 2 children or join with the years 3 to 6 children by reading and performing plays together. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education — through Learning Media — publishes *School Journal* four times a year. Every journal has a play in it, so we have a heap of material to choose from. The neat thing about the plays is that they are short, funny and have lots of parts. Boys (and girls) love to read and perform them.

■ Feed 12.30–1.00pm

Dads and their children love food! In New Zealand, like Australia, we love BBQs. So we decided to have a sausage sizzle. Dads and their children pre-ordered sausages and the mums (PTA) cooked them and made complimentary coffee and tea and cold drinks available. Any profits raised from the sales went towards books for boys in the library.

■ Speed 1.00–1.30pm

The last part of the day was some sport together. We decided on two sports, due to lack of ground space and ease to play. They were soccer, which was chosen by 90%, and touch rugby. Every class in the school had a field, or part of a field, set aside for them to play on. Each field was laid out and numbered (by class) and had the equipment needed for it ready to go. The teacher tended to be the referee, very loosely, and the children either mixed with the dads or played against them. The latter usually tended to be the case. (In actual fact, because of the huge response we had, we had to have half of the classes eating from 1.00–1.30pm after their sport was from 12.30–1.00pm).

Another important ingredient

I believe that without a supportive staff, one person on their own — even if they have copious passion —

cannot effect a change of culture. Although I was the instigator, we needed the support of the management and the total teaching staff. We are very fortunate to have a principal who will support anyone who has a passion and a staff who are hard working and willing to take risks. The staff got totally behind the concept. Each teacher had to co-ordinate their own class and parents, from organising books and scripts to taking in sausage orders and money and refereeing their own game. It is extra work for them but I guess the idea and the fact that dads were coming into school inspired them too.

Part of the school culture

Read, Feed, Speed has now become part of our school culture. One dad, who lives overseas, for the last two years has planned his summer holiday dates around the date we hold it! It is now an expectation in our school calendar.

We have run Read, Feed, Speed for the last two years (last year it was called Read, Feed, Speed 2) and both years we have had around 200 dads and OSMs in the school for at least an hour and a half, reading, eating, playing, talking, laughing, getting dirty and spending time with their children. The children are really disappointed if their dads can't make it. The dads love interacting with their own and other children but they also love meeting the other dads and sharing time with them too.

Both boys and girls enjoy it and I love seeing so many dads interacting with their children in an environment that used to be so foreign. Read, Feed, Speed has only been the start. We have now developed other programs and ways to get dads involved and past the school gates as well as making our school more boy friendly. These are a list of some of the things we are doing:

- Breakfast with the Boys — a special breakfast put on by the



mums each year for Year 5 and Year 6 boys and their dads. We have El Gregoe, a magician, sharing in the program about values of a dad and a young man.

- Boys' Choir — for all Year 5 and Year 6 boys. It only lasts for a term and we only learn a few fun songs for one presentation. There is something special about boys only singing together.

- Dads-only parent help days in the junior classes — only dads in the classroom.
- Fendalton Friends — where every Year 6 boy (and girl) has the chance to be a leader of a *whanau* (family) group of 15 to 20 children across the school. This is a bit of an extension of Buddy Classes, which we also do. I find my Year 5 and Year 6 boys also love being a buddy to a five year old and their caring nature comes out, which we don't usually see during a normal class day.
- Dads' and Sons' Bake-off — where the boys do the baking and bring it in to be judged during a lunchtime.
- Experimenting with a boys-only class and boys-only classes for other subjects, such as writing.
- Student-Led Conferences — a guided tour by the child through their learning at a time when dads can make it. Boys really enjoy being able to take ownership of their own successes and sharing them with dad.
- Encouraging boys into the arts — especially dance, where last year we ran our own dance festival with boys taking part as much as girls. (I really believe the arts hold an important key to unleashing another side of boys that we have rarely seen. I've seen glimpses of it in the Boys' Choir and in my class singing and being involved in dance festivals.)
- Flow Days — where children plan their own day and do something for the total day so that they stay 'in the flow'. Boys love this sort of day. I do it once a term and the boys usually end up teaching younger children a sport or making an iMovie for a total day.

Most of the ideas aren't really new but we are trying out things and mostly succeeding. I hope you are inspired to try something too.

What children think about Read, Feed, Speed

I really liked the Read, Feed, Speed because I hardly get to see my dad. He's fun to read with. Matt, age 9

I can't explain it. It was just awesome, wicked, fun as. Max, age 9

The funny thing was the dads were lifting us up and making new rules up. The special thing was my dad came and he was lifting me up when we were playing soccer. I especially liked my dad playing soccer and reading books to me.

Grace, age 9

I liked it how dad came to school because usually he never comes to school.

Oliver, age 8

I liked the Read, Feed, Speed because we had a catch-up time with our dad since they go to work for the whole day. Also, because we got to play sport as well as reading. Tom, age 10

My dad did not like playing soccer in his work clothes! Jack, age 9

I thought it was a great time to spend with our dads. My favourite part was playing soccer and eating sausages Judge, age 10

I liked it because we got to spend time with our dads reading books, eating sausages and playing sport! Angus, age 10

It was good for dads to come along to Read, Feed, Speed. It's good for us to see our dads at a time we do not usually see them. William, age 9



Paul Norton has been a dad for longer than he has been a teacher. He has two children, plus a son or daughter due to be born in May (who had not arrived at the time of going to press). His wife, Tina, also teaches at Fendalton Open-air School in Christchurch. He was a youth pastor for five years before teaching and worked in the advertising industry before that.

Paul is passionate about children (and especially boys) enjoying — not just surviving — their education; about children being fit and healthy; about children expressing themselves through the Arts and ICTs; and about children bringing him gifts of chocolate and licorice! As well as being responsible for sport and PE at his school, he loves helping to run a yearly boys' choir, and he would love one day to see dads and their boys involved in a dance presentation together! Watch this space!

You can contact Paul at: paul.norton@fendalton.school.nz



Male role models

Emotional regulation, identity scaffolding and fathers' involvement in schools

While research has failed to provide evidence of the effects that male role models have on boys, Richard Fletcher suggests that our educational policy may actively work against the development of effective strategies for boys. He offers a framework for teachers and school administrators looking for role models.

