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1

Introduction