

Submission

to

Senate Legal and Constitutional Reference Committee

Inquiry into the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill 2004

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**A SUBMISSION BY THE
AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
TO THE SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISIONS OF THE
SEX DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT (TEACHING
PROFESSION) BILL 2004**



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Gender Equity: Preamble

The Australian Education Union (AEU) appreciates the opportunity it has to make this submission to the Inquiry Into the Provisions of the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill 2004. The AEU represents 155,000 teachers in schools, pre-school centres, TAFE Institutes and other educational settings across Australia and it has a long-standing involvement in issues relating to the teacher shortage and particularly work of the Inquiry.

The AEU has a long term interest and involvement in these matters and is keen to work with Government on this important issue.

The AEU is committed to a fully funded, free, quality public education system.

The AEU is committed to promoting gender equity in education settings to bring about a safe and challenging learning environment for all students and equitable, gender balanced working environments for all education workers.

The AEU believes that all students have the right to be educated to their potential as participating, responsible people.

The AEU is committed to addressing the complex underlying reasons for the current and continuing shortage of teachers in Australia and promoting the profession as one of essential public benefit, personal satisfaction and deserving of high community respect.

The AEU notes that where professions and sectors have traditionally been dominated by women and seen as such as the work of “nurturers”, that this has not only resulted in low professional status, but equally lower remuneration, less investment of public funds and higher degrees of sex role stereotyping than in male dominated areas.

The AEU believes that recruiting quality teachers and providing public schools with the best resources, professional development and small class sizes should be the priority of any government. Ensuring quality teaching and quality learning environments is the fundamental catalyst for improving the educational outcomes for both girls and boys.

Ensuring a range of genders, ethnicities, cultures, and sexualities, are represented within schools (and hence the teaching profession) is also a positive goal to enable acceptance of difference, provide a range of role models and promote/celebrate diversity.

Essentially, the related issue of teachers as role models for students, must be viewed within the context of gender construction and sex role stereotyping, as much as understanding that quality teachers inspire, challenge, lead and foster positive self esteem in their students regardless of their own or the student’s gender.

Gender equity focuses on the development of positive constructions of both masculinity and femininity. These positive constructions should recognise and redress power dynamics, which traditionally exist between men and women, boys and girls.

Understanding of the process of gender construction is crucial if schools and systems are to work for equitable and improved educational experiences for girls and boys.

Dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity define males and females as opposites by highlighting their differences and assigning them unequal value, status and power.

These dominant concepts limit, in different ways, expectations of girls’ and boys’ schooling experiences and successes.

An Overview : the teacher shortage and boys' literacy

Essentially there are three distinct yet wrongly linked issues being grappled with within the scope of the proposed Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill. The male (and overall) teacher shortage, the literacy rates of some boys and absent fathers/ single parent families.

The AEU believes that many assertions being used to justify both the notion of male teacher scholarships and remedies for the underperformance of some boys' literacy levels stem from a misinterpretations and generalisations about role models, masculinity, parenting, 'feminised' industries and quality teaching.

Put simply, within this submission the AEU will argue that:

- scholarships for men will not redress the teacher shortage, nor adequately balance gender in the classroom unless greater investment is made in public schools and the recognition of the teaching profession
- more male teachers alone will not increase the literacy competency levels of those select groups of boys who are underachieving
- more male teachers in and of themselves do not provide automatic 'role models' for boys simply because of their gender, nor has anyone identified what characteristics or "masculinity" are desired for young boys, let alone what characteristics these boys are said to be lacking.
- quality teaching is gender blind and facilitates students feeling respected, involved in setting learning goals (thus have ownership of their learning); can analyse and understand their ways of learning so as to improve learning efficiency; are encouraged to construct their own understandings; value their education; and experience satisfaction and achievement from their learning. Quality teaching goes beyond measured literacy and numeracy outcomes and can only be achieved when students are well supported by the school as well as home environments.
- thus quality learning outcomes are best facilitated when schools are well resourced, class sizes are small, and teachers have adequate preparation time and professional development, and are valued and rewarded for their work.
- recruitment methods should be aimed at attaining quality teachers, regardless of gender.
- teachers provide essential development, learning, guidance and inspiration for their students, however they are NOT employed to be substitute parents. The wider (perceived) social issues of single parent families, absent parents, youth suicide, violence and crime should not be considered solely the responsibility of teachers/schools.