Introduction

Let me begin with an example of a role-modelling conversation I overheard recently. One morning, in February this year, the national youth radio station Triple J was asking listeners why they should read out the weather report from their city or town. People were asked to call in to give reasons for their location to be part of the national weather report. A young boy from Bundaberg in Queensland called in. Asked what was noteworthy about Bundaberg he fumbled for a suitable reason but then hit on the famous Bert Hinkler who had gone to the same school, North Bundaberg State School (who still have one of their four houses named Hinkler).

The boy explained that Hinkler had been a pilot in WWI, that he was the first to fly solo from England to Australia in 1928 and that he'd been killed attempting another flight to Australia. The two announcers asked him, 'This Bert Hinkler is a bit of a role model for you? You want to be a pilot some day, is that it?' The boy — sensing that this was the correct answer — agreed, but his tone suggested that he was nonplussed by the idea that Bert Hinkler would inspire him to

anything much.

This conversation highlights a number of important questions surrounding the identification of suitable men for boys to emulate. Just what are the qualifications needed to be a role model for boys? Because boys are thought to be fascinated by sports, machinery and speed, male public figures with credentials in these areas are often identified as suitable models. However, the fundamental fact about Hinkler, which qualifies him to be a role model, is his maleness. This is his primary qualification since, for the boy, the essential need is to know what it is that men do in their role so that he might develop his own male role. Although Hinkler's flying prowess, bravery, endurance or popularity might be relevant to his choice as a role model (and house name for the school) his maleness is a primary qualification. Yet it is precisely this aspect, the sex of role modelling, which is the most difficult to fathom. As long as we are unable to answer the question 'Why do you need to be male to be a role model for boys?' then developing a comprehensive approach to the widely acknowledged poor outcomes

for boys (and therefore for the community) will be problematical.

At the level of individual schools, the strategy of utilising suitable men to address boy's disengagement with school is widespread. Professional publications for teachers (such as *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*) have carried dozens of reports of programs linking older boys, fathers, grandparents or men from the community with male students. The successes of these initiatives are measured through a range individual and group changes, so identifying causal pathways is understandably difficult and there has been little pressure to specify exactly how maleness is relevant. However, when education authorities have attempted to address the issue of male influence in schools in a more systematic fashion, by focusing on the lack of male teachers in the classroom, the lack of clarity over male-female differences becomes apparent. In rejecting the Catholic Education Office request for exemption from the *Sex Discrimination Act*, the Human Rights & Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) found that there was insufficient evidence that boys were suffering due to the lack of male

teachers (HREOC 2003). In response, the Commonwealth Government introduced a Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill 2004 to allow for scholarships to be offered to male teachers (Parliamentary Library 2004). The issue of boys' needs, including the lack of male role models, was the subject of ongoing debate from all sides of parliament (Bills Digest No. 110 2003–04). While all commentators agreed that boys were lagging behind girls academically, and that social indicators such as disciplinary measures and juvenile detentions revealed that boys were experiencing difficulty, there was little discussion of the mechanism of role modelling by which male staff might impact on boys. The Australian Labor Party's proposal for a \$24m dollar mentoring program was issued under the heading of 'More role models for boys' but contained only a generic description of mentors for 'young people' (Latham 2004). In the end, a compromise was reached with HREOC to allow the Catholic Education Office to offer

scholarships for male and female teachers, and the issue of boys' needs was allowed to recede once the federal election was concluded.

Academic research in education has been of limited use in this discussion. When HREOC called for submissions to assist in deciding the Catholic Education Office case there was little to be gained from the available research. The development of models of positive male–male relationships has not been a popular topic with researchers, and so the beneficial aspects (or drawbacks) of male teachers' interactions with boys have not been investigated. (Male sports stars and their role modelling via the media has, however, been discussed — see for example Whannell 2002). A review of role-modelling programs in Australia failed to find any programs specifying male role models, although they did describe two sex-specific programs — for young women (MacCallum & Beltman 2002). It should be noted that the confusion over role-modelling processes is not restricted to males. The perception that female role

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models worked for girls, because having teachers who share common experiences might facilitate students' progress, is just that, a perception, the processes involved in female role modelling has also not been researched (Carrington 2003). Similarly, the research on ethnic minority teachers provides some support for same-race teachers but the mechanisms are acknowledged as unknown (Dee 2001, Hess 1997).

While research has failed to provide evidence of the precise effects that male role models would have on boys, the policy context in Australia has actively worked against the development of effective programs or strategies for boys. Although male students have deficits on a number of standard outcomes measures, males as a group are not acknowledged as having needs in education policies. On the contrary, the policies shaping teachers' dealings with boys and girls provide an exclusive focus on the negative aspects of 'being male'. Teachers seeking male role models for boys in schools must not only decide for themselves what qualities they seek in a male mentor, but they must ignore the weight of policy advice that sees boys exclusively in terms of 'repudiating and deriding femininity, restrictive emotionality, seeking achievement and status, self-reliance, aggression, homophobia and non-relational attitudes towards sexuality' (MCEETYA 1997, p 40). While classroom teachers do not avidly read and digest policy documents, they are certainly constrained and guided by the policy framework in their choices of learning activities for their students. When the educational policies clearly articulate a narrow and destructive concept of male identity, then developing positive mentoring or role-modelling initiatives addressed to boys becomes difficult.

When gender reform was focused on removing barriers to girls' full participation in education and public life there were many

opportunities for teachers to challenge girls' stereotyped beliefs about their options in an expansive and empowering framework that validated the worth and abilities of girls. The widely distributed bumper sticker declaring that 'Girls can do anything!' captured the celebratory, energetic flavour of the equity approach of the 1980s. This was a time when the National Policy for the Education of Girls set the tone by inviting a female engineer or business executive to the school as a popular role-modelling strategy. In the last decade, as policy makers have sought to apply 'gender equity' to boys, finding an emancipatory tone for promoting boys' capabilities has proved impossible. While at the school level teachers (male and female) have sought to use male role models to address the difficulties faced by school-age boys, the policy for gender in schools, and the educational theory underpinning the framework, has been explicitly opposed to promoting 'male' identity. In 2003 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (through its Targeted Initiatives of National Significance Taskforce) commenced a review of the gender equity framework. A working group comprising representatives from state and territory education jurisdictions, the Commonwealth, the National Catholic Education Commission and the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations was formed. It remains to be seen whether this group can develop a more inclusive framework (and influence the state bureaucracies which also have negative policy frameworks), which will allow the recognition of positive boys' development.

