

Submission to:

**THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS  
INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church in Queensland has been providing formal school education for more than 150 years. Today, as in the past, Catholic schools offer a comprehensive education from pre-schools to the final year (Yr 12) of secondary schooling. In the last decade the church has also established the Australian Catholic University with a major campus in Queensland which continues the education of young men and women in undergraduate programs as well as enrolling more mature students in post-graduate studies.

There are almost 300 Catholic schools in Queensland, with approximately 100,000 students enrolled. These schools range from small, often isolated, rural schools to large multi-racial urban schools. Parents have a choice of co-educational or single sex schooling for their sons and daughters. In addition, there are a number of boarding schools, including one enrolling very young students in their first few years of school. These schools, once staffed mostly by members of religious congregations, are now mainly staffed by lay teachers - most of whom are Catholic. Generally, Catholic schools experience a stability in staffing with less than 10% of new teachers entering the system each year.

The number of Catholic schools in Queensland is steadily increasing each year; enrolments are rising and staff are encouraged and supported to engage in and meet the educational challenges of the times. The focus of the current inquiry into the education of boys is one of the many educational challenges confronting not only Catholic schools but all schools in Australia.

## 2. CONTEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS

Catholic education in Queensland locates the inquiry into the education of boys in the larger context of the inquiry being made by governments, churches, centres of learning, business and industry into what is commonly called *the state of transition* from an industrial world to the emerging information world (post-industrial, knowledge society, post-modern world - no single description is universally acknowledged).

This broader context is significant since it holds some of the forces relevant to the education of boys. Generally, Australian society is experiencing a paradigm shift which, in the broadest terms, is from an industrial, mechanical, mass production model to one that is information-based, technological, personalized and diverse. Such a paradigm shift is often described using Likert-type comparisons of extremes, eg.

from INDEPENDENCE	to INTERDEPENDENCE
HIERARCHIES	to WEBS or TEAMS
STABILITY FOR GROWTH	to CHANGE FOR GROWTH
COMPETITION	to COLLABORATION
CONTROL	to LIBERATION
IMMUTABLE LAWS	to EVOLVING INSIGHTS
PARTS	to THE WHOLE

In the context of this changing paradigm is the process of schooling which, in the earlier model, was regarded by many as conforming with the industrial values associated with mass production and marketing. Schools tended to be agents of conservatism and concerned with knowledge transmission. Well established traditions are usually very resistant to change. The emerging paradigm has challenged educators to embrace greater diversity in curriculum content, in the ways knowledge is accessed and constructed, in the ways in which teaching and learning occurs so that individual potential is maximised.

One of the significant factors in the paradigmatic shift has been the contribution of women - in all walks of life but particularly in governments, churches, education and the law, Arts and Sciences. One cannot deny the emergence of some well articulated, philosophically (and theologically \*) sound feminist views of the world, its institutions, processes and values. Such feminist views have challenged, and are transforming, much of what was traditionally accepted as the only way to interpret social, scientific, economic and family life. These feminist contributions have impacted upon the processes of schooling and the ensuing search for a new equilibrium is currently being experienced in the nature of curriculum and pedagogical reforms. In this search male teachers and students are at various stages of knowledge, understanding of and engagement in the subtle processes of change. It is recommended that the Committee of Inquiry peruse the text *The Paradigm Conspiracy* by Denise Breton and Christopher Largent : Hazelden, Minnesota, 1996.)

(\*Theologically, Catholic schools continue to examine notions of God, and various forms of spiritual development - relationships to God - which have been mostly masculine in their origin. The movement towards more inclusive views of God and spiritual development may complement the work of other scholars who are promoting more inclusive views of what it means to be masculine or feminine. In a similar way, brain research has moved beyond simplistic left and right brain interpretations to more holistic interdependent explanations.)

