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I write as a teacher and parent from the central coast of NSW which has one of the highest rates of adolescent suicide, so have an interest in the education of boys. I have a masters majoring in literacy, so boys' literacy skills are an interest.

I spent three years teaching at International School Bangkok which caters for the children of ex pats from 62 different countries, but mainly American. It was here that I saw a different type of boy and realised that a lot of the issues that concern us in Australia must result from the socialisation process our boys experience. Admittedly, the boys enrolled at the international school were from families of high achievers, so on our return to Australia, I enrolled my son in a fairly well-to-do private school where the parents are predominately high achievers, but the boys are not the same. They possess all the boy characteristics that are prevalent at other Australian schools. I have several theories to why boys often under achieve and have difficulty fitting in.

Firstly, our male culture, which is basically competitive. We see it in adults and the expression, 'The one with the most toys wins' sums up the attitude many men have. Many boys know from an early age that they will not win, so opt out. It is better for appearance sake to look as though you don't care, than to really try and not do very well. Generally, I think most primary schools do an excellent job of promoting boys' education by focussing on what they can do, rather than on what can't be done. In primary schools the practice of being with one teacher most of the time encourages a positive relationship with the teacher, who if actively promotes risk taking and a non-competitive classroom (individuals aim to better their own results, rather than being compared with others) boys do well.

Problems usually surface in high school. I realise this is the greatest period of change for boys and girls, but I feel there are factors which escalate the problems, and one is high school teachers. I have met high school teachers who are innovative and readily change to meet the needs of their students and these teachers should be acknowledged. Unfortunately, there are many more high school teachers who are so content based in their delivery and their classrooms are competitive.

I have a son and daughter in high school and the way they explain to me how lessons are delivered; it is no wonder students lose interest, particularly boys. From pre-school days girls adapt to sitting still and doing desk work far better than boys. Boys like to be active learners and they are very good at it. In high school there is too much sitting down while the teacher delivers and then there

will be a test to assess and rate the students.

Certainly, boys' education is an issue, and I am very pleased to see that it is important enough to involve a national inquiry BUT in adult life men hold the vast majority of CEO and other executive/managerial positions, so somewhere along the way many men do take their place in society.

So, we could have another national inquiry about the issue of girls doing so well at school, usually better than the boys, yet ten or twenty years later, they only hold a minority of high flying positions. I could offer further views and strategies that have helped boys, but maybe what I am writing is not what you are actually looking for. If you would like further input please contact me at this email address or at the mailing address written at the top of this letter.

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