

# BOYS IN EDUCATION: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

A THESIS:

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Elizabeth M Ryan. T.P.T.C. Dip.Theol. B.A.

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## ABSTRACT

Gender roles, and the construction of gender, are under scrutiny in our society. Many questions are being asked about the roles of men in light of the successful emergence of feminism (Connell, 1989). There is a “crisis of masculinity” (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996) which has resulted in a bombardment of literature surrounding the issue and this, in turn, has filtered through to schools responsible for the education of boys. The purpose of this particular study is to contribute both to the theory and the practice of boy’s education. It endeavours to identify the issues surrounding boy’s education and to support the involvement of a small group of teachers in a school based curriculum development to bring about improvement in the area.

The site of the study was a Catholic, boy’s boarding school which is unique for its isolation and for its high percentage of Aboriginal students and those from Papua New Guinea. The research focused on the work of four teachers who were responsible for one Year 8 class.. These teachers, together with the researcher, formed a community of learners in the context of this study.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to both the theory and the practice of boys’ education and its aims were to identify the issues surrounding boys’ education and to support the teachers engaged in school based curriculum development in the area of boys’ education. At the outset of the study, two major questions were asked;

- What are the key issues surrounding boys’ education?
- Would a curriculum intervention program support the personal development of adolescent boys?

The method of research considered most appropriate to the aims of this study was a qualitative model called action research. Action research is a form of self reflective enquiry that supports the involvement of not only teachers, but also the researcher in the improvement of practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, p.5).

Moments of observing, reflecting, planning and acting within five action research cycles led the researcher and the participants to make three major conclusions:

- that a whole school approach is the most effective way to communicate messages affecting behaviour and attitudes of boys
- that an intervention, curriculum program has a beneficial but limited effect on the process of communicating concepts affecting adolescent boys
- that the participants involved in this action research project grew in awareness of the issues surrounding boy’s education and in their own personal development.

# DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not contain without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree at any University nor being currently submitted for any other degree; and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not include any material previously published or written by another person without due reference made in the text.

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Elizabeth M Ryan

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have inspired and encouraged me during the twelve months of preparing this thesis. I am particularly grateful to my husband, Peter who helped me when my computer skills were found lacking and my daughters, Gabii, Claire, Rebecca and Genevieve who will be happy that it is finally finished.

I also wish to thank the community of St. Paul's College<sup>1</sup> who showed their hospitality each time I visited and made available to me the delicious boarding school lunches. Especially, I would like to thank the participants in the group:- Dave, Paul, Terry and Sue<sup>2</sup> who gave of their time so generously. Their dedication to their students was an inspiration to me. I would like to thank the principal for his patience with me and his committed leadership at St. Paul's. And of course, this study would not have been possible without the honesty and openness of the boys in Year 8.

The final product is a credit to the supervising skills of Dr. Gayle Spry who made herself available for me at all times. She taught me attention to detail which is necessary for a work of this nature. Her generosity was very much appreciated.

Finally, I wish to thank the people in the schools in which I work, because without the grass roots experience and honesty which they provided for me, I would not have asked the questions which led to this research.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Paul's College is a pseudonym. The name has been changed to protect the identity of the school.

<sup>2</sup> These names are also pseudonyms.



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## **Chapter One: The Research Defined**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The study takes place in a single sex, agricultural, Catholic, boarding school. Although all of these factors are important and have a bearing on the study, the main thrust of this research is to identify issues which limit the education of boys and to address these issues through curriculum intervention. The agricultural and boarding perspective will not be dealt with in detail but should be seen as an important background to the study.

### **1.1 The General Problem**

The re-emergence of feminism in the late sixties resulted in many questions being asked, not only about women's roles but subsequently about the role of men. Boys and male teachers in schools watched as initiatives for girls were introduced into the school structures and girls were being identified as having special needs. Ten years of focusing on girls in education with the various government initiatives<sup>1</sup> has had marked success in giving girls access and success in the educational system. This same success in girls' education led many teachers to ask whether the male gender might also have special needs, especially as the problems associated with behaviour and learning difficulties were increasingly seen to be predominantly masculine problems (Connell, 1989. Farrell, 1996. Gilbert, 1996. O'Doherty Report, 1994). As a consequence of these concerns, the daily papers carrying the 1995 final year results in NSW emphasised (and

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<sup>1</sup> The first national policy to be developed in the area of schooling for girls was in 1987, *The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*.

in some cases bemoaned) the fact that girls were outperforming boys. "What about the boys" has become a common cry.

So, great! We're supposed to welcome the news that girls have dramatically outperformed boys in the latest Higher School Certificate....These lopsided results should cause much anger and soul searching...The reaction to the distortion of education outcomes in favour of girls has been dishonest at worst, muted at best. (Miranda Devine, *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, Jan 11, 1996)

Thus the initiatives in girl's education, while acknowledged as being successful in giving girls a better deal, has been blamed by the media as being instrumental in causing the problems with boys that are now being identified in schools.

At the same time, the masculine role appears to be fraught with problems within the wider community. Gender roles, and the construction of gender, are under scrutiny in our post-modern, western society (Connell, 1995; Alloway & Gilbert, 1996. Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Writers and researchers are exploring how gender affects the way people operate within society in general and within educational settings in particular (Connell, 1995). The old adage, "boys will be boys" which people, including teachers, have used as an excuse for inappropriate behaviour among male students is being challenged. Anecdotal and research evidence of boys opting out of leadership in co-educational settings and generally not performing to their academic potential is a phenomenon well known to teachers in Australia, especially in country high schools (O'Doherty Report, 1994). However, it is only in the last five years or so that people have carried out research to consolidate these anecdotal beliefs and have started to identify the problems with gender and gender stereotyping.

At a time in which educational results of boys are of concern, the media is also publishing articles about other possible problematic areas of masculinity. Men aren't as healthy as women and are dying younger; their suicide and car accident mortality rate is far higher than women's. (Carr-Gregg; 1996. O'Doherty Report, 1994). Being male is beginning to be seen as a disadvantage and a "crisis of masculinity" has been identified. Within this context:

The alternative priorities of a new curriculum design and a changed approach to teaching and learning in the field of working with boys is tied into a radical rethinking of boys, men and masculinities. This rethinking has been provoked by the recent explosion of interest in the 'crisis of masculinity' and the related expansion of a critical men's studies literature, especially over the last five years. (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996)

This general problem of the crisis of masculinity and the education of boys will be further explored in chapter two. Here initiatives within the education of boys in general, and Catholic education, in particular, will be further explored.

## **1.2 The Particular Problem**

This issue of boys' education was of concern to St. Paul's College, the site of this study. (St. Paul's is a pseudonym for the name of the actual school) St. Paul's College is a boys' boarding school situated in an isolated part of North Queensland half an hour's drive from the nearest town. The school was originally founded by the Christian Brothers. A conversation with one of the original founding brothers of the college lead me to an admiration of the pioneering spirit needed in the setting up of a College in such an isolated area in the years before the war. There was no road south to Brisbane, just a cart track. The stories of the journeys, complete with furniture, from the capital city are inspirational.

The College now is administered as a systemic school under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Education Office, (CEO). It has a lay principal, with no Christian Brothers remaining on staff. The school has a student population of approximately 250, a teaching staff of 21 and a boarding staff of 10. As there is no real town adjacent to the College, most teachers either live on campus or on farmhouses nearby. Naturally, any school so isolated and so insular has trouble hiring and maintaining staff. As most staff live on or close to the school, there is very little privacy; it is not everyone's desire to live so closely to their place of employment. However, although St. Paul's has had its share of staff problems, it also has a stable nucleus of competent teachers who are committed to the students.

St. Paul's is an agricultural school which historically has catered for the sons of farmers but which recently has expanded to include a large percentage of Aboriginal and New Guinean (PNG) students. Some of the Aboriginal students either come from traditional settlements in the far north of the state or from an Aboriginal island settlement, while still others come from rural country towns.

The agricultural aspect is a significant feature of the school. St. Paul's College is situated within an idyllic geographical site. It is nestled within green, rolling plains set against a background of rugged mountains and interspersed with rivers, creeks and cane plantations. The wet season, however, can isolate the college from the nearest town as the creeks swell across the road.. The College manages a small cane plantation and the countryside and climate lends itself to canoeing, horse-riding, camping and

swimming. The College motto, "Reap what you Sow" expresses the environment and symbolises both the mission and purpose of the school.

It is within this context that my role as Gender Equity Officer for the Catholic Education System is situated. I have encountered the "What about the boys?" (Devine, 1996) response as well as the changing understanding of masculinity in the wider society. Therefore, at the outset of the study I was keen to discover more about the education of boys and to support teachers as they grappled with this issue in the classroom. As the teachers and students whom I serve are fifty percent male, I believed it important to come to an understanding of an issue which is surrounded by anger, prejudice, contradiction and a general feeling of unease and confusion. I also considered that I could not be effective in the area of girl's education unless I had an understanding of the issue of boys' education.

It was with this thought in mind that I visited St Paul's College. As part of my role I was required to appoint a Sexual Harassment Referral Officer in all schools within the Diocese. After inservicing the role holder at St Paul's College, I spoke to the principal about the general issue of gender equity in the school. He expressed a desire to undertake some form of program focusing on the boys' personal development as he was concerned that the boys had very little contact with women or the feminine side of life and that their attitude towards each other, as well as towards women could be improved. The Principal had attended a traditional boys' Catholic school himself and was anxious that St. Paul's embrace a more holistic approach to education. For this reason, there was already an emphasis on the personal development of students and the



principal was keen to further his vision for the school as a real community. When asked to articulate this vision, he replied:

A real community; not just in word only. We hear the word used a lot in rhetoric but I mean a real community; not a family because that word has different meanings...some come from huge families; I'd say community's a better term; one that accepts people from so many different cultures and backgrounds, so that the ideals of those different cultures and backgrounds come together as one.

He sees the individual student as important and recognises that within the context of a boarding school that there are many opportunities to help students who need that extra personal attention. There have been many examples of students who have come with less than perfect reputations and have settled down well in the atmosphere of clear expectations and compassionate care.

The principal's claim that "if we start to ignore the individual kid, we're lost in Catholic schools," is shared by a majority of the staff. David, a teacher/counselor and one of the participants in the study, has introduced a quite unique program of personal development into the College, - a nine day, 500 kilometre bike ride through the outback. This is more than just an endurance test. Each boy who takes part in the voluntary event has to undertake a personal and spiritual journey as well. There are interviews beforehand; they are voluntarily given the Myers/Briggs Indicator (McGuiness, Izard & McCrossin, 1992) to discern what type of personality they are and discussions are held with each individual boy about his coping with the rigours of the ride. Each boy has on-going monitoring throughout the marathon ride and a session of de-briefing follows the bike ride. The College supports two bike rides a year. They are open to everyone from year 8 to year 12 but the demand outstrips the

places available. Boys are asked to write why they would see the ride as beneficial. When choosing which boys to take, David tries to select those who would most benefit, such as boys coming from single mother families or those who have no masculine role model at home. The bike rides take place in school time which I think is significant as it says something about the administration of the school and the priority given to the personal development of the boys. The Principal has given his full support to this adventurous, bike riding venture and it is fast becoming an institution within St. Paul's College.

In addition to this emphasis on personal development in the College, there is also a new emphasis on academic success. St. Paul's College has not been noted for its performance in the recent past. Four years ago, when the Queensland Year 12 results were published school by school, it appeared near the bottom of the list. This was largely due to the numbers of PNG students who were not O.P<sup>2</sup> eligible but also to the many students who were at St. Paul's because they had troubled backgrounds and/or learning difficulties. The school has had the reputation of taking boys who have failed at other schools and whose principals thought the wide open spaces might help them. It was not until the current principal took over that the college has enjoyed a resurgence in the academic area. The barely adequate facilities were improved and there is now a waiting list of students. The staff morale appears to be high and there is a good "feel" around the school between teacher and teacher as well as teacher and student.

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<sup>2</sup> O.P - Overall Position is the tertiary entrance score applied to year 12 students in Queensland.

Although the school has experienced a cultural and physical renewal in recent years, it is still recognised by the administration and staff that the issues of boys' education and the "masculinity crisis" (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996) found in the wider community are also found within the boundaries of St. Paul's College. As a consequence, it was felt that boys were not always able to achieve their full potential within this learning environment. This concern provided the impetus for this study.

### **1.3 The Purpose of the Study.**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to both the theory and practice of boys' education. In particular this study focuses on teaching and learning in one particular boys', secondary, boarding school, St. Paul's College. The principal of this school had expressed his desire for a study of boys' education be carried out at the College. As Gender Equity Officer, I was happy to comply with this wish. From the outset, we believed that the introduction of a curriculum program on boys and their relationships would be an appropriate vehicle for the study. We were hoping that the findings of the study would bring about an improvement in the educational offerings for one year 8 class and provide a direction for future initiatives in the College. At the same time, I was hoping that the findings of this study would provide an exemplar for other schools in the Diocese of Townsville.

## 1.4 The Aims of the Study.

The aims of this study were as follows:

- To further identify the issues which surround boys' education, namely the many facets of the "crisis of masculinity" which has been identified in our society today (Biddulph, 1996; Connell, 1995; Carr-Gregg, 1996).
- To support the teachers engaged in school based curriculum development, in the area of boys' education.

Two questions suggested themselves to me at the outset of this research. They were:

*Question One:* What are the key issues surrounding boys' education?

*Question Two:* Would a curriculum intervention program support the personal development of adolescent boys?

## 1.5 The Significance of the Study

Very little research has been done on boys' education in Catholic schools, especially in rural areas. In 1996, the Christian Brother's Province of Victoria and Tasmania initiated a conference entitled *Celebrating Boys' Education*. The lead up to this conference saw each Christian Brother's school undertake an action research project on some aspect of male education. The results of these were then presented at workshops in Melbourne in July 1996. Some of the titles of those workshops were:

*Beyond the football culture; (St. Bernard's College, Essendon).*

*Male spirituality; (Fr Michael Smith. S.J, Xavier College, Kew).*

*A Man for all Seasons; (St. Patrick's College, Ballarat).*

*Literacy acquisition among non-readers. (St. Vincent's College, South Melbourne).*

*Boys and Community Service; (St. Kevin's College, Toorak).*

While boys' education and the issues relating to it, i.e. the construction of masculinity and the hegemonic aspect of masculinity, appear to be topical, further research is needed to separate the reality from the mythological and to identify practical solutions to the problem.

### **1.6 The Design of the Study.**

The qualitative method of action research was chosen to carry out this study which seeks to contribute to both the theory and practice of boys' education.

Action research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5).

The characteristics of action research are collaboration, self-reflection, transformation of ideas, practice of the participants, concern with improvement of a social problem and always set in a definite context. It operates in a cyclic fashion with the four fundamental elements of planning, acting, observing and reflecting driving the research. Chapter 3 provides a more full description of the design of the study.

The participants involved in this study undertook this project with vague notions of what the outcome would be and brought with them their own various understandings of the problem of boys' education. They were, however, keen to engage in a form of

self reflective enquiry. My task, as researcher, was to attempt to facilitate this self reflective enquiry. In this sense, I assumed several responsibilities. I was:

- (i) the initiator of the research
- (ii) a resource person to whom the participants turned to for advice and information
- (iii) a teacher, training other participants in their participation.

### **1.7 Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

In this study, it was assumed that the area of study was an important one. No. 1.1 provides a rationale for its significance. Having become aware of a general pattern of unrest among teachers concerning boys in education, I assumed that the same problems would exist at St. Paul's College and that the boys would re-act in a similar pattern to boys described in the literature. It was also assumed that the site of the study, namely a Year 8 class at St. Paul's College was a sub-system of larger sub-systems and systems and therefore needed to be responsive to the shifting influences within this broader context. A further assumption was in the goodwill and expertise of the teachers involved in the action research. Although all expressed a willingness to take part when asked, they had not originally been volunteers. They had varying degrees of experience in the classroom and I assumed a relationship with the students which would enable them to undertake the teaching of the program. A final assumption was that the findings of this study would inform ongoing work with boys both in this school and the wider educational community.

In addition, there were limitations to this study. St. Paul's has a unique character. The features which make it so are discussed above, i.e. its boarding status, its high

percentage of PNG and Aboriginal students from both traditional communities and urban communities as well as its isolation from any major centre. The boarding and agricultural aspects of the study are not dealt with in detail and this is a limitation of the study. Research into the effects of boarding schools on boys' construction of their masculinity would be beneficial and certainly add to the depth of this study, but unfortunately it is outside of the scope of this research. This study, therefore, cannot generalise for all boys' education. It merely places a window on a small group of teachers working with boys in a grade 8 class for a period of six months. It is hoped, however, that the issues discussed are of concern to teachers of boys everywhere and therefore the insights gained from the research would help in other contexts. This is in keeping with the thinking of Burns (1994) who appreciates that a work such as this is

embedded in historical, social, political, personal and other contexts and interpretation (p.326)

but cites the example of Piaget and Freud who used the case study method of research to test their theories. Subjective research:

aims at enabling the use of the reported material to increase understanding through the naturalistic generalisation that the readers do themselves, thus emphasising autonomy and responsibility on the part of the practitioner. (p.327)

## **1.8 Conclusion**

There is a growing concern about the education of boys in Australian schools. The initiatives in Girl's Education, while largely succeeding in giving girls a better deal, have been instrumental in identifying problems with boys (Connell, 1989). The last twelve months has seen a surge in the literature dealing with this issue of boys. This body of literature has evolved from different viewpoints; from the popular view that the girl's movement has caused the boys' problems to the more substantiated view that boys have different sorts of problems and need different strategies to address those problems than the strategies used to affirm the girls.

Catholic education, including St. Paul's College, is not excluded from this growing unrest. St. Paul's is an agricultural school set in an isolated rural area catering for students from every spectrum of life in Australia and Papua New Guinea. It has adequate, but not luxurious, facilities and is emerging from a difficult phase in its history. At the time of the study, it was enjoying a resurgence of morale and community respect although there was a concern that the curriculum was not meeting the special needs of boys. This concern provided the impetus for this study.

Chapter 2 of this study will explore the context of the problem set against the broader context of society where there is an apparent new understanding of gender which in turn both influences and shapes the Catholic situation in general and St. Paul's in particular. Chapter Three reviews the body of literature on masculinity and gendered learning where the contrasting opinions of the nature v nurture debate will be explored and Chapter Four outlines the design of the study. Chapter Five will tell the story of



the action research at St. Paul's and the concluding chapter will discuss the findings and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

### 2.0 Introduction

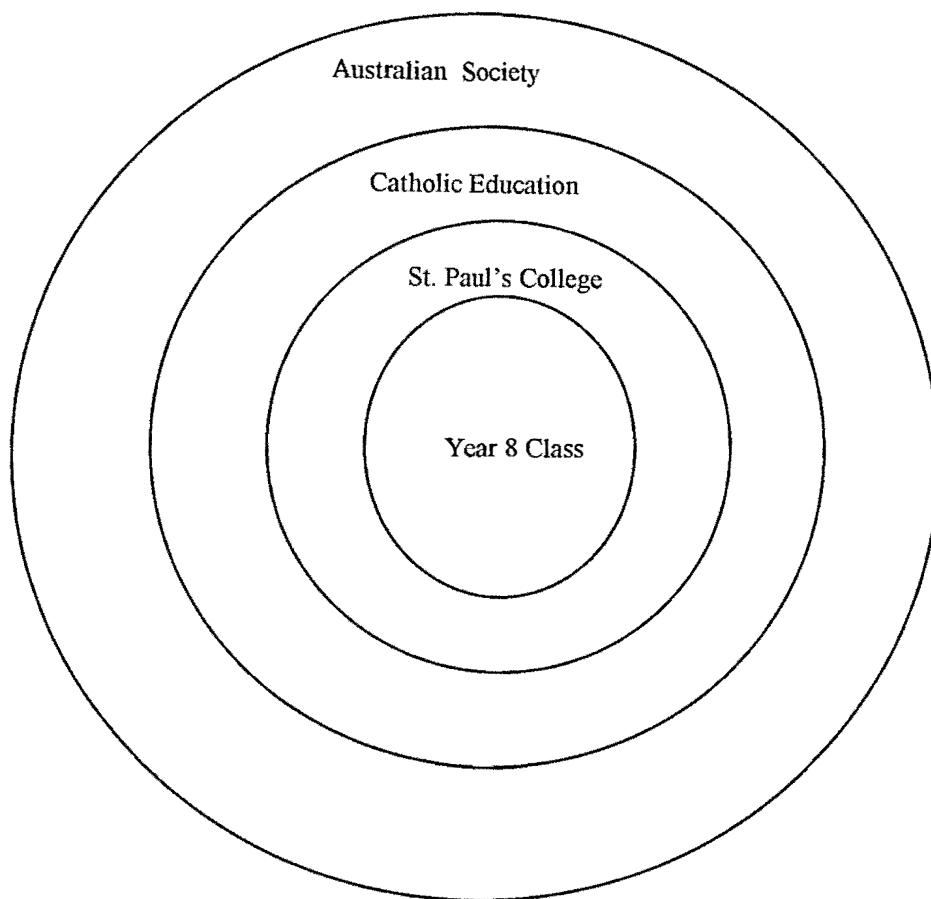
The aims of this study are to further identify the issues which surround boys' education and to support the involvement of a group of teachers in a school based curriculum activity that aims to improve boys' education. This research is concerned with the problem of boys' education in a world which has seen unprecedented change in the understanding of gender roles

There is no doubt about which of the redefinitions of the last 20 years has had most impact on the Australian way of life; it is the redefinition of gender roles...it is sobering to remind ourselves that we only have to go back as far as the mid-1970's to realise that a revolution of breathtaking speed has taken place in women's view of themselves-and by implication, in their view of men. ...It is still fair to characterise the typical Australian male response as being a dim awareness that something has gone wrong with his life (Mackay, 1993, p. 24).

