

# 2000 ASPA Conference Report

## "The School Reforms Required to Engage Boys in Schooling"

The listing below contains the recommendations from Ian Lillico's research, carried out as part of his Churchill Fellowship in 2000.

Taken from the website: [www.boysforward.com](http://www.boysforward.com)

1. Both at home and at school women must be in positions of power - they must not be seen as the nurturers and men as the power brokers. Both men and women must play a rearing role in their sons' lives. The father (or male teacher) must not be seen as the disciplinarian as this tends to further emphasize the gender stereotype.
2. Since boys convert feelings to movement it is essential that parents and teachers realise that boys need to move when faced with emotions and that a good way to *open boys up* is to do something active with them that they enjoy. In the middle of some physical activity they will often reveal what problem they may be facing.
3. There is a concern that both families and society may be prematurely separating boys from their mothers. Many boys and men suffer lifelong problems as they often long to return to the close relationship they had with their mother. No amount of **mother nurturing** is harmful for boys or makes them into weaklings or sissies.
4. Boys must have a home in schools - particularly Secondary schools. Males have territory as their number one need and need to feel there is somewhere within the school that is theirs - their classroom, locker, play area. etc. If they feel there is nowhere within the school that is *theirs*, they tend to regard the school as a foreign place to which they show no loyalty or belonging - causing problems of discipline, vandalism and graffiti.
5. Our schools must have a focus on getting girls to do and boys to think. Boys are speculative thinkers and often act without forethought. Girls are reflective thinkers, but often need to go beyond reflection and take some risks with their play and later their activities in schools.
6. Teachers must change their pedagogy to teach less and facilitate more. Students must do a lot more work in school - both individually and in proximal learning groups and not rely heavily on homework as the time and place that students practise concepts and skills.
7. As writing is a major area of deficiency for boys it is important that boys should communicate before writing something - this should be done at school or at home using a variety of techniques and models. When boys talk through things before writing, their writing fluency and volume is dramatically increased.
8. All writing for boys up to the end of their compulsory school years should be done within teacher-prepared templates or *scaffolds*. Teachers should hand out the requisite number of pages required for the boys to fill in with headings and the number of lines required for each section. Eventually boys will intrinsically expand their writing as they enter the post-compulsory schooling years.
9. Programmes should be introduced for boys and girls dealing with gender construction and issues affecting adolescents, such as violence, sexuality, feelings and relationships.
10. The sense of touch has become *dirty* in our Australian culture but is absolutely essential for connecting with boys - particularly by parents and teachers. Violent and aggressive boys are often the victims of being *under-cuddled* as young children and touch therapy is one of the techniques used worldwide for bringing these boys back on track. Even though *stranger danger* is essential we have to allow for boys to be given a pat on the back; a shake of the hand etc when they have done something well. We must allow teachers to do this without fear of recrimination to develop a connection with boys who communicate their feelings for each other in a non-verbal way through wrestling and play fighting.
11. Classroom lighting and colour need to be reviewed to make lighting less bright - with fluorescent lighting used rarely. More subdued lighting results in more settled behaviour by both girls and boys and provides an atmosphere in which boys are more able to talk about their feelings and discuss emotive and other difficult or relationship issues. The use of colour rather than black and white at the front of a classroom in terms of blackboards and whiteboards is more relevant and effective in getting boys to watch the front and retain information provided.
12. Adolescent and teen boys and girls wear a mask to protect themselves from bullying and to hide behind rather than show their real selves. We must train teachers and parents to not

communicate with these masks, but to talk only with the real boys behind these masks. Boys are very vulnerable and protect themselves from *put downs* with these *cool* masks but must be taught to take them off regularly if they are to lead a normal life and come to terms with their feelings. Drama is a useful subject where boys can *take their mask off* in a safe environment or put on another mask and act out roles they would otherwise not play.

