
CHANGE

TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION



CHANGE OF TITLE

Please note that the *Forum of Education* Journal has changed its title to *Change: Transformations in Education*, commencing with Vol. 1 No. 1 1998.

The last issue of the *Forum of Education* was Vol. 52 No. 2 1997.

The ISSN remains the same.

**A JOURNAL OF THEORY,
RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE**

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2 NOVEMBER 1998

CHANGE TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION

EDITORS

Marjorie O'Loughlin
Judyth Sachs
Richard Walker
of the University of Sydney

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Craig Campbell
Jim McKenzie
Carmel Young

Robert Young
Helen Watt
of the University of Sydney

CONSULTING EDITORS

Professor Michael Apple *University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA*
Professor Stephen Ball *King's College, London, UK*
Assoc. Professor Guoliang Chen *Shanghai Institute of Human Resource Education, China*
Professor Pamela Christie *University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa*
Professor Robert Connell *University of Sydney, Australia*
Professor Chris Day *University of Nottingham, UK*
Professor Ivor Goodson *University of East Anglia, UK*
Professor S. Gopinathan *Nanyang Technology University, Singapore*
Professor Andy Hargreaves *OISE, University of Toronto, Canada*
Professor Sverker Lindblat *University of Uppsala, Sweden*
Professor Sven Eric Nordenbo *University of Copenhagen, Denmark*
Assoc. Professor Shirley Pendlebury *University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa*
Assoc. Professor Peter Renshaw *University of Queensland, Australia*
Assoc. Professor Viviane Robinson *Auckland University, New Zealand*

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Nigel Bagnall
University of Sydney

FORMATTING/LAYOUT

Jill French
University of Sydney

MANAGER

Jill French
University of Sydney

Change: Transformations in Education seeks to promote discussion of a wide range of issues, themes and problems arising from the varieties of change which now impact upon education at every level, in differing contexts and with enormously varied results. The orientation of the journal is cross-disciplinary and critical. The journal's intended readership is that of educational policy-makers, analysts and activists working in contexts of social and organisational change and development. It also aims to interest professionals involved in the planning and implementation of educational programs across all education sectors nationally and internationally.

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE SUBMITTED TO AT LEAST TWO REFEREES BEFORE BEING ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION.

Editorial correspondence, including manuscripts for submission and books for review, should be addressed to: The Co-editors, Change: Transformations in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia. Details concerning the preparation and submission of articles can be found on the inside back cover of each issue.

Business correspondence, including orders and remittances relating to subscriptions, back numbers, offprints and advertisements, should be addressed to the Business Manager, Mrs Jill French, Change: Transformations in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.

© Copyright. The University of Sydney, ISSN 0015-842.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the written permission of the copyright holder, The University of Sydney.

The journal is published twice a year in May and November. These two issues constitute one volume.

Printed by Southwood Press Pty Ltd, Marrickville 2204, Australia.

Introductory Essay: Issues in Boys' Education

BOB LINGARD, *University of Queensland*

MARTIN MILLS, *University of Queensland*

Introduction: Dealing with current contexts

An important issue in educational policy and practice over the last few years has been the way in which a renewed concern for boys' issues has reframed gender equity in education. There has been a lot of media talk about boys as the new disadvantaged in schooling. Some of these media constructions work with arguments and research derived from the recuperative arm of contemporary masculinity politics, including both mythopoetic and men's rights responses (Lingard & Douglas 1999). At worst, these arguments are misogynist and suggest that feminism has succeeded in both society and schooling and that it is now time for public policy (including education) to develop special programs for boys and men who are deemed to be the new disadvantaged. To some extent these calls have been successful in allowing those who articulate such views (for example, Biddulph 1997, Fletcher 1995, West 1995) to do work in schools and also influence those who work there. In educational policy terms, we have seen the defensive policy response of *Gender equity: A framework for Australian schools* (1997) which replaced the *National policy for the education of girls in Australian schools*. We should not, however, be too critical of this policy statement as it held off the possibility of a boys' program framed by anti-feminist sentiments and it also contains papers written by well-known feminists and pro-feminists and these work discursively to contain the recuperative and backlash readings of Part A, the policy section of the framework. Similarly, space has been opened up for pro-feminist questionings of the 'What about the boys?' refrain in school curricula and pedagogies (Mills 1997, forthcoming; Mills & Lingard 1997). Thus the current context has also allowed for both policy and practice interventions from a pro-feminist perspective within a broader framework of gender justice.