This research is on a small scale but it is undertaken against a background of large scale social change in the area of gender roles. Within this context of social change, organisations such as schools can be seen as sub-systems fitting within a larger system, each independent and interdependent one on the other (Morgan, 1986).

The issue of gender in Catholic schools provides an example of this independent/interdependent nature of organisational life. Although one Year 8 class in a small country school is a sub-system of the Catholic system which in turn is a sub-system of Australian society which is a sub-system of wider cultural systems and so on,

each is influenced by the other and contributes towards the total understanding. (Figure 1) For this reason, it is appropriate to begin the study of boys' education in one Year 8 classroom with an exploration of significant initiatives in the wider systemic context.



*Figure 1. Interdependence of the elements of the system upon one another.*

In particular, this chapter will examine a significant government initiative, the New South Wales O'Doherty Report. This is important because the Catholic school works within an educational framework which is strongly controlled and influenced by government policies. In addition, this chapter will discuss the Catholic education's response to the problems of boys' education. This discussion will include the recent responses at St Paul's College.

## **2.1 A Government Response to the Perceived Problems of Boys in Education.**

The NSW O'Doherty Report (1994) was produced as a response to "a growing community concern about boys' education, together with some worrying educational trends" (p 1). It stresses that boys' programs should not be in competition with girls' programs but complement the valuable work being done already in the gender equity area, most of which has been directed at girls. It does however express grave concern about the education of boys. Some of these concerns include:

- lower retention rates to year 12;
- poorer academic outcomes;
- an over-representation in programs for students with learning problems;
- An overwhelming over-representation in problem behaviour;
- Lack of communication skills;
- Low self-esteem;
- A reluctance to excel in any area except sport;
- Lack of conflict resolution skills;
- Unacceptable behaviour towards girls;
- Reluctance to take part in the leadership of the school;
- High suicide rates;
- The lack of male classroom teachers, especially in the primary area;

The Report acknowledges that although it is impossible to generalise that all boys have these problems, the problem is widespread enough to cause concern. The concerns are consistent across NSW, urban and rural, and across socio-economic levels.

Recognition is made of the “dominant male” stereotype as the controlling force of masculinity.

The O’Doherty Report is a pioneering Government initiative. It is “the first time this (looking at boys’ education issues) has been done in any systematic way in NSW.”

(p.11) One of the recommendations: “Schools’ progress in implementing the Gender Equity Strategy should be a mandatory part of all Quality Assurance Reviews of NSW schools” (p. 33), calls the schools to be accountable on the issue of gender equity.

## **2.2 The Response of the Catholic School to the Problems of Boys’ Education.**

The Catholic school operates within the wider society and is affected by the shifts in societal thinking. Government initiatives such as the O’Doherty Report influence the wider educational community and impact upon the Catholic educational scene as well. In addition, the response of the Catholic Schools to these shifts in societal thinking is influenced by core philosophical beliefs which are expressed in the Vatican documents, the Gospels and the work of contemporary Catholic writers.

The seminal document on Catholic education - *The Catholic School* (1977) proposes Catholic education: “must help him, (sic) (the student), spell out the meaning of his experiences and their truths” (p.26) “to discern in the events, needs and hopes of our era, the most insistent demands which she (the Church) must answer” (p. 14). Thus the document espouses three tenets of Catholic education:

- Educating with Jesus Christ as the supreme role model;
- Educating the whole person;
- Listening to the signs of the times:

In a world where “the art of fathering has all but disappeared” (Biddulph, 1995, p.105), the Catholic school can offer Jesus Christ as an authentic masculine role model. He “is the one who ennobles man, gives meaning to human life and is the model which the Catholic School offers to its pupils” (The Catholic School, 1977, p. 32). Jesus breaks through “religious and cultural taboos to invite woman and men into a discipleship of equals” (Fiorenza in Wagner, 1988, p. 197). In a time of major transition, in which “the decline of patriarchy” (Block, 1993) permeates society, the story of Jesus offers an alternative and comforting way forward for people proactively deconstructing and reconstructing gender.

Jesus challenges us to transcend all laws, rules and principles, even the ten commandments, in order to take full responsibility for our own actions....many people find this kind of freedom quite frightening. (Nolan, 1982, p. 61)

Although Jesus lived in a patriarchal society, he did not behave in a patronising manner. The gospels reflect the “discipleship of equals” (Fiorenza, 1988). Catholic Schools, in their dealings with the problems of male violence, bullying, harassment and despair, can turn to Jesus Christ as a role model in a society which, as Rossiter (1988) says, provides the “Rambos” of pop culture as heroes for the young male population. For the Earth to survive, both masculine and feminine energy has to be released, not only by empowering both sexes but also by empowering both the masculine and feminine in each person (Edwards, 1989.); and that “part of the educational role of

Church is to free both men and women from an overemphasis on the so called 'masculine' approach" (Wagner, 1989. p. 209.).

The Catholic school therefore, is challenged to educate the whole person; In doing so, it is intent upon freeing both the masculine and the feminine dimensions of the boys in their care, and also to do this in a context of counter culture if the accepted peer culture is not based upon gospel values. (Collins, 1987) Thus if the dominant male culture is not life giving, either to those who enforce it or to those who are its victims, it is the task of the educators of the "whole person", i.e. the Catholic school, to offer a challenge to such a culture. Rather than the Catholic school providing a unitary and fixed culture (Flynn, 1993), the principles of justice and equity would seem to demand that the school accept the fact that different masculine sub cultures exist within its boundaries (Austin-Broos, 1987). A boy who grows to manhood in a Catholic school can expect that his spiritual and emotional development are considered as essential as his academic development (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988). He is being educated in a system which espouses a "holistic" education, a system which will prepare him to "promote the Christian transformation of the world" and "contribute to the good of society as a whole" (Vatican II, Declaration on Christian Education, 1966, p. 640).

This promotion of holistic education is easier said than done. The Church is caught up in the "crisis of masculinity" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996) as much as any other institution. The needs and confusion of men in our modern day world are beginning to make themselves heard in western society in different ways depending on how the world is viewed. The spread of United States based religions such as the "promise keepers" (A.B.C "Compass" 23/6/96) into Australia is indicative of men's confusion

about their role. Primarily a fundamentalist religion, the “promise keepers” aim to re-establish a man’s role in society as the biblically authorised leader of the household, to uphold heterosexuality, faithfulness in marriage, the family as the cornerstone of a man’s life and a closer relationship and intimacy between men who, once a week, “confess” their “sins” to other men. Thus the response of these men, in attempting gender security, is to tighten the boundaries of the sex roles. At the same time, contemporary Vatican documents emphasise that the Catholic School is “particularly sensitive to the call from every part of the world for a more just society and it tries to make its contribution towards it” (The Catholic School, 1977, p.44). The Church is not so much intent upon tightening boundaries, such as is the case with the “promise keepers,” but to explore a more just society. Helping young people to construct their gender within a framework of social justice and equity is surely contributing to a more just society (Connell, 1995).

Literature on Catholic schooling however says very little about gender based education. Both genders are included in the term “person.” Or the masculine “he.” The reason for this could be quite simple. The movement, demanding specific educational pedagogy for boys, is only just beginning. When the Religious Orders of teaching brothers and priests emerged from the last centuries with a specific mandate to educate boys to become good Christian men, it was a very different world. It was taken for granted that these boys would be the leaders and protectors of the family and in fact the world. The philosophy for educating boys in today’s world, it would appear, is still in the process of being formulated, as the Church “participates in the dialogue of culture with her own positive contribution to the cause of the total formation of man(sic)” (The Catholic School, 1977. p. 17.).



In summary therefore, it would be true to say that the Catholic School inspired by the model of Jesus espouses the gospel values of human dignity, human solidarity, sharing and service. It aims to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love (Collins, 1987). The literature consistently emphasises these values in a Catholic School, (Collins, 1987; Edwards, 1989; Flynn, 1993; Wagner, 1989; Leavey, 1992. Declaration on Christian Education, 1966. and The Catholic School, 1977.). A lack of equity for both sexes would appear to be in contradiction with what a Catholic School is all about. The fact that such writers as Leavey (1992), Crawford & Rossiter, (1988) and Flynn (1993), did not discuss issues from the point of view of gender does not mean a lack in their writings, it merely means that until very recently, the idea of gender was not even considered as a major factor in how students behaved. The intention of this study is to add insight into the whole idea of gendered learning in a Catholic school setting so that masculinity, as well as femininity, can be reconstructed in a Christian context.

### **2.3 The specific context - St. Paul's College**

There are other specific contextual factors which have a bearing on this study. One of the most important is the fact that St. Paul's is a boarding school. Boys going into secondary school have much to contend with sorting out where they fit - their pecking order so to speak. This situation is compounded when they live so closely with the other students and have to develop the important skill of living in community. To explore the issue of boarding schools, however, is beyond the scope of this study and I ask that the reader merely consider it as another factor in the study.

The single sex feature of the school is another contextual factor. When the boys are not hearing the female perspective and not having to deal with feminine re-actions in class, one might think their education unbalanced. I spoke to the principal about this very issue asking him what issues he felt were coming through in such a male environment:

I see a number of messages coming through, depending on the teacher. I think there has to be a recognition of what they (the boys) bring. They bring a hell of a lot of preconceived notions about masculinity to this school. What mum and dad does at home, the family actions, their messages...they're so vast. Their fathers are their role models and a lot of kids have no role models, there is really no clear role model of masculinity at home and no clear ideals of fatherhood.

When asked about the question of the single sex environment, the principal stated that it was not really a totally male environment:

Myself, Bill...the admin team, the kids see us as family men. We are family people. We are seen often with our kids, they accept that. We might take the little ones to tea and they help out in the line. They accept the kids of the staff; they enjoy playing games with them. My wife's been away this week and the boys see me looking after the kids. I think modeling that family thing is a strong message.

A strong criticism of single sex schools, especially boys' schools, is that the boys are not exposed to the feminine side of life; that the "boys' own club" is advocated and that remains the only environment where the boys feel truly comfortable. The principal acknowledged that he had, himself, believed this criticism until very recently. He felt he was in a process of changing his beliefs.

Yeah, I always thought that we needed females on staff, but I don't believe that anymore. Last year we went for a female in preference to a male because we thought we needed females, but she wasn't a nurturing type; she didn't want to know these kids and where they were at. It's more important to have a balanced teacher, say a male who can nurture the boys and model that feminine side to the boys....In the dormitory situation, we have such different models of masculinities. (sic) A diversity of males. Sure I'd like more females on staff, but they have to be balanced females.

The principal did not rule out the possibility that the school would one day go co-educational. But until that time, he would just make sure that the boys were exposed to both the masculine and the feminine sides of life; through arranged meetings with girls from other schools certainly but more importantly, through the modeling of balanced men and women teachers. The fact that it's a boarding school with many of the teachers living on campus or close to the school, also meant the boys saw their own teachers displaying the importance of fathering in family situations.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The site of this study, a Year 8 class at St. Paul's College, is a sub-system of many other systems which are in turn sub-systems of yet bigger systems. Each of these sub-systems needs to inter-relate in order to survive and vitalise each other (Morgan, 1996). The grade 8 class is connected to the whole of the school at St. Paul's which is turn is connected to the Catholic Education System. It is also connected to State Education and the educational systems which exist all through Australia. The teachers and students involved in this study are also influenced by other contextual factors: the fact that it is a single sex school, a boarding school, a geographically, isolated school and a Catholic school (Figure 1). The chapter that follows examines the broader picture as expressed through the body of literature on the subject of masculinity and boys' education.

## **CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to both the theory and practice of boys' education. In particular, it aims to further identify the issues which surround boys' education and to support teachers engaged in school based curriculum development in the area of boys' education. In the previous chapter, the wider context of boys' education was examined.

Whether the notion of masculinity, as it is commonly accepted in society, is inherent or socially constructed is widely debated. Writers have positioned themselves at opposite ends of the continuum as to the inherited or cultural impact on constructing masculinity. The theory of an inherited essence of masculinity lying dormant within each man waiting to be released (Bly, 1996. Biddulph, 1994.) is at odds with the theory that basically men and women are the same but develop differently according to cultural expectations (Connell 1989; 1995; Walker, 1988; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996. This literature review will explore both positions - nature versus nurture, as well as those writers who position themselves somewhere between the two extreme ends of the continuum.

In respect to boys' education, the literature is relatively new. Therefore, it is important to state the different starting points of the writers who have had influence in this field. Some of these writers work within a highly academic structure with their writings

based heavily on research (Connell, 1989; 1995; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Walker, 1988; Lehne, 1974). These theorists emphasise the nurture argument. Others focus more on the anecdotal, emotional shifts in public opinion, tapping into the growing awareness of the issue of gender and also what is perceived as the problematical symptoms of masculinity (Bly, 1996; Farrell, 1994; Biddulph, 1995). These writers emphasise the importance of nature. Both types of literature have value and studied together give a balanced view of the work done in the area.

Although the literature dealing with boys' education is relatively new, there is evidence to suggest such literature is a direct result of twenty years of concentrating on girl's education (Dunn, 1995; Connell, 1989; Farrell, 1994; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Biddulph, 1995; Browne, 1995). Observers have noticed the effectiveness of Government sponsored reform policies and projects in changing the outcomes of schooling for girls and ask the question, "what about the boys?" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). The bulk of the literature studied refutes the arguments that gender specific programs for girls have caused any of the problems in boys' education (Dunn, 1995). The majority suggest that the situation for girls is far from satisfactory and that the good work begun twenty years ago needs to continue alongside different strategic program for boys. Moreover, writers agree that the research into girl's issues has highlighted problems with boys which have always been there but which have never been articulated (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Teachers who were protecting girls from harassment in class began to ask the question why most harassers were boys. In concentrating on giving girls equal access to educational opportunities, they began challenging the rights of boys to disrupt teacher's agendas and be excused with the old adage, "boys will be boys" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Feminists have drawn

attention to the significance of gender in the educational setting and have researched how boys monopolize language and social, psychological and physical space in co-educational settings (Spender & Sarah, 1980. Mahony, 1985. Stanworth, 1983. Walkerdine, 1990). They have done this with a view to improving the educational outcomes for girls. Helping boys was not their priority.

Walkerdine, Stanworth and Fuller show the loudness of boys in the classroom, their sexual harassment of girls and female teachers, their demands for attention from peers, their desire to impress each other and their attitude to the girls in their class as the silent or faceless bunch. (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p 26).

Gradually the gender issue is being extended to include boys as well. The question is being asked as to whether they need emancipation. Certainly not from the restrictions placed upon them from the opposite sex, but maybe from the expectations placed upon them from their own sex.

It seems to me that the boys create an inferior or outside group and level the abuse at them which they would otherwise direct at girls. The least 'manly' boys become the target and are used as substitute girls in a way...The sexual hierarchy gets set up but some boys have to play the part that the girls would take in a mixed school (Spender, 1982. p121)

Most of the research examined for this study has been done by men. Dunn (1995) believes that the involvement of men is a necessity for the credibility of programs for boys. As long as women are leading the way in problematizing the dominant male culture, it is not likely that men will want to listen (Biddulph, 1994; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Connell, 1989; Biddulph, 1995; Dunn, 1995) all see the men's movement as: "reaffirming that masculinity is a positive, life-supporting force - and working to bring this to the fore" (Biddulph, 1994. p 25).

With positive outcomes for boys in mind, the literature has evolved from different perspectives. Some has been stimulated by boys' poor performances in the secondary school context, academically and socially (O' Doherty Report, 1994; Biddulph, 1995). Other writings have been inspired by the feminist movement which has problematised some behaviour of men and boys (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p3; Biddulph, 1995; Connell, 1995). Still more literature has come from the growing men's movement which is seeking to "define" what masculinity is in the post modern world and to reclaim some of the self-identification which men feel they have lost (Farrell, 1994; Biddulph, 1995; Mackay, 1993).

Within the body of literature on the education of boys, most of it less than 5 years old, the following issues have been identified as the key themes;

- (i) The construction of masculinity
- (ii) Hegemonic masculinity
- (iii) Gendered education
- (iv) Specific programs for boys

These themes will be discussed in the sections that follow. In this discussion, an attempt will be made to present the different and varied writings on the subject and how they relate to the study undertaken.

### 3.1 The Construction of Masculinity.

The construction of masculinity is a key theme which permeates the literature on boys' education. The basic question underpinning studies of gender, in this case masculinity, concerns whether or not masculine traits are inherited or cultivated by society. The controversy concerns the debate about nature versus nurture, or inherent traits versus social conditioning.

#### Masculinity as an inherent trait, the nature argument.

Bly (1996) is perhaps the most extreme of those writers who categorise men as a homogenous group with inherent biological programming controlled by hormones. Seen by many as the father of the modern men's movement, his book, *Iron John*, became a best seller in the United States in 1990-91. Bly uses folk tales to explain the need for each man to embark on a journey to find the deep masculine within himself and when successful to initiate other men into the experience. The boy transforms to the "wild man" within this initiation process. It is acknowledged that within this man there are also feminine traits which need to be acknowledged and integrated "Our obligation...is to describe masculine in such a way that it does not exclude the masculine in women, and yet hits a resonant string in the man's heart" (Bly, 1996, p. 235). Men are seen to possess something which is uniquely masculine. The task of the boy is to discover his difference, his maleness and to rejoice in it.

Other writers would agree with Bly's philosophy that boys, in order to celebrate their masculinity and to grow to manhood need the ritual of initiation. This initiation can take many forms. Without suitable adult role models, the media or the playground will



provide that initiation (Ellyard, 1996). Masculinity is passed on from old to young and if this process is not happening, then the boy will never become a man (Biddulph, 1995; Bly, 1996).

Thus the construction of masculinity is suggested as a personal phenomenon, with boys constructing their masculinity with reference to the older, wiser, adult male (Biddulph, 1995; Bly, 1996; Park, 1995; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Schools play a part in this process by providing expectations for boys of what it means to be male. These writers focus on initiation and role modeling and they see both these functions as ideally performed by the boys' father. The father figure features largely in their writing and much of the success in constructing masculinity lies in the relationship with the father. Where the relationship with the father is less than ideal, or non-existent, such writers would endorse an alternative system of mentoring, as in the employer mentoring his apprentice or the allying of one man to a group of students (Biddulph, 1996).

The question of male role models is important to the question of the education of boys. Boys come to school with their own emotional framework, which is the result of their experiences, their parent's expectations, and their own thinking patterns. Biddulph (1995, p.39) estimates that less than ten percent of men see their fathers as sources of emotional support. The vast majority of men can "suppress [the pain this causes] by hard work and denial but will still be prone to outbursts of deep distress, often masked by anger" (p.41).

### Masculinity as cultural, the nurture argument.

The idea of the “male sex role,” a term often used in the literature, is crucial to an understanding of this whole question (Connell, 1995). In the one hundred years from 1890, psychological and mental differences between men and women have been measured in North America showing non-existent or very small differences (Connell, 1995), yet the term “male sex role” still continues to be used in our society meaning a “general set of expectations which are attached to one’s sex” (Connell 1995, p. 22). In this sense there are only two sex roles, male and female. Thus each is a homogeneous entity. It is this idea of homogeneity of sex role that many writers challenge (Connell, 1995; Gilmore, 1990; Blackmore, 1995; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996) and other writers seek to re-enforce (Biddulph, 1995; Bly, 1996; Farrell, 1994; Park, 1995). Although the latter writers do encompass a much broader definition of male than the popular media, for example they are in favour of gay rights and values in mainstream society and decry homophobia (Biddulph, p.130; Farrell, 1994, p.87), there is still that idea that men are a vastly different species from women, with a unified culture of masculinity.

But are men homogenous in their masculinity? Anthropological studies cited by Connell (1996) indicate that whereas different societies have culturally defined sex roles for males and females, and definite initiation rites for men, these roles differ widely from society to society. For example a study of the “Simbu” culture in the eastern highlands of Papua New Guinea showed that although violence and aggression were accepted forms of behaviour by the men, much like our own society, a ritualised homosexuality where blood and semen were seen as the sources of masculine strength,

was compulsory for all men in the initiation period. Thus what is seen in our culture as “effeminate” is seen by another culture as “essentially masculine” (Connell, 1995.).

Some would claim that the whole idea of homogeneous sex roles is inadequate and that “role theory exaggerates the degree to which people’s social behaviour is prescribed” (Connell, 1995. p. 26). It appears that men are changing and adopting different sex roles as they re-act to society’s expectations. For example, men of the seventies discovered their feminine side and were disappointed when their new sex role was not accepted by women (and other men) who labelled them as “soft” (Connell, 1995.p. 27).

History illustrates a fascinating insight into the supposed political reasons why certain traits of masculinity were propagated. This hypothesis looks to the introduction of organized sport, and in particular rugby, into the British and later colonial schools, as a political move producing a particular form of manhood; a manhood that was expected to allow aggression to emerge in the ultimate team sport of war.

Team sport was being developed at this time, across the English speaking world, as a heavily convention-bound arena. The exemplary status of sport as a test of masculinity, which we now take for granted, is in no sense natural. It was produced historically, and...produced deliberately as a political strategy (Connell, 1995. p. 30).

Thus many writers (Connell 1989; 1995; Martino, 1995; Walker, 1991) would dismiss the homogenous male sex role, arguing that cultural conditioning plays a much greater role in the development of masculinity than inherent factors. “Schools do not simply adapt to a natural masculinity among boys or femininity among girls. They are agents in the matter” (Connell, 1989).