A useful framework for thinking about male role models

In December 2002 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the RIKEN Brain Science Institute in Japan brought

together leading neuroscientists and an international group of educators to review developments in brain research and their implications for teaching and lifelong learning. The forum heard of new approaches to teaching word pronunciation to assist dyslexic pupils and to teaching number concepts based on recent discoveries in neuroscience (Masters 2003). The significance of the forum, for the purposes of understanding how male role models might be conceptualised, was in the collaborative approach to educational issues between scientists and school educators. Research throughout the 1990s into brain development and children's wellbeing has significantly altered the way that we view children's social development. Advances in brain imaging — such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Positron Emission Tomography — and improved analysis of brain chemistry have allowed more detailed and dynamic understanding of brain function, thereby emphasising the complexity of interaction between experience and neurological development. Three particular aspects of the emerging understanding of the brain's role in behaviour have major implications for the way that we conceptualise gender within child development:

- the effects of hormones on brain development
- the plasticity of neural connections within the brain
- the role of emotion in developing cognition

Within neurosciences and, increasingly, across the range of social sciences, it is being recognised that the brain, and consequently behaviour, is affected by biology through the operation of specific hormones. The influence of androgens in particular (of which the most well known is testosterone) affect the way that brain structures develop and this in turn, influences the behaviour of males and females

from an early age. The notion that hormones influence the development of reproductive organs, genitalia and secondary-sex characteristics is well established. Recent research adds that subtle differences in brain architecture between males and females can also be linked to developmental hormone activity (de Courtney-Myers 1999).

A second major development in our understanding of neural development is the crucial role of experience. This is more than saying that we learn from experience. What we now realise is that the loving touch and synchronised vocal, visual and kinaesthetic interplay between primary carers and infants is not only nourishing of the infant's emotions, but helps to form neural connections which will influence that child's relational capacities and tendencies in the future (Nelson & Bosquet 2000). As well, the role of emotions in development is recognised to be central rather than peripheral to intellectual development. Attention within educational psychology has been mainly focused on intelligence as an important marker of student success, however we now recognise that emotional development is integral to reasoning and decision making and central to developing mental activity (Damasio 2000, LeDoux 1998, Shore 1994). It is through relationships — and specifically the emotional component of relationships that baby's neural learning takes place — which prepares them for the future. As well, the plasticity of brain structure throughout the school years also suggests that not only parents but teachers and other significant adults can influence brain development. The full impact of these research findings are yet to be felt, but significant developments in Australia based on the importance of early brain development are already apparent in the commitment of government funding to the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and the development of

curriculum materials applying the new brain research to the general areas of teaching and learning (Sanson et al. 2002, Department of Education and Training, Government of Western Australia 2003).

If male–female differences are not simply an invention, then seeking males to be role models for boys makes perfect sense as boys are not just learning information at school but developing an identity. As Edwin Sohun, a Papua New Guinean boy studying in northern Queensland told the 1999 Boys to Fine Men conference:

According to the opinions of the boys we've met, they said there is a general idea that teachers go to school to teach and kids go to learn. What we found is that, yes, that's the teacher's idea. But the boys seem to hope for something different from school. They are more interested in who they want to be than what they want to learn.

But how can role models help boys figure out 'who they want to be'? Having males who can validate the distinctive positive ways that males behave in the school will be an important strategy for schools, but there is more to role modelling than being seen. Often, as in the Hinkler example, there is thought to be a general transfer of motivation or self-esteem, via a motivational speech from the role model, or even simply viewing his image linked to the preferred activity (such as posters featuring sports stars in literacy, anti-smoking or anti-violence campaigns). But we still have little idea of how role modelling works. Two areas are emerging as important aspects of effective male role modelling: emotional regulation from the new brain sciences; and the idea of scaffolding from literacy teaching. Scaffolding is well understood by teachers through the extensive discussions of teaching methods in literacy. Emotional regulation, however, is not

commonly discussed in educational research. An example from recent popular literature will illustrate how this concept applies to developing adolescents.

In the fifth Harry Potter novel, *The Order of the Phoenix* by JK Rowling, there is a conversation between three of the main characters: Harry, Hermione and Ron. In the scene below Harry and Ron are talking about Harry's recent episode kissing Cho. It's important to know that in the previous book Cedric, Cho's boyfriend, was killed by the forces of darkness. Hermione is part of the scene but is busy writing. Ron asks Harry what the kiss was like and Harry answers:

'Wet' he said truthfully . . . 'because she was crying.'

'Oh' said Ron his smile fading slightly. 'Are you that bad at kissing?'

'Dunno' said Harry who hadn't considered this, and immediately felt rather worried, 'maybe I am.'

'Of course you're not,' said Hermione absently, still scribbling away at her letter.

'How do you know?' said Ron very sharply.

'Because Cho spends half her time crying these days,' said Hermione vaguely, 'She does it at mealtimes, in the loos all over the place.'

'You'd think a bit of kissing would cheer her up,' said Ron grinning.

'Ron,' said Hermione in a dignified voice, dipping the point of her pen into the inkpot, 'you are the most insensitive wart I have ever had the misfortune to meet.'

'What's that supposed to mean?' said Ron indignantly. *'What sort of person cries while someone's kissing them?'*

'Yeah,' said Harry desperately, 'who does?'

Hermione looked at the pair of them with an almost pitying expression on her face.

'Don't you understand how Cho's feeling at the moment?' she asked.

'No,' said Harry and Ron together. Hermione sighed and laid down her

quill.

