

To Dr Brendon Nelson MP (Chair of Committee)

My name is Robyn MacDonald

I am a primary school teacher at Farrer P/S in the ACT. For many years I have had a concern about the education of boys and their literacy skills-more in the area of the reluctance of boys to write. I am the Executive Officer for the kinder to Year 2 area at my school and currently teach a year 2 class. I have a number of boys in my class (irrespective of their reading level and competency) who are reluctant participants in literacy areas. I believe that it is at the early years of schooling that we need to address the literacy issues otherwise the gap widens over many years and we lose a lot of our students later on.

My teaching partner on the other year 2 class plan and develop programs to assist the motivation of our male students by choosing activities and topics that will stimulate interest. Our school has given us a PD grant to investigate best practice in literacy for boys (that was our submission submission). We contacted the ACT Literacy team for schools to visit. While the team aims to assist they are not at the grass roots like myself and could not offer ideas for schools. I am now in the process of looking for schools in NSW or Queensland. So far I have no contacts to steer me in the direction of schools that my teaching partner and I can visit to see exemplary practice in Literacy for boys (that is working!!!) Our school (Farrer P/S) already has a high reputation for good literacy practice and teachers from other schools visit my class and the other classes of my team of teachers to get ideas for literacy.

I am a highly qualified experienced teacher in the ACT system. I have a MEd (1996) in LA, Numeracy and IT, I have been involved in system trials of benchmarking numeracy and literacy tests and have worked at school and system level initiatives. As the area that you are looking at is high on my agenda and it is something our school is already heavily involved in, I would like to be involved with you in your study. You need someone at the grass roots level to work with. As teachers we often have people at office level or other areas outside school giving ideas and "top-down" passing of information and we are yet to see results (eg. the ACT system gave us the "First Steps" program as a system initiative ( I have inserviced my staff on areas of First Steps) but no one has been able to quantify whether this has been a program that has given definitive results. You need someone like myself who has identified the problem at the class level and is already looking at strategies to address the issues of literacy and boys.

This sort of enquiry should have been done many years ago. While we have touched on gender issues over many years, no one has looked specifically at boys and literacy (and this is much broader than you think). I believe you will find that Boys and Literacy is a HUGE issue. Data from National testing, HSC results etc will confirm this but it is finding the "key" to open the door for boys that will hold your largest challenge. I know because it has been my concern as a class teacher for many years. Even integrating IT does not come close to assisting.

Please, once again, I would really like some involvement in your study. I am writing to you personally as I know that you will contact departmental level people who are not at the grass roots. (Everyone follows this line-I know I worked in the ACT Education Office for 3 years (1994-97)) Work with people like myself at the classroom level. I work closely with our Literacy coordinators in our school as part of our Literacy team. As an executive officer I oversee programs in the school to see what teachers are doing.

I can be contacted in a number of ways.

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Good luck with the study. It really is needed. Don't spend too much time on the data to prove that boys need help in literacy (& numeracy when it comes to problem solving or explaining how they did the work!) as the data is already there at system level as I have said before. Really concentrate at looking at strategies. We all know about the left-right brain development differences of males and females, it is ways to make the males make the shift to left side language development.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Robyn MacDonald