In summary, then, whereas the literature in general recognises the need to explore masculinity in our society, writers differ in what they believe to be the essence of masculinity. One school of thought, led by Connell (1995), believes the construction of masculinity to be so intricately tied up with social, economic and political history that the unravelling of what is masculine and what is socially constructed is fraught with difficulties and certainly not simplistic. Another school of thought led by Bly (1996) and Biddulph (1995) believes that the essence of masculinity is unambiguous. It used to exist among the primitive races and the pre-industrial males; and men in the twentieth century merely have to rediscover it in their own social context. It is against the theoretical background of conflicting ideas of the nature of masculinity that this study is being conducted. Such huge questions as the essence of masculinity and how it is constructed must be considered when embarking upon a specific program with a group of teachers concerned with the education of boys.

### **3.2 Hegemonic Masculinity**

Whether or not masculinity is the result of nature or nurture, the problem of a masculinity in crisis is one which society is presently facing. The problem cannot be addressed without an understanding of the hegemonic nature of masculinity. The concept of hegemony “refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted” (Connell, 1995, p.77). Thus any form of hegemony is, of its very nature, socially acceptable. It makes a successful claim to authority. Authors such as Walker (1988) and Connell (1989; 1995) are careful to point out that whereas hegemony is fluid and people can drift in and out of the

hegemonic traits of masculinity, the masculine hegemonic phenomenon maintains its power.

Particular groups of males are positioned at differing points of the hierarchy of hegemony. At the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men are homosexuals and “soft” heterosexual men because the qualities they possess are the same qualities which hegemonic males have expelled from their characters. Qualities such as wimpishness, dependency, fastidiousness and so on are seen as feminine qualities and as such are unmasculine (Connell, 1995). An ethnographic study which deals with this very issue of hegemonic construction of masculinity in the schoolyard has been conducted by Walker (1988). In his book, *Louts and Legends*, he followed four different “groups” through a period of five years, beginning when the boys were in Year 10 in a NSW, disadvantaged, state, single sex school. The school had a heavily migrant population and was predominantly working class. Walker’s work provides rare insight into the construction of masculinity in the school playground, the power of the dominant, masculine culture and the alienation of those who reject this dominant culture. It is worth looking at his research in detail because although his groupings will be different from another Australian school, the idea of the hegemonic masculinity surfaces very clearly. The four groups which he tags are:

- (i) The Footballers. This group were loud, aggressive with a desire or need to dominate space. Although they didn’t tend to be academics, they were well accepted within the school culture as their success on the sporting field endeared them to students and teachers alike. This was the group from which the school leaders were generally chosen.

- (ii) The Greeks. Made up of migrant boys, this group sometimes drifted into the Footballer's group but on the whole were set apart by their ethnic origins.
- (iii) The Three Friends. Dobbed the "poofs", there were hints of homosexual tendencies in this group. They did not interact with the other groups, in fact their behaviour and values directly contrasted to the Footballers. Their only social success in school life was in the drama production.
- (iv) The Handballers. These boys were not a strong group but were more tolerant of the other three groups than the others were of them.

The "footballers" were indisputably the "dominant" male culture and, as a consequence, decided what was acceptable male behaviour and what wasn't. "In the dominant behavioural programmes, there was normal masculine behaviour and there was abnormal, the latter being promptly assimilated to feminine behaviour" (Walker, 1988, p.90). The categorising of the "Three Friends" as "Poofs", and the verbal assaults on their sexuality was all part of the culture of this dominant or hegemonic group. They spread: "tales about the stigmatised group, ...boasts about what (they) will do to them and expressions of disgust of homosexuality" (Walker, 1988, p.91). With the "Footballers" and the "Three Friends", the rejection of each other's values was mutual. The "Three Friends" also rejected the school and its emphasis on competitive sport and macho values. The only time in which there was a joining of groups was in the School's Drama Festival when two of the "Three Friends" won the competition with their brilliant "camp" performances in a play written by one of the "Footballers" (Walker, 1988, pp. 90-95). The "Greeks" were also outside of this dominant group. However, because of their strong outside support system their ethnicity did not produce the alienation felt by the "Three Friends". Many of the values within the Greek

Group as well as their general opinion of women as playthings echoed the values of the dominant group. The “Handballers” were seen by the dominant group as colourless and they largely ignored them. The “Handballers” rejected the bullying tactics of the dominant group who, whether in the schoolyard or at the school dance, demanded more space. They were a loosely knit group and by far the most diverse in forms of ethnic and intellectual membership. Their masculinity was never questioned by the “Footballers” or the “Greeks” however, which leads one to conclude that there was an acceptance within this dominant group of different forms of masculinity, as long as they weren’t “effeminate”.

Each one of Walker’s “groups”, and they were only part of the population of the school, exhibited a different form of masculinity. The dominant group exhibited power not only over other forms of masculinity but also over women. Walker’s description of a dominant group was suggested earlier by Lehne, (1976) who believes this group is responsible for the perpetuation of the aggressive, intolerant behaviour patterns which have caused society today to see male behaviour as problematic. Lehne’s theory of boys exerting strong pressure on each other to conform to the macho values of the “club” would see Walker’s “Footballers” as the controlling force in the school, the decision makers, the power group.

It should be noted here that both Walker and Connell warn against a simplistic categorising of the groups. Many boys crossed from one group to the other, for example some “Greeks” were also footballers and others changed as they grew older and rejected the values of the group in which they had previously enjoyed membership. Even within the dominant group, differences can be seen between members:- degrees

of tolerance towards women for example. It is also important to realise that “maturity” plays a part in the changing of groups as high school boys are still in the process of constructing their form of masculinity (Walker, 1988). Connell (1989) gives an example of a boy who succeeded, after desperate effort, to become accepted into the “cool” group and then found after years of pretending, that he didn’t really want to belong to that particular group.

Research (Connell, 1989) also suggests that by the time the adolescent boy reaches secondary school, he has had twelve years of inculturation, already having negotiated his own relationship with the Institution of the School. Connell (1989) interviewed two groups of men who had left school some years earlier. The first was a group of lower, working class men and the second were upwardly mobile, professional men. He interviewed them about their experience of school, especially the groups to which they belonged in their student days. Their comments, of course, were coloured with hindsight but Connell (1989) received enough information to categorize the groups (“Cool Guys” “Swots” and “Wimps”) thereby identifying “key moments in the collective process of gender construction, the social dynamic in which masculinities are formed” (p 292.) in a school situation

As boys participate in the “pecking order” of who goes where in the continuum of masculinity, constructing different expressions of manhood, there emerges many male cultures. One of these, which has been discussed at length above, will be the dominant one, the “real boys”. This usually happens in the first year of high school and there is a general acceptance from all the participants of the pecking order, of the results of this peer sorting process.



The cool guys hang out together and the cool girls hang out together, and there was the swots and the wimps...you knew where you stood and which group you belonged to. (Connell, 1989, p.294)

The peer group is one of the influencing factors on the adolescent boy, but so too is the school organisation where he spends so much time. Connell (1989) concluded that when a boy is confronted with a bureaucratic organisation like school, which has the backing of much bigger organisations like the State and even prison, it became a conflict of power. Some boys gained access to this power through academia or sport; others saw “getting into trouble” as their “act of resistance or defiance” (p.294) against an intimidating power.

This institutional “powerfulness” is taken up as an issue in the works of Biddulph, (1995) and Salisbury & Jackson (1996). If the male teachers in a school operate in a certain way, with students and female teachers, boys are given a message as to how males conduct themselves in a working environment. Such a hidden curriculum is a subtle but effective statement of the male sex role in the school.

The masculinized nature of the school ethos comes through a hard, disciplinary approach linked with competitive, individualized self-sufficiency. Such an approach captures the essence of how you need to be to succeed. The only things that make sense for the many boys in the school is the patriarchal, individualist, competitive approach to them. For this reason it is easy to see why such boys reject the small group drama-style way of collaborative learning (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.30).

The dominant group can be known by various terms. Connell (1989) uses the colloquial word “cool” as descriptive of this group when he discusses his findings which are close to those of Walker. Both see this “dominant” or “cool” group as being

the major factor in constructing which types of masculinities are acceptable and which are not Salisbury & Jackson (1996), whilst basically agreeing with the idea of a dominant male group, suggest that the issue may be more complex and that the boys within this group often reject the values and culture of this group.

Boys aren't just brainwashed by macho values. They don't just swallow the dominant models of manliness in a docile, passive manner. Instead they have a much more wry approach-half-mocking, half-accepting - both contesting and buying into these models (p.13).

Their work echoes the sentiments of Connell and Walker, especially the idea of the school being "agents" (Connell, 1989.) in the construction of masculinity (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). According to Connell, the "cool" group provided the dominant masculinity thrust, at least in early secondary school, and other boys would aspire to belong to this group. For some boys, this meant going against their normal personality and behaviour patterns. Connell mentions that in senior high school, the challenge to a dominant male culture came from the "academics". But whether it was the "footballers" or the "academics", the masculinity of this dominant group presented in both Walker's and Connell's work, is diametrically opposed to the masculinity of the "effeminate" boys. It is not surprising, therefore, that homophobia, or as Lehne (1974) calls it "homosexism", is prevalent amongst the members of this group (p.67). Homophobia is an attitude which Lehne (1974) suggests has a great deal to do with maintaining the male sex role of the dominant, or "cool", male power group in our society today. He wrote more than twenty years ago of the homophobia in American society but his works have relevance today. He suggests that the male role in society is predominantly maintained by men themselves.

Since any male could potentially (latently) be a homosexual and since there are certain social sanctions which can be directed against homosexuals, the fear of being labeled a homosexual can be used to ensure that males maintain

appropriate male behaviour. Homophobia is only incidentally directed against homosexuals - its more common use is against the 49% of the population which is male (Lehne, 1974. p.78).

Walker's "Footballers" (1988, pp. 91 -100) hated homosexual men. Some expressed a desire to act out violent fantasies against them. Interestingly enough, they did not have the same emotional response against lesbians whom they found quite intriguing. Homosexual masculinity was directly in conflict with the male dominant group who could not treat the issue in a non-emotional way. The "Handballers", however, saw homosexuals as people to be pitied or people who have not had a decent father to show them the correct expression of masculinity. It was not an emotional issue for them, but rather an intellectual observation. It did not threaten their own masculinity (Walker, 1988).

Adolescence is a time of seeking acceptance. It is of paramount importance for the male adolescent to belong to the male "club". At this stage in his journey, teachers and mothers are a background influence. The reality of being excluded from membership of the "club" is enough to deafen any boys' ears to a message which runs counter to what the "club" is espousing and if the club rejects certain traits in a male, then each member of the club must ally himself with these sentiments

One of the stimulus for this study is the realisation that the values espoused by the dominant, hegemonic group are, in fact, under scrutiny within society (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). It is this group which has enjoyed the approval of the authorities as hegemony, of its very nature, is socially acceptable. It is this group which usually provides school captains and prefects, not the other more marginal groups which dare

to express an alternative masculinity (Walker, 1988). Changes, however, come slowly and sometimes painfully. The deconstruction and reconstruction of gender is happening in the wider community and in the schools and practitioners are requesting more literature on the subject and programs which offer positive celebrations of masculinity which takes into account the gender of the student in its pedagogy and strives towards positive outcomes.

### **3.3. Gendered Education**

It is only twenty years since official recognition was given to gender influences on how a child learns. The movement to give girl's education a priority in Government funding and policy, and the success of that initiative, was seen by Connell (1989) as the inspiration of the present programs to address problems in boys' education. The intervention of programs for girls and the change in school structures which catered better for girl's learning was highly successful and paved the way for similar initiatives for boys.

One of the earliest reports dealing with the disadvantages experienced by girls, *Girls, Schools and Society* (1975), found "conventional gender stereotypes spread blanket-like through textbooks, career counselling, teacher expectations and selection processes" (Connell, 1989, p.291). Connell believes that the same gender stereotypes of males are spread blanket-like through every aspect of the school and contends that it is not just a matter of transferring the strategies which worked with girls to the male school student population and hope that the same beneficial effects will result. Men are the privileged sex in today's society and therefore will re-act negatively to anyone

trying to “change” their role (Connell, 1989, p.292). “Educational work on gender with boys must take a different shape.”

The question of gendered education, from a male perspective, has only been studied very recently. Most of the literature is less than ten years old. When American sociologists, David and Brannon (1976) embarked upon their study of the male sex role in western society, they visited the Library of Congress in Washington to research their topic among the 2,439,028 books in the Social Science section. There was not one entry under Sex Role - Male. There had been nothing written specifically on that topic and yet they argue it is fundamental to understanding much of what goes on in our society.

As soon as boys enter the school institution, they are met with certain expectations and acceptable stereotypes about what it means to be male in our society (Biddulph, 1996; Connell, 1989). These stereotypes are acted through peer group influence, the values of the particular school, the curriculum and the way in which the school is administered (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Powerful statements are made through the hidden curriculum of the school as to the relative sex roles - where men and women are positioned in the school structures (Browne & Fletcher, 1995). The study of the male sex role, whether socially conditioned or biologically natural is fundamental to educating boys. “You may be born male, but you become a man” (Walker, 1988, p.88).

This study is conducted within a society which has very definite expectations of males (Connell, 1995). The pressures and the expectations placed upon the adolescent male

are strong and the expression of masculinity available to him is something which he must "get right" depending on his environment (Walker,1988). His responses will depend upon the background he has come from and his relationships with those who have reared him. When the boy is at school, he is filtering what he sees through those domestic experiences (Connell, 1989). It is for these reasons that it is thought worthwhile to intervene and implement specific programs dealing with what it means to be male in a society which can offer inauthentic stereotypes of masculinity.

Since 1986, when the first *National Policy on Gender Equity* was produced, many effective programs have been introduced into schools to improve educational access and success for girls. In those early days, with funds being made available for girls to gain entry into the "masculine" subjects of maths and science and technology, "many boys and men in schools were left confused, hostile and very defensive by these developments" (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996, p.5). Males were getting the message that whatever they did was wrong. Any work done with boys was trying to explain the feminist viewpoint and focus politically on women. Men were being asked to be feminists. Hearn (1987) disputed that men could be feminists. They could be sympathetic to the feminist cause but he maintained that men's problems were not with the opposite sex as women's were; men's problems lay with themselves. Hearn's criticism was instrumental in changing approaches to working with boys. The recognition that boys had problems was slowly dawning on the wider community. But these problems were of a different nature from girls' problems and the strategies used for one would not necessarily work for the other. Those who advocate boys' programs acknowledge the need for further work on girls' programs as well (Connell, 1988; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Kenway, 1994). The objective of gender education is: "so

the sexes can live alongside each other in a safe, secure, stable, respectful, harmonious way and in relationships of mutual life-enhancing respect” (Kenway, 1994). By liberating men to transcend the stereotypes, it follows also that women are more likely to be liberated from the stereotypes as well.

It would seem, therefore, that for any boys’ program to be successful, it has to be carried out from a holistic approach, permeating the whole school culture and complementing work done with girls. Salisbury & Jackson (1996) call for “A freshly designed, anti-sexist programme for boys, working alongside a positive action programme for girls and women teachers” (p. 11).

The literature, therefore, emphasises that programs implemented specifically for boys come from a different vantage point from those implemented for girls. Educationally, girls have been disadvantaged. They have been positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy of power and economic wealth. Boys have not experienced the same disadvantage and their problematic behaviour is a whole different issue, evolving from different causes. (Connell, 1989) Authentic programs for boys, therefore invite a theoretical framework which examines the whole question of masculinity.

The connections between constructions of masculinity and boys’ attitudes and behaviours to schools and school learning, need to be re-examined. Most school-based programs that have dealt with boys’ reading failures, writing reluctance, school expulsions/suspensions, or resistance to participate in school cultures, have not analysed how constructions of masculinity are implicated in such behaviours. (Gilbert, 1996)

Whereas to work with boys, it is important to seek an understanding of the construction of masculinity and the hegemonic masculinity, most teachers are coming face to face with problems exhibited by boys in the school and need to address those

problems as part of the normal daily routine, sometimes in crisis situations. *Boys in Schools* (Browne & Fletcher 1995) is a collection of strategies practised by various teachers of boys in Australian secondary schools. The emphasis of the work done by these teachers is in the field of behaviour, values and relationships. All the contributors emphasise that for teachers to work effectively with boys, it is important that they enjoy and like boys and see the positive aspects of masculinity.

Recently, writers (Biddulph, 1995; Dunn, 1995; Fletcher, 1995) have focused on the positive aspects of masculinity and identified five major areas of understanding needed by those who work with boys.

They have to be at ease with their own masculinity (including its lust, angers and energies) and to have arrived at a safe place through resolution not social compliance. And those men and women who would teach boys have to have a genuine liking, in fact a love, of boys---with their scruffiness, noisiness, in-your-face honesty and surprising capacity for tenderness and vulnerability. (Biddulph, 1995. p. ix)

(i) Boys must stop getting the message that being male is somehow intrinsically dirty, dangerous and inferior.

On all sides they are getting this message: that boys achieve at a lower rate than girls in their final year in school; they are more likely to die, get cancer, be killed in an accident or die violently. They can't seem to say anything right around women, have the constant threat of being accused of harassment, are punished more often and fill up the learning difficulty classes.



No longer does society expect them to be the breadwinner, the provider or even the defender. Farrell (1994) discusses how the female has changed her role drastically in society in response to modern stimulus; but the male has not. The world for which he was expected to control, protect and be prepared to die has changed its expectations of him but he has not found a new role. Soldiers returning from the First and Second World Wars were hailed as heroes. Soldiers returning from Vietnam were booed, rejected and labelled "rapists". Women who leave their husbands can now afford to support their children on social security. They can buy a house, get a bank loan, seek paid employment with the help of day care subsidy and seek legal support for any intimidation perpetrated by a former husband. None of these supports were available to a woman when the men returned from the Second World War. Women were financially dependent upon their husbands, especially if children were involved.

(ii) Fathers must take more responsibility for their sons, especially at adolescence.

This issue has already been discussed in the context of initiation of the young male by the older mentor. But there are obvious difficulties here. When there are so many single parent families or families in conflict, it is possible that the adolescent has no access to his father or even a father substitute. The Bureau of Statistics records that between 1982 and 1992, the number of single parent families in Australia grew by more than 180,000 reaching an estimated 619,000. There are no fathers living with the children in 84% of single parent families (O'Doherty Report, 1994, p. 17). Fathers need to be involved in the secondary school in ways other than the usual working bee (Fletcher, 1995). Most fathers were uncomfortable in a school setting, leaving the son's education to their wives. However, when they were consulted about such things as unemployment, discipline, smoking and violence and giving in to pressure to buy

expensive brands of clothes, they were willing and anxious to form a cohesive group to discuss such issues (Fletcher, 1995).

(iii) Playgrounds and classrooms must be made safer, physically and mentally.

Many authors describe how the dominant males often make life unbearable for the “less masculine” boys and also for the girls (Rossiter & Crawford, 1988; Connell, 1989; Walker, 1988; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). They decry bullying, sexual and gender based harassment which make life difficult for the victims and also the traditional response of “boys will be boys” which has been used to excuse inappropriate male behaviour, of varying seriousness, in the playground. (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Browne, 1995). They see teachers as playing an important role in deconstructing the “boys will be boys” approach, by challenging the commonly held assumptions about hormones driving boys to behave unacceptably in the classroom and the playground. Boys are to be encouraged to stand outside their own experience and critically observe what is happening.

(iv) Boys need to be shown how to celebrate their own masculinity.

Doing group work with boys with the intention of trying to make them behave better towards girls may be counter-productive (Biddulph, 1995; Connell, 1989). A chilling article by Browne (1995) gives the example of his beginning a lesson on rape only to have it completely hijacked by a dominant group who trivialised the whole issue thereby making rape a laughing matter in a co-educational year nine classroom. The damage had been done and the teacher had learnt a valuable lesson about how to approach sensitive issues with a mixed class with their own agendas and perceptions.

Throughout the literature, a theme which comes through very strongly is that boys' programs need to be done for their own sake, not with specific reference to positive outcomes for girls; although this will be a natural, accidental outcome: "it's time we honoured and put a positive value on the unique qualities of boys" (Biddulph, 1995. p.x). However, while accentuating the positive features of masculinity, the same writers stress that destructive elements of masculinity should not be accepted (Fletcher, 1995; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Browne, 1995; Fletcher, 1995; Biddulph, 1995).

(v) Boys and Girls experience differing rates of development.

The literature discussed above accepts that much of our sex roles are conditioned by society, but acknowledges that there are two distinct sexes, male and female which develop at different rates. Whether this rate of development is because of biological factors or social conditioning is part of the same debate but the facts faced by teachers is that of girls, by and large, possessing fine motor skills in the first year of primary school and boys, by and large having difficulty (Alloway; Davies; Gilbert; Gilbert & King, 1996).

Many boys are six months behind girls in fine motor development when they enter Year 1. This is a real physical difference. They actually need more movement and activity than a seat at a desk affords, and are much less able to handle pens, scissors and other mechanisms. So they are immediately disadvantaged. For some, their careers as problem learners are set in motion. (Biddulph, 1995. p x)

This question of differing stages of development raises the argument of whether boys and girls should be taught differently or even separately. Writers in the field of literacy, trying to answer the question as to why boys do so badly in senior English (Whitby,

1996) wonder whether teachers, mainly female, honour the boys' life experience in their presentation of the subject and their expectations (Alloway, et. al, 1996). Whitby's work done in single sex boys' schools however, shows that there is no significant difference in boys' performances in English in single sex and co-educational schools.