Executive Summary

There is no need to amend the sex discrimination act to offer male teacher scholarships. Amending anti discrimination legislation to allow for "positive discrimination" and/or short term exemptions weakens the purpose of the legislation and creates confusing and oft misapplied justifications for the very discrimination the legislation is set up to outlaw. The issue of male teacher numbers and of the teacher shortage in general can be remedied much more significantly and longer term by industrial and other promotional means, than a small number of scholarships and watering down important legislation.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, when assessing the Catholic Education Office's bid for an exemption to the Sex Discrimination Act to offer scholarships to male would-be teachers, said, 'neither the means of offering scholarships, nor the ends of producing better boys' literacy performance' could be proven to justify granted the exemption.

And importantly recent reviews into higher education and coming investigations into student income support (student poverty) indicate that though student debt is a deterrent for students contemplating tertiary qualifications, the HECS charged for studying teaching at university is NOT the reason why men are staying away from teaching. The recent DEST report "Australia's Teachers : Australia's Future" (DEST, 2003, pxxi) supports the AEU's long held belief that, "several factors underpin teacher satisfaction and retention. Among them are: improved remuneration; physical conditions within schools; availability and quality of curriculum resources; teaching loads; class sizes; access to and use of technology; appropriate in-service training and the opportunity for study leave and professional development."

At a time of a current and accelerating teacher shortage, governments should be addressing the underlying factors that are turning graduates away from teaching as a career and are failing to retain beginning teachers in education systems. Consistently pay, status and workload are sited as why teachers of both genders are moving away from the industry. Quality teachers must be attracted back to teaching and not falsely and discriminately lured to a profession that does not value their work.

Further, male teachers and female teachers act as role models, for students of both genders, and both boys and girls need role models. Reasons given for male teachers only needing to be recruited to be role models, (and to be role models to boys only) ignores the fundamentals in role modelling as a concept.

A role model is a positive force displaying qualities worthy of replicating. A teacher is not *automatically* a role model simply because they are an authority figure, nor because they are the same gender, nor because they are the same ethnicity, nor because they are the same religion, class, sexuality etc. Though good teachers often are role models for their students, it is their responsibility to teach their students rather than to be pseudo-parents. The AEU wants schools to represent diverse cultures, both sexes, all classes and ethnicities, so that students are not constrained in their perceptions of what opportunities they have in their lives to pursue their dreams. But we want quality teachers first and foremost and we want them to be there with qualities worthy of replication, not simply because they will reinforce gender stereotypes that may be absent in students' homes.

It is also worth noting, that throughout the process of attempting to increase the numbers of male teachers for reasons of role modelling, no argument has been put that the female teachers in schools have *not* successfully acted as role models for girls and boys for the decades they have been in the profession.

Specifically, the boys who have been identified as underperforming in the area of literacy are of concern, and targeted programs to address the underlying reasons for their underperformance are welcomed by the AEU. However, this does not equate to a literacy crisis for ALL boys, nor is the under-performance attributable to the fact that they ARE boys, because in fact, academics who have been researching boys schooling for over a decade have identified that the more influential factors in these boys schooling (and consequently behaviour) are along the lines of ethnicity, indigeneity, socio-economic background, abusive parents, sexuality etc.

Clearly, these underlying factors contributing to the underperformance of some boys in the area of literacy will not and could not be remedied simply by more male teachers in schools.

