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Deborah Hartman

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Towards New Approaches to Reviewing Literature in Gender Education

Deborah Hartman, University of Newcastle, New South Wales, AUSTRALIA

Abstract: Policy making and practice for gender equity in schools is undergoing substantial change as the focus has shifted in recent years from girls to boys. It has been argued that social policy makers need evidence from a variety of sources to make informed decisions about social policy and program implementation. There should be ways of characterising, comparing and contrasting differing perspectives from the public, the media, research and practitioners so that their similarities and differences can be laid open for inspection and therefore provide broad, deep and useful information to policy makers and practitioners. New approaches to reviewing and synthesising literature have both been claimed to have the potential to provide more useful information to social policy makers about 'what works' than traditional methods of reviewing literature. One is an 'argument catalogue' developed by the Canadian Network for Knowledge Utilisation. This paper outlines an attempt to synthesise literature from a variety of sources, including views from parent bodies, teacher unions, practitioners, the media, government departments, and research and theoretical perspectives on gender in schools. The paper offers the findings from utilising this approach as one possible way of dealing with the complexities facing research on policy and practice in this highly contested field.

Keywords: Research Methodology, Literature Review, Gender Equity in School Education

POLICY MAKING AND practice for gender equity in Australian schools is undergoing substantial change as the focus has shifted in recent years from girls to boys. One difficulty for policy makers and practitioners is that concerns about boys do not fit neatly into policies about gender equity that were largely designed to address concerns about women and girls. Policy making around gender equity for girls occurring in the 80's and 90's in Australia was informed by a wider social movement of change for women and a congruent social theory of gender construction. In contrast, the public debate about the need to address boys' educational issues occurring during the 90's and 00's has centred around 'evidence', particularly statistical analyses of a variety of academic and social outcomes for boys compared to girls.

New methodologies for informing social policy making have the potential to move the discussion on boys' education forward from a hotly contested, highly emotional and rather rigid adherence to particular positions towards ways that could bring together the common, distinct and differing views. Methodological approaches to characterising, comparing and contrasting differing perspectives from the public, the media, practitioners and researchers so that their similarities and differences can be laid open for inspection have the potential to provide broad, deep and useful information to policy makers and implementers.

This paper argues for a new and broader approach to reviewing the literature on educating boys that could synthesise the major issues and theoretical concepts raised in public, government policy, and practitioner and research documents regarding boys' education; identify common and dissonant assumptions and gaps in these documents; and identify the most promising lines of inquiry for addressing the issues raised. The paper offers the preliminary findings from utilising this approach as one possible way of dealing with the complexities facing research on policy and practice in this highly contested field.

The Gender Equity Debate in Australia

Concern about girls' education in Australia, as in other Western countries, grew during the 1970's from the second wave of feminist activism and widespread social movements for change in the status of women. One of the major drivers of the social movement was the disparity in women's economic and social status compared to men. The policy making around girls' education was therefore located within equity frameworks that saw education as a means to an end, the end being equal access for women to the economic and social benefits of society already enjoyed by men. Significantly, the commonwealth government took leadership on national policy making in this area, despite education largely being the responsibility of the various state and territory governments in Australia. A commonwealth report *Girls, School and Society* (Schools Commis-



sion, 1975) argued the case for equity for girls and women in schooling and society that was subsequently enshrined in policy.

In this policy and theory, the root causes of the problems facing girls were seen in the wider power relations in society and the school and in the broad inequality of relationships between men and women as a whole. Gender equality, not just in terms of access to education, which in Australia is compulsory, but also in terms of outcomes, was central to the theory and programs were addressed towards all girls. A *National Policy for the Education of Girls* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987) was developed with the cooperation of the commonwealth and all states and territories.