### **3.4. Specific Programs**

Using these five points as the basic philosophy behind any boys' program, some educationalists have developed specific programs for use in schools by teachers wishing to work with boys in an interventionist way and some of these will be discussed here. The work being done in Australia at the moment mirrors that done in Britain and America. The Program used by participants in this study, *Boys and Relationships* (1995), emanates from South Australia and is the work of a team from the Tea Tree Gully Community Health Centre. The authors (Hunt; Koszegi & Shores, 1995), trialled the program in six South Australian Schools before making it available to the public. Its aims are:

- Raising awareness of the negative effect of stereotyping
- Encouraging boys to explore positive aspects of being male
- Promoting psychological well being by exposure to alternative behaviours, skills & strategies.
- Providing opportunity to rehearse these skills & strategies in a supportive environment

The program is divided into eight lesson plans and geared towards upper primary and junior secondary boys. In describing why the program was developed, Shores says: “we developed the *Boys and Relationships* Program as a preventative response to the large number of referrals of boys for aggressive and anti-social behaviour” (Shores, 1995, p.97). The aims and objectives of the program echo the sentiments and research of the O’Doherty Report (1994), Walker (1988), Lehne (1976), Biddulph (1995 & 1996), Jackson & Salisbury (1996) O’Connell (1989), and Dunn (1995).

*The Boys and Relationship’s Program* recognises the need for intervention in the education of boys. Whether masculinity is culturally constructed or an inherited essence or whether it is a combination of the two is an important issue but not one with which the practitioner will necessarily wrestle. To those facing the everyday problems with boys, intervention is necessary. How the boys “turned out” like they did is of less importance to them than strategies to improve the situation. What the *Boys and Relationships Program* does is to recognise that there is a problem with male aggression and to develop a particular set of lessons to educate boys in their formative years. The authors are quite clear that the program is not a “quick fix” strategy and that “teachers will need to closely consider their appropriateness, and their social justice and inclusivity implications” ( Hunt, et. al, p.2).

There are other writers also who have produced helpful assistance to the practitioner dealing with the problems of adolescent boys. Salisbury & Jackson (1996) have produced activities and strategies for all aspects of boys’ development, including critical looks at “*The Ideal Manly Body*”, “*How Boys become Real Lads*” “*Fathers*” “*Violence*” and “*Bullying*” “*Language*” and “*Media & Masculinity*”. This work is

philosophically similar to the *Boys and Relationships* Program. The idea that an intervention program is necessary to help boys develop a positive and caring masculinity comes through very strongly.

Browne & Fletcher (1995) have edited a book in which sixteen people around Australia have embarked upon programs with boys. These projects range from literacy to violence to studies of homo-phobia in our culture to bullying. All have documented problems faced and strategies used to overcome these problems. Most express the desire for a whole school approach but stress good work can be done without it. Articles have been appearing with growing rapidity in journals and publications throughout Australia (Dunn, 1995) suggesting that intervention strategies will develop in much the same way as they have with the girl's equity initiatives.

Although the *Boys and Relationships Program* is concerned with the *behavioural* aspect of masculinity, other concerns centre on the academic achievements, or lack of, of boys. One contribution to the research in this field is a newly released three part book called *Boys and Literacy* (Alloway, et. al. 1996). Developed using a research grant at James Cook University in Townsville, it has used the research done by post graduate students in this field. The subtitle of the package is *Meeting the Challenge*. It includes fifteen practical units of work written for boys in primary and secondary schools as well as readings concerning the theoretical framework of the construction and deconstruction of masculinity.

More and more educators are working with boys and documenting their results. Boys' education is achieving growing awareness within society which is largely supportive of

intervention initiatives (Devine, 1996). This fact can be illustrated by quoting the example of the recent conference in Melbourne which hoped to attract one hundred people. The organisers closed the applications at two hundred and fifty and many were turned away. Speakers such as Steve Biddulph, Professor Bob Connell and Richard Fletcher are in demand as teachers seek to understand how to approach the issue of boys' education and are relieved that the problems they have been aware of for some time are finally being articulated.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The Feminist Movement and especially the initiatives for girls in schools, has problematized some areas of masculine behaviour. The literature studied suggests that these problem areas are widespread throughout the masculine community. They include:

- the high rate of young male suicide;
- the over representation of school boys in the unsociable behaviour category;
- the problems in the area of literacy;
- the persecution of males whose behaviour patterns do not fit the hegemonic male culture;
- the inability of many men to handle conflict and resorting to violence;
- sexual harassment of girls, especially those who seek to break out of the submissive mould;
- poor performances by boys in senior schooling.

Ten years ago there was very little written on the subject of masculinity or boys' education but in the last few years, there has been a growing amount of research and writing in the area. The literature agrees that there is work which needs to be done, especially in the schools. All writers, however, do not agree, on the methods used to achieve this aim; nor the theoretical framework.

Some writers believe that what we see as masculinity today has been culturally constructed throughout history. Even the biological behaviour of males has social connotations (Connell, 1995). Other writers promulgate a unique maleness in every man which has to be searched for and celebrated (Bly, 1996). The latter writers emphasis the importance of initiation or mentoring, passing on the masculine baton to the boys who want to be men whereas the former call for widespread cultural change in attitudes to both men and women.

The literature acknowledges a hegemonic masculinity which dominates those men who possess "feminine" qualities and in particular homosexuals. Whatever end of the continuum a writer finds himself in discussing construction of masculinity, all call for greater acceptance of the varied expressions of masculinity. As the literature on boys' education is relatively new, it announces the beginning of a movement which is gaining momentum in this country. Working with boys and exploring the social construction of masculinity is a new area for teachers, one which is supported by the literature which is being produced, both in the theoretical domain and the practical.

The practical programs produced are supporting the work carried out by teachers. There are specific programs being used within schools, some by individuals and others



as part of a whole school approach. One such program, *Boys and Relationships* is being used for the purposes of this study. Alongside specific programs there are other initiatives happening, such as scrutinizing the power structures that exist within the school to see that they fit the model of co-operative models of resolving conflict and do not perpetuate the “masculine as dominator” approach (Salisbury & Jackson; 1996; Browne, 1995). If the power structures of the school, e.g. the discipline procedures and policy or the make up of gender in the authoritative roles, echo the aims of the programs discussed above, they cannot be patriarchal and competitive.

This review of the literature explores the fundamental issues of the construction of masculinity in society and the massive changes which have occurred in the area of gender in the last thirty years. It is only through an understanding of these issues that the education of boys will be improved. To this end, this study seeks to contribute to both the theory and practice of boys’ education by focusing on teaching and learning in one Year 8 classroom in a Catholic, boys’ secondary school.

## **Chapter 4      The Design of the Study**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to both the theory and the practice of boys' education. It seeks to identify the issues which surround boys' education and support the involvement of teachers in a school based curriculum development activity that aims to improve boys' education. It was with this purpose and these aims in mind that the design of the study evolved. However, choosing a research approach is no easy task. In making this choice I understood that the worth of a specific technique was best established by reference to the phenomenon it seeks to comprehend and the understanding it seeks to develop. Thus the aims and the purpose of the study invited a qualitative approach known as action research.

### **4.1 Action Research.**

A form of qualitative research known as action research provided a methodological framework for the design of the study.

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out". (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988. p. 5).

The participants can be any group of people with a shared concern, in fact another name for action research is 'practitioner action research' (Schatz, 1993. p.4)

Action research began with the work of Kurt Lewin (1946) who applied it in his community experiments in post-war American Society and it was then carried on by

Stephen Corey (1949; 1953) at Teacher's College, Columbia University in New York in his efforts to assist teachers to develop inquiry learning. It has been an integral part of the Australian educational research scene since the seventies due to the work done at Deakin university by Kemmis & McTaggart. This work helped teachers in their own professional development as well as being a valuable tool in assisting schools in review and development work. Action research involves the researcher being involved in the community of inquirers. Researchers are not "outsiders" as is the case of some quantitative research. They are an integral part of the group as action research must be a group activity using the collaborative approach. It is a structured method by which teachers can learn from experience. (Somekh, 1983)

Action Research...is a direct and logical outcome of the progressive position. After showing children how to work together to solve their problems, the next step was for teachers to adopt the methods they had been teaching their children, and learn to solve their own problems cooperatively. (Hodgkinson, in Cohen & Manion, 1994. p. 188)

Action research, therefore, is a means of growing in understanding of a perceived problem by observation, reflecting and planning and then implementing change to improve the situation.. Action research seeks to approach the problem and address it at the same time (Burns,1994). The focus of action research is on a specific problem in a context which has definite parameters and for this reason, it does not attempt to generalise or formulate scientific knowledge but rather seeks to effect change through collaboration. Active intervention with the parties involved, both researcher and researched, is an essential ingredient of this type of research.

Since the end of such research is not simply the contribution to knowledge, but practitioner-relevant information, action research has a different audience and is

likely to be presented differently to other kinds of research. (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 27)

Action research has the following specific characteristics:

- It must be collaborative. "Collaboration" here is intended to mean:

Everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding; no-one's point of view will be taken as the final understanding as to what all the other points of view really mean. (Winter, 1989, p. 57)

Differences in personality, social standing, age and rank vanish as the group attempts to come to a deeper understanding of the problem. By pooling subjective opinions, feelings and observations it is possible to emerge with a completely new understanding which is far less subjective in its evolution than its origins. In my study, there are five very different personalities with varying degrees of experience, expertise and confidence. It is essential that each of the voices is heard as each has a different relationship with the students and a different story to tell.

- It must be self-reflective and open to critical examination, of the participants by the participants. As the data are observed and reflected upon, the participants evaluate and re-evaluate what their own thoughts, pre-conceived notions and feelings are. Reflection is the process whereby we make sense of the evidence presented to us. (Winter, 1989)

Action research develops through the self-reflective spiral: a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, (implementing plans), observing (systematically), reflecting...and then replanning, further implementation, observing and reflecting. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 22)

A certain rigor needs to be applied to the reflective process:

In both cases, issues and understandings, on the one hand, and the practices themselves, on the other, develop and evolve through the action research process - but only when the self -reflective spiral is thoughtfully and systematically followed in processes of group critique.(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 23)

- It must be open to transformation of ideas and practice. “Initiators of research must put themselves ‘at risk’ through the process of the investigation,” (Winter, 1989. p. 60) not just their “hypothesis’ as in other forms of research but themselves. The participants transcend the tentative ideas they started with as they seek to learn as much as possible and implement what they have learnt. Although we started with a formalised program, it would be interesting to see whether it survived the rigors of practice.

- Its findings must be presented within a pluralist structure. The action research report is a:

dialectical, reflexive, questioning form of inquiry (which) will create a ‘plural structure’, consisting of various accounts and various critiques of these accounts, and ending not with conclusions (intended to be ‘convincing’) but with questions and possibilities (intended to be ‘relevant’ in various ways for different readers).( Winter, 1989, p.62)

- It is ultimately concerned with changing or improving a situation Theory and Practice are not two distinct entities but two different and yet interdependent and complementary phases of the change process. (Winter, 1989. p. 66) Schratz highlights the “ new and unpredictable” environments teachers will increasingly encounter in this post modernist sea of change. Action Research is: “ ...especially important if we as teachers are to retain any sort of significant control over our working lives.” (Schratz,

1993. p. 5) Teachers need to reflect the consequences of change upon their social context, and to “innovate practice in a socially responsible way” (Altrichter, 1993 p.53).

- It does not claim to be generalizable. As the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than produce knowledge, it is highly contextualised. The reader of the study may find that it is possible to translate ideas and practice into their own situation or better still be inspired to carry out a similar research in their own context. However, this is not the primary purpose. The positivist finds the inability to generalise a fault with all qualitative studies. The context in which this study is developed however has many complex factors, the sum of which could never be reproduced anywhere else.

The four fundamental aspects, or “moments” of action research, observing, reflecting, planning and acting, are linked together into a cycle which in turn may link into another cycle so creating a spiral of cycles. [Figure 2]

Observing. Careful Observation is essential in action research as it documents the effects of the action and provides the basis for the reflective stage. It has two components in that it must be planned in that many different ways of collecting data will have been put into place and it must be sensitive to unplanned observations, so that the unexpected will be noticed and learnt from. There are many varied ways in which observation can be structured. Keeping a journal where impressions, concerns, moments of enlightenment or change are all recorded is seen as essential practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.78). However, other techniques, such as interviews,

photographs, questionnaires, collection of documents, tape recordings, observation of lessons and many others, can be used for this purpose.

Reflecting. The moments of “reflection” seek to “make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints made manifest in strategic action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.13). The reflective, group discussions are essential because it is at this stage that changes may be decided as necessary before the next “action”. As the group reflects on the observations of the implementation of the plan, a deeper understanding of the issue will evolve.

Planning A general plan is formulated to guide the action. Already a reconnaissance has taken place whereby the general focus has been established. Now it is time to ask the question “What is to be done?...The planning phase of the action research cycle is the phase in which you orient yourself, with your collaborators for action.” The context is all important. What changes can be attempted are going to depend on support networks, resources and boundaries. As the plan develops, the question “What is to be done” will be extended to “how,” “when,” “where,” and “by whom.” Within this planning phase, members of the participatory group will be identified as to their particular tasks and responsibilities, no one being more important than the other. Consequences of the planned action will be monitored and other people who may be affected will be taken into consideration

Acting. The moment is followed by the implementation or action. What this action is depends very much on the ability and resources available to the members of the participatory group. Monitoring techniques should be put into place which tell us the following: how well the plan is being implemented, evidence of the hidden or unintended effects and what is happening from different points of view.

All of these four “moments” are inter - related. They mingle and weave interdependently as they spiral into a cycle.



## 4.2 The Particular Design Of This Study

This study involved five action research cycles. Each cycle incorporated the four inter-related “moments” of observing, reflecting, planning and acting.

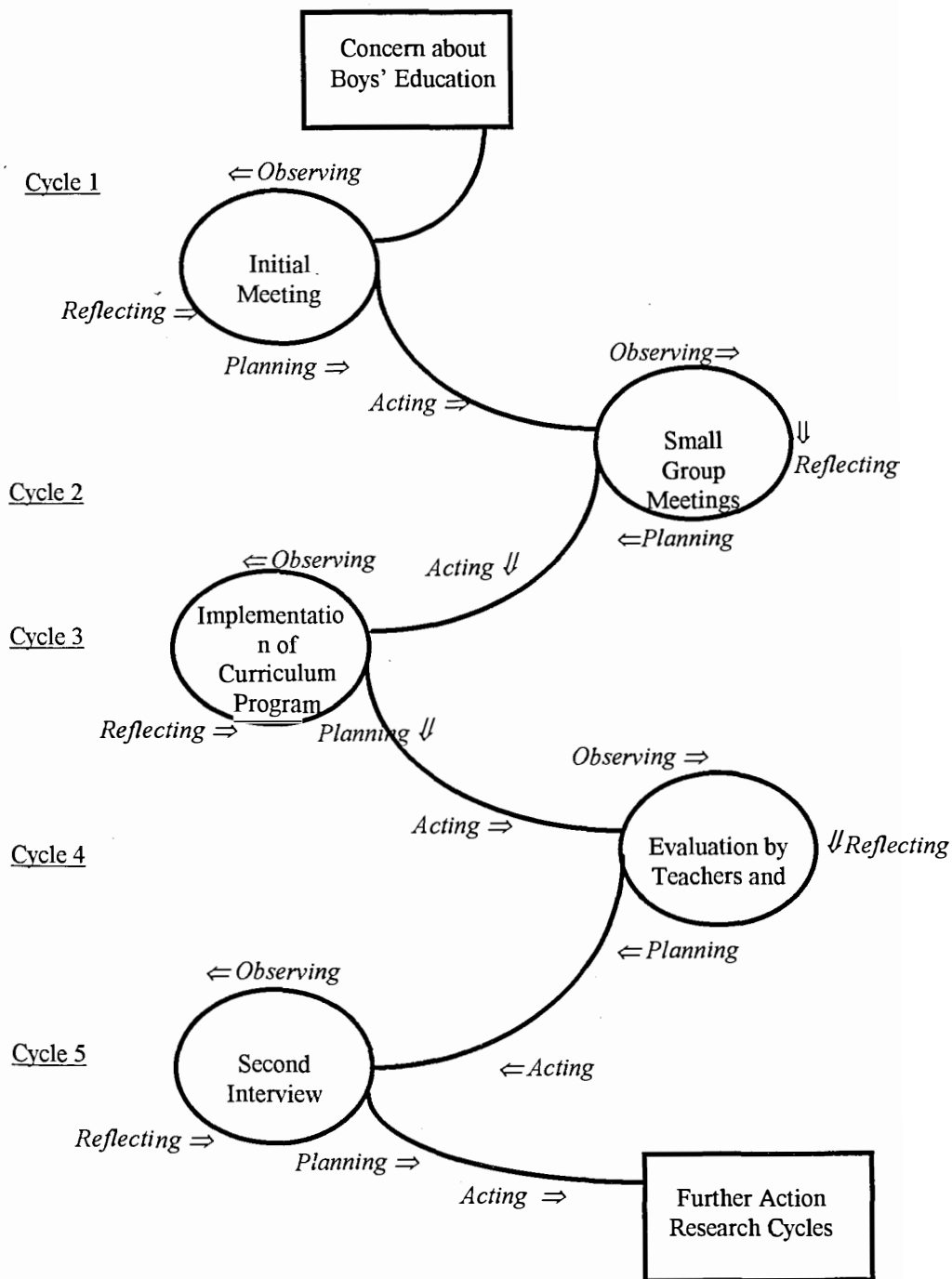


Figure 2. The Five Moments of the Action Research Spiral

An elaboration of the “story” of this action research study is found in Chapter Five

### 4.3 Data Collection

The data base for this study included:-

- (i) Student's work sheets. The curriculum program used contained numerous work sheets provided for the use of the students to recapitulate the lessons taught. When some of these proved too difficult for the students, an alternative lot of worksheets were used from a different program. The students were not keen on writing but their "butcher's paper" collages were valuable pieces of data.
- (ii) Interviews. Following the formal teaching of the program, a taped interview was conducted with the participants. As well as this, two interviews were conducted with the principal. A further informal interview involved one of the participants who, in turn, conducted eight individual interviews with students.
- (iii) Group evaluation sheets. These were sent to the participants by the researcher a week before the conclusion of the program. A meeting was then held whereby the evaluations were discussed according to the original aims and objectives of the program.
- (iv) Student evaluation sheets. When the interviews were done with the students by one of the participants, a written account of the interview was recorded onto a formal sheet. This was then given to the students for confirmation that it was what they said and they were permitted to make changes.
- (v) Feedback Accounts of Meetings. With each of the early meetings, before the program started with the children, minutes of the meeting were given to the participants who were asked for confirmation.

#### **4.4 Validity and Reliability**

Action research is qualitative research which is often confused for an absence of methodical rigour (Lather, 1991). This criticism can be addressed if a number of reflexive, self correcting techniques are used by the researcher to minimise the distorting effect of personal bias (Lather, 1991). Triangulation, or the use of multiple data sources, is one such technique.

As noted in the previous section, the data base for this study was quite expansive. In addition to triangulation, “reflexive subjectivity” (Lather, 1991) or reflective deliberation was used. This was achieved through the researchers commitment to journal writing which showed how assumptions underwent change and elaboration when faced with the data collected. “Face validity” (Lather, 1991) was another method of validation practised by the researcher. This involved feeding back to the group a record of their discussion and asking for confirmation that it captured the feelings and beliefs expressed by the group. The last type of validation practised by the researcher was that of “catalytic validity” (Lather, 1991). This involved collecting evidence that the research had lead to insights on the issue of boys’ education and also that it had resulted in improved practice. The taped interviews at the end of the program showed developing insights, disagreements with the program and a more definite idea as to what directions the education of boys should be heading.

#### **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

At the outset of this study, the principal, teacher participants and students were made aware of the study that I was conducting. The four teachers entered into the program willingly and were all given pseudonyms to disguise their real identity. Permission was given by the participant teachers and the principal for some parts of this study to be taped, transcribed and used in the final draft. No student was able to be identified within the study as their pseudonyms were merely letters of the alphabet. The school was also given a pseudonym although the principal did not insist upon this as a requirement. He was quite happy for the school to be identified if I chose to do so. It was my choice that the school remain anonymous.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This study seeks to contribute both to the theory and the practice of boys' education by identifying the issues of concern and by supporting a group of teachers in school based curriculum in the area of boys' education. This purpose led the researcher to adopt a qualitative approach to research, namely action research. Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by a group of people collaborating to improve a social situation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This approach to research is characterised by: collaboration, self-reflection, transformation of ideas and practice of the participants and concern with improvement of a social problem. Another of the characteristics is that it is highly contextualised. It operates in a cyclic fashion with the four inter-related moments of observing, reflecting, planning and acting.

This study involved five such cycles. The first cycle began with an interview with the principal, proceeded through a number of cycles involving teachers and students and concluded six months later with a second interview with the principal. The data base included interviews, meeting minutes and student work and records. In addition, the researcher employed the methods of triangulation, reflexive subjectivity, face validity, and catalytic validity to achieve methodological rigor. The participants in the study and the researcher undertook this project with vague notions of the expected outcome and the next chapter sees the unfolding of the story of this action research project.

## CHAPTER 5: THE STORY OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

### 5.0 Introduction

This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of gendered teaching and learning in boys' education. Specifically it attempts to discover worthwhile teaching and learning activities that will assist adolescent boys to adopt a positive view of masculinity. The aims of this study are as follows:

- To further identify the issues which surround boys' education
- To support teachers involved in school based curriculum development in the area of boys' education.

In line with these aims, two pertinent research questions were raised at the outset of this study. These questions were:

*Question One:* What are the key issues surrounding boys' education?

*Question Two:* Would a curriculum intervention program support the personal development of adolescent boys?

Action research provided the methodological framework for the design of this study. This action research study involved five cycles with each cycle comprised of four "moments" of observing, reflecting, planning and acting.