Further, the Government's own report from the lengthy stage one of its Boys Lighthouse Schools Project, shows that 8 of the 10 recommendations are SOLELY about the principles of quality teaching, (that preparation time, resources, smaller class sizes and professional development matter to educational outcomes as well as student motivation and behaviour) and only 2 recommendations superficially acknowledged that gender existed as a factor in the boys' educational experience. But even then, few of the pilot projects the report deals with, actually DID specifically tackle notions of masculinity and how this impacts at school.

There are multiple learning styles but not a boys' learning style *only* common to *all* boys. Certainly, multiple teaching styles exist, but not a common male teaching style that can only benefit boys.

The Boys' Lighthouse Project has demonstrated that boys' literacy can be improved. But it has also shown that the methods used to produce successful learning outcomes for boys are matters of quality teaching not gender, and thus are equally as applicable to all in the classroom.

The AEU would prefer the energy currently being spent on all boys (many of whom do not require additional assistance) be invested in targeted programs to support students (boys and girls) who are disadvantaged because of their background or personal circumstances. In addition, education systems, as a whole, should be valued and funded in with the same enthusiasm.

Recruitment and Retention : Quality Teachers, Regardless of Gender

If the goal is to recruit more male teachers, ONLY to have a gender balance across schools, then the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the value the community places on the education of future generations are therefore being placed as secondary considerations. This approach is short sighted and negligent.

It is acknowledged that Australia, as with many other OECD countries, is in the midst of a teacher shortage. In Australia, that shortage is currently resulting in teachers teaching outside of their area of expertise, teaching with lesser qualifications than desirable and taking on obscenely large workloads. It is predicted, however, to worsen. Even the Minister for Education identifies (09/10/2003) that estimates indicate a shortage of 30 000 teachers in Australia by 2010. Of note is the "survey conducted for the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) teachers nominated the following factors which were driving them out of the profession:

- Poor remuneration
- Poor resources/heavy workloads
- Lack of professional standing in the community
- Large class sizes
- Poor student behaviour."

Given that this shortage is therefore inextricably linked to the conditions of employment rather than the necessary pre-service training (and arguably the stigmatized and sexist implications of the clearly gendered workforce) and costs surrounding it, the issue of recruitment must surely look to the profession rather than piecemeal solutions of a small amount of scholarships. Further, when the alternatives to teaching degrees, are clearly still being taken up by male university students in areas such as medicine, science, engineering and law, (which all attract higher if not the highest HECS debts, and are traditionally male dominated areas) it is clear that perceived income and status are much larger driving factors in industry/university recruitment than the fees themselves.

The AEU supports the extensive arguments put by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner (12/04/04) that further highlight the issues raised above and the misguided nature of scholarships as a remedy for broader reaching issues. Ms Goward says, "one of the problems is that male teachers either leave the profession mid-career because of poor remuneration, or they are promoted out of the school room to become Principals or Assistant Principals. Programs to stop this exodus and programs to encourage the promotion of a representative number of women teachers into senior administrative positions in schools would both result in more male teachers in the classroom."

Importantly, the discrimination inherent in the SDA amendment proposals, is greater than the original concern that the scholarships would be only open to men. Because, as Ms Goward explains, "the simple fact is that young men are not attracted to teaching because they can earn better money elsewhere. As 'women's work' it has never been remunerated properly....Front loading the pay of male teacher students through a scholarship, effectively relieving them of the HECS burden their female counterparts will carry into their professional careers, entrenches this inequity and has not been demonstrated to address the disparity in numbers of male and female teachers long term."

As a legislative process, the proposed amendment to the Sex Discrimination Act, even though the opportunity is created for initiatives for either gender to redress imbalance where it exists, is still a flawed concept and the ruling already given by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in February 2003 is still relevant in exposing these flaws.

The HREOC summary decision says that "the profession should be attempting to attract the "best and most suitable people into the profession, regardless of gender. If teachers mirror more accurately the society in which they operate – in terms of gender, class and ethnicity – so much the better. But teaching ability must remain the primary consideration."