It is interesting that boys are now constructed as an equity issue. This has really come home to us in research we are currently conducting on school restructuring. When we have asked administrators and teachers about the most important equity issues in their schools, the most frequent response has been that of the supposed poor academic and social performance of boys. Equity workers in State Departments of Education tell us the same thing. The policy lexicon now talks of gender equity to signify the inclusion of boys, but it is almost as if today gender equity in education has become synonymous with a concern for boys. We thus believe that it is very important to theorise the issues of boys' education in more complex ways and place policies and practices for boys' schooling within a gender equity framework which acknowledges the ongoing need to consider girls' issues. This will entail, amongst other things, disaggregation of educational performance data. Such disaggregation will clearly demonstrate that girls as a social group are not outperforming boys as a social group (see here ch. 4, Lingard & Douglas 1999). However, it will also indicate the extent to which Aboriginal and working class boys do tend to have very low levels of academic achievement. This is, of course, not a startling revelation; it has been the case for a long time, but is worrying nonetheless in social justice terms. What is new is the way in which middle class girls are challenging middle class boys in 'masculinist' subjects such as physics. It is thus important when considering academic

performances to ask the questions, as posed by Teese et al. (1995), which girls and which boys are we talking about? The same applies to literacy which is a current policy concern and raises questions to do with the definition of literacy, how we measure performance and how we should seek to remediate the under-performance of working class boys.

Disaggregation of performance data should also entail an examination of participation levels. For instance, boys do a much narrower range of subjects than girls in the post-compulsory years (see Collins et al. 1996, Gilbert & Gilbert 1998). Boys do not study languages, the humanities and social sciences in the same numbers as girls. Dominant masculinising processes are at work here. These same processes are also implicated in boys' negative behaviours in schools. This anti-social behaviour of boys is clearly a problem in schools and society more generally and more specifically a problem for teachers, girls, and other boys—usually those practising marginalised masculinities.

The question then is—what ought to be done about boys? Our argument is that a proper disaggregation of the data on all of these dimensions will begin to tell us something about the complexity of the appropriate responses. Broader theorising is also required about the complementary constructions of masculinities and femininities and the role of schools in relation to these (see Connell 1996). This is so because the character of hegemonic masculinity is a central factor in boys' relationships to the academic and social orders of schools (Mac an Ghaill 1994). Thus, for example, effective interventions for working class boys' literacy problems would require work in schools around dominant practices of masculinity, as would strategies to alleviate anti-social and at risk behaviours amongst boys.

It is our view that most teachers and administrators in schools want to do the right thing concerning this range of boys' issues. However, we also believe media constructions of the issues often feed a recuperative masculinist or backlash type of response. (These issues are pursued in Bob Lingard's article in this special number of *Change*.) The danger here is that the backlash accounts carry some resonances with those working in schools, particularly when teachers experience daily boys' poor behaviour and sometimes dispirited commitment to school as the transitions between school and work, particularly for working class boys, have been disrupted or totally attenuated. Paul Willis' 'lads' now learn not to labour!

In Queensland recently some media publicity has been given to Maryborough State High School's Boys in Education Strategy. We deal with this Strategy briefly here not for the purpose of being critical, but rather for the heuristic purpose of traversing the relevant issues. This Strategy frames the issue as simply one of boys' under-achievement in the context of a taken for granted success of the feminist project for girls. The assumption is girls have succeeded and boys are now failing, a view expressed in the first page of the Strategy: 'It would appear that the boys have been left behind in the race for gender balance'. However, if one looks at the data on the Strategy's website (<http://www.cyberlink.com.au/boysined>) there is a clear overstatement of the success of girls which probably 'expresses a deeper cultural fear of the loss of male hegemony, and reinforces the belief that gender equity is a zero-sum game, with girls' gains coming at the expense of boys' (Lingard & Douglas 1999). The school's own data demonstrate that a few more girls are now doing the masculinist subjects at the post-compulsory level and doing well, but the fact that numbers of boys doing the humanities remains very low is not commented upon at all. Cherry Collins and her colleagues (1996) in their research found that while some schools had given attention to the issue of broadening girls' subject choices—getting more girls into maths and science, for example—there had been little