A review of the policy in 1993 led to the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls, 1993-1997*, (Australian Education Council, 1993). Girls were clearly the target of the strategies in this plan. Explicit in both of these documents was an important program focus on girls' subject choices as a limiting factor in their later career choices. Strategies to address this often involved role models of women in non-traditional jobs and industries. Sexual harassment as a barrier to girls' achievement in school and in work was another major focus. Programs addressing sexual harassment at an individual, curriculum and school organisational level were implemented. Curriculum offerings and school policy implementation were designed to raise awareness that sexual harassment and violence towards women was unacceptable and at a school level would attract serious consequences for perpetrators. Some school-based programs were designed to explicitly teach the theory of the social construction of gender and to assist students to identify gender limitations and unequal economic and social gender relationships in society and at school. Attempts to more fully integrate understandings of the social construction of gender into curriculum frameworks were thwarted by the collapse of the processes to develop a national curriculum and a return of these responsibilities to each state and territory department. (Daws, 1997) More recently, gender equity has been included in the curriculum along with discussions of other inequalities in society in the form of content or assessment tasks which explicitly takes a 'critical' stance. A notable example of this is the critical literacy approach within the subject English curriculum which explores assumptions or positions underlying texts in specific theoretical ways.

To the extent that the strategies of the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* addressed boys at all, they were targeted towards boys' recognition that their behaviours had a detrimental impact upon girls and women. However, at the same time, there was mounting public concern in Australia, as

in other developed countries, such as the USA, Canada, the UK and New Zealand, about the achievement of boys. In contrast to the social movement and theorising about social constructs characterising the implementation of policies for girls, the public debate about the need to address boys' educational issues occurring during the 90's and 00's has centred around the 'evidence' or statistical analyses of comparative data of various academic and social criteria, that seemed to indicate that boys as a group and specific groups of boys were not doing as well as they could either compared to girls as a whole, or a comparable specific group of girls, or compared to their historical levels of achievement.

The *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* laid the groundwork for this focus on statistical evidence when it for the first time required reporting of statistical data. Literacy and numeracy levels, performance on key employment related competencies and student pathways were expected to be reported on in the annual National Reports on Schooling in Australia (Daws, 1997). This focus on 'evidence' represents a shift in policy making that has been occurring in most social policy fields throughout the last decade. The reporting of statistical data was increasingly required of all government agencies in line with a trend towards a more 'evidence-based' approach to social policy planning and decision making.

The data revealed some interesting differences between boys and girls academic outcomes. This evidence showed that girls as a gender group had made substantial gains in some areas and had in fact always been ahead of boys in other areas. Literacy data indicates that girls have always outperformed boys in literacy testing over the 20 year period of reporting and that the gap between boys and girls is increasing not decreasing over time. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004, 2007)

The National Reports on Schooling in Australia and Australian Bureau of Statistics Data Cubes on schooling factors also indicate that there have been significant changes to numbers of girls choosing particular science subjects and higher level maths subjects; to the numbers of young women entering university and to the range of courses chosen by women at university in the past ten years. (Cumpston and Smith, 2003; DETYA, 2000) These are some aspects the 1993 plan for girls was designed to address. The extent to which the National Action Plan contributed to these gains made by girls in education has never been fully evaluated and has kept pace with societal changes in employment patterns and gender relations. Clearly, girls have made many gains since the inception of the national action plan and while inequalities still exist, the national gender equity policies and strategies are widely considered

to have been successful for girls in a number of ways. (Daws, 1997)

There have also been significant improvements in income levels for some women, yet workers in certain female dominated industries remain amongst the lowest paid. As well, barriers to women's participation in and promotion to the highest executive levels in industry and public life also remain. Sexual harassment and domestic violence rates have not significantly improved. There are still many barriers to girls' and women's full participation in all aspects of social and economic life. The hope espoused in the 1975 Schools' Commission report that increased access to and outcomes from the broadest range of educational opportunities would result in wider social change has not yet been fully realised.

Boys' Education in Australia

At the same time as data on academic indicators for both boys and girls were being more rigorously gathered and scrutinised by schools, data on health and social outcomes for boys was also being gathered together for the first time. Accident rates, deaths, completed suicide rates, involvement with violence (either as victim or perpetrator), drug and alcohol abuse and incarceration rates all showed far greater numbers of boys at risk on these indicators than girls (Vimpani, Fletcher and Vorobioff, 1996; AIHW, 2003, 2007).