The crux of the decision against awarding an exemption for the purposes of offering scholarships for male students is clear. HREOC said, "the underlying goal of the Exemption Application was to increase the number of male primary school teachers so that boys have male role models. It was further suggested by Sydney's Catholic Education Office that having access to male role models will help improve the 'substantive equality of boys and girls' in primary schools. Underpinning

this argument are a number of assumptions (which are not clearly articulated in the Exemption Application), including that: male and female teachers have different teaching styles, employ different discipline techniques and interact with boys differently; there is a relationship between the gender of the teacher and the academic achievement of the student; and boys suffer a disadvantage in primary schools due to the paucity of male teachers."

Their decision goes on to highlight, "a number of the submissions opposing the grant of the exemption pointed to what was said to be a lack of evidence showing that financial hardship is the barrier preventing a higher number of males from enrolling in primary teacher training." Therefore HREOC ruled "that the granting of that application would be inconsistent with the objects of the Act and unreasonable in that the discriminatory effects that would be caused by the proposed scholarship scheme outweigh the reasons advanced in favour of it".

Who can be a role model?

Throughout the debate on the need for male teachers, the AEU has consistently argued that more quality teachers are needed. If they increase the balance of men and women in teaching, so much the better, but the concern should be not that too many women are teachers and that this is implicitly undesirable or harmful for students learning.

It needs to be understood that describing school teaching as a 'feminised' profession is incorrect— or misleading at best. The AEU's 2000 submission into the inquiry into the education of boys stated: "the use of the word 'feminisation' of the teaching profession can be misleading. (The Australian Educator, 2003, p25)

Certainly the majority of the workers in the system are female and the percentage is growing. Women, however, are under-represented in the positions of management in the schools and systems.

Recent AEU publications have discussed the fact that "women have always been under-represented in areas of senior management means that they have had little influence and control over policy directions, the informal and formal curriculum, the allocation of resources and the appointment and promotion of staff. With women making only very slow inroads into positions of senior management, and in some cases no movement, the education system remains in the control of men." (The Australian Educator, 2003, p26)

"And certainly, women teachers themselves are part of the overall teacher shortage, and in particular are not overly represented in shortage areas like the maths and physical sciences. Critics who want to blame women for the problems in the teaching profession have also taken up the 'feminisation' tag...According to Janet Smith, a lecturer in social and environmental education with the University of Canberra, the word 'feminisation' is often used pejoratively—implying that the trend is a worrying one that needs to be reversed. Smith, who is writing a thesis on men in primary education, says that, while low status and pay contribute to teaching being unattractive to men, the main barrier is that the profession is regarded by society as women's work." (The Australian Educator, 2003, p26)

Therefore, despite the actual numbers in schools both male teacher AND female teachers are role models for students. And both genders can represent qualities that education systems seek to develop in their students; of positivity, self belief, acceptance of diversity, cooperation, compassion etc. However, gender construction and gender identity, (how boys learn to "be male" or how girls learn to "be feminine") is something that doesn't occur in a vacuum and certainly not just whilst at school.

The AEU believes that "the preponderance of male role models throughout the media, business and society is another factor to consider in rebutting any statements of a lack of influence by males on boys in schools ...Dominant masculinity saturates the world of boys—and girls." According to author Chris Mclean, "boys are also deeply affected by the collective pressures of masculine culture but left to themselves they are unlikely to identify it as the source of their problems... Unfortunately, much of the current men's movement has responded to this situation by identifying women as the problem, rather than joining with women in challenging the gender system which impacts so negatively on both boys and girls in different ways."