'Well, obviously she's feeling very sad, because of Cedric dying. Then I expect she's feeling confused because she liked Cedric and now she likes Harry and she can't work out who she likes best. Then she'll be feeling guilty, thinking it's an insult to Cedric's memory to be kissing Harry at all, and she'll be worrying about what everyone else might be saying about her if she starts to go out with Harry. And she probably can't work out what her feelings towards Harry are, anyway, because he was the one that was with Cedric when Cedric died, so that's all very mixed up and painful. Oh, and she's afraid that she's going to be thrown off the Ravenclaw Quidditch team because she's been flying so badly.'

This example was pointed out to me by my sixteen-year-old daughter. The account well captured, she thought, the distinct lack of empathic intelligence among boys of her age. While I acknowledge her point, I would also say that the passage illustrated the labile emotionality found in some teenage girls (not, of course, in reference to my own family). Emotional regulation encompasses both of these elements, recognition of emotional states in others (empathy) and the ability to manage a range of emotions in oneself. As part of the shift away from an exclusive focus on intelligence, the role of emotional regulation in students' ability to concentrate, to persevere, and to access their thinking is being recognised by educators as an important aspect of learning. Emotional regulation may be an important contributor to the whole range of difficulties faced by boys (Bradley 2000).

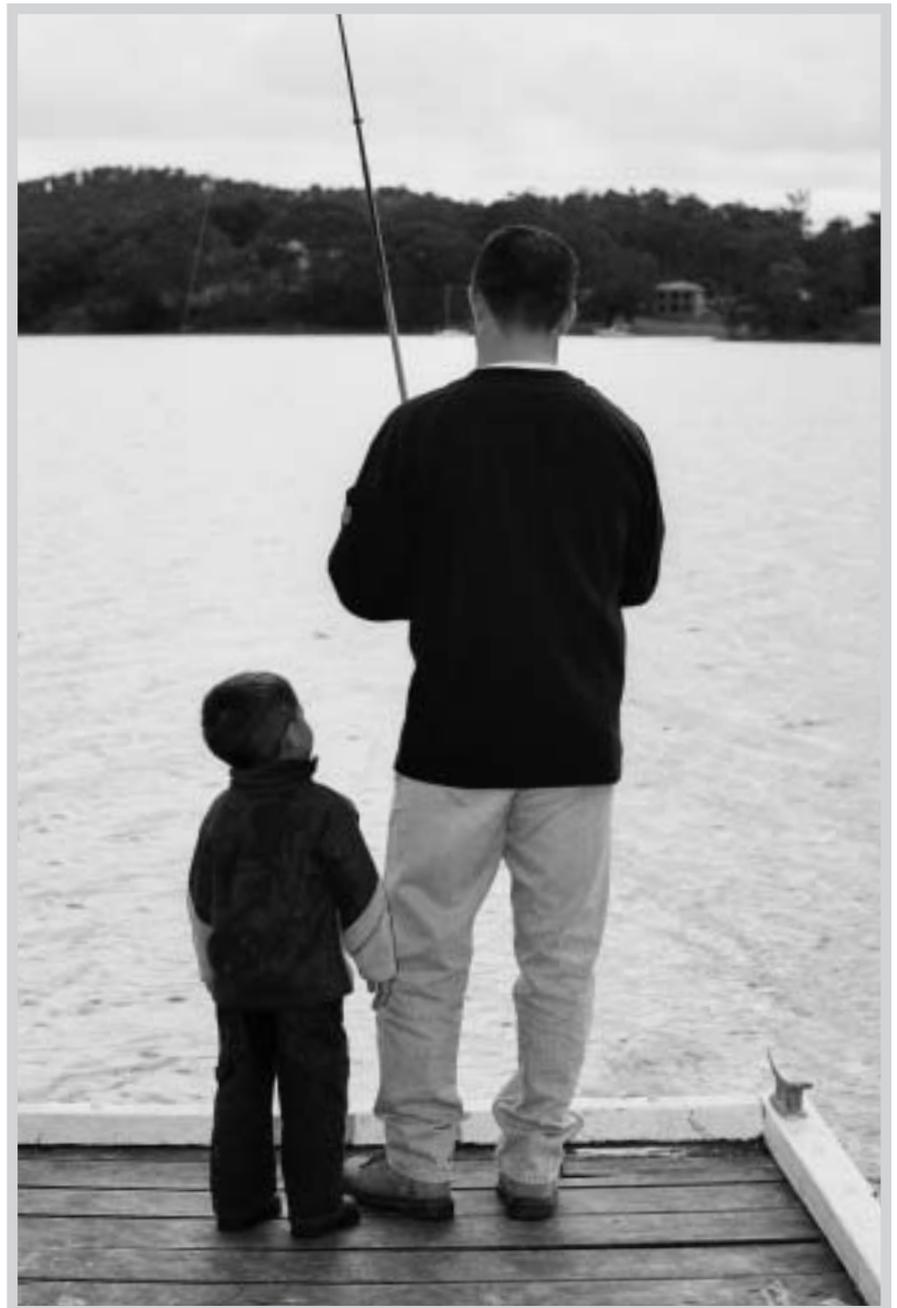
But how do role models help boys develop emotional regulation? The simplest model we have is to look at parents with their babies. Mothers and fathers help their infants' to learn to regulate their emotions not by changing their nappies but by engaging in reciprocal interaction.

When we watch babies develop their ability to tolerate frustration and to manage elation and excitement we can see that they do it through being in a personal relationship with their caregivers. They learn to control the physiological processes — such as their heart rate and breathing to calm themselves — not by being told 'Keep quiet' but by interacting with their closest role models, their parents (Shore 1994). Children and adolescents can also learn to regulate their emotions by being in a trusting, secure relationship where they feel safe. One mechanism thought to be important in the process is social referencing — the way that infants who are unsure of something look at their carer's face to decide if they should be fearful or not. For boys in a relationship with their role model, one of the important situations may be the situation where the young male is not certain how to appraise either his own or other people's behaviour. The reaction from the role model will influence the boy's development. Social referencing should not be confused with offering a value judgement. The baby or the young male are reading the emotional message on the older carer's face, voice and body, not looking for a moral lecture, so that the significance of the interaction may be that the adult is calm when the boy is overexcited, or the adult is refusing to be angry when provoked, providing the safety for the young man to settle his own emotional turmoil. Of course, both male and female infants learn to regulate their emotions through the relationship with their mothers as well as their fathers. Boys can learn to regulate their emotions with female teachers as well as males. In this area — modelling the emotional response to situations and behaviours — both female and male teachers can be role models for boys in situations where 'being male' is not important. In fact, female principals and executives from over 90 schools attending the first Boys in Schools

conference in Newcastle in 1999 identified that female leaders in schools could model the power of consistency and persistence and the ability to be tough (strength) without entering power plays.