systematic attempt to broaden boys' subject choices in the post-compulsory years. While this is probably understandable, given the valorisation of the maths and sciences and their significance for careers, we believe that it is bad for boys and for the culture that so few boys study the humanities, social sciences and foreign languages. The Strategy also adapts feminist approaches which were used for girls for the apparent needs of boys, for example, in respect to role models for boys, while neglecting gender based power differentials within the societal gender order. The School's Deputy Principal, a woman, who is a major mover behind the Strategy, argues that feminists have always recognised the need to change boys so as to make things better for girls, a perspective with which we agree. Thus the Strategy is a well intentioned yet odd amalgam of recuperative masculinist and pro-feminist approaches.

Collectively, the articles in this special number of *Change* work within (pro)feminist frameworks. We use (pro)feminism to signify that we are talking of both feminist and pro-feminist approaches. Pro-feminism is that response within masculinity politics which has two foci, notably, support for feminist goals and a recognition of the related need to change men, or more pertinently, to change the practices of masculinity. Having said that, we recognise that pro-feminism is often easier said than done, but nevertheless does offer some progressive path through the mire of confusion present in response to the 'What about the boys?' discourse. (Pro)feminism recognises unequal power relations between men and women and boys and girls, rejects a battle of the sexes approach to boys' issues, accepts the disadvantages some boys experience through dominant practices of masculinity (as they intersect with class, race, ethnicity and sexuality), and takes as a central goal more equal gender relations in both school and society, and aims for what Bob Connell (1995) has called 'gender multiculturalism', whereby schools encourage and value many masculinities and femininities.

The articles in this *Change*

There are three articles which contextualise the current focus on boys' issues in education, namely those by Deb Hayes, Bob Lingard and Rob and Pam Gilbert. Deb Hayes takes an historical approach—or more accurately a genealogical approach—in her article, which documents the move from a discourse of differential provision in schooling for males and females to one of equitable provision. This transition occurred in the 1970s and, she suggests, is now taken for granted and within traditional histories regarded as progress. On that terrain she then traces the displacement of girls as the disadvantaged subject by a discourse of boys as the new disadvantaged as an operation or effect of power. She notes how this discursive construction might benefit girls (or at least some girls) and some disadvantaged boys, but at the same time have negative effects. This is the Foucauldian notion of discourses as both productive and repressive. In a normative sense, she suggests that it may be time to move on from the discourse of the disadvantaged subject. Feminisms of difference also probably challenge the discourse of equitable provision if it is read simply as the same curricula for all, or if the current status hierarchy of subjects remains unchallenged.

Julie McLeod (1998) has recently argued that backlash feminism, *a la* Faludi (1991) and French (1992), has sought to politically unify women's voices at the very same moment as post theorising has pushed feminist politics out of the comfort zone with its emphasis upon differences among women. While recognising the political usefulness of the backlash argument, she suggests that such accounts work with a simplistic view of history

and fail to recognise structural changes going on within society. Bob Lingard's article seeks to contextualise the 'What about the boys?' refrain, while accepting McLeod's critique of backlash accounts. He suggests that while both recuperative and progressive masculinity politics (Lingard & Douglas 1999) have been responses to the impact of feminism, the recuperative approach is also linked to the deprecations of economic globalisation which have produced political and policy uncertainties, as well as pervasive insecurity. The economic rationalist or market liberal response to economic globalisation has witnessed the growth in inequality, stark life experience divergences between those who have the credentials to participate in an almost globalised labour market and the rest, as well as intractably high levels of unemployment. At the same time, as argued by Sylvia Walby (1997) in the British context, there has been an increased convergence between the educational and career trajectories of young middle class males and females. As with this introduction and many of the articles contained in this *Change*, Lingard nonetheless suggests that the 'What about the boys?' discourse can be utilised to open up gender equity policies and practices in schools for (pro)feminist goals of a more gender just society. He outlines a framework for such policies, programs and practices in schools.