The Victorian Department of Education's gender education unit has put extensive resources into understanding the concepts of role modeling and positive masculinities in schools. Tim Delany, senior project officer with the department, has commented (The Australian Educator, 2003, p26) that expecting male teachers to come into schools as role models has a problem: what if they don't have the professional development, skills and training to engage boys in issues of gender, and reinforce undesirable notions of dominant masculinity? "[We] don't speak in terms of teaching needing more men or needing more women," he says. "I just believe we need more loving, firm, friendly, professional, educated people in teaching. We need a diversity of 'masculinities' and 'femininities', coming from diverse ethnic, sexual and social backgrounds—people who come into school with those multiple selves and show students the positives of those multiple selves rather than perpetuating certain stereotypes." (The Australian Educator, 2003, p26)

However, it is understood that it is vital that adult men play an important part, but "this assertion is not based on some belief that 'boys need men' in ways that women cannot fulfill. Rather, I believe it is unrealistic to expect boys to challenge the dominant culture of masculinity, if adult men are not challenging it themselves. This has nothing to do with 'role modeling'. (Mclean cited in Educator, 2003, p27)

Moreover, due to the way dominant masculinities have in the past, and even now in some cases are reinforced in schools inevitably correspond with the very disinterest and behavioural as well as academic challenges the Boys' Lighthouse Project, and other boys specific targeting, aims to redress. Mclean demonstrates how, "on the one hand boys (as young people) are expected to be well behaved and obedient, but on the other hand they are expected (specifically as boys) to demonstrate a willingness to take risks and bend the rules. In some quite fundamental ways 'being good' is incompatible with the images of heroism, hardness, strength, and domination which we associate with masculinity (Davies, 1993, p.92). For many boys, the struggle against school authority becomes a testing ground for their emerging masculinity (Connell, 1989, p.291), while for many male teachers, putting down this challenge is experienced as essential to their own continued sense of manhood." (cited in Kenway, 1997, p16)

The AEU believes more understanding on gender construction in schools will dispel the view that men are needed for men for men's sake, and education systems can get on with addressing underlying disadvantage, through a gendered perspective, but not as the sole determinant for recruitment nor targeted initiatives for learning outcomes.

Gender and Learning Outcomes

Though the literacy rates of boys are showing an increase in the gap between the average performance of boys as compared to the average performance of girls of the same age group, research (longitudinal and otherwise) that has been undertaken for over the last decade actually needs to be considered more closely than simple averages.

For as long as literacy rates and measured learning outcomes have been collected, girls have outperformed boys. The current panic surrounding the underperformance of some, not all boys, in comparison to girls is not new. Simple social psychology indicates that girls mature socially much faster than boys, particularly in the years of early secondary school, when literacy tasks and curriculum complexities are increased. At the end of this submission is a lengthy list of quality research reports by academics whom, some of them, have been investigating this area of relative disadvantage for years and it is worth dissecting in order to expose which boys and which girls are actually performing below average. It is not all boys, and their reasons for underperformance are much less likely to be a result of their gender.

But more importantly, what has significantly changed over the past 20 years is the detriment to students' post-compulsory school outcomes and employment opportunities. The increase of women's participation in the workforce, coupled with the increase in service/IT based industries as opposed to apprentice and manual skilled labor opportunities has impacted on many school leavers choices.

Historically, boys who under-performed in the area of literacy, communication and organisational skills, were more often those who did leave school early and sought employment in manual labor, construction and basic skills apprenticeships. Girls either did not have the same expectation of employment post school, or already had the value of tertiary qualifications impressed upon them in order to ensure financial independence and security, hence worked hard to ensure post-school opportunities.

As the Australian Secondary Principals Association submitted to the Inquiry into the Education Of Boys in 2002:

"Economic and structural change in Australia since the 1970s has created a mismatch between the capabilities of school leavers and the nature/levels of skills required in the workplace. While this affects both boys and girls the most significant impact is on those boys with traditional "male" skills who leave school and line up for jobs which no longer exist. *It should also be noted that it is this structural change and resulting mismatch, not any deficiencies in schools, which has fuelled the so-called literacy crisis of the 1990s.* Lower skilled boys in particular are competing for jobs further up the employment ladder, jobs for which they are poorly equipped (and "illiterate").