## 5.1 The “Cycles” of the Research

### Cycle 1. Meeting with the Principal

This study commenced when I was visiting a boys’ boarding school in my role as a Gender Equity Officer for the Catholic Diocese of Townsville. The principal of the college expressed his interest in introducing some form of educational, intervention program for the boys in the school. The principal was anxious that “something” be done for the boys as he, like many other principals I have spoken to, was aware of a vague feeling that “all was not right” with boys in our schools. He and I spoke of the problems with boys’ education and the concerns I had absorbed at other schools. He had read some of the material written by Steve Biddulph (1995) who was fast becoming a man in demand as a guest speaker to parents and teachers all over Australia on the issue of masculinity. The principal had a few reservations about his writings. He did not like the way sport was always chosen as the negative expression of masculinity. He felt school sport was being stereotyped as the British public school experience which he saw as bearing no resemblance to a sports program which is introduced with concern for each individual child and his needs.

During these discussions, I recommended a program called *Boys and Relationships* (Hunt, et. al, 1995) as a possible intervention strategy. I suggested this for two reasons:

- I had attended an inservice on the program run by one of the authors, David Shores and was very impressed with the values running through the program and the philosophy of the authors.

- It was the only suitable program written for boys that I knew of.

The *Boys and Relationships* program was written in 1995 in South Australia. It evolved from the Children and Families Team at Tea Tree Gully Community Health Service, in conjunction with the Department of Education. It was an attempt to involve teachers in an intervention program for boys which challenged the stereotypical and problematical “male” behaviour. The writers of the program were seeing this stereotypical “male” behaviour resulting in domestic violence and suicide and hence their theme that “Men often hurt themselves and the ones they love”. The authors stress that the format is only a guide and really must be adapted for local context: these lessons focus on:

- (i) The Changing Roles of Men
- (ii) Feelings
- (iii) Expressing Feelings
- (iv) Behaviour Models
- (v) Heroes
- (vi) Conflict Resolution
- (vii) Conflict
- (viii) Overview

Although this program was written for senior primary students, I believed it would work with slight adaptation in a junior secondary situation. I suggested that there should be a trial implementation of this program with a class in the school. The principal readily agreed.

I did not want to have any contact with the boys myself as I felt the teachers were in a better position to work with them and I would work with the teachers as a group of



practitioners seeking to improve the situation. The principal suggested a Year 8 class would be ideal for this work as the class was made up of a variety of cultures, with boys from Papua New Guinea, (3 students) Aboriginals, (5 students) white rural (11 students) and white city (10 students). A few of the students were still in Grade 7 having agreed to come to boarding school early and do a 2 year Grade 8 course. This class was one of two grade 8 classes in the school:- a small one consisting of students who needed help with literacy and a mainstream class. I was to work with the mainstream class. We decided to start the program in second term as both students and teachers were just getting used to each other and the boys had just arrived into a boarding school situation.<sup>3</sup>

Four teachers were involved with this particular Grade 8 class. They would all be asked to participate in the teaching of the curriculum program. Three of the participants were male and one female. This was an important feature as much of the literature expresses a preference for male teachers to work with boys (Dunn, 1995. Biddulph, 1995. Browne 1995). I was glad, however, to be working with both male and female teachers as it gave a richer perspective to the discussion sessions. Two of the teachers involved with the class were experienced teachers of more than 15 years. One had a few years experience and the other was a first year teacher. All were invited to participate in the teaching of the curriculum program, *Boys and Relationships*. In this way, the teachers were part of a “package” that came with the particular class I was to work with. Because they had not volunteered out of an interest in the particular research project but were given an invitation which they may

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<sup>3</sup> Grade 8 is the first year of secondary school in Queensland.

have felt unable to refuse, I asked in my journal whether they would in fact be committed enough to undertake this research? Time would tell. I had the support of the principal, a class to work with, four teachers to invite into participation. All was in readiness to move into Cycle 2.

### Cycle 2. Small Group Meetings

The principal introduced me to the four teachers involved in teaching the Year 8 class which was to be the site for this study. Susan was an experienced female teacher who was actually the wife of the principal and the mother of three children. Paul was a teacher of three year's experience, recently married and Terry was a first year male teacher. Susan was interested to be involved in the study as she had a son approximately the same age as the boys participating in the program. She expressed a concern that her son might lose his sensitivity to life as she had observed had been the case with many other boys during adolescence. If being involved with the study helped her as a parent as well as a teacher, then she was keen. Paul was a little wary of being involved as he could not see the relevance within the context of his subject areas. "I am a Maths and Agriculture teacher" he said, but was willing to learn more about the program and agreed to come to the first meeting organised for a few weeks hence. Terry was fresh out of university and was most interested to get involved with such a program. He was confident that he had something to give to the project and was very interested in the issue of boys' education. He himself had attended a Christian Brothers' school; albeit one more traditional than St. Paul's. The fourth male teacher, David, a man of considerable teaching experience who also acted as a part time counsellor in the school was more than willing to take part in the project because he

was doing research on the spirituality of adolescent boys and thought we would have much to share and offer each other.

My agenda at this first meeting was twofold:

- To communicate my feelings that there was a problem with boys in schools. This was a vague feeling that I had absorbed from my readings on the subject and from the work I was doing in both primary and secondary schools in the Diocese, as well as from my extensive teaching experience in three states.
- To discuss the procedural steps of the program. We had a class of 29 boys with their four teachers. The program would have to be adapted for the big class and also take into account that the four teachers were working with the one class.

Our first meeting was naturally quite formal with all of us feeling our way. As noted in my journal, I was impressed with the keen attitude of all four teachers. I began the meeting by asking the question; “What do you hope for the boys in this school?” Terry answered by saying “I would hope that we would produce boys who are at peace with themselves”. This was an answer which fitted well into the objectives of the program we were about to launch, a hopeful sign.

When we discussed at length what major areas of concern they had about the boys in their care, two major concerns came through:

- That boys find it hard to accept their limitations and ask for help
- That boys are reticent about showing their softer side to their peers.

David gave the example of one of the boys in the class who, having been brought up by maiden aunts, thought the way to be accepted was to act tough. He had been involved

in a series of fights in the short time he had been at the school and most of these fights were unprovoked. Another example was used of a senior boy who quite happily showed his sensitivity to his peers but was hard and cold towards the junior boys.

I gave copies of the *Boys and Relationships* program to each of the members and asked them to look over the proposed eight lessons set out in the book. I also handed out a few articles dealing with the issues of boys in schools which were relevant to the program and also explained what other people were doing about the perceived problems with boys in Australian schools. The group decided that since Susan and Terry taught in the subject areas of Religion, Personal Development, English and Social Studies, they would be the best two to actually teach the lessons. Paul and David would act as critical friends, immersing themselves in the program and contributing to the discussions but not formally teaching the lessons. Paul was a little confused about this arrangement but agreed to run with it.

The second meeting was rather short as it occurred during lunch time. We changed the meeting times to lunch times as Susan had small children to organise after school. Paul was late for this meeting as he had detained some of the students from the class for failing to do their work in class. We agreed on two more meetings before actually starting the program with the students.

During the meeting all four teachers agreed that the program *Boys and Relationships* was well worth following as it was set out in the book. Terry felt a certain security by beginning as the book suggested on changing roles. Susan and Terry decided that they would alternate the lessons. Susan would start with lesson 1 and Terry would follow

with lesson 2 and so on. In the case where two weeks were devoted to a particular topic such as conflict resolution, the same teacher would follow it through. The starting date for the program with the students would be the first week of the second term. After discussing whether or not the boys should know why they were doing the program, we felt it was best to tell them the truth. Susan felt the novelty of giving “artificial answers” would last for “five minutes at the most”. This proved to be a correct presumption on her part.

The next step saw the group discussing the objectives of the program. David felt the thrust of the program was “cognitive” and saw that as a limited perspective without denying its validity. He spoke about the “marathon bike rides” which he instigated at the College and which he saw as a more effective means of personal development. These 9 day, 500 kilometre treks through the outback on push bikes are open to all students at the College and are part of a personal development program where each individual is helped to design a schedule which will challenge him towards his full potential. He spoke about his belief in using the Myers Briggs Indicator (McGuiness, Izard & McCrossin, 1992) to discuss with the boys their strengths and weaknesses and how they would be tested in such a demanding situation. Helping them to understand themselves better over the course of the bike ride was one of David’s major aims.

This lead to the question about improving behaviour as a result of classroom programs. Was it even worth introducing such a program? Paul spoke about his concern about an incident which he experienced on the school bus returning from an excursion. The boys verbally harassed and belittled a young woman walking nearby. He could not believe their language and their attitude. Boys who never would have behaved so badly

on their own were egged on by others. He felt it was not difficult to believe that the same boys could be involved with gang rape. After some discussion on this attitude, another perceived problem had emerged: That, when boys are all together, they can behave in an unacceptable and sometimes criminal way towards women.

I tabled some research (Bothe, 1995) done in other secondary schools in the diocese showing :

- boys are the bulk of the behavioral problems in schools;
- boys are achieving well below the girls academically;
- boys are opting out of leadership roles in a co-educational setting;

The group took copies of the research for perusal.

Terry surprised me by saying that he had read the whole of the book *Manhood* (Biddulph, 1995) since our last meeting. He found it challenging and thought provoking. As it was one of the key books used in my literature review, I felt reassured that he had taken the project so much to heart.

We discussed the principles of action research as “the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (Elliott, 1982, p.1). I stressed that we were a group of people engaging in reflective practice about the education of boys and that I was not the expert. This was a difficult point for both myself and the group. I felt a certain “responsibility” that the group go well and come up with some answers. In my journal I noted that my need for control was something I would have to work on if the research was to be successful. Added to that, the group were not yet taking ownership of the process and still looked to me to organise their next move. They

agreed to have one more meeting before the program started with the students. Terry in particular felt the need of another meeting

The third and last meeting before the launching of the program was also very short. Susan and Terry had discussed the arrangement of teaching alternate weeks and re-arranged the program to suit this arrangement. They agreed not to use the time set aside for personal development as this could then be used as a debriefing time if needed. David, offered his services to be a back-up person if either Susan or Terry needed to use him either by splitting the class or by team teaching. David was quite happy with his role as a critical friend who could observe the boys during his informal art class and re-enforce the work of Susan or Terry if the need arose.

We then discussed the likely problems. The difficulty most anticipated was the domination of the more vocal boys who were capable of hijacking the lesson.

Strategies were evolved to allow everyone to participate. David shared a method he often used whereby each boy was only allowed one comment and he had to wait his turn. When time for his comment came, the student had to decide to speak about his own re-action to the issues discussed or to refute what another student had said. Gary said that almost always, the boy would choose to speak about himself rather than about what another student had said.

By this stage of the school year, the four teachers had a much better idea of the students in the class as they had been teaching them for seven weeks. The rest of the meeting was spent discussing the lack of role models that the boys had in their lives and the many dysfunctional families that many of them came from. Taking the boys

from where they were at was seen as essential to any program focusing on behaviour.

It seemed then, that all was in readiness for the program to start.

- the teachers were organised;
- the class had become a familiar entity;
- the problems had been anticipated;
- the program had been studied.

Some issues had emerged from our preliminary discussions:

- That boys find it hard to accept their limitations and ask for help;
- That boys are reticent about showing their softer side to peers;
- That, when boys are all together, they can behave in an unacceptable and sometimes criminal way towards women;
- That many boys come from dysfunctional families and have few, if any, suitable male role models.

The first two of these concerns mirror the concerns which prompted the writers of the program, *Boys and Relationships*, to produce a school based document. As the aims of the program are generally to develop the boys' self esteem so that they celebrate being male, enjoying their feelings in a positive and enriching way, it was interesting to see how closely these concerns reflected a program written in an entirely different context in the capital city of Adelaide. Perhaps this suggested there were similar problems facing boys all around Australia. It would be interesting to see whether these same concerns would remain as the main concerns at the end of the following term.



At this point of time, I felt that the project was going well. The group had shown themselves to be caring and positive about their students and anxious to help them improve. They were showing a true understanding of action research which recognises that “any phase of data-gathering and interpretation can only be one tentative step forward, *not* a final answer” (Winter, 1989. p.14). Understandably there were concerns about generalizing problems which filtered through about individual boys; and there were also vague feelings of discomfort that there were problems in the boys’ lives which had not yet been identified or articulated.

### Cycle 3. Implementation of the Curriculum Program.

A pre-program questionnaire had been given to the boys before the first lesson. (appendix 4d) At the first meeting of second term, these results were discussed and many responses surprised the teachers. Aggression and the handling of it featured largely in the boys’ minds and the fear of alienation from peers was very strong. The fear of alienation has been documented by writers as such a strong driving force that boys are prepared to go against their own better judgments rather than being ostracised by the group (Connell, 1989; Walker, 1988; Biddulph, 1995; Martino, 1995).

One boy wrote about his loneliness and his desire to change himself to: “be more of a man and not laugh like a girl.” Others spoke of their desire to change their “attitude” so that they would treat teachers, parents and friends better. They expressed the feeling that they allowed their emotions to get out of control resulting in behaviour which they regretted. In light of the theme of the *Boys and Relationships* program, that males often hurt themselves and the people they loved, this was an interesting comment. A quite surprisingly strong comment was also on the boys’ dissatisfaction with their

physical appearance. Having tended to associate teenage girls with such a pre occupation with physical appearance, here we were hearing boys express concern at their “weight”, their “face” and their “lack of physical strength”. As these boys were only new in a boarding school, the fear of “not fitting in” was not surprising. Many were from different cultures and were obviously homesick.

Sport and schoolwork were also very important features of the boys’ lives and most wanted to be more successful in these fields. The questions tapped into some interesting perceptions of the boys about what being male was all about. 10 boys responded that the worst thing about being a boy is that you have to work much harder than girls and 12 responded that the best thing about being a male is that you don’t have to give birth and have periods. This last perception drew agreement from some of the male participants in the study.

Terry was the first to report about his lesson. He was not very enthusiastic! When the boys were told about the study, most were unfazed and seemed happy enough to engage in a “pilot” program. However, when it came to written work, there were those who “performed” for the class and used the written sheets to display their extensive knowledge of the world and what masculinity was really for! It was the “quality” of this written work that encouraged Terry to abandon the “homework” sheets from the booklet and focus on oral discussion instead. But even here, he found that some of the louder boys, as anticipated, had tried to hijack the lesson. He seemed disappointed that the lesson which he had prepared extensively, did not go to plan. As he acknowledged himself, he had prepared far too much work for the time allotted and had gone “too deeply too quickly.” He had overestimated the boys’ ability to absorb

the material and had gone way over time into another lesson. At this point, I reminded myself that Terry was a first year teacher and hoped I had not put him in a compromising situation. He was happy that the boys had responded well to the drama and the games, but disappointed that they had remained restless for the theoretical part. I also had to keep in mind that the boys at St. Paul's College were not "easy" boys to teach. Many came from dysfunctional families and parental emphasis on education at home was not a strong feature.

Susan gave a more favourable account of her first lesson which followed on from the pre-program questionnaire. She placed the boys in groups and asked them to use butcher's paper to express their responses. She found that their respect for each other was quite good and they took the activities seriously. Susan explained some interesting themes emerging namely:

- their acceptance of male dominance;
- the solving of problems by resorting to violence.

She was also staggered by their horror of their perceptions of what it must be like to give birth. The group floated the idea that maybe it was television which gave the students such a horrific picture, that birth in films was often used as a traumatic background in life and death situations when the person giving birth either died or had horrific complications.

At this point in the discussions, Susan made the comment that the course was time consuming in preparation and that resources were difficult to find when the school was so far from a major city. She had been searching for a poster showing men in non traditional work environments but was not successful. There were plenty of posters

showing women in non traditional occupations but none showing men in the same light. This inability to find such a resource was an interesting point in itself. Both Susan and Terry who were involved in the actual teaching component had given a great deal of their time in making sure that the lessons went well. I noted in my journal that I had to fight the temptation to feel guilty for “imposing more work” on these already hard working teachers. We were all working towards improving the teaching and learning of boys.

Paul, in his mathematics lessons, had not heard the boys speaking about the program. However during our meeting he did talk about the parent/teacher interviews the previous weekend. He was overwhelmed by the loving concern which the parents had for their sons, even the parents of the more challenging boys that he was finding difficult to see anything positive about. After talking to the parents, he resolved to see those same boys in a different light, through their parent’s eyes. I found this an interesting comment as one of the recurring themes which comes through the literature is the fact that those who teach boys should actually *like* them (Browne, 1995; Fletcher, 1995; Martino, 1995; Biddulph, 1995; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). Here we had a teacher who was sincerely struggling to *like* some of the boys and prepared to work at it.

The next meeting would see the students half way through their program. A rather traumatic start for Terry had dampened his enthusiasm somewhat so I resolved to look for extra materials to help him out. I found a newly published work on the education of boys, *Challenging Macho Values*, (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996). These two practitioners published several lesson plans which were heavily based on meditation

and reflection. I sent these to Terry as they were far more structured, directive and spiritually based than the lessons in the *Boys and Relationships* program.

At the next meeting, I noticed a difference in Terry. David was sick and so did not attend and Paul was late as he had detained some recalcitrant students. Susan and Terry had both decided to use some of the new materials I sent and were happy with their lessons. The digression onto the far more structured work from *Challenging Macho Values* had been successful. One of the strong anecdotal beliefs about teaching boys is that they need more structure than girls (Biddulph, 1996). Perhaps there was some truth in that. Susan spoke about the meditation exercise whereby boys had to take on the identity of a boy about their age who had been alienated and put themselves in his shoes (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996. P. 56 - 59). It was a rather long meditation done in silence but she reported that they seemed to take to it very well, and some asked if they could do it again. She did remove one boy who was not coping with the exercise as she felt he was breaking the concentration of the others. Terry operated a highly structured group activity which involved each boy listening to the other and responding. He told them directly that if they didn't behave, there would not be any more of this work. They decided to behave.

Since the last meeting, the tragedy of the Port Arthur Massacre took place. A lone gunman took his automatic rifle and killed 35 tourists and workers at the Port Arthur historic convict site in Tasmania. Susan described how the boys related the event to the discussions which had taken place during the program. They talked about the "iceberg" (appendix 4f) which showed the tip (anger) surfacing above the water but the other emotions of frustration, loneliness, fear and confusion featured below the water line.

Maybe the gunman had stored his feelings under the surface for too long. I found Susan's story interesting because the week previously I had been working with a teacher of boys much the same age in an isolated mining town. When I suggested she could use the Port Arthur event as an example of bottling up aggression, she scoffed. Apparently, she had tried to introduce the topic as I suggested and had been horrified at the boys' response. The boys who contributed to the discussion had no sympathy for the victims but were in awe of the gunman and his expertise with the weapon he chose to execute his task. She felt the lesson had been completely hi-jacked. They felt smug and she came away feeling powerless and depressed. In contrast was the response from the boys at St. Paul's who had every sympathy for the victims and their families, especially as they knew how difficult it would be for their families if something happened to them when they were living apart, such as at boarding school. Of course there would have been many contributing factors to the different response but I noted in my journal that maybe the program was having some effect on the boys' understanding of why people act the way they do. Susan felt the discussion which followed about guns and domestic violence was a sensible and fruitful one because they had so much lead up on the issues of feelings and conflict resolution. Although a dreadful tragedy, the Port Arthur Massacre presented itself as a practical example of the issues spoken about in the course.

The last meeting of the teaching phase was short and fairly unproductive. It was during the busy part of second term when there were many interruptions due to illness. The aim of the meeting was to begin to measure our original aims against the outcomes but to start with, there was a mix up in the dates for the meeting and by the time we got started, we had very little discussion time. Although the program was supposed to be

finished, Terry wanted to go over a few unresolved issues with the students and needed extra time. We decided our next meeting had to be after school for a longer period of time as we needed to evaluate the program.

#### Cycle 4. Evaluation by the teachers and the students.

In preparation for the evaluation meeting, I sent out evaluation sheets with questions matching up to the original aims. (Appendix 6) I did this in keeping with the idea that “observation must be planned so that there will be a documentary basis for subsequent reflection” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988. P. 13). I also requested that the meeting be taped. All were quite happy with that suggestion. By the time the evaluation meeting occurred, the group was acting as a cohesive group with a solid grasp of the issues of boys’ education. I noted in my journal that at the beginning I had been fairly tense about the success of the group and that had caused me to push some of the discussions too strongly. With this meeting, I turned on the tape recorder, sat back and listened to what the group had to say. The pre-evaluation questionnaires I had sent out had helped the group to focus on the task of matching up the objectives of the program with the reality of its effectiveness.

A possible dilemma had presented itself to me as I perused the data collected to this point. The fact that the research was being conducted at a single sex boys’ school meant that there was very little mention of girls and virtually no comparisons being made. The work I had done previously at co-educational schools had relied heavily on comparisons; in the area of leadership, academic performance and behaviour. The participants in the group however, saw their students as children first, not as boys. This

fact, I felt, was interesting in the light of the literature I had read. Much of this literature had seen boys as different from girls, as distinctly masculine. Here at St. Paul's College, boys were treated as people first. The problems arising may have been distinctly masculine but without conducting similar studies in girl's schools and in other boys' schools, I could not make that assumption. So far the only distinctly masculine trait which had emerged was the boys' feeling of dominance and their verbal ill treatment of women.

If the problems we have with masculinity in schools is due to nurture or cultural stereotyping (Walker, 1988; Connell, 1989 & 1995; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Shores, 1995; Browne, 1995; Fletcher, 1995), I was anxious to understand what the program *Boys and Relationships* had done to increase the boys' understanding of gender stereotyping. I asked the participants about this and their responses were of interest.