Rob and Pam Gilbert's article considers the links between concerns for boys' issues in schooling and broader political debates about contemporary masculinity. Jane Kenway (1995), in a somewhat ironic tone, has spoken of contemporary masculinities as being 'under siege, on the defensive and under reconstruction'. There have been two broad types of responses within masculinity politics to this situation—those of a pro-feminist character and those of an anti-feminist nature. The alternative responses in respect of schooling have been either a move to reject the negative aspects of dominant masculinity practices—as suggested in this introductory essay for example—or a revival of what some, particularly the mythopoetic or masculinity therapy men, see as the need to emphasise the virtues of traditional masculinity or masculine heritage. The Gilberts reject the latter approaches which work with what they call 'psychic essentialist' conceptions of masculinity. Such conceptions assert that there is only one 'true' way to be a man, that men are an homogeneous group and that the construction of masculinity is dependent upon a categorical distinction between men and women. In contrast, they argue for more open and flexible constructions of masculinity which would better meet the changing complexities of contemporary society. However, they do emphasise that some aspects (of a dominant masculinity) are virtues, for example, strength, courage, public leadership and independence, but that these have no essential meaning and are also practised by women. More specifically, the Gilberts support a notion of masculinity as negotiated performance, *à la* Judith Butler (1990), and acknowledge its relational character to femininities, as well as the existence of multiple masculinities. They put it this way: 'The problems of masculinity are best understood as the performance of a set of gender relations in a context where a narrow set of storylines and repertoires of action is culturally dominant and socially powerful'.

While these three contextualising articles deal largely with the Australian situation, Pat Mahony and Sue Smedley, from Roehampton Institute at The University of Surrey in England, deal with the issue of the under-achievement of boys in schooling in the UK context. There the boys' issue has been largely one of a concern about school performance. Mahony and Smedley note that this concern is not a new one—it has a long historical provenance with boys' success most often being attributed to 'innate brilliance' and failure to factors associated with teachers, pedagogies and curricula, with the reverse being true for girls with the added common explanation of girls' success as being attributable to

conscientious hard work. They also note the international character of the panic about boys and the contextual element in changing labour markets. On the latter: there has been in the UK a sharp decline in manufacturing as an employer of people—the traditional labour market segment dominated by males from working class backgrounds. Simultaneously, there has been the rise of 'feminised' service sector employment. Another factor in the panic about boys, they suggest, is a fear about what unemployed working class boys will do if they are not fully occupied in education and training and/or in employment. One response, both in Australia as well as the UK, has been the call for more men in teaching to serve as role models for such young men and to overcome the supposed feminised culture of schooling. (There has been the related concern about the impact of fatherless families (Blankenhorn 1996) upon boys. In some places the two issues have been linked.) They also document the role of the media in promulgating a particular reading of the boys' issue, an argument also explored by Bob Lingard in his article. In concluding, Mahony and Smedley suggest the need for a better understanding and analysis of what is going on and the need to move beyond a battle of the sexes, essentialised account of boy/girl differential performances in schooling. They also note that the current concern about boys' education should be utilised to make masculinities the focus of concern for schools, a stance they take in respect of a gender equity agenda, as well as in relation to boys and changing labour markets. This stance is echoed in the Rob and Pam Gilbert article, and also in Bob Lingard's.