However, if we wish to assist boys to discover 'who they want to be' as men, then we also need male role models to form relationships with the boys. Social referencing has a major role here. One of the obvious reasons to have males involved in the education of boys is so that the boys can literally 'see' how men react to stressful or high-risk (shaming) educational situations. The emotional regulation aspects become sex specific when the boy is trying to figure out what sort of man he can be. This question is also important for schools seeking role models. In seminars with teachers and parents across Australia the question 'What sort of men do we aim for in this school?' has been raised in staff meetings, parent discussions and public conferences. For many schools this is their first attempt to answer such a fundamental question. The general approach has been to specify what schools do *not* want in the men that their boys become. There is no glib answer to the question as to the sorts of men that we value. Teachers and parents usually have no trouble acknowledging that they value their own father, however much he might have been a man of his time. But to grapple with the sort of men we value now is a complex but important task for those who wish to guide boys.

The evidence of emotional regulation suggests that men who can manage their own emotions and who are secure in their own identity will be able to offer some safety to boys. So for those seeking role models, these are important criteria. In addition there is the ability to scaffold the boys' experiences. Parents who let their young children in their play risk scrapes and bruises, know this dilemma as well as parents of adolescents beginning to



drive and stay out at night. Role models must have the judgement to support the exploration of the boys they link with. But for the boys themselves, the questions are different. For the boys, the key questions are: How do other men see this man? And, How does he see me? The male role model does not have to be an elite sports star to have credibility. But if he is someone without friends of his own, he will be limited in what he can offer a younger male. Boys are alert to this dimension. They are also aware of how they are regarded by the role



model. If he has no fondness for the boy, in spite of his attraction as an older, successful male, he will not be able to provide the safety for the boy to thrive. These aspects of role modelling provide some guidance to those wondering who to target when looking for men to support boys' development.

Five basic questions when selecting role models for boys

- Are they male?
- Can they model appropriate emotional reactions to stress, risk and excitement?
- Will they give the boys 'enough rope'?
- Will they be able to communicate what they like (admire, value, recognise) in the boy?
- Will the boy see the role model as credible?

Fathers as male role models

At this point some principals will be thinking 'But how can we have male role models when we have few male teachers and men don't come to the school?' One obvious group to target is fathers. While fathers (biological fathers and father-figures) are not the only candidates they make an obvious choice for three reasons:

- they already have a connection with the school
- they care what happens at the school and know at least one pupil very well
- the involvement of fathers can improve educational and social outcomes for many of the students (girls and boys)

Fathers have multiple ways to influence their child's success at school. A large scale survey in the USA of more than 20 000 families found that father involvement improved student's outcomes even after allowing for mother's involvement and factors such as race and income. When fathers were more involved their children achieved higher grades, liked school more, were involved in more extracurricular activities and were less likely to be suspended or to repeat a year (Nord et al. 1997). Studies from Britain show that positive involvement by fathers in their children's learning is associated with better mental health, higher quality of later relationships, less criminality, better school attendance and behaviour, and better examination results. As a result the UK Department for Education and Skills has made involving fathers a core standard for all schools (DfES 2004).

As the USA report suggested to schools:

The evidence provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics should encourage schools, fathers and communities to find creative ways to involve dads in the education of children. But research studies can only provide the rationale, the real passion for dads' involvement comes from the kids. Their expressions of delight and approval (and sometimes, cool acceptance) offer the most important rewards to dads and staff (Nord et al. p 66).

Around Australia there are many excellent initiatives bringing fathers and father-figures into schools to support boys' learning and identity. With governments and academics slowly moving to a more realistic approach to male and female identity, and with consistent support from parents to address boys' needs,

schools have an opportunity to incorporate male role models into the important task of developing fine boys into fine young men, something to benefit the whole community.

For the references in this article, refer to the Engaging Fathers Project website at:
www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efathers/einfo.html



Can education policies veto positive male role models for boys?

Richard Fletcher further discusses the problem with 'dominant masculinity'

The 1997 Gender Equity Framework defines social construction as the 'process by which individuals actively build, or "construct" a sense of themselves as gendered' (MCEETYA 1997, p162). This view is contrasted with the

perception in schools and the wider community that there is an 'essential' difference between men and women, that male and female behaviours are biologically determined and thus 'fixed'. Thus, differences between genders are defined as 'those differences in behaviours and attitudes which are constructed through social practice, which are dynamic and capable of challenge and change.' (p 163)

The South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment states:

Sex and gender are different in that sex is biological, something we are born with, while gender is something that is of human making — a construction (that is, not biologically determined). One of the central ideas to support educators in making progress in understanding and dealing with boys' and girls' behaviour is to assist them in understanding that sex and gender are not the same. (South Australian Department of Education & Training and Employment 2001, p 2)

And the NSW Teachers Federation submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry explained: 'Where the Federation uses the term gender, we are using the term to acknowledge that one's masculinity or femininity is not fixed, nor is it determined by biology and that gender is socially constructed' (NSW Teachers Federation 2000, p 3).

It follows from the idea that gender is not fixed that a variety of gender identities are available to children as they develop. This point is made repeatedly by education authorities and academics commenting on the development of gender policies in Australia. The notion that there are many available masculinities, in particular, has been repeatedly stressed (Connell 1987, 1995). Although multiple femininities is not advanced so frequently for girls, there is a consensus among the state and federal policy documents that the social construction of gender allows a multitude of avenues for females and males to develop their identity. It is also generally agreed that the choices that children make in acquiring ways of constructing their identity are not value free. In particular, educators have been concerned that beliefs about appropriate behaviour, choices of subject and orientation toward teachers and peers embedded into gendered identities restrict boys' and girls' choices of experiences in schools and lead to reduced benefits from their involvement with school. As the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993–1997* explained, 'many girls and boys develop narrow and limited concepts of masculinity and femininity — concepts which impoverish their existence' (Australian Education Council 1993, p 7).