I think they understand it (stereotyping) cognitively but they are victims of it, so it's not a matter of saying, "now that I understand it, my behaviour will change" (David)

Sometimes they act like the stereotype, and they know they're doing it, but they do it anyway. It has become some sort of awareness....I guess they use it sometimes. Other times it's not worth it. (Terry)

I found it hard even finding material that wasn't stereotypical when I was doing that lesson. I couldn't find non-stereotypical pictures anywhere. I wanted a male nurse, things like that, but there was nothing. (Susan)

The group agreed that for students to breakaway from the stereotypical image of what is expected of boys this age, they must be confident in themselves, and many adolescents do not yet have that confidence. David gave the example of one of the young students in the class:



He, “x” is centred very much on his own integrity, rather than the stereotype image. The emphasis is what I have to give from my creative centre. I use this approach to “y” and other kids...I say to them, “look, they call you these names and this rubbish, but you know that’s not you. Come back to who you know you, yourself are and develop your gifts so that you leave that social model behind. What you’ve got to give becomes who you are as a person. (David)

I asked David if he believed that leaving the “social model” behind was the sign of maturity.

It becomes a case of giving them a goal to aim for and for them to move towards that goal as their own personal development. (David)

So it appeared the course had alerted the boys to what stereotyping meant but had given them no strategies to help them integrate that knowledge into their lives and thus change their behaviour.

We moved on then to the question of “feelings”. Terry felt that the boys had no trouble expressing their feelings “collectively” but then qualified this statement by saying:

Anger and injustice are expressed with ease. But I’m sure there are some feelings they can’t express. (Terry)

He then went on to tell the story of “w” who was obviously upset about something but would not divulge what it was. It was ages before he, Terry, discovered what the problem was and then it was only that another boy had told him. Apparently “w” had been teased and called a “poofter” and the insult went so deep, he could not speak about it.

I’d agree with (Terry). In a peer group situation, it’s the type of feeling that’s expressed. The anger and all that sort of stuff. But it’s not the hurt, it’s not the pain they’re trying to resolve. (David)

Paul was inclined to disagree:

I don't know. I kept those ----- in at lunchtime because they didn't do their homework. They didn't have any trouble expressing their feelings! (Paul)

They'll express those feelings; feelings of injustice and anger. But when they're hurt, they'll bottle it up (David)

But they know it's not good to bottle up feelings. I think they've learned that. That came home to me when they talked about the Port Arthur incident. They pointed at what happens if you keep your feelings inside. (Susan)

I think they refer to what is right and wrong, not what they experience. At this stage in life, they're testing feelings because they're building their own emotional body and therefore what they experience needs to be honoured not judged. Then a positive feedback comes from the source of anger etc. In one sense you're detached as a teacher but understanding what's happening in them and always give positive response if you possibly can because they're really testing to find out where their feelings are coming from...these kids want to say what they're feeling without being judged. There's so much hurt. That came home to me on the first bike ride when they tore each other to shreds. I had to change my whole strategy. (David)

I picked up on the comment of the hurt and asked if they thought these particular kids were more hurt than other kids in schools around the place.

Definitely (Terry)

This was an interesting comment from Terry as this was his first year teaching and he had not been exposed to students in very many schools.

There might be a few kids in there that are hurt but most of them don't seem too bad. (Paul)

Just look at their family histories, mate, and the low number of "normal" (if you call marriage normal) families. There must be an incredible amount of hurt.

“P”s mother for example; she’s not his mother. Did you know that? These kids are dealing with all this. (David)

As the researcher, I couldn’t help feeling that this sort of discussion would have been good before the program started as it was dealing with such an important issue of teacher/student relationships. The group was using the program to discuss educational issues far beyond the scope of the program. They were demonstrating a tremendous awareness and concern for their students and the life experiences they had come from.

We moved onto conflict resolution; the difference between aggressive, assertive and passive behaviour.

They understand it in role plays done in class but whether or not they integrate it into their lives outside the classroom is another thing. (Susan)

I think they are more aware of “the way to act” rather than knowing the term “assertive...it helps when I use “I” messages. We spent a lot of time on conflict and conflict resolution; they know about the three conflict models and the one to aim for, win/win and we talked a lot about compromising. (Terry)

The boys had certainly covered the course. Whether or not it had been successful in bringing about change remains to be seen. As time was running out, I needed to address the two questions:

- Do you think this program has been worth doing?
- What do you now see as the key issues of boys’ education?

All of the teachers involved in the program saw its worth; but there were some qualifications as all saw it as having a limited effect when it is not part of a whole

school approach. Susan expressed the feeling that sometimes it felt contrived, talking about such in depth emotions in a 40 minute lesson.

The older boys need it badly. Their self-esteem is so low that they express it in violence. (Paul)

It needs to be balanced with affective work. It is too cognitive. Sitting in class is a non-active activity. They need to be... breaking horses with someone who is a role model. (David)

The group was too big (Terry and Susan)

It was interesting to note that when the Arts Council came, the boys who participated in the activities were all from that class. (Terry)

The preparation was difficult with few resources. (Susan)

Because the teachers cannot see the world from the boys' view, and because the program was ultimately meant to help the boys in forming their masculinity, it was essential to evaluate the program from the boys' point of view. To do this, I needed someone who was not involved in the actual teaching program but who had been a part of the research team. David was the obvious choice for his skill with adolescent boys and his grasp of the aims of the program. He was willing to carry out this task and so we set up a short meeting to discuss the process.

We decided it had to be a small group of students and that it had to combine both written and oral evaluation with the emphasis on the oral. Because of Terry's earlier experience with the written sheets, this seemed an appropriate decision. David selected every third student from an alphabetical list giving him nine students. One of those did

not attend the evaluation meeting. The remaining eight were each interviewed individually using 2 reference sheets.(Appendix 7). Because of their lack of written skills, David transcribed what the boys said, showed it to them for confirmation and made any necessary changes.

It is important to note that this evaluation meeting was more than two months after the program had finished. Grade 8 boys have short memories about what happens in the classroom as can be described by the response to the question:

(David) Do you remember the course?

(5) I don't remember anything about second term. Did we do it then?

Although I was a little worried about the length of time which had passed, I could also see the advantages. If the program was to be truly beneficial, its effects would have to last at least two months. The fact that the boys were chosen at random was good as the authors of the *Boys and Relationships* program discourage the "selection" of particular boys to do the course, stressing that it is meant to appeal to all boys.

When the boys' memories had been jolted a little and they did remember doing the program, most expressed positive feedback about their enjoyment of it. They remembered the role plays and the class discussion. The specific comments they made were: "fun" "involved the whole class" "learning more about yourself" learning more about women" "good to hear what others thought". Some of the negatives were "the class played up" and "it was confusing". The latter comment referred to difficult concepts introduced which the boys didn't understand.

When David interviewed each boy individually, after they had had their memories jolted by the word association sheet, (Appendix 7) reactions emerged in far more

depth. When they were asked if they had learned anything about themselves as boys some the responses were varied:

I learnt things. I thought only girls cry but it's o.k for boys too. Showed me not to be embarrassed about what others think...your own opinions are the only ones that count. I reckon it was good, it was fun. Some lost their cool when you said things, so you just lay off them. Some shared bullying stories and family troubles and I learnt to be more sensitive to them. (Student 1)

I learnt a little bit about what being a man means. At my old school I used to cry whenever I got into trouble. Now I can take it a bit more. Thinking about yourself is hard but...probably worthwhile. I think I can understand other people's anger a bit more, you know the thing about the iceberg and that. (Appendix 4f) (Student 4)

In discussing the content of the course with a different person from the one who taught it, the boys were able to clarify what that content was. They were seeing the concept of feelings, anger, assertiveness etc from a different angle. As David handed me these data, I was convinced of the need to follow up such a program with individual interaction. It took the boys a while to formulate what the course had done for them but when they did it was invaluable data. The program gave the boys a springboard to talk about "crying" as the two above respondents have, and for the following boys to speak about "feelings" and about their frustrations with "group discussion".

(Terry's) explanation helped me understand more about what it means to be a boy. I understand more about my feelings and people treat me differently since those talks (Student 5)

Nothing. Definitely nothing. You can't discuss things with our class, they make too much noise. I listen to people I know and learn from books...and from the bike ride. I learnt a lot about myself on the bike ride. It (the *Boys and Relationships* program) should be done in primary school; most people in high school find it too embarrassing to talk about feelings and heroes and

stuff. I don't care much for heroes. I think we should do more quiet stuff like that meditation stuff - that was good. (Student 3)

I thought we all showed our feelings; it was a great help to me. I know, now, that it's ok for me to show my feelings and be me. When other people get used to showing their feelings, we can all get used to it. I think it's important that the teacher can show feelings too....like you can sir. You are relaxed with showing *your* feelings. Year 8 Gold is a happier class now, better than before! (Student 6)

Some people had some good stuff to say. Listening to them talk about anger helped me a bit but ...no... it didn't help me much. I think it would be better done with older grades, like grade 10. I don't remember much about the words we used. The bike ride helped me a lot; how to set goals and that and how to be helpful to other people.(Student 2)

I don't remember anything. (Student 8)

David and I discussed the importance of "personal" relationships between the teacher and the student. The program had been taught to a class of 29 students at a time when they were all in the process of "fitting in" to a new environment. This follow up with 8 students, chosen randomly, two months later spotlighted the benefits of the program and also suggested possible changes if it were to be repeated at a later date.

#### Cycle 5. Interview with the Principal

My second interview with the Principal, a rather lengthy discussion which I tape-recorded, was used as a critique not only of the program but of the whole issue of intervention in the area of boys' education. As The Principal did not know the program as intimately as the teachers involved in the research, we spoke about it in very general terms. The interview was used to reflect on the experience, in keeping with the recommendations of good action research.

Reflection seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints ...it takes account of the variety of perspectives possible in the social situation and comprehends the issues and circumstances in which they arise (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p.13).

During this interview, which was six months after my first interview when the idea about doing “something” for the boys was first suggested, I felt that both of us had a much clearer understanding of the issue of what the boys needed. The principal had given a lot of thought to issues such as providing an outlet for boys to express their feminine side. He spoke openly about the affection with which the boys treated each other and how he had learnt to accept the way they touched each other with a jovial affection, even though this was difficult for him with his Anglo/Irish upbringing.

I think we’re continually surprised, especially in the boarding situation. Things like putting arms round each other, the warmth shown to each other, the lack of fear of touching each other that I haven’t seen anywhere else, I find myself being threatened sometimes, but to them it’s the most natural thing in the world to put your arms round someone and say “How you going mate?”. Today there’s a real paranoia, it’s forced us into a real stand offishness but between the kids there’s not the same fear. There’s an amazing amount of warmth which generates between them. The PNG and Aboriginal kids especially are demonstrative with their feelings.

Reflection on the research was a valuable part of the cycle. When I asked the principal if he believed the program had had a positive influence on the boys, he expressed doubts.

Perhaps it was a bit artificial, contrived. I prefer the more holistic approach. Through our personal development program of meditation, the bike rides, the faith development program and our role modelling of balanced teachers...most of the right thing should be covered in a more integrated way.

This, of course, would be the ideal - for the hidden curriculum of the school to encompass all of the aims of the program. The evaluation with the students, however, suggested that sometimes the messages of the school are too subtle and that a



cognitive program can have the effect of articulating what the school ethos embraces in this hidden curriculum. At the end of the interview, we returned to our original concerns of six months previously, that there was need of “something” to be done for the boys. I asked the principal what he felt now about boys growing up male in our society; what did he hope for them:

That boys can be the person they want to be and not what other boys say they must be. If they have a strong image of themselves, with balanced role models, I don't think it's important whether they are in a single sex school or a co-educational school. I used to be a strong supporter of co-ed schools before I came here, but now, I'm not so sure. If the school is not the “boys' own club” organisation that some boys' schools are, I think they can be positive, nurturing places.

Single sex schools are often seen as breeding places for the chauvinistic male who exhibits the antithesis of masculinity expressed in the program, *Boys and Relationships*. In my experience of conducting this study for six months, the anecdotal evidence condemning single sex boys' schools appeared to be questionable. The research at the end of this fifth cycle was suggesting more questions than it was answering and it was becoming apparent that further work would have to be done. The principal and I discussed the desirability of presenting the findings to the staff towards the end of fourth term or early next year. This would then hopefully lead to further initiatives within the school as it worked towards the improvement of boys' education..

## **5.2 Conclusion.**

This research study had progressed through five cycles, each with its own “moments” of observing, reflecting, planning and acting. Each cycle had suggested more questions than it offered solutions in the area of boys' education;. The five cycles were:

- (i) Initial meeting with the principal;
- (ii) Meeting with the small group of teachers;
- (iii) Teaching the program;
- (iv) Evaluation by teachers and students of the program;
- (v) Second interview with the principal.

The whole issue was complex and we had only touched the surface of “gendered” learning. In Chapter Six, the findings of the study will be summarised and discussed.

## CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

### 6.0 Introduction.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to both the theory and practice of boy's education. The aims of the study were to identify the issues surrounding boys' education and to support the teachers engaged in a school based curriculum development in the area of boys' education. Two questions were posed at the beginning of this study. They were:

*Question One:* What are the key issues surrounding boys' education?

*Question Two:* Would a curriculum intervention program support the personal development of adolescent boys.

This concluding chapter reviews the findings and evaluates the program chosen: *Boys and Relationships* (Hunt, et. al, 1995) in terms of bringing about an improvement in the boys' understanding of their own masculinity, a masculinity which is seen as problematical in today's society.

The education of boys provides the theme and central concern of this study. Here it was recognised that the development of adolescent boys is problematic because of concerns about gendered teaching and learning in education and the masculinity crisis in society in general. Of particular concern was the personal development of adolescent boys in one Catholic, single sex, boarding school in an isolated part of Queensland.

This concluding chapter begins with an overview of the study. The lessons of the study

are reviewed and summarized in terms of the two research questions raised at the outset of this study.

## **6.1 The Design of the Study**

The design of the study, as outlined in Chapter Four, has its own history. Initially it was recognised that there were both qualitative and quantitative approaches available to the researcher. It was felt that a qualitative approach would give more credence to the subjective experience of the participants and a form of qualitative research known as action research was chosen. In this particular design, five cycles were followed through, each cycle having its own “moments” of observing, reflecting, planning and acting.

Cycle 1. Meeting with the Principal. A Grade 8 class and 4 class teachers were chosen for the site of the study.

Cycle 2. Small Group Meeting. The teacher /participants came together with various vague notions about the education of boys and set about studying the *Boys and Relationships* curriculum program.

Cycle 3. Implementation of the Curriculum Program. Two of the teachers were formally involved with the teaching of the program while the other two acted as support teachers dealing with the program informally.

Cycle 4. Evaluation by the Small Group. Meetings were held throughout term 2 while the program was being formally taught. Lessons were changed, adapted or omitted while other resources were included.

Cycle 5. Concluding Interview with the Principal. This second interview allowed both the principal and the researcher to reflect on the original interview with the vague feelings of unrest about the education of boys and to critically reflect on what had eventuated over the six months of the program.

## **6.2 Lessons From The Journey.**

The original questions at the outset of the study were twofold:

- (i) What are the key issues surrounding boys' education?
- (ii) Would a curriculum intervention program support the personal development of adolescent boys?

The first of these questions was to identify and articulate the issues surrounding boys' education. From a study of the body of literature and the interpretation of the data from the group working with boys in a Year 8 class at St. Paul's College, the following concerns have been identified. It is worth noting the strong similarity between these concerns and the concerns of Biddulph (1995) documented in Chapter Three. In reflecting on the concerns emerging from this study, I have used the same points as used by Biddulph (1995).

- Boys are receiving the message that being male is dirty, dangerous and inferior (Biddulph, 1995). The boys from St. Paul's College expressed a pressure from society that they be the "provider" and the "strong" one of a relationship involving both sexes but they also expressed a confusion about their role in society. This reflected the work of Farrell (1994). Their role in society is not as clear to the boys

as it has been to past generations. In the evaluation done by David, it became apparent that some of the boys grew to a new awareness of what it means to be a boy in our society. "I thought we all showed our feelings, it was a great help to me...I learnt a little bit about what being a man means." (Student 4), or "I thought only girls cry but it's O.K. for boys too...showed me not to be embarrassed" (Student 1). If, as Biddulph (1995) claims, males feel almost apologetic for their masculinity, there is need for some form of intervention to counter this culture. The *Boys and Relationships Program* could well have provided an opportunity for this to happen. Indeed Susan's story of the boys not wanting a "sex symbol" as a partner but wanting someone they can relate to was a perfect opportunity for this intervention to occur.

- Male mentoring, including fathering, is lacking. Many boys have no father or father figure as an important fixture in their lives and many boys go from school to home being surrounded totally by females. Those who do have fathers at home often do not communicate with them in a meaningful way (Biddulph, 1995; Fletcher, 1995), and the passing on of malehood from one generation to the next is accompanied by mixed messages and doubtful role models (Carr-Gregg, 1996).

This lack of male role models has been recognised as a problem at St. Paul's and the personal development program already operating in the form of the bike rides and the faith development program is attempting to address this issue. One of the most passionate discussions experienced within the group was one where this lack of a balanced gender role modelling was identified. Many of the boys had experienced a father leaving the family home and many others had experienced traumatic family break

down. In 1992, in N.S.W, there was no father living in 84% of single parent families (O'Doherty Report, 1994, p.17). When Paul expressed the idea that he couldn't see much evidence of boys suffering from hurt, David disagreed vehemently. "Just look at their family histories, mate, and the low number of "normal," if you call marriage normal, families. There must be an incredible amount of hurt." David also told the story of the women, mother and aunts, who had sent one of the boys to St. Paul's to mix with men as there had been none in his life to date. An awareness of this lack of role models for young men is growing. The book *Manhood* by Steve Biddulph (1995) has been read by several staff members and even some of the students by the time of writing. As most of the book deals with the relationship between father and son, it is interesting to note its popularity. David, in his selection of boys to take on the bike ride, takes into account the boys who have no male role model at home.

- Playgrounds and classrooms are not always safe, physically or mentally. As discussed in Chapter Three, the hegemonic male decides what is acceptable as "male" and what is not. Thus, the "outcasts" of male society, that is, the boys who show "unmasculine" characteristics can be unmercifully teased and harassed by the "cool" group (Walker, 1988; Connell, 1989). The term, "boys will be boys" is often used by teachers as well as other adults to excuse inappropriate behaviour (Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Browne, 1995) and the school plays a vital role in either maintaining or challenging this attitude (Connell, 1989). The boys at St. Paul's are no exception to this need for approval as "masculine". They express the need to fit in, not to be alienated. Terry's story about the boy who was obviously upset, but who could not talk about the reason for his upset is an example of this. The other boys had called him a "poofster." They had done this within days of

experiencing a lesson on stereotyping. To be labelled as a non-masculine boy by his peers was the worst possible insult. For some boys, the classroom and the playground can be a source of unhappiness and tension. This was identified by the participants as a real problem. Aggression and solving problems by using violence was an ever present occurrence.

- Boys have difficulty celebrating their own masculinity. The boys in this study, when asked to list the best things about being male often resorted to negative, anti-social aspects of being male. And again, some thought the best thing about being a boy was not being a girl having to experience periods or child birth. Very few thought of positive aspects of being male. Susan said that one of the best parts of being involved in this study was to watch the growth of the boys and to grow in awe of their goodness and generosity. To be able to focus on that goodness was what writers say is needed when working with boys (Dunn, 1995; Fletcher, 1995). The celebrating of “masculinity” was happening at St. Paul’s in various ways:- the bike rides, the performance of their own aboriginal male dance troupe, sport, riding, farming, performing in rodeos and in general, the clear expectations of what it means to be a boy in the community of St. Paul’s, with respect for people and nature. One of the questions I noted in my journal was whether this same celebration would have been possible in a co-educational setting.
- Boys are finding it more difficult than girls to achieve their academic potential. This is noted in the first years of school where boys display lack of fine motor skills and continues through secondary school where it is expressed by their poor literacy skills (Alloway, et. al, 1996; O’Doherty Report, 1995; Whitby, 1996.) The boys of



St. Paul's in this Year 8 class were well aware of the need to achieve academically and wished that they could do better but the sharings of the participants expressed the boy's lack of organisational skills, especially in written work. Terry abandoned any written worksheets as it was clear early in the research that the boys' lack of skill in this area would jeopardise the aims of the program. In this particular area of literary competence, the experience of the boys involved in the study appeared to reflect more closely the general picture gained from research in the wider Australian community.

In summary, therefore, the concerns identified in the Year 8 class at St. Paul's College, closely identified the concerns documented in the literature (Biddulph, 1995; Fletcher, 1995; Farrell, 1994; Jackson & Salisbury, 1996), that boys are receiving negative messages about being a male from the media and from society, that they are drastically underfathered, that they do not know how to celebrate their masculinity in a positive way, that their expression of masculinity is determined in a narrow way and that their literary skills are not adequate.

In response to the second question, the study provided lessons regarding both the strengths and the weaknesses of curriculum, interventions such as the *Boys and Relationships* program. These will be discussed here:

- Discrete Programs are limited unless they are integrated into a whole school approach.

When people are confronted with a problem, quick fix programs are very attractive propositions. Then when the same programs don't cause a significant change in behavior, people become very cynical. What this research has shown is the desirability of the integration of discrete programs with a whole school approach to the education of boys. In support of this theory, the authors of the *Boys and Relationships Program*, make it very clear that they do not promise a "quick fix" to the problems facing adolescent boys, but stress that the best education comes through a whole school approach. "It is suggested that this program will be most effective when it is a part of an overall school approach to gender based socialization" (Hunt, et.al, 1995. p.6). If that is not possible, however, they suggest the program as a discrete entity to be used when the whole school approach is not possible, claiming that it "has the potential to enrich all boys' lives, regardless of any perceived difference in levels of need"(p 6).