School based data reveals there is current evidence of boys' overall lower social and academic achievement compared to girls in literacy from as early as Year 3, in school retention and specific subject and overall results at year 12. In addition, boys are significantly over-represented in school attendance and behaviour indicators such as detentions, suspensions and expulsions and in other social indicators listed above. There is evidence that all of these indicators are particularly high amongst boys from low-socio-economic circumstances, rural locations and amongst indigenous boys (Lamb, 1997; Marks and Fleming, 1999; ABS, 2007).

The linking together of academic and social data on boys created a powerful set of indicators that for many parents and teachers illustrated that the academic and social and emotional needs of many boys were not being met by current school programs and policies (Browne and Fletcher, 1995). This data and discussion was widely reported in the media. In the academic debate about boys' education however, this evidence-based approach was hotly contested. Many academic researchers and policy makers who had been intimately involved in the development of policies for girls, saw the interest in boys' education, particularly as it was reported in the media, as a conservative backlash against the gains made by girls

and women, and as an attempt to reassert male dominance. The nature and validity of the evidence presented was questioned. There was discussion about whether the very act of analysing data in this way contributed to a 'competing victim syndrome' that pitted boys needs against those of girls and therefore was not useful. (Kenway, 1997; Hayes, 1998; Lingard, 1998) In many academic discourses, media comment was often castigated as producing or contributing to the perceived 'competing victim syndrome.' Sensationalist headlines from tabloid newspapers were often quoted as a representation of this problem and a small random selection of articles cited as examples of this phenomena. (2000) A cursory search of the major NSW metropolitan newspaper, The Sydney Morning Herald, reveals over 200 diverse articles on the topic of boys' education within the five year period 2000-2005, yet to date no serious quantitative or content analysis of media articles on the topic has been undertaken.

Campaigns to address concerns over boys' education were often driven by parents and teachers and initially conducted by individual teachers and schools or by teachers associations (University of Newcastle, 1994). Practitioner responses to the data on boys' achievements were often careful to assert that any suggested programs for boys should not be to the detriment of girls. Suggestions often mirrored approaches prevalent in the UK during the 1990's where there was already a much stronger data reporting culture amongst schools, education authorities and educational researchers. U.K. research often linked school data on outcomes with programs within the school. (Kent County Council, 1997; NFER, 1999a; 1999b; 2000) In 1996, the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals independently produced a discussion document on improving the school performance of boys which contained many suggestions later taken up by individual schools.

As early as 1994, one state government in Australia, NSW, had commissioned an inquiry into boys' education in that state which found that there were indeed significant educational issues for boys which should be systematically investigated and addressed (O'Doherty, 1994). This was followed by the NSW Board of Studies Report of the Gender Project Steering Committee (1996). However, no substantial policy changes occurred as a result of this inquiry and report.

The federal government again took leadership on the issue of gender in education. In 1996, a new document *Gender Equity – A Framework for Australian Schools* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1996) was produced which attempted to include boys' educational needs within the existing framework largely designed to address structural inequalities experienced by girls. This document and subsequent

attempts to revise it have met with mixed reaction from both advocates for a continuing explicitly feminist, social construction approach to girls' strategies and those who advocate for a different approach to the needs of boys. The hard won educational policies for girls represented the success of a wider social movement for the emancipation of women. These policies were not designed to answer the increasingly publicly asked question "What about the boys?" Many regarded the inclusion of boys into this framework as a watering down of the original intention to draw attention to structural inequalities experienced by girls. Others argued that the focus only on structural inequalities did not do justice to the variety of issues facing boys in a world of changing gender relations and expectations. It appears that an explicitly feminist, theory-driven, girl-focused approach was unable to successfully incorporate the emerging concerns about the education of boys. Daws (1997) argues that the particular political, personal and bureaucratic relationships and structures in the state and federal education sectors during the 1980's and 90's contributed both to the success of the original girls' education policy, to its eventual weakening and perhaps to its ultimate demise. This remains to be seen.