The restructured economy increasingly demands capabilities which have traditionally been identified with girls rather than those of boys. The key competencies outlined in the Meyer Report in the early 1990s, highlighted the need for schools to develop competencies such as the capacity to communicate ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others (and in teams) and cultural understandings. These competencies have tended to be culturally coded as "female" qualities, and as demonstrated in a recent DETYA report: *Employer satisfaction with Graduate Skills* (AC Nielsen Feb. 2000) are increasingly the skills sought by employers for both initial employment and subsequent career advancement." (ASPA, 2002, p3)

Further ASPA's contribution to the debate, which supports the reality of the extent of "disadvantage" boys are apparently suffering, as a result of gender equity policies, details where some boys' underperformance lies and the extent of it:

"They reflect a trend identified in most northern European based cultures. The United Kingdom National Foundation for Educational Research project *An investigation into gender differences in Achievement* has been a landmark report in this area and many of its observations are very pertinent to this Inquiry. These include:

1. Boys level of achievement have not in fact declined over the past twenty years, rather, girl's attainment levels have improved at a more rapid rate. As this is also true in Australia, it is worth asking what the intended goal of concerns regarding boy's achievement might be. If boys' achievement levels are in fact rising, then what will constitute an acceptable rate of improvement? Are we intending that boys must achieve as well as girls, when this has in fact never been the case?

2. There has been a consistent pattern of attributing the academic success of boys to innate factors such as motivation or ability, whilst their failure is attributed to external structures such as the style of assessment or curriculum. For

girls on the other hand, the reverse has been true. This has certainly been true of this debate in Australia. As indicated above, claims that the cause and solution to boys' relative under performance can be attributed or solved by changes to curriculum or assessment regimes are not substantiated by the material evidence.

3. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this Report has found that where schools have introduced best practice programs explicitly designed to improve the achievement of boys, it has achieved that end. *However the performance gap between girls and boys at these schools widened, as girls' outcomes improved at a more rapid rate than before.*

Overall, this study found that a school focus upon improving boys' attitudes and perceptions rather than upon curriculum or assessment practices was critical. For these reasons, this submission does not endorse the search for a 'boy friendly' curriculum, but a focus upon strategies and programs which work towards improving boys' attitudes and perceptions towards schooling and about themselves; especially the interrelationships between masculinity and education as reflected in previous recommendations is more appropriate. It is also worth reiterating that a focus upon improving academic performance *per se* is unlikely to have much impact upon the majority of the areas of concern detailed earlier." (ASPA, 2002, p3) The AEU supports this analysis.

In terms of why men are being encouraged back into teaching, aside from the positives of representing a range of sex roles and backgrounds in schools, the key determinant is not quality teaching; this is disappointing. Ken Rowe, (2003, p8) however, sums up how the debate around boys' literacy has skewed the importance being placed on particular areas of schooling when this phenomenon is neither new nor as alarming as is being promulgated:

"More recently, issues related to *teacher quality* have arisen in response to manifest 'concerns' related to the *education of boys* – 'concerns' that have both local and international currency. In Australia, these 'concerns' have been brought into sharper focus in response to calls (initially during 2000) for submissions to the federal government's *Inquiry Into the Education of Boys* by the then House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, and subsequently by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training during 2002.