The evaluation of the program at St. Paul's, was completed firstly by the teaching group who studied and taught its contents for six months, secondly by the principal who was kept abreast of what was happening, and thirdly by the students who were the recipients and the reason for the program. Although all could see good points about the program, a strong theme coming through was its limited nature. Susan said that sometimes it felt "contrived" to be discussing such in depth concepts as "feelings" in a 40 minute classroom situation.

The concern for the researcher was whether a curriculum program was the best way to model positive masculinity to boys in the process of developing their own masculinity.

As mentioned earlier in this study, the principal had misgivings about a discrete program being the right way to tackle the problem. He was very aware of the single sex environment of the school where there were very few females on the staff but countered this by recruiting balanced staff, whether they were male or female, so that the boys saw the different expressions of masculinity or femininity, and saw men who were comfortable with both the masculine and feminine side of life.

I try to hire staff that I know will share that same vision of the school as a community embracing differences...people that I've heard about that would fit in well. And we're getting there (principal)

What he was speaking about here was the “informal” curriculum. The “informal” curriculum of a school is the climate, spirit or ethos of the particular school (Flynn, 1993. P.5):- the messages that get shouted loud and clear even though they may be quite different from the articulated messages of the vision statement. From my impressions of St. Paul's College, the informal curriculum echoed the aims and objectives of the *Boys and Relationships* program and fitted in with the values expounded that boys need help to channel their masculinity in a positive way.

But what of the program? It was the general opinion of the participants that the boys understood the issues “cognitively” but once class had finished, they were still “victims” of behaving the way they thought they should. Yet, some of the boys had made some attempt to build the lessons from the program into their lives. The journey to maturity is a long and individual one. The fear of alienation is very strong. The students themselves spoke of this as a real issue - their need for peer approval and their fitting in as a basic desire. Young adolescents do not want to be alienated from

the group and will not choose alternative behaviour strategies if it is going to alienate them.

One of the aims of the *Boys and Relationships* program was to provide a supportive atmosphere where these alternative strategies could be rehearsed. Writers on the issue of boys' education suggest these strategies can be achieved by building on their relationship with the boys in their class to discuss an emotionally threatening issue with them, for example that of homosexuality (Palotta-Chiarolli, 1995.). At St. Paul's, there was evidence that this atmosphere was there on occasions throughout the teaching of the course, but there were also times when it wasn't. Terry gave an example of a boy in the class who had been upset for some time and wouldn't divulge what was wrong. A classmate finally told Terry what it was. He had been teased by the others in the class who called him a "poofter". That fact in itself was not surprising but what disappointed Terry was that the victim had felt so ashamed of this label that he would not tell his teacher. Stereotyping in practice was different from learning about it in theory.

Therefore we have the dilemma. What is more effective? Specific teaching units or a spontaneous intervention approach springing from the informal curriculum? The findings would support both in our modern education structure. Both would be ideal. It would be true to say however that if the informal curriculum were clear enough, and adhered to strongly enough, there would be no need for interventional programs. But that is an ideal.

The idea of intervention as a spontaneous act when the need arises is one which many writers have advocated (Connell, 1996. Pallotta -Chiarolli, 1995. Biddulph, 1995). The old practice of the apprentice and the master was that the young apprentice would learn from the master gradually and effectively; the student sitting at the feet of his mentor (Biddulph 1996). Theory would be taught as a by product of the practice, it would not be taught separately for example an English teacher could weave a social justice issue into an English lesson effectively and subtly:

As my teaching career progressed, it became increasingly obvious that on-the-spot interventions and mainstreaming approaches were the most effective ways of challenging homophobia. Implementing anti homophobia strategies did not mean designing and teaching a two week unit for the classroom and then forgetting about the issue for the rest of the year. Specific teaching units were a significant part of the larger but not impossible task of shifting school culture in relation to issues of gender, race, sexuality and other social justice issues (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995. P 68).

The philosophy of the bike rides organised by Dave is that the student taking part will grow in his own self-knowledge. Dave, and the other students, are there to “intervene” when the need arises. In this way the student learns in an experiential rather than theoretical way. When being asked about the worth of the program, two boys actually compared it unfavourably with the bike rides which they had just experienced. “I learnt a lot about myself from the bike ride” (Student 3)said one boy and yet when asked what he had learnt from the *Boys and Relationships* program said “nothing, absolutely nothing...our class...make too much noise.” (Student 3)

In the copious amounts of sporting activities in the College, the philosophy is the same. It is believed that boys will learn about themselves and about the acceptable way to behave through the actual playing of the sport. “We make big deals of the ones who really try as well as the successful kids” (Principal). In the boarding situation,

experienced men are on hand to deal with each crisis or trauma as it arises and it frequently does in a boarding situation. The principal told the story of a boy who was missing from his bed at 3am in the morning. They found him sitting in the middle of the football oval. He just needed to be by himself. The situation was handled very delicately, supporting the individual boy without sanctioning the practice of wandering off in the middle of the night. In keeping with the unwritten philosophy of the school that hard and fast rules cannot be made, the boys, as much as possible, are given the chance to enjoy solitude in the beautiful surrounding countryside.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, therefore, it is apparent that St. Paul's believes in educating the boy into a fullness of his own self as a man. From my experience of working with the teachers, speaking with the principal, reading the College newsletters and promotional literature, as well as my immersion in the life of the College frequently over the six month period, it would be fair to say that the school philosophy affirms that:

- each boy learn to live in a community where different cultures are embraced;
- each boy learn about himself and his personality type;
- each boy learn about who he really is at the centre of his being, so that he will accept himself and have no need to embrace stereotypical behaviour;
- each boy experience success on the sporting field, whether that be as a participant, a spectator, in a team game or in individual sporting pursuit;

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<sup>4</sup> There is tension here because St. Paul's has a crocodile infested river flowing through its grounds.

- each boy is exposed to the feminine side of life and encouraged to be in touch with his own feminine self. The warmth and affection with which the boys treat each other is not discouraged;
- each boy is surrounded by a religious ethos; by prayer, meditation, recognition of sacred places, celebration of mass, and knowledge of the Catholic religion;
- each boy is treated as an individual within a highly structured environment.

St. Paul's still has its problems. Boys express the negative aspects of masculinity of aggressive fighting and a sense of male dominance over women. In addition, less "masculine" boys are not readily accepted by the majority of this student body. The school recognises these facts and seeks to address them by offering an alternative philosophy. The *Boys and Relationships* program is one small attempt to re-enforce that alternative philosophy.

- The Boys and Relationships Program had a positive, if limited, effect.

All of the participating group felt that the program was worth doing. Paul felt that the boys further up the school needed "something like it" because their self-esteem was so low that they often reacted violently to adverse situations. David agreed with Paul's assessment of the older boys but did not think a program was enough.

It's in their brain, it's how they see the world. If you read "g's" journal on the bike ride, the language he uses about other kids, it's really the only way he looks at other people. Yet, on the ride, he achieved magnificently but because he's got this image of himself which is so low, he only sees other's behaviour in those terms. The more he looks at others the more self perpetuating it is. (David)

Here we were going back to the discussion on "hurt" individuals. If a student is damaged by the time he gets to school, what can the school do? The authors of the

program state quite clearly that they would not like the program to be used on groups of “difficult” students. A unitised cognitive program cannot make up for years of learning destructive messages. It’s use is as a support message to what is already happening in other areas of the boys’ life. If the message that violence is not the answer is heard in class as well as on the football field, then there is more chance that it will be accepted as the “right” message. The beauty of the program is in its re-enforcement of what is already seen to be happening around the school. Without that integration, there would be mixed messages producing confusion in the student’s minds. For those boys who are receptive to the values contained in the program, it can be a very positive experience.

The evaluation of the random group of students emphasised that they enjoyed doing the program and some appeared to have integrated its messages into their lives. “I know now that it’s o.k for me to show my feelings and to be me” (Student 6) or “I learnt a little bit about what being a man means” (Student 4). It was certainly not a harmful experience and the evaluations appeared to suggest it was a positive experience for most and a neutral experience for some. Of course it is impossible to know how much of the program’s messages the boys have integrated into their lives. As all teachers would know, results are not immediately tangible.

- That teachers involved in the project grew in their own awareness of boys’ education

The four teachers involved in the program were not strictly volunteers. They were asked if they would be willing to take part and all agreed so in that way they were



willing conscripts. Paul was a little tentative but was willing to come along to the discussion groups and be a part of them. His main reticence was in his inability to see how his subject of mathematics could have anything to do with “boys’ education”, which was an interesting comment in itself because it pushed the issue into the humanities area, an area usually associated with the feminine side of life. David had a real interest in the subject as he was doing his own research. Susan was interested to learn more as a parent as well as a teacher and Terry had the enthusiasm of a first year teacher who really wanted to help students be “more at peace with themselves.”

Paul was an invaluable member of the group because of his honesty and searching to improve his teaching. He worried about the students in the class, about their moral development as well as their academic achievements. His insights, often given “out of the blue”, made sure we did not get too complacent about our success. His interest in the group centred around his concern for the boys. He did not take a real interest in the theoretical part of the program. Many times he was engaged in clarifying issues with David and the interchanges which took place were beneficial to the whole group. Paul took things at face value and it was a real challenge to him to accept that many of the boys in his maths class were insecure and hurt. In his efforts to help them improve their performance, he had not thought of them in this light.

Susan said that the main benefits of the program for her were twofold: firstly she enjoyed the discussion group deriving great benefit from being a member. She felt she had grown in her understanding of boys and her understanding of the issues surrounding the area of gender equity. Secondly she was uplifted by the boys themselves and their views of life. She quoted an example where in class they had

discussed their ideal “partner” and she was amazed how easily the boys saw through the stereotypes. They did not want an “ornament” as a partner and rated the qualities they would look for in their girlfriend in terms of intelligence, beauty and cooking ability.

Susan and Terry also commented that when the Arts Council visited the school, it was the boys from this class who were the main participants when volunteers were called for. She was obviously proud of the boys and had a real affection for them. The program had perhaps provided a vehicle for this relationship to flourish. Although many writers say that it is important for men to work with boys (Dunn, 1995, Biddulph, 1995), I am inclined to agree with the Principal who said it’s balanced people who make the difference not a particular gender. Susan had an excellent relationship with the boys and they worked with her without any feeling of holding back because she was a woman. The responses she got from the boys and their trust in her was one of the highlights of the program because it answered that nagging suspicion that it was possible for women to succeed in this area as well as men. It was all a question of balance.

Terry was in his first year teaching. When I approached him, he had only been at the school for three weeks. He had a reputation for being keen and dedicated to teaching. I realised it was a difficult position for a first year teacher to be placed in because he was being asked had to learn the whole art of classroom management and planning as well as branching out onto something more adventurous such as the trial implementation of this program. As the study progressed, his concern for the boys was obvious and his relationship with them one of true pastoral orientation and although he had the usual

problems with the class in the early stages, he seemed to overcome them by adopting a more structured approach. He, like Susan, was amazed at the boys and their depth of feelings. The best part, he said, was “listening to the boys and watching them evolve from uncertainty to understanding about an issue.” He felt that the boys forgot all about the program they were piloting and just treated the lessons as pastoral care. He felt that some of the issues were far too important and deep to be covered in a forty minute period and expressed the intention of “revisiting” a lot of the content of the program later in the year. David and Susan were willing to give Terry any support he needed and the working relationship between Susan and Terry appeared to be an enriching one.

David, with his experience as a counselor, was invaluable to the group. He had not been at the school long and needed support structures to operate effectively with the boys. He felt he received support from the Principal and from most of the staff. As the boys came to know his way of operating, he was becoming all the more effective. And the contribution he has made to the school with his “bike rides” are quite astonishing. I felt David enjoyed the discussions. His passion for bringing the boys to a sense of freedom by finding out who they were in the realm of creation was inspiring to the group and his initial doubts about the program gave way to a true appreciation of what was happening with the boys. In his teaching of art, David had a real chance to listen to the boys and spontaneously intervene if the need arose. His role in the evaluation process with the students was also valuable as his relationship with them allowed them to speak the truth yet to have the respect for their real feelings.

As an action researcher I was also part of the group. Each of my many visits to the school involved a four hour drive through beautiful country with time to think about what was happening in the discussion group. It was a growth experience for me. In my work throughout the Diocese, I often met with apathy and negativity. These visits were my tonic, the highlight of my fortnight. I met with four teachers who cared about their students and were willing to put in extra time to understand them better. As I mentioned earlier, the actual *Boys and Relationships* program was fading into the background and the question of “how can we better serve these boys in our care?” was taking precedence.

### **6.3. Recommendations For Further Research**

I met formally with the Principal twice with approximately six months between the first meeting and the second. He was very aware of the work I was doing and the issues which were being dealt with in the *Boys and Relationships* Program. The difference in him in the six months was quite marked. At our first meeting, he had a vague idea that the boys needed “something”. At our last meeting he was much more confident that the school community was developing strategies to address the problems of boys’ education. I had the feeling that he had thought over the issues very carefully and had come to a point where he could much more easily articulate the problems and the possible solutions. He had not so much changed his mind as had become more confident in naming both the problem and what he felt was the solution. St. Paul’s has a vibrant personal development program which is obviously a priority at the school. There are sufficient people, including the principal, who are continually asking the question: “How do we best educate these boys in our care to be fully integrated men?”

Further research could well be done in this area following on from this study. Programs such as the *Boys and Relationships* Program could well be integrated into the teaching and sporting program throughout every level of the school. One of the most obvious lessons from the journey is that school is only one facet of the boys' life and much of his learned behaviour is ingrained before he reaches secondary school. After six months of research at St. Paul's College, however, certain findings have emerged. They are:

- that a whole school approach is the most effective way to deal with boys' education
- that intervention curriculum programs such as *Boys and Relationships* have a conditional effect depending on the integration of its aims into the 'hidden' curriculum of the school.
- that action research undertaken in the area of boys' education is a worthwhile form of personal development for teachers to identify relevant issues and to improve their teaching accordingly.

The issues surrounding boys' education are complex. They are inter-connected with societal expectations of masculinity and the shifting attitudes of the community towards gender. Therefore the recommendation is to integrate the content and values in the *Boys and Relationships* Program into the curriculum at all levels of the school. In order to do this at St. Paul's, it would be necessary to present the findings at a staff meeting and to open up the whole issue for discussion amongst the staff. This, then, would become the next cycle of an action research project at St. Paul's.

## 6.4 Conclusion

The education of boys provided the theme and central concern of this study which took place in a single sex, Catholic boarding school. The participants of the study were teachers actively engaging in the day to day teaching of a class of Year 8 boys. It was believed that for any improvement in boys' education to eventuate, it was necessary for these teachers to "own" the research. Through this research, the participants have grown in their own awareness of the problems facing boys in education today as well as the problem in the broader community. The researcher also has learnt of the complexities involved in attempting to bring about improvement in boys' education and the enormity of the issue which extends far beyond the classroom.

Studies such as this one add to the understanding of the teaching and learning process in the area of boys' education but it is only a small contribution. Much more needs to be done as "there is surprisingly little discussion of the role of education in the transformation of masculinity...about education for boys in modern mass school systems...the intersections of gender with race, class and nationality...and how education is the formation of capacities for practice" (Connell, 1995). Hopefully, raising an awareness of the issue will lead to further research at St. Paul's College, the site of this study.

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## APPENDIX 1

### MISSION STATEMENT

**Reflection:** In 1996 we have decided to review our College Mission Statement. As part of a Staff In-service some minor changes have been made to our Mission Statement that reflects the nature of the College now. The revised Mission Statement reads:

*(St Paul's College) is a Catholic Boys' Boarding College where a family spirit is promoted by its belief in the brotherhood of Christ.*

*Its principal role as a Catholic School\* is to support the holistic education of each unique individual in the community and to develop an understanding that education is a life-long process.*

*It provides a Christian, residential environment in which faith and personal harmony are the foundations for life.*

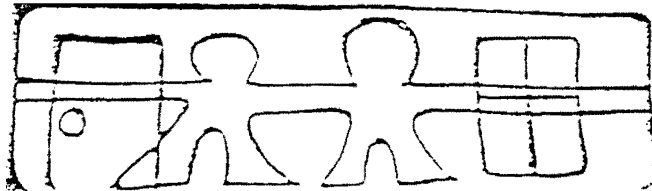
*The College cherishes its option for Christ's poor. The value of family life and the needs of Australia's rural community, is respected and understood. Moreover, cultural diversity and the complex needs of indigenous peoples are valued and embraced.*

*The College seeks to uphold the sanctity of family life which is integral to the day-to-day functioning of the College.*

*(St Paul's College) in its mission statement, desires to encourage all to recognise their full potential as beloved children of God, who can engage in their lifelong challenge to take Christ's Gospel into the world.*

\* as understood in *The Catholic School* (The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. Rome 1977)

I invite all parents to read the College Mission Statement carefully and if you would like to comment on this new version please do so in writing as soon as possible. A Mission Statement is vital to a school as it sets the focus of that school. It is so important for all our families to be aware of what drives this College and to also have the opportunity to contribute to this focus.

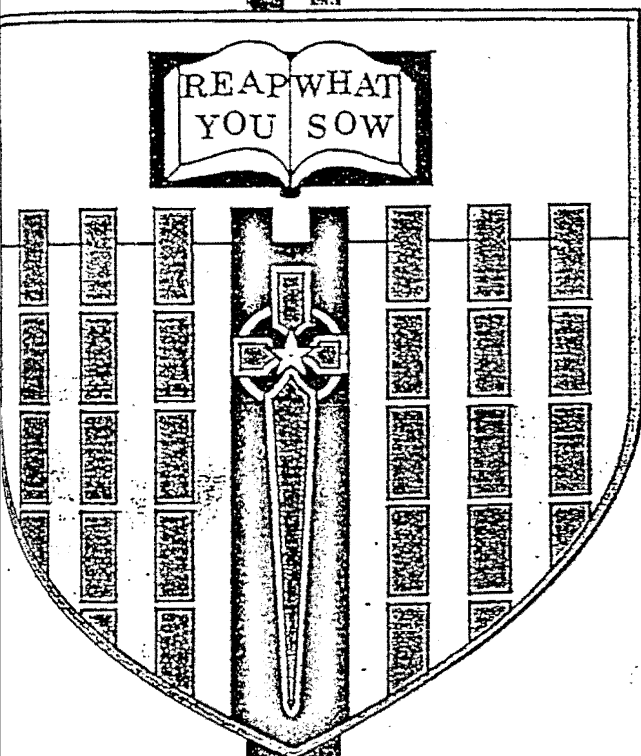


\* Pseudonym

## APPENDIX 2

### SCHOOL MOTTO

looking forward....