To address this seeming impasse, the federal government committed itself to two actions. It commissioned research on the educational performance and post-school destinations of boys and girls. This influential report (Collins, Kenway and McLeod, 2000) set the agenda for much of the academic and policy discussion around gender in schools in Australia from then on. The report clearly linked gender to social disadvantage and argued for a 'which boys, which girls' approach that identified gender as one of a number of possible compounding and intersecting social disadvantages or limitations effecting outcomes for some boys and girls which included socio-economic and educational status of parents, poverty, rural location and indigeneity. It linked boys' and girls' education to the broad anti-discrimination goals embodied in *The Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the twenty-first century*, (MCEETYA, 1987), which was a general document agreed upon by the commonwealth and all state and territory governments.

The second action of the federal government was to open a federal inquiry into the education of boys. Two hundred and thirty one written submissions were received from members of the public, particularly individual parents and representative parent bodies; teachers and their representative organisations; state departments and school systems such as the private independent and church school systems; as well as education commentators and researchers.

As well, two hundred and thirty-five witnesses appeared in person before the committee.

The report on this inquiry (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002) identified nine areas of interest: labor market and societal changes; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; literacy and numeracy; schools, teachers and role models; peer relationships; school structures; teacher training; male teachers, fathers and role models; and reporting responsibilities. They made twenty four separate recommendations. In response to the report the federal government subsequently funded two large national programs: the Boys Education Lighthouse Schools program (BELS) and the Success for Boys (S4B) program, which were both based on two application and funding rounds or stages where interested schools across Australia could apply for funds to conduct projects in individual schools or small clusters. Clusters were usually between five and seven schools in the same geographical area. Through BELS, schools could apply for funds to conduct their own 'evidence-based' school-based innovations to meet the needs of boys in their school. In 2003, this program released a summary report of the first phase of the program which outlined ten guiding principles for success in educating boys. The principles centred around the now common themes: pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; literacy and communication skills; student engagement and motivation; behaviour management and positive role models for students. The final report on this program was released in 2006, well after the next federal program supporting boys' education S4B had commenced (Cuttance, Imms, Godhino, Hartnell-Young, Thompson, McGuinness and Neal, 2006). This left little possibility that the findings could inform the new project. The report showed that 351 primary and secondary and other schools participated in the program across all states and territories and from a variety of capital cities, regional centres and rural locations. It concluded that schools that were most successful in meeting the outcomes of the program conducted complex, integrated multi-faceted strategies that were supported at a whole school level. Many schools focused on a small sub-group of boys within the school or cluster. The program added a large amount of knowledge on successful approaches to educating boys, particularly in the area of developing activity-based learning environments to suit boys' learning styles. The challenge, the report says, is to build this knowledge into the every day practices of all schools. The most significant outcome achieved in the project schools was improved outcomes in boys' behaviour. A difficulty of project schools was their capacity to collect, analyse and interpret data. The short time-frame of 18 months implementation which did not coincide with the normal school plan-

ning cycle was also a difficulty for project schools in demonstrating or achieving changes in academic outcomes.

Through S4B, individual schools applied for funds to conduct professional development and targeted action research projects around the specific needs of boys in their school. Around 700 schools have participated. An evaluation of the outcomes of this program is currently underway.

The focus on boys' education in recent years has produced a huge upsurge in teacher professional development and experimenting with new programs and practices to address issues at a school or district level. Along side of the large scale federal programs, many practice innovations have been undertaken and reported on at conferences and in practitioner journals (University of Newcastle, 1994-2007; Hartman, 2006).