At the centre of these 'concerns' is the relative underachievement of boys (compared with girls) and their poorer attitudes, behaviours and experiences of schooling. Unfortunately, much of the related public and academic discussion, and the media 'hype' that surrounded the *Inquiry*, were replete with 'myth', anecdote, opinion and uninformed comment that have little basis in findings from recent and emerging evidence-based research. Even a cursory inspection of submissions to the *Inquiry* suggest that such is the case.²⁰ This is not to deny the legitimacy of such offerings, but in the absence of substantive, research-based evidence to support the Committees' deliberations, their task has been a particularly difficult one. But what has emerged from the *Inquiry (inter alia)* is a clear affirmation of the importance of *teacher quality* as a key determinant of students' experiences and outcomes of schooling throughout their years of primary and secondary education." (Rowe, 2003, p8)

Much of "Meeting the Challenge", DEST's report on stage of the Boys' Lighthouse Schools Project, indicates that most boys' lighthouse projects highlighted only superficially acknowledge the element of gender and how the boys that participated in the program responded to teaching methods, distinctly *as boys*. Much of the programs initiated by the lighthouse schools, it appears, could in fact have been just as applicable and successful for girls as they were for boys because they simply highlighted the impact of good teacher practice and proper resourcing. Without discussions of particular attributes of masculinities and how they interplay with educational outcomes and attitude towards schools, (without the application of stereotypes) the lighthouse programs simply become pilots of quality teaching. (DEST, 2004, p7)

AEU welcomes and points to the clear indication from "Meeting the Challenge's" recommendations/observations that preparation time, resources, smaller class sizes and professional development matter to educational outcomes as well as student motivation and behaviour. Specifically, the Literacy element (as the original focus for government alarm for boys' decline in measured results in this area) dealt with in the report particularly supports the ideals of quality education and successful learning, rather than any evidenced notion of those teaching methods cater specifically for a particularly unique "boys learning style", or a "male teaching style" for that matter. (DEST, 2004, p7)

The AEU has discussed the notion of gender equity and of gender construction in schools at length throughout its submission to the Inquiry into Boys' Education in 2002, as well as having extensive policy into gender equity principles in education systems.

To reiterate, however, the AEU submission (2002, pp1-2) says gender equity “focuses on the development of positive constructions of both masculinity and femininity. These positive constructions should recognise and redress power dynamics, which traditionally exist between men and women, boys and girls.

Understanding of the process of gender construction is crucial if schools and systems are to work for equitable and improved educational experiences for girls and boys. Dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity define males and females as opposites by highlighting their differences and assigning them unequal value, status and power. These dominant concepts limit, in different ways, expectations of girls’ and boys’ schooling experiences and successes.”

The AEU’s policy on Gender Equity highlights:

1. The AEU is committed to promoting gender equity in education settings to bring about a safe and challenging learning environment for all students. The AEU believes that the critical factor in achieving gender equity is cultural change. As Bob Connell stated, “Progress in education requires building a *culture of equity*. In a culture of equity, all forms of injustice are automatically contested, and an ethic of mutual care, not the search for competitive advantage, is central to policy making”.
2. The AEU Gender Equity Policy complements and builds upon the AEU’s commitment to the education and training rights of women and girls and affirmative action strategies detailed in specific policies.
3. Gender reform in education should :
 - 3.1 have as its basis research on issues of gender, sexuality and other equity issues;
 - 3.2 address the needs of all students, and the power relationships which exist within and between the sexes;
 - 3.3 include programs which focus on the construction of gender and its impact on learning outcomes and personal development;
 - 3.4 provide programs which redress the impact of gender construction and which may include differential treatment to ensure more equitable outcomes;
 - 3.5 be holistic in its approach and integral to all policies and programs in education settings;
 - 3.6 address the issues of sexuality in gender and power relationships.(AEU, 2002, p2)

Again, the AEU has pointed out before, (2002, p6) that educators “can however continue to develop for boys and girls practices around varied pedagogies which allow for the different learning styles of students. This does not constitute an advocacy for a view that there is a male learning style or a female leaning style but rather it seeks an intensification of research, and training and development processes which facilitate inclusive classroom practices which allow for individual students to learn in their own style.

Federal and state education authorities have a responsibility therefore to give greater emphasis to pedagogy within their training and funding emphases and to ensure that pre-service and in-service training takes account of the theory and practice around different learning styles. Systems also have a responsibility to train teachers in the special difficulties boys and girls are likely to encounter at different stages of their development and to develop whole-system responses to meet the needs of males and females.