Up to this point in the application of the social construction of gender, the notion could be said to apply to both girls and boys in approximately the same manner. Teachers should urge both girls and boys to expand their ideas of acceptable gender identities. This notion of expanding options is appealing in its even-handedness and fits well with the more general philosophy of education as broadening pupil's perspectives. However, there are two additional features of the social

construction of gender advanced by state and federal jurisdictions that make this approach unworkable: the harmful effects of boys' gendered identities and the reliance on power as the only mechanism to explain gender dynamics.

While the narrowing of options has been seen as disadvantageous for boys and girls, the education policies see boys' narrow gender identities as particularly dangerous. A 1997 policy targeted the reduction of 'gendered violence' and sex-based harassment as key outcomes (MCEETYA 1997, p 17). The accompanying paper on school violence explained that 'dominant masculinity' caused girls to withdraw from participation in classroom activity, or leave particular subjects altogether. For boys the effects of 'dominant masculinity' were also severe and for gay or lesbian students may 'become intolerable, leading some students to leave school or contemplate suicide' (*ibid* p 41). While the effects of narrow constructions of femininity were seen to have damaging outcomes for girls, they were not regarded as resulting in harm for boys or as having negative effects on boys' success. At no point is femininity described in explicitly negative terms, however, the male identity of most boys (the dominant masculinity) is unequivocally attacked as 'repudiating and deriding femininity, restrictive emotionality, seeking achievement and status, self-reliance, aggression, homophobia and non-relational attitudes towards sexuality' (MCEETYA 1997, p 40).

The narrow and destructive characterisation of boys' identity as 'dominant masculinity' was not obvious in the *Girls, Schools and Society* policy of 1975 and the following policies through the 1980s and early 1990s, because all of these documents had an unambiguous focus on girls. The most recent Gender

Equity Framework (MCEETYA 1997), however, attempted for the first time to incorporate boys' needs into a policy to address gender. The attempt failed because the policy was explicitly designed to build on the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993–1997* (Australian Education Council 1993). The policy could not reconcile its advocacy for girls (using the 'dominant masculinity' theory to define everything male as dangerous, power-driven and oppressive) with the wish to include boys. In the end the policy included boys purely as a problem to be solved so that girls' needs could be attended to. In the process, the policy specifically denigrated Indigenous and low income boys.

A policy is needed that doesn't stigmatise Indigenous and low-income boys

A 'which boys, which girls?' approach has been forcefully advocated in the debate over boys' education by state education departments and by groups of academics (Australian House of Representatives 2002). As part of the 'dominant masculinity' model it is argued that to talk about boys' needs as something applying to all boys — as if maleness was an important factor — is to advocate biological determinism and undermine the needs of girls (Collins et al. 2000). Instead of identifying boys' needs, it is argued, subgroups of boys who are not achieving — such as low socioeconomic or Indigenous boys — should be singled out for attention. If the 'attention' directed at these groups was empowering and affirming of their identity as boys from a particular background or as Indigenous boys then this might be a feasible recommendation. However, when

combined with the notion of 'dominant masculinity' in the social construction analysis of gender, to point to these groups of underachieving boys plainly labels them as having even more 'dominant masculinity' problems than other boys and being more responsible for girls being 'dominated, controlled, disparaged, powerless and silent' (MCEETYA 1997, p 25). If these boys are disruptive and not engaged in school, then the theory interprets their behaviour purely as protecting their advantages and seeking to control and dominate others. Not only are Indigenous and low socioeconomic boys seen to be deficient in this framework, but all of the better-off, non-Indigenous boys are presumed to have sufficiently broad male identities not to require attention. In order not to further stigmatise groups such as Indigenous boys, and to promote better gender relations among all students, a more inclusive approach to understanding and addressing gendered behaviour in schools is called for, one based on a broader conception of the development of gender.

For the references in this article, refer to the Engaging Fathers Project website at: www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efathers/einfo.html



Richard Fletcher is a well known advocate and researcher in the field

of men's and boys' issues. He is currently researching fathering in Australia, particularly in the areas of neo-natal attachment. Until recently he was team leader of the Family Action Centre's Engaging Fathers Project at The University of Newcastle.

bulletin board

What we can do for you!



Staff development workshops and seminars

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.

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 strength-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 a classroom as well as 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 12- to 18-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 (eg 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 12 to 18 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 a 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 troubleshooting 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



FILE PHOTOS USING MODELS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GAUL & JULIA HASTIE

bulletin board

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 Masters 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 40 credit points made up of one core course and three electives. Graduates can apply to continue on to the Master's program. For the Master's program, students need to complete 80 credit points.

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

More information is available at

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

or

contact Michelle Gifford on 02 4921 8739

or

email Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au

Boys in Schools Program



The UNIVERSITY
of NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

Family Action Centre Indigenous resources

Our team at the Engaging Fathers Project has developed vibrant resources, which promote positive role modelling for Indigenous fathers and father-figures.

Strengths of Indigenous Dads, Uncles, Pops & Brothers DVD

A group of young Aboriginal fathers were trained over a period of three months to film and edit using digital cameras and computer-based editing software. These young men became the producers of this DVD. They not only were cameramen and editors (with technical help) but, with Craig Hammond as the team leader, they planned and developed the idea of the clip. They filmed each other as well as other members of the community and so presented their own experience as well as that of their community.



DVD PRICE **\$77.50** Code: INDIGDVD

VIDEO PRICE **\$77.50** Code: INDIGVIDEO

Indigenous Fathers posters

These five dynamic, vibrant posters (A2 size) give Indigenous men clear, positive messages: Our Kids Need Dads Who: Stay Strong, Smile, Take an Interest, Be There, and Listen.

The messages were developed by Craig Hammond and the Indigenous community (men and women) as part of the Engaging Fathers Research Project on Young Aboriginal Fathers.