The research literature seems to concur with the themes identified by the large scale government programs. Four key themes for directions on improving educational and social outcomes for boys emerge from research literature. These are male identities; relationships with others; literacy attainment; and teachers' pedagogy and student motivation and engagement. All of these operate within the school environment and influence the quality of boys' school lives and academic success. While there are differing theoretical perspectives on the nature of the themes (and therefore type of intervention suggested), it is agreed that the themes are interactive and interventions to address issues within the themes can improve educational and social outcomes for boys. In order to improve school outcomes it has been suggested that the role of adult males, particularly fathers and father figures, is important (Fletcher, 2000; Barwick, 2004); dominant views of masculinity be explored (Connell 2000, Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli, 2003; Martino, Mills and Lingard, 2003); boys' interests and activities be incorporated in the curriculum (Blair and Sanford 2002; Smith and Wilhelm, 2002; Cuttance et al, 2006); family and community cultural capital of boys should be utilized (Kalantzis, Cope, and Harvey, 2003; Curriculum Corp, 2003); teachers and the pedagogies they use contribute most significantly (Slade and Trent, 2002; Rowe 2001,2002; Hattie, 2005); approaches to boys and literacy need rethinking (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert and Muspratt,2002; Rowe 2001,2002; Wheldall and Beaman 2003; Clay and Hartman 2004).

There has been more than a decade of government, academic and practitioner activity about boys' and girls' education since the 1996 policy attempt to bring together issues for boys and girls into one gender equity policy document, yet we are no closer to a consensus on these issues. The social theory

driven approach to girls' education and the ad hoc experimental approach to boys' education, both driven by the federal government do not seem to have produced a consistent approach to gender across the states and territories.

The linking of gender to social disadvantage, while drawing attention to important issues such as the large gap between outcomes for indigenous students and others and the importance of poverty in school outcomes seems to leave little space for a new engagement with gender itself. Critics of the policy point to the lack of inclusion of a post-modernist theoretical perspective that would give more weight to an individual boy's or girl's experience of gender in their lives. (Daws, 2004) One criticism of the focus on societal factors in girls' education is the inability of many of the educational programs and practices to move beyond a critique of society towards actions that support girls' educational and life choices in concrete ways. School programs seem to have difficulty in encompassing the real life concerns and dilemmas of modern girls and boys who are living in a world of full employment, juggling personal and gender identity issues in their decisions about careers, in the full knowledge of the need for two incomes for families to afford housing and educational expenses, the need to make child-bearing and care decisions, and to balance work and family responsibilities as the roles of men and women become increasingly blurred. Emerging discussions about an emphasis on difference, on the inter-relatedness of sex and gender, incorporating new knowledge of neurological and biological differences and on approaches that frame difference and diversity, including gender as a positive identity framework cannot easily be accommodated within the current policy frameworks. In New Zealand a strengths based approach to male identity has been suggested in government reports on youth development (Barwick, 2004.) In the USA practitioners and commentators are exploring gender differences in brain development that may influence learning and pedagogy (Gurian and Stevens, 2007; Sax, 2006). While a positive sense of gender identity has been suggested as important, systematic approaches to gender difference and positive identity have not yet been fully explored. There is a danger, that without a systematic agreed way to deal with gender issues in schools, that gender is by default being removed from the policy making agenda altogether.

Two central issues remain unresolved. The first is whether boys' issues can be incorporated into a gender equity framework designed for girls. The second is the state and school reporting and accountability requirements around boys' and girls' outcomes that could provide hard evidence of need and success.

National policy making in this area has stalled as there appears to be little agreement and no clear ways to incorporate disparate approaches. There remains a policy vacuum in gender equity and in strategies to meet the gendered educational needs of both boys and girls.

A New Approach

There is an urgent need for a new approach to the evidence relating to boys' and girls' education. The short examination of the recent literature on the education of girls and boys provided in this paper reveals a wide variety of opinions, approaches and theoretical frameworks, often competing and overlapping within any one document. The literature on the education of boys cannot be understood without placing it in the context of the previous and current discussion of the education of girls. There has been prolific discussion and debate on the issues surrounding the education of boys and its relationship to the education of girls in the public, media, practitioner, academic and policy making arenas, particularly in the last ten years. It remains a highly contested field without clear policy guidance that fully reflects recent interest in the education of boys and with a plethora of different practical programs and approaches being used in different context with a great degree of variance in demonstrated success.