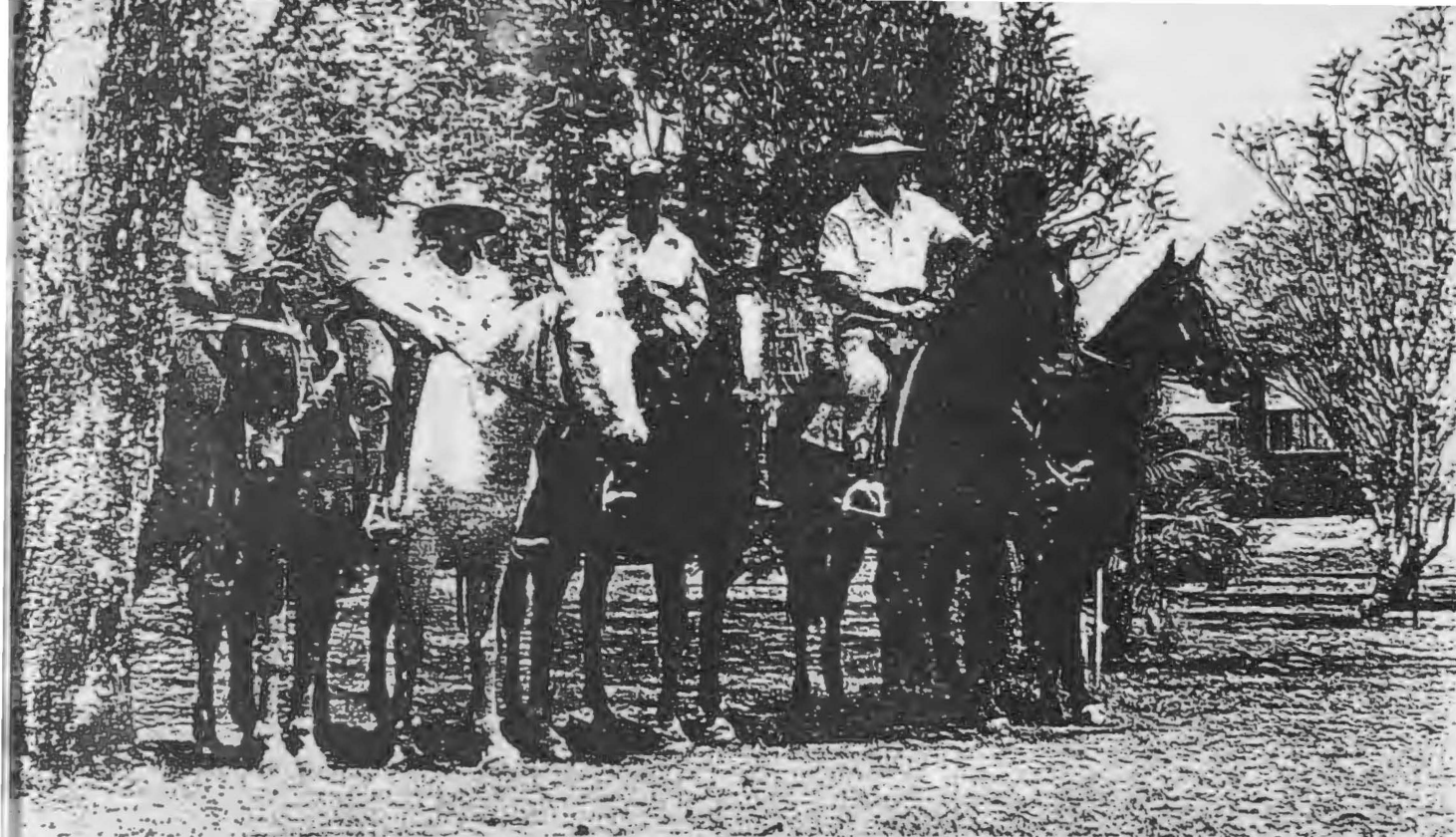
*To the Boys  
who  
are proud  
to wear  
the  
Green and Gold*



## APPENDIX 3

(3a) STUDY COURSES AVAILABLE

(3b & 3c) THE LIFE OF ST PAUL'S



*The Pony Club*

## COURSES AVAILABLE

### YEAR 8 COURSES

— All Students —

- \* Religious Education
- \* English
- \* Maths
- \* Science
- \* Animal Husbandry
- \* Agriculture
- \* Geography
- \* History
- \* Graphics
- \* Physical Education
- \* Arts Fusion

### YEAR 9 & 10 COURSES

— All Students —

- \* English
- \* Advanced Maths or Ordinary Maths
- \* Religious Education
- \* Agriculture
- \* Science
- \* Physical Education
- Electives —
- \* Animal Husbandry
- \* Business Principles
- \* Geography
- \* Citizenship Education
- \* Agricultural Mechanics
- \* Graphics
- \* Health and Physical Education

### YEAR 11 & 12 COURSES

— All Students —

- \* Maths I or Maths in Society
- \* English
- Electives —
- \* Agriculture and Animal Production
- \* Physics
- \* Chemistry
- \* Biology
- \* Maths II
- \* Economics
- \* Geography
- \* Rural Welding and Fabrication
- \* Health and Physical Education
- \* Accounting
- \* Study of Religion
- \* Practical Agriculture



*Leaders being recognised*



*Gospel values are the basis of all we do*



*Beating the heat*



*In the dormitory - a time to relax*



*Football—the most popular sport*



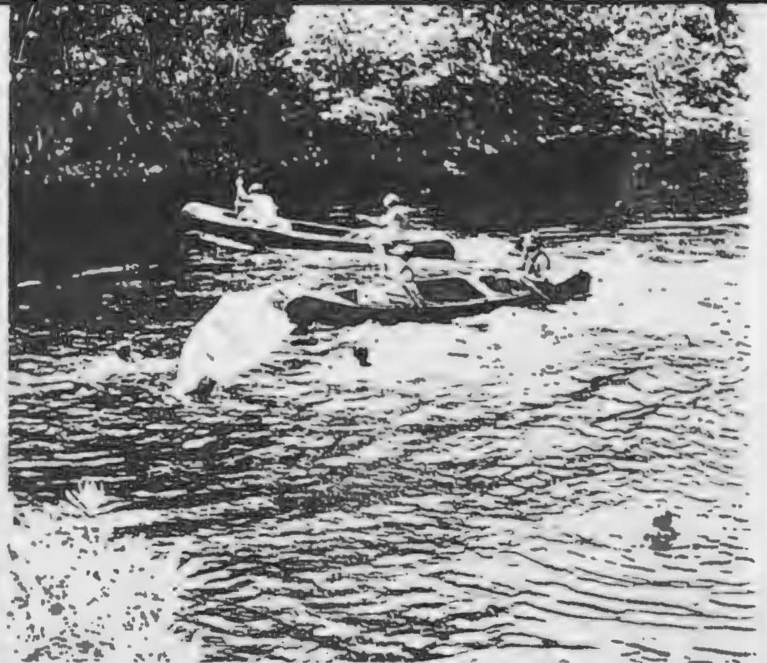
*Class drama*



*In the lab*



*Concern for livestock*



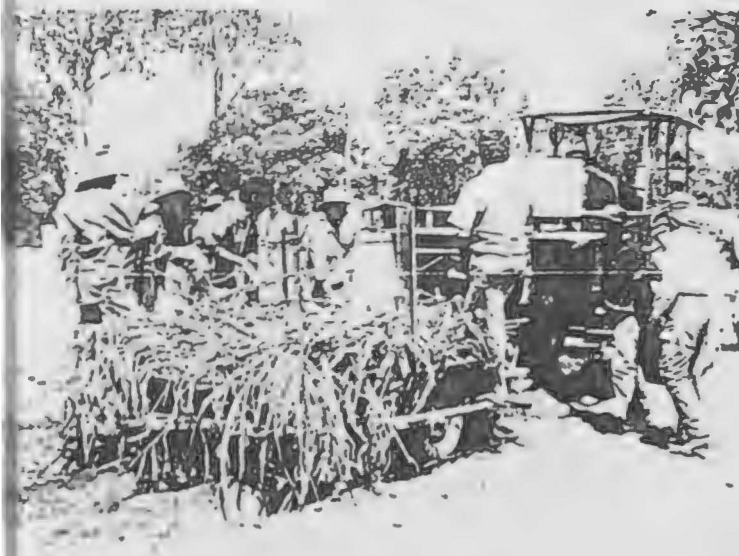
*A weekend away from it all*



*In communion with Nature*



*The library*



*Cane planting*



*The Computer Club*

## APPENDIX 4

### THE BOYS AND RELATIONSHIPS PROGRAM

4a The Title Cover

4b Aims of the Program

4c The Lesson Contents

4d Pre-Program Questionnaire

4e Passive, Assertive, Aggressive Behaviour

4f The “iceberg”

4g The “Boil-Over Pot”



Windows

on

Practice

**BOYS AND  
RELATIONSHIPS  
PROGRAM**

**UPPER PRIMARY  
JUNIOR SECONDARY**

**WIN 0060**

**DECS**

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION  
AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

93  
f41

# AIMS AND STRUCTURE

## THE AIMS OF THE PROGRAM

The Boys and Relationships Program seeks to

- raise awareness of the limitations and negative effects of gender stereotyping
- encourage boys to explore the positive aspects of being male, and further develop their own self-esteem
- promote personal development and psychological well-being by exposure to alternative behaviours, skills and strategies
- provide the opportunity to rehearse these skills and strategies within a supportive environment.

## STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

The program presented here is structured into eight sessions, each covering a particular aspect. The specific aims of the eight sessions are

- to understand the stereotypical image of male.
- to be able to recognise feelings and understand the different ways of communicating them.
- to become aware of the importance of expressing feelings and to recognise listening and opinion stating as communication skills.
- to become aware of assertive/aggressive/passive behaviour models.
- to explore the role of "heroes" and to gain some understanding that the hero style of personal operation is not always helpful.
- to understand the nature of conflict, to examine the conflict resolution model, and to experience relaxation exercises
- to review and consolidate learning associated with the program's aims.

## TWO MAJOR THEMES

The program is based on two underlying themes, developed within the 8 sessions. These are

- *Things are changing*
- *Males often hurt themselves and the people they love.*

The point of the first theme, *Things are changing*, is to show how the past commonly accepted right of adult males to exercise authority is being called into question generally within today's society. The patriarchal and hierarchical models of social organisation are rapidly becoming unacceptable through a process of education, community awareness and legislation. It is important that boys are made aware of these changes, particularly as they are growing up in a time of transition. Consideration of the second theme, *Males often hurt themselves and people they love*, provides opportunities for boys to discuss aberrant male behaviour, particularly that related to relationships, as reported in the mass media. Having alerted boys to such behaviour, the program then seeks to draw out the connections between this behaviour and male conditioning. This is followed by consideration of alternative means of dealing with problems within relationships.

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# BOYS AND RELATIONSHIPS

## PRE-PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What do you like best about being a boy?
2. What is the worst thing about being a boy?
3. Do you think there are any activities only boys can do?
4. Do you think there are any activities only girls can do?
5. Something that makes me mad is .....
6. I feel frustrated when .....
7. Something that makes me happy is .....
8. I feel sad when .....
9. When I feel really mad I usually .....
10. When I feel really happy I usually .....
11. When I feel really sad I usually .....
12. If I have a problem with another boy I usually .....
13. When I have a problem with a girl I usually .....
14. I usually discuss my problems with .....
15. Most of the time I feel .....
16. The thing about me I'd like to change is .....
17. One thing about me I'd like to change is .....
18. Something I find really difficult is .....
19. I'd like to be better at .....
20. I wish .....

### INCLUDE EXTRA QUESTIONS IN THE POST-TEST

- *From this program I have learned .....*
- *Since starting the program I am better able to .....*
- *Did you prefer working with only boys? YES / NO*
- *Why?*



## EXPLANATION OF BEHAVIOUR MODELS

### **A**GGRESSIVE, **P**ASSIVE, **A**SSERTIVE

#### **A**GGRESSIVE

##### BEHAVIOURS

Stands up for own rights and ignores rights of others.

Dominates and in some cases humiliates others.

Does not listen to others.

Makes decisions that do not consider others' rights.

Can be hostile or defensive in attitude.

##### MESSAGES

*I think this - you're stupid for thinking differently.*

*I feel this - you're feelings don't matter.*

*This is the situation. I don't care how you see it.*

#### **S**UBMISSIVE

##### BEHAVIOURS

Ignores own rights and allows others to infringe own rights.

Does not state own needs, ideas or feelings.

Is emotionally dishonest - actions and words are not in accord with feelings leading to suppressed anger and resentment.

##### MESSAGES

*Your thoughts are important - mine are not.*

*Your feelings matter, mine don't.*

*It's how you see the situation that counts.*

#### **A**SSERTIVE

##### BEHAVIOURS

Stands up for own rights and recognises rights of others.

Expresses needs, ideas and feelings.

Relates confidently to others.

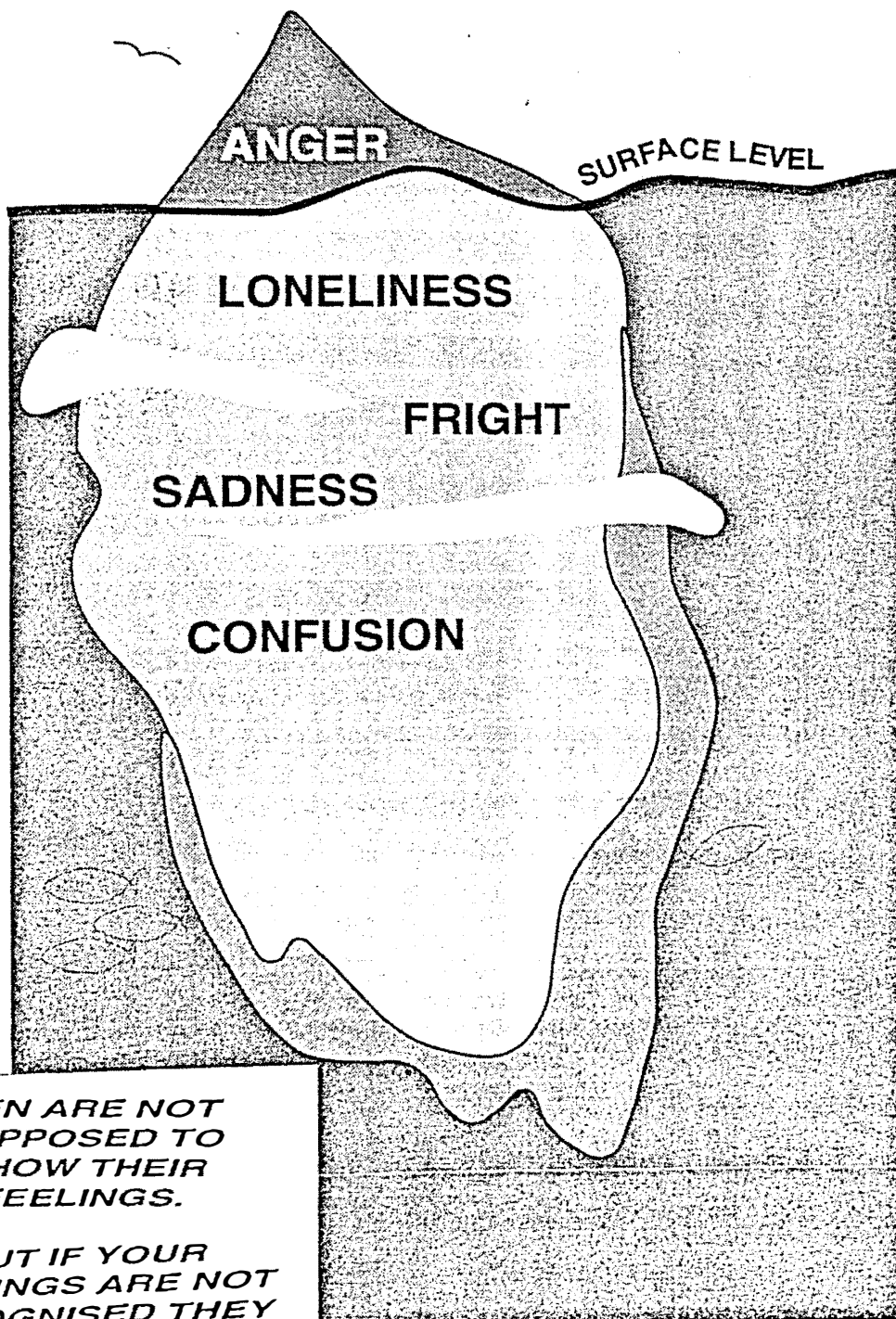
##### MESSAGES

*This is what I think.*

*This is what I feel.*

*This is how I see the situation.*

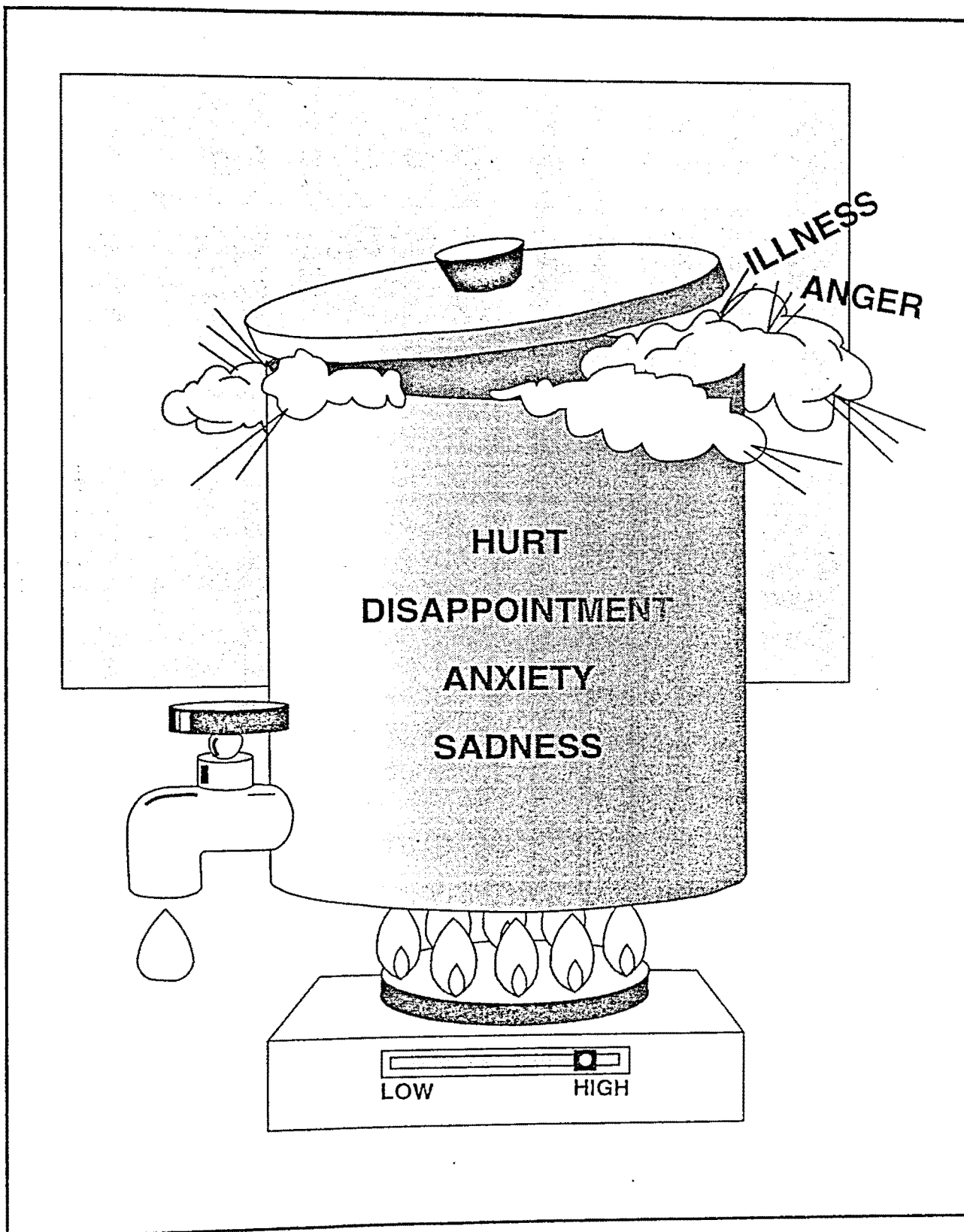
*I would like to hear what you think and feel and perhaps we can both be happy.*



**MEN ARE NOT  
SUPPOSED TO  
SHOW THEIR  
FEELINGS.**

**BUT IF YOUR  
FEELINGS ARE NOT  
RECOGNISED THEY  
CAN EASILY WEIGH  
YOU DOWN.**

May be copied for classroom use



May be copied for classroom use

## APPENDIX 5

### HANDOUT TO PARTICIPANTS AFTER FIRST LESSON

Monday 29th April

*Meeting following the initial lesson with the class.*

THEME. Changing Roles

Questions:

How did the boys react when told about the study?

How did they respond to the subject matter?

Did the whole class respond?

What written activity did they do?

Did the games work?

How was their classroom respect for each other?

What sort of issues did they raise?

Will this lesson lead easily into the next two on "feelings"?

Do any changes need to be made in our approach?

Have any other teachers noticed any feedback from the boys?

## APPENDIX 6

### EVALUATION SHEETS FOR PARTICIPANTS

## QUESTION SHEET ON THE AIMS OF THE PROGRAM

Do you think the boys understand the stereotypical image of being a male?

Can you give an example of their opinions on this matter? .

Do you think they understand any better after the program, that these images are just stereotypes?

Do the boys, on the whole find it difficult to express feelings?

Can you give an example from the class of their attitude towards expressing feelings?

After discussions, do you believe they have a greater understanding of expressing feelings? Examples?

Do you think they are more aware of the difference between assertive, aggressive and passive behaviour? Can you think of examples which illustrate this?

In discussions on "heroes" did you see any development of their ideas?

Conflict Resolution is a difficult concept for 13 yr olds. Do you think they developed their understanding of the concept and their ability to utilise it in their lives?

Can you give some examples to illustrate their ideas of conflict resolution?

The boys did some meditation and relaxation exercises? How do you think they responded to these?



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Overall, do you think that a program such as this has been worth doing?

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What were the negatives or the limitations of the program?

---

What were the difficulties in implementation?

---

Do you think the boys appreciated the program?

---

What do you see as issues in boy's education which need addressing?

---

What were some surprises to you?

---

If you were doing a similar program again, how would you do it differently?

---

What was the most enjoyable part of it for you?

---

What ways would be best to gauge the boy's reaction to the program? It could involve the whole class or just a sample of students from the class.

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## APPENDIX 7

### EVALUATION SHEETS FOR STUDENTS

# HOW HAVE I GOT ON ?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I have enjoyed this course:  
a lot ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ not at all

I have found this course useful:  
very ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ not at all

CIRCLE THE WORDS YOU FEEL APPLY TO THE COURSE:

irrelevant fun stressful relevant interesting  
confusing helpful relaxing stimulating boring  
difficult entertaining disappointing easy depressing

Two things I liked about the course:

1 .....  
2 .....

Two things I disliked about the course:

1 .....  
2 .....

Rate the following:

worksheets very useful ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ not at all

discussion ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

teacher talking ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

video (if used) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

role-play ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The goals I have set myself are:

.....  
.....  
.....

Probably the most important thing I have learnt is:

.....  
.....  
.....

My suggestions for improving the course are:

.....  
.....  
.....

I feel good about myself because:

.....  
.....  
.....

CIRCLE THOSE WORDS WHICH DESCRIBE YOU:

lonely loved sad failure winner miserable happy  
lively rejected fun successful OK hated  
wanted loveable dislikd dull liked loser  
friendly avoided not OK

## **GROUP DISCUSSION EVALUATION OF BOYS' EDUCATION COURSE**

- 1. Do you think the lessons done with (teachers' names) helped you understand more about what it means to be a boy?**
- 2. Did you feel that the group discussions helped you in any way?**
- 3. Did the lessons help you in any way to cope with your feelings?**
- 4. Did the course explain better what happens when you get angry or frustrated?**
- 5. Could you cope with your anger, frustration or conflict better now that you have talked it over in class?**
- 6. Do you remember the differences between passive, aggressive and assertive? Which is the more effective strategy for you?**
- 7. Do you think such a course is good for students in grade 8?**
- 8. Would you like it to continue into grade 9 & 10?**
- 9. How would you change it?**
- 10. Any other comments?**