Martin Mills in his article also acknowledges how panic about the behaviour of boys in some schools has opened up possibilities for (pro)feminist boys' programs to be introduced into school curricula. His article is thus focused on the operation of specific programs for boys in schools. In many instances the entry of such programs, such as the gender and violence program considered in his article, occurs largely via personal development type subjects. This article demonstrates how such a point of entry can be problematic. For instance, such subjects are often seen as peripheral to the 'real' business of schooling and hence in many schools large numbers of students, and some teachers, do not engage with the content matter with any great seriousness. Furthermore, the implementation of gender and violence programs through these subjects usually occurs as one-off programs and as such are often ineffectual in addressing the more deep rooted causes of gender-based violence. This need not be the case. The experiences of one school documented in this article serve as an indicator of how it is possible for such programs to act as a starting point for implementing a whole school approach to tackling the problem of gender and violence.

Conclusion

The contemporary focus on boys' issues in schooling is related to the rise of recuperative masculinity politics and must also be situated in the context of contemporary changes brought about by globalisation. As suggested throughout this introduction and in the articles included in this *Change*, the current politics surrounding boys and masculinity can be utilised for (pro)feminist interventions. However, it should be recognised that this will involve contestation and resistance. And while the systemic policy frames have held off the worst claims of recuperative masculinists, for example, the national *Gender Equity Framework* (1997), these frames are not operating in a context where there appears to be widespread system support for such (pro)feminist approaches to boys' issues. And anyhow, devolution has seen schools develop their own local policy frames; unfortunately

media constructions of the 'masculinity crisis' and issues to do with boys are often of the recuperative masculinity politics kind and have more powerful effects on school policies and practices than the commitments and work of state equity workers and their policies. The achievement of changes in schools of the type argued for here is not easy, as the research of Jane Kenway and her colleagues (1997) has clearly demonstrated. It nonetheless remains an important goal for those committed to a more gender just schooling system and society.

REFERENCES

- Biddulph, S. (1997) *Raising Boys*. Sydney: Finch.
- Blankenhorn, D. (1996) *Fatherless America: Confronting our Most urgent social problem*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, C., Batten, M., Ainley, J. & Getty, C. (1996) *Gender and school education*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Commonwealth Schools Commission (1987) *The national policy for the education of girls in Australian schools*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Connell, R.W. (1995) *Masculinities*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Connell, R.W. (1996) 'Teaching the boys: New research on masculinity, and gender strategies for schools', *Teachers college record*, 98 (2) pp. 206-35.
- Faludi, S. (1991) *Backlash: The undeclared war against women*. London: Vintage.
- Fletcher, R. (1995) 'Changing the lives of boys' in R. Browne & R. Fletcher (eds) *Boys in schools: Addressing the real issues—Behaviour, values and relationships*. Sydney: Finch, pp. 202-211.
- French, M. (1992) *The war against women*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Gender Equity Taskforce for Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1997) *Gender equity: A framework for Australian schools*. ACT Government, Canberra.
- Gilbert, R. and Gilbert, P. (1998) *Masculinity goes to school*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Kenway, J. (1995) 'Masculinities in schools: Under siege, on the defensive and under reconstruction', *Discourse*, 16, 1, pp. 59-79.
- Kenway, J., Willis, S., Blackmore, J. & Rennie, L. (1997) *Answering back: Girls, boys and feminism*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Lingard, B. & Douglas, P. (1999) *Men engaging feminisms: Pro-feminism, backlashes and schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Mac an Ghail, M. (1994) *The making of men: Masculinities, sexualities and schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McLeod, J. (1998) 'Out of the comfort zone: Feminism after the backlash'. *Discourse*, 19, p. 3.
- Mills, M. (1997) 'Boys and masculinities in schools', *Education links*, 54, pp. 22-24.
- Mills, M. (forthcoming) 'Issues in implementing boys' programs in schools: Male teachers and empowerment'. *Gender and education*.
- Mills, M. & Lingard, B. (1997) 'Reclaiming the 'what about the boys?' Discourse for gender justice in schools and society', *Social alternatives*, 16, 3, pp. 51-54.
- Teese, R., Davies, M., Charlton, M. & Polesel, J. (1995) *Who wins at school? Boys and girls in Australia*. Department of Education Policy: The University of Melbourne.
- Walby, S. (1997) *Gender transformations*. London: Routledge.
- West, P. (1995) 'Giving boys a ray of hope: Masculinity and hope', Discussion paper for Gender Equity Taskforce Australia.