We can also seek to further establish alternative models of male endeavour beyond the existing media stereotypes so that we can as an education system extend the range of human possibility for males as they move through various stages of maturation. It is essential for boys and girls to have educational settings which show and model adult females and males in different roles, circumstances and positions of authority.”

Masculinity and Absent Parents

Finally, it is worth briefly touching on the ever present, but rarely articulated issue underlying the assumptions made regarding the need and virtues of more male teachers in schools. This is, that somehow the male teachers will “fill the hole” of the absent parent, (more often the father) in the lives of many more students in our education systems.

The issue of single parent families, absent fathers, youth suicide, child abuse and violence/crime amongst young people in Australia are issues far more complex and requiring extensive policy responsiveness than to opt for quick fix solutions like more male teachers.

Tackling such serious social issues must be a key priority of all Australian Governments, on a committed and bi-partisan level and is not the responsibility of schools, education departments, or any other government bureaucracy's responsibility alone, to address.

It is, however an area that schools can and do prioritise as a matter of crucial importance to student well being as well as educational performance. Schools can indeed play a role in assisting students with psychological and physical difficulties that manifest whilst at school, but broader social issues cannot be adequately dealt with in this manner.

Michael Flood's (2003) paper “Fatherhood and Fatherlessness” offers much assistance in understanding the process of community shifts in expectations of parenting and the resulting ‘deficiencies’ often identified, and the impact they can have on children's development.

The AEU recommends the insights and initiatives within reports such as this, ought be supported and further investigated to ensure that the root of the problems associated with absent parents and parental responsibilities are addressed by Australian Governments.

The Report discusses how, “perceptions of fathering have shifted, and the image of the nurturant and involved father now exerts a powerful influence on popular perceptions. However, the culture of fatherhood has changed much faster than the conduct. Fathers share physical care of children equally in only 1-2 per cent of families, and are highly involved in day-to-day care in only 5-10 per cent of families. Many fathers aspire to do more fathering than they actually perform, yet they face important economic, policy and cultural constraints to their involvement.” (Flood, 2003, pviii)

Though the research evidence shows that, “in general, children raised in two-parent families do better on measures of educational achievement and psychological adjustment than children raised in single-parent families. But the research also shows that neither fatherlessness nor divorce by themselves determine children's well-being. The quality of parenting and the nature of parents' relationships with each other and their children are the critical factors in shaping the impact of father absence upon children...The association between father absence and poor outcomes among children is shaped by the changes which accompany divorce or separation, particularly economic insecurity and loss of access to social networks and communities. Poverty is both a cause and an effect of single parenthood, and post divorce economic hardship is associated with negative outcomes among children. While children experience their parents' separation and divorce as traumatic, three-quarters of children show no resulting negative effects or long-term problems in adjustment.” (Flood, 2003, pviii)

Most importantly, Flood's observation on role models is particularly pertinent to the arguments in favour of male teachers, which warns against blindly accepting the common argument in contemporary debates about fatherlessness, “that children, and boys in particular, require male role models in the form of a biological father to ensure their healthy development. While there is no doubt that boys, and girls, benefit from the presence in their lives of positive and involved fathers, the research evidence again tells a more complicated story than that allowed by simplistic assumptions about male role models...In terms of boys learning ‘how to be men’ from their fathers, the research finds that fathers' masculinity and other individual characteristics are far less important formatively than the warmth and closeness of their relationships with their sons. The characteristics of fathers as parents, rather than their characteristics as men, influence children's development, and there is no evidence that fathers' involvement is more beneficial for boys than it is for girls.” (Flood, 2003, pix)

Concluding References

In conclusion the AEU would like to draw the Senate's attention to quality research on this topic that supports the views the AEU attempts to outline within this submission and certainly recommends, in particular, the works of Teese, Martino, Pallotta Chiarolli, Kenway, Martin and Collins.

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