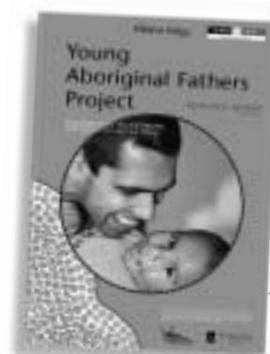
PRICE **\$110.00**

Code: INDIGPOSTERS

Young Aboriginal Fathers Project Research Report

How do young Aboriginal men react when they discover that they are going to be fathers? What do they do at the birth? What do they think of the services available? What would they like to happen?

These questions were the basis for interviews with young Indigenous fathers from the Hunter Valley. At the same time, the services available to support Indigenous families were surveyed to discover what support was available to this group.



PRICE **\$27.50**

Code: INDIGREPORT

SPECIAL PACKAGE PRICE

Purchase all three of our Indigenous resources — *The Skills & Strengths of Indigenous Dads, Uncles Pops & Brothers DVD*, the *Indigenous Fathers posters* and the *Young Aboriginal Fathers Project Research Report* — for the special price of: **\$180.00** Code: INDIGPKG

bulletin board

Rock and Water

Workshops? Courses? Conferences? The choice is yours . . .



One-day introductory

The one day Rock and Water workshop provides a survey of the entire course, focusing on the first four lessons of the program. These include standing strong physically and mentally, introduction to the Rock and Water attitude (in physical and verbal confrontation), Rock and Water in the schoolyard and in relationships (what kind of friend am I? Too rocky, too watery?). It will also include breathing exercises, exercises for boundary awareness and body language. This is a great way to familiarise many staff with the Rock and Water principles in your school/organisation. Maximum of 30

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

Three-day course

This 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 14 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, empathetic 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).

New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory

All NSW and ACT courses are organised by the **Boys in Schools Program**.

For registration and information contact:

Michelle Gifford at the Boys in Schools Program, Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle
Ph: 02 4921 6830
Fax: 02 4921 8686
Email:
Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au

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

Murwillumbah 31 October–
2 November
(Murwillumbah High School)

Canberra 7–9 November
(Queanbeyan Public School)

Balgowlah 11 November
(Balgowlah Boys High School)
1 day introductory

Sydney 14–16 November
(St Clair High School)

Newcastle 17–19 November
(Swansea High School)

Western Australia

Panawonica 21–23 October
Panawonica Primary
Anne Mead 08 9184 1172
ann.mead@det.wa.edu.au

Perth 26–28 October
Wesley College
Susan Laughton 08 9368 8047
slaughton@wesley.wa.edu.au

Victoria

Melbourne 3–5 October
Parade College
Bernadette Linnehan
03 9468 3300
belinehan@parade.vic.edu.au

Victoria contd

Advanced Training Level II
Melbourne 6–7 October
Parade College (as above)

South Australia

Adelaide 17–19 October
St Peter's College
Stephen webber 08 8362 3451
swabber@stpeters.sa.edu.au

New Zealand

Christchurch 23–25 November
Chuck Marriot +64 3 358 7414
rockandwaternz@xtra.co.nz

Rock and Water Conference 16 October 2006 (Newcastle)

Do you want to find out more about Rock and Water in boys' education and hear more about:

- Implementing Rock and Water in your school or centre?
 - Evaluating your Rock & Water program?
 - And much much more?
- Then come to the first Australia-wide Rock and Water Conference.

Express your interest in attending now

- Yes, I would like to attend the Rock and Water Conference, please send further details
- I am interested in attending the one-day introductory training and conference
- I am interested in attending the three-day training and conference
- I have previously completed a one-day introductory workshop
- I have previously completed a three-day training workshop
- I have not completed any training at this stage

Name/s _____

Organisation _____

Postal address: _____

Town/Suburb/City _____

State _____ Postcode _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Fax _____

Please return this expression of interest to Boys in Schools Program, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308 Phone 02 4921 8739 Fax 02 4921 8686 Email Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au

Family Action Centre Resources / ORDER FORM

		RRP (INC. GST)	QUANTITY	TOTAL
NEW RESOURCES	Nuts & Bolts of Kids & Schools: A Course for Dads	\$66.00		
	6 Pack of Strengths	\$176.00		
	7 Days That Matter	\$29.95		
	Boys Business (book & CD-ROM)	\$88.00		
	Boys & Families: Literacy Strengths Resources	\$55.00		
	Bringing Fathers In Handbook	\$77.00		
	Fathers & Schools Together (FAST) in Literacy & Learning: A resource manual	\$77.00		
OTHER RESOURCES	Resilience Tool	\$60.50		
	The Boys in School Bulletin 2005 (single subscription) — 1 copy of each issue	\$45.00		
	The Boys in Schools Bulletin 2005 (school set subscription) — 3 copies of each issue	\$110.00		
	The Boys in School Bulletin back issues 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000 (single issues)	\$12.00		
	The Boys in School Bulletin back issues 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000 (single set)	\$40.00		
	Being a Man Photopak — photographs to help provoke boys' thoughts and words	\$132.00		
	Boys in Schools — addressing real issues: behaviour, values and relationships	\$28.00		
	Games for Growing — Wilson McCaskill — game, 163 A4 pages	\$44.95		
	I Can Hardly Wait Till Monday — women teachers talk about what works for them	\$33.00		
	Leadership in Boys' Education — results from a national forum held in 1999, 16 case studies	\$33.00		
	Leadership in Boys' Education — tapes	\$20.00		
	Man's World: A Game for Young Men (suitable for high-school age only)	\$121.00		
	Our Scrapbook of Strengths — 42 cards to explore the strengths that bind families & communities	\$49.50		
	Sometimes Magic — 32 colourful laminated cards	\$46.75		
	POSTERS	Strength Cards for Kids — strengths-based resources for primary school-aged children	\$49.50	
2003 Boys to Fine Men Community Partnership Conference Manual		\$10.00		
Boyz Rulez posters		\$33.00		
Boys to Men posters		\$33.00		
ROCK AND WATER RESOURCES	113 Ways to Be Involved As a Father poster	\$11.00		
	Rock and Water Approach (3rd edition)	\$55.00		
	The Rock and Water Perspective: Theory Book	\$35.00		
	Rock and Water Action Reaction video (English subtitles, high-school age only)	\$55.00		
	Rock and Water Basic Exercises video	\$55.00		
	Rock and Water Basic Exercises DVD	\$60.00		
INDIGENOUS RESOURCES & ENGAGING FATHERS	Rock and Water polo shirts	\$45.00		
	Indigenous Fathers Posters — set of five A2 colour posters	\$110.00		
	The Skills & Strengths of Indigenous Dads, Uncles, Pops & Brothers DVD	\$77.50		
	Young Aboriginal Fathers Report	\$27.50		
	Indigenous fathers posters, DVD and report: Special package deal	\$180.00		
	Fatherhood Reserach in Australia (report)	\$27.50		
	Engaging Fathers T-shirts (women's)	\$28.00		
Engaging Fathers polo shirts (men's)	\$33.00			