13. The current hype about ADD is causing hardship for many boys and their parents. The biological condition of ADD or ADHD does exist and is a real issue for many boys at school and at home. Even though society is talking scornfully of drugging students to make them behave, the fact is that medication may be the only hope for many boys faced with this condition. In the absence of drugs these very boys are posing a problem to themselves, their schools, their families and society in general.
14. When boys come to parents and teachers with feelings we have to allow the boys to share what they are feeling without jumping in and trying to solve their problems for them. When we deny boys' feelings or don't give them the time they deserve, we cause the relationship between us to break down, resulting in increased conflict in our homes and schools.
15. When boys are given responsibility they grow. If, later, that responsibility is taken away again, we will face boys who disengage and become increasingly hostile and unmanageable. Schools must be particularly aware of this as boys progress annually through classes - that the degree of responsibility gradually increases from year to year. This should form a part of Whole School Planning. It is particularly important at the Primary School/Secondary School interface that the degree of responsibility students possess at the end of their Primary Schooling is tapped into and that students are not made to *regress* on entering their Secondary Schooling. This is the cause of many boys disengaging from school once entering High School and schools must take every step to *stop* what is happening around Australia.
16. Boys need empowerment in schools. When boys have a say in what is going on around them they engage. If they have no say they disengage as it is someone else's rules - not theirs. They should play a part in deciding school, classroom and home rules. Student councils need to have widened powers and become the spokespeople for students.
17. Boys need to reconnect with nature. It is important for boys to do the type of activities men were designed for - hunting, fishing, crabbing, camping, etc. as these give boys confidence that they can do something. It teaches them that they can provide for the table - fish, game, etc and this brings out the hunter/gatherer instinct in boys. At every opportunity they must be challenged by nature and come to understand the forces of nature and where they fit in the universe.
18. Schoolyards and playgrounds must be reviewed for relevance and purpose in the society of today. Many schoolyards (full of bitumen and concrete) are foreboding places, which encourage rough and violent interactions among students. There should be seating in shelter for more than half the student population of the school to *tone down* the noise levels and allow students to interact in a pleasant atmosphere. Activities - both outdoor and indoor should be available during all school breaks to cater for all students and cater for the variety of activities that students choose. Supervision must be more vigilant to ensure that all students are safe from bullying.
19. At every opportunity both at home and at school, boys should be given opportunities to reflect. They should reflect on masculinity and on life in general. Posters in classrooms, icons around the school, rituals, discussion groups and debates are some strategies that should be employed.
20. Boys should be given every opportunity to relate to animals - both at home and at school. Relating with animals brings out the empathetic, caring side of a boy's nature. They need to learn that animals have needs that are to be catered for and that they *can* look after someone. Even the toughest boys can still give a dog a pat - it is crucial for them.
21. Gender construction must be taught in schools and talked about to illustrate to boys how society and the media shape their masculinity. They should be made aware of how society is presenting boys with a form of stereotypical masculinity, which may now be *out of date*.
22. Schools must emphasize The Arts and make concerted efforts to get boys into drama, music and movement as this helps them balance their lives and provides an outlet for their emotions. There are many talented boys who don't fulfill their dreams because they consider artistic pursuits are weak or feminine. Sometimes making these subjects compulsory for a year group allows these boys to participate in these areas without fear of ridicule.
23. Parents and teachers should never shame boys. The shaming language "How could you!" should change to "What has happened?" so as not to initiate the shame response. Once the shame response is activated, boys *clam up* and disengage from conversation with a corresponding deterioration of the relationship between him and the adult concerned.

24. Adults must look beyond boys' anger to give them a vocabulary for what they are *really* feeling. Anger has become the *emotional funnel* through which all emotion is channelled, as anger is the only accepted response by the peer group. Once we can give a boy the words for what he is really experiencing - hurt, anxiety, frustration, disappointment, shame etc, he can begin to deal with it, and help himself.
25. Teachers and administrators must be particularly vigilant in seeking out the *loners* in our schools. These are the boys and girls who are suffering rejection by the peer groups and who feel they are alone. Unless we help loners feel valuable and accepted in schools we will continue to suffer the agonies of school massacres, self-harm and eventual societal rejection that loners face. Loners have a very high risk of suicide and violence if not helped.
26. The "*Boys are toxic*" myth needs to be exploded. Many boys are viewed suspiciously by shopkeepers and the general public and receive the message that society frowns on them because of their gender. Many boys are spoken to in a very derogatory and rude manner by business proprietors and this must be tackled.
27. Adults need to be optimistic about the future so that boys will be also. Our media is very negative and doom and gloom is in our papers and lounge room every day of the week. Adults must balance the negativity with hope and optimism as many boys fear the future, are anxious about their future lives as men and often don't want to *grow up*.
28. From the very earliest of ages parents must not let boys *opt out* of family gatherings. Girls are given the chores of helping to serve food and interact with relatives and friends - and so improve their verbal communication and collaborative skills. Boys (who are often noisy) are often left to play in a non-verbal manner on the floor or outside and, consequently, don't develop the same verbal literacy as girls. They are starting school up to 18 months behind girls academically and often don't catch up until into their late teens.
29. Boys must be given the keys to communicate and write about their feelings and emotions. They will learn to communicate feelings when the important adults in their lives do the same - especially males (Fathers and Teachers). Boys write basically to communicate information and fact. They must learn to be more expansive in their writing and attempt to communicate feelings as girls tend to do in their writing.
30. Our national curricula have no subjects left that are traditionally *boy friendly*. Considering the needs of our workforce of the future we must move towards reflective, open-ended skills but this should be an end point and not the starting point. Boys have always learnt by being shown and we must encourage teachers to demonstrate more and let boys learn more from experience. They must be eased into reflective, open-ended processes by firstly receiving success at shorter, closed, experiential ones.
31. Classroom practice should include more interactive class teaching through the use of audio-visual instruction, CD-ROMs and the whole range of current multi-media tools.
32. Classroom activities should be broken down into shorter, more intensive periods of *time on task*.
33. Lessons in schools need to be more dynamic to capture boys' interest at the beginning of the lesson.
34. Boys should be encouraged at school to expand their answers more in oral and written form, when answering questions. The same should be done at home whenever boys interact with us.
35. Classroom practitioners should use quizzes more as a form of classroom learning, consolidation and examination. A test is teacher vs. student whereas a quiz is student vs. student - hence more competitive. Boys are much more likely to study for a quiz than a test especially if there is some small prize and if they can work in teams so that individuals are not being compared for knowledge.
36. Teachers must explicitly explain the relevance of topics being taught to boys and attempt to integrate new concepts into existing ones. If (after a great deal of deliberation) no relevance can be found - DON'T teach that topic.
37. Rewards and praise that are helpful should be integral to teaching and parenting boys. Boys seek short term and immediate praise and rewards and every effort should be made to reward boys when they have done something that is praiseworthy.
38. Allow more time for boys to think before answering questions in class. Review the *hands up* approach to teaching. Rather, have students talk to the person next to them after the teacher poses a question. It is better and fairer to choose students to, then, answer the question rather than picking the boys who have their hands *in your face!*
39. Explicitly structure time more. Tasks should be quantified so that boys learn to work within a given, explicit time frame - this focuses their work and inhibits the time wasting they are often prone to - especially during group work. In particular *always* give a suggested time allowance for homework that is set. This enables boys to *budget* their time and makes homework tasks not seem so