There is a need for a wide-ranging literature review that would assist policy-making on girls' and boys' education to continue. The purpose of such a review would be: to identify the recent and current evidence regarding outcomes for boys and girls at Australian primary and secondary schools; to synthesise the major issues and theoretical concepts raised in public, government policy, practitioner and research documents regarding these outcomes; to identify common and dissonant assumptions and gaps in these documents; and to identify the most promising lines of inquiry for addressing the issues raised.

Mays, Pope and Popay (2005) describe the variety of ways health researchers could approach evidence from a wide range of sources. They argue that a cocorane-style systematic review is not appropriate to applied fields as it only has the capacity to take into account a narrow range of research literature. Four different types of reviews offer the applied researcher broader scope to take into account all the available evidence. These are narrative approaches, which include some form of thematic analysis or knowledge synthesis, meta-narrative analysis, qualitative meta-ethnographies and quantitative synthesis. While there is no single agreed framework for incorporating evidence from a wide range of sources they argue that the choice of approach is contingent on

the aims of the study and the nature of the available evidence.

In seeking to make sense of the wealth of data available about boys' and girls' education in order to inform gender policy, a standard review of published articles in academic journals and of published research reports is inappropriate, as these articles only represent a small sector of the discussion on educating boys and girls. An approach that would encompass and give weight to all views expressed about this public issue of concern to all sectors of society is needed. A relatively new approach to reviewing literature, an argument catalogue, has been developed by the Canadian Network for Knowledge Utilisation (CanKnow), in response to the need for research to inform and provide guidance to practice and policy making in applied fields such as education. An argument catalogue "is a systematic compilation of views on a topic from various documented sources..." (Abrami, Bernard and Wade, 2006, p418).

Argument catalogues are a specific type of literature review. The purpose of argument catalogues is to identify consistencies and inconsistencies between research evidence, public policy, practitioner experience and public perception. The processes associated with developing an argument catalogues can present similarities and differences and bring to light multiple and discrepant views. It has the potential to illuminate what exists in particular bodies of literature as well as what may be missing.

"... an argument catalogue attempts to provide a comprehensive and inclusive framework for understanding by giving voice to all the key constituencies who generate and apply what has been learned" (Abrami, Bernard and Wade, 2006, p420).

An argument catalogue is a tool to systematically compile evidence from a variety of sources, beyond those usually found in systematic literature reviews. It can include evidence from the print media, as an expression of the general public's exposure to the issue under scrutiny. It can also include policy documents, articles from practitioner journals as well as reviews of literature and primary research studies. The argument catalogue offers ways of characterising, comparing and contrasting differing perspectives from the public, the media, research and practitioners so that their similarities and differences can be laid open for inspection and therefore provide the possibility of broad, deep and useful information to policy makers and practitioners. The methodology of an argument catalogue involves developing appropriate coding mechanisms that can take account of this variety of sources that is quantifiable and also summarises the major messages from the documents in a qualitative way.

This approach has been used in a small-scale study, reviewing a number of submissions to the In-

quiry into the Education of Boys conducted in 2000 by the Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training (Hartman, 2008). It appears to offer great promise as a methodology to review a much wider body of literature to inform new policy making around boys' and girls' education.

The terms of reference for the inquiry into the education of boys were quite wide ranging and elicited almost 500 written and verbal responses. They were to:

- “inquire into and report on the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling; and
- the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.”

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, p.xi)

The submissions to the inquiry in 2000 offer the researcher a significant body of evidence and a clear snapshot of public, practitioner, academic and policy making discourses at a particular time. A comparative analysis of these submissions, through the methodology of an argument catalogue has the potential to inform the current discussion of boys' education and current attempts to reform gender equity policy.

Hartman (2008) coded for and quantified submissions according to author type, length, submission structural logic and content in order to meaningfully compare the widely divergent documents. Submissions were coded according to the content categories of identity, learning, relationships and systems. As well submissions were coded according to theory or assumption categories which were: Evidence-based, Theory-based, Strengths-based practice or Deficit-focused. If submissions contained suggestions for strategies, they were coded according to the strategy categories: Discipline specific or Multi-dimensional/multi-disciplinary; strength-based practice or deficit-focused.