### 3. CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Catholic schools in Queensland are conscious that the broad transitional movements from one paradigm to another inevitably impact upon Australian society and culture and are manifested in a variety of ways. We wish to draw to the attention of the Committee the following manifestations (in no particular order of significance):

- ◆ changes to the nature of work, the workforce and the increasing gap between the haves and have nots

- ◆ the fragmentation of marriages and families
- ◆ rising levels of personal stress and suicide
- ◆ the continuing focus on a curative rather than preventative approach to personal and public health
- ◆ the tardy movement from environmental awareness to action on behalf of an ailing environment
- ◆ the struggle for human rights for the marginalized, women and men
- ◆ the lack of a clear vision of who we want to become as Australians.

These and other cultural manifestations have an impact upon the educational provisions that are made for young people. In times of cultural transition, those who lack the skill and knowledge to work together to negotiate more peaceful processes, respond negatively by capitulating to uncertainty or by resisting and rebelling against the changes, or by seeking power-based solutions. Schools are not exempt from this range of negative responses and, perhaps, some of the issues affecting boys education can be found in the world view of administrators and teachers as well as in their consequent pedagogical practices.

We commend the Inquiry for focusing on the social development of boys and would urge the committee to explore:

- the connections between boys' self image and their views on being a male adult;
- their views on being an Australian male;
- their attitudes towards schooling, study and general educational aspirations, and
- the relationships of boys with significant women in their lives.

We believe that much of understanding of the present apparent under-performance of boys has its roots in the cultural complexities and counter-cultural forces impacting on the traditional views of Australian maleness.

#### 4. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Catholic schooling authorities in Queensland have been encouraged to make individual submissions to the Inquiry. In these submissions there will be detailed information about particular strategies and organizational arrangements that schools are utilizing to enhance the education of boys.

Results in literacy (in particular) and numeracy indicate that, in the first seven years of schooling, boys do not perform as well as girls. It is important to ask WHICH BOYS? Indigenous boys, boys in remote and rural areas and boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds feature prominently. This raises the question about the appropriateness of pedagogical approaches. It would be helpful if the Inquiry could encourage or commission reputable research into group-specific strategies in literacy for differing groups of boys.

In addition it would be profitable for the committee to inquire more broadly into the nature of curriculum content, teaching/learning processes and assessment practices in order to see whether the feminization of teaching is producing any unintended effects that might be gearing schooling towards an experience preferred more by girls than by boys, particularly those boys most strongly affected by the feminist contributions to changes in schooling and in society in general.

There seems to be evidence that there are insufficient role models for boys in Australian primary schools - in fact from kindergarten and preschool to the end of primary (and perhaps secondary?) schooling.

The reasons why so few males are entering teaching are many and varied, but two prominent reasons were advanced at the recent Australian College of Education Conference (July 2000). The first is related to the status of teaching as a profession in Australia. Men, it was argued, do not see teaching as a profession held in high regard by Australian society. If this is so the Inquiry will need to investigate the ramifications of this view in terms of its focus on the education of boys. Secondly, whilst the salary of a beginning teacher is attractive in comparison with other beginning professionals, the 'ceiling' is reached within 9 years. Overseas countries have found ways to raise the ceiling - teachers take longer to reach the maximum salary (an incentive to stay in teaching) and the maximum salary is much higher, hence more attractive to teachers.

Finally, evidence is beginning to emerge that some pedagogical practices are not suited to boys' learning styles, and that control takes precedence over empowerment in the choices made by teachers. The increasingly effective use of technology, particularly in secondary schools, seems to produce better outcomes for boys. Perhaps there is an issue for middle schooling and even for early primary education.

## CONCLUSION

Catholic education is built around a particular view of the human person. Central to that view is the dignity of each person, created in the image of God. Nourishing this dignity is foundational to good teaching and learning. Without a positive self image; without a safe and respectful environment for learning; without effective relationships built upon regard for one another's dignity; and without trust and a genuine search for truth there can be little effective cognitive, emotional, physical or social learning.

We offer the above contributions to the Committee's consideration. We look forward with great expectation to genuine reforms being initiated, not only in schooling but in our societal values, structures and relationships which will enhance the education of all Australians, especially our young people, boys AND girls.

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