daunting. This also limits the extra time that girls tend to spend on homework and enables parents to get an idea of what is expected.

40. Boys need to be challenged a lot more in class. Challenge helps to motivate boys into activity and taps into the intrinsic nature of men to *rise to the task*. Challenge is particularly useful at the beginning of a lesson.
41. Group work must be revisited by teachers and schools in such a way that (during a school term) all students work in a structured way with every other student in the class. Groups should cycle between friendship, single gender and mixed gender, with the teacher taking into account ability levels of the students in a group. Classes must not remain as groups of strangers. This structure can dramatically reduce the incidence of *put downs*, bullying, racism and sexism, if used properly. This structure also increases the communication in a class by placing boys and girls in group situations (every few weeks) where the natural inability of males to reflect and females to speculate is compensated for in mixed groupings of gender.
42. Single sex education should be revisited and experimented with in different localities in order to increase the participation of boys in the gender-stereotyped subjects that have traditionally been dominated by girls. This structure allows boys who are sensitive, artistic or *different* to flourish by not having to compete with girls. Single sex classes in selected subjects or year levels in a Co-Ed environment should also be trialled as a compromise to having the entire school as single sex.
43. Always apply a time structure to homework - completion, overnight and assignments. This greatly increases the likelihood that boys will do the work as they can quantify the amount of time they are giving up.
44. Bullying must be overtly tackled by school authorities and eliminated so that boys and girls feel (and are) safe in our schools. This problem needs to be addressed in conjunction with parents and the Aussie tradition of *not dobbing* must be challenged and revoked if we are to stop bullying.
45. Teaching to Doing ratios must be increased dramatically in our classrooms so that teachers are teaching less and students are working a lot more. The amount of time students should spend working in class should increase continuously from Primary to Secondary and then Tertiary.
46. Less homework should be given. Homework is often given as practice that is often left out in class because of time constraints. Recommendation 45 tells of the needs to dramatically increase the amount of time students are spending working in class so the need to practise at home is reduced. Homework *for homework's sake* needs to be eliminated as this is seen to doubly disadvantage students (particularly boys) whose home situations are not conducive to homework, quiet and study generally.
47. All classes in Primary and Secondary Schools should devote a proportion of each lesson (at least 15%) to reading to assist boys with their reading skills. A variety of techniques should be employed including group reading in pairs and note taking under given topic headings. Reading for homework should centre on boys finding out information from what they have read.
48. Teachers and parents must reduce the expectation slope for boys who need to make behavioural improvements. If too much is demanded at the one time, boys tend to regress and make no improvement at all. By reducing the slope, we make changes realistic and attainable for boys who otherwise find the changes required *too hard* and don't make any attempt to improve their behaviour.
49. In a similar manner to recommendation 48, when assignments or questions seem to open ended and reflective - boys often *put off* completing the work until the last minute as the task seems too daunting for them as they prefer shorter, structured, more closed tasks. It is important for teachers to give boys work that first enables them to get success and *then* lead them onto more challenging, open-ended tasks within the same assignment. Once they achieve success at easier, more closed questions at the beginning of the assignment, they are more likely to continue with it.
50. *Boys learn teachers and not subjects* according to Steve Biddulph. This is, indeed, true and boys tend to work for teachers they believe like them and respect them as an individual. Teacher professional development must concentrate on giving teachers the skills to relate to boys in an effective way so that the connection between them is maximized at all times.
51. Australia must make a massive effort to get more males into teaching. Boys need male role models in our schools and must see men in a nurturing role.
52. Schools need to review their pastoral care and disciplinary procedures so that the current pre-occupation with punishment changes to natural consequences for misbehaviour. Boys who are punished often have revenge fantasies that interrupt true remorse for what they have done. Boys who are quickly punished by our school systems are not given the opportunity to make amends for what they have done, as punishment *clears the ledger* and allows boys to re-offend in the future without attendant feelings of guilt.