The study found considerable overlap in the themes for the identified concerns throughout all submissions and across all author categories. This overlap suggests that concerns were shared by the public, practitioners, policy makers and academics alike. This is an interesting finding in light of the highly contested nature of the debate. The content analysis also revealed evidence of a greater emphasis on certain themes by certain author groups. Also evident were particular types of inter-relatedness between the themes emphasised by some author

groups. There was a more extensive overlap between the public and practitioner submissions in relation to the themes emphasised, than there was between those groups and either the policy makers or academics. Similarly, there was a more extensive overlap between policy makers and academic submissions than between them and the public or practitioner group. The public submissions seemed to be concerned about boys in a holistic way, including both social and academic concerns and linking these together as a general concern about how boys were coping in the wider world. A very strong theme among both public and practitioner was that boys needed more male role models in schools, either teachers or other older men who could model appropriate behaviour and learning and connect with them on a personal level. They often mentioned the need for male teachers to specifically teach boys relationships skills, including self-control and of accepting responsibility.

Another interesting finding of the study was that public and practitioner submissions tended to be more critiques of current sociological theories than supporters of them and also tended to draw more on models of practice than theory based analysis for their suggested strategies. Academics on the other hand, tended to be supporters of current theories, with these four policy makers evenly divided between supporting and critiquing current theories.

While there was evidence of competing theoretical positions, and of extremes in positions, findings suggest that there may be more common ground amongst groups taking very divergent positions when it comes to practical strategies and solutions than it would first appear. Interestingly, some suggestions from policy makers and academics who urge a continuation of the current gender equity framework are very similar to those who urge an overhaul of the current framework.

The study also found indications that there is a well articulated body of practitioner knowledge or beliefs about effective teaching practices for boys as a group that is not so evident in current policy documents.

Conclusions

The methodology of the argument catalogue appears to be a very useful method for comparing diverse sets of literature. The process of developing and analysing content categories and comparing across author types reveals common themes and areas of difference within and across author categories that are extremely useful for further analysis. It would seem that this methodology does offer a way forward for a more detailed discourse analysis of themes within and between author categories to further ex-

plore common patterns and differences in discourses. This approach could be utilised to analyse the wider literature on educating boys, beyond the submissions to the inquiry.

There is a need for more analysis of the wider literature using this approach. The current policy and practice documents of state and federal education departments and systems and the body of published academic and practitioner literature in the field can be analysed using this methodology. It appears that the government has not systematically taken up a range of strategies widely supported by the public and practitioner submissions, particularly those around male identity and male role models. An argument catalogue would shed light on this as it gives

the ability to map the overlap between the discourses and the areas where there is no overlap.

The field of educating boys remains highly contested. Unlike girls' education, the links between a social movement, education practice, education policy and demands for wider social change, can not be so easily be forged. The commonalities and differences between the needs of girls and boys are still unclear. There seems no clear way forward within current policy frameworks. An argument catalogue that could make sense of and draw together the similarities and lay bare the differences in public, practitioner, policy and academic discourses would be an important contribution to the field.

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About the Author*Deborah Hartman*

Deborah Hartman Dip Teach (DDIAE, QLD), BA (Macquarie University, NSW), Grad Dip Teaching English as a Second Language (Darwin, N.T.), MEd (Deakin University, Vict.) Deborah has been an educator for over twenty years. She has taught primary aged children in Queensland, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, Australia, where she worked as a teacher, teacher-educator and curriculum developer with Aboriginal communities. Deborah is the mother of two fine young men and has an interest in the care and education of boys, both as a teacher and parent. She is currently the Manager of Research at the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia. She is particularly interested in women's work with boys and the relationship between the social and academic outcomes for boys and those for girls. Deborah believes that child-care and school settings offer us important opportunities for developing wonderful, equitable relationships between boys and girls and for assisting both boys and girls to reach their full potential.