- **Please note:** Resources cannot be purchased on approval
- **Overseas customers:** Please send bank draft in Australian dollars

Subtotal	\$
Postage & handling (add 15% to max. \$30)	\$
TOTAL	\$

Make cheques payable to: **The University of Newcastle** (ABN 15 736 576 735)

Contact name: _____ **Organisation:** _____
Postal address: _____ **Postcode:** _____
Order no: _____ **Phone no:** _____ **Email:** _____

Please invoice our organisation (Australia only)
 Enclosed is my cheque for AUD\$ _____

Please debit my credit card
 Bankcard
 Visa
 Mastercard

Expiry date: _____ **Name of cardholder:** _____

Signature: _____

New Resources

from the Family Action Centre

To make your job easier . . .



6 Pack of Strengths

Rewards bring rewards

The *6 Pack of Strengths* is a bright, engaging set of materials that enhance the social and emotional skills necessary for school success. It provides a systematic way for educators to recognise the efforts of students and reward them immediately, and enables students to identify their positive behaviours and be rewarded for moving towards social and emotional skills. The *6 Pack* is all about celebrating and rewarding the great things going on in and out of classrooms, no matter how subtle the actions maybe. It's fun for the students and easy for the teachers. Designed to appeal to both boys and girls, particularly in the middle years (from Year 5 to 8) the pack is made up of six parts:

- a classroom wall **Poster** as a visual reminder of strengths-based actions
- 160 colour-coded Spotting Strengths **Stickers** which are all about noticing the great things kids do every day
- 50 colour-coded **Action Reward Cards** to provide students with tangible rewards they really want to get
- 12 **Totem Tags** — symbols students can wear to be proud of their strengths
- 4 **Totem Trophies** to publicly acknowledge great strengths
- 12 **Gift Cards** to spread the strengths message to your school community

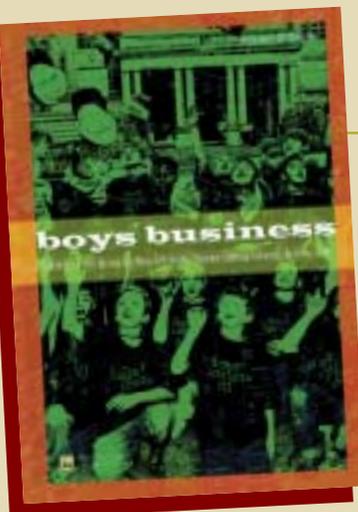
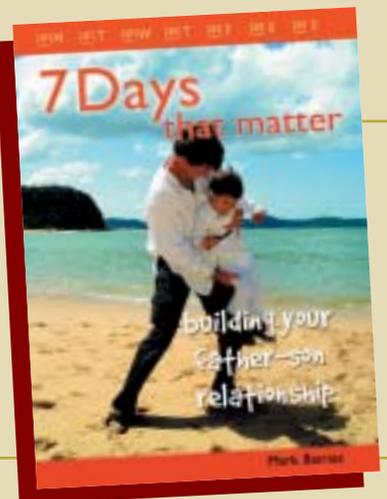
PRICE **\$176.00** Code: SIXPACK

7 Days That Matter

by Mark Barnes

There's no simple, straightforward route to being a fine man for boys growing up in the 21st century. Sadly, too many of our boys get lost along the way. Using wisdom, gentle humour and experience Mark Barnes has produced a practical, heartfelt guide for fathers who want to help their sons stay on track.

PRICE **\$29.95** Code: SEVEN DAYS



Boys Business

Tuning into Boys in the Middle Years Using Music & the Arts

by Robert Smith

Boys Business is a program about affirming boys. Although it uses music as a vehicle, it's not about creating a 'Vienna Boys Choir'; it's more about helping boys evolve into collaborative, creative and independent operators. This teaching pack provides everything you need to run the program: the theoretical background, module outlines, games, activities, CD-ROM and sheet music.

Manual, Songbook & CD-ROM

PRICE **\$88.00** Code: BOYSBUSINESS

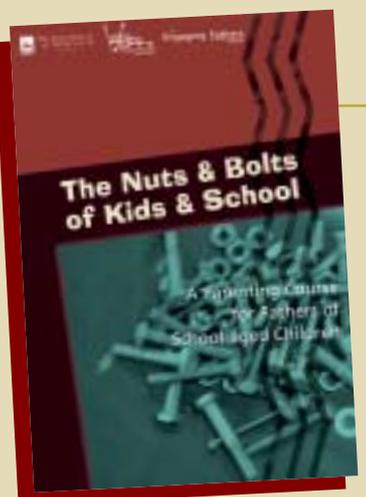
The Nuts & Bolts of Kids & Schools

A course for dads

by Ken Bright, Sue Pascoe,
Craig d'Arcy, Simone Silberberg, Richard Fletcher

This manual provides a step-by-step guide to facilitate a short course for fathers and father-figures. The exercises have been field-tested on non-reading dads and dads from low income and middle income areas. We know that they work. Topics include: The Strengths of Dads, Communication, Fathers Contribution to School and Community, Resilience and Positive Interactions and Child Protection.

PRICE **\$66.00** Code: NUTSBOLTS



Cover shown may differ from published manual

Available soon

A new publication entitled **Educating Boys: The Good News** will link the conference themes of literacy, learning and identity through an analysis of the conference proceedings. It will be published later this year in both book and CD-ROM form.

For ordering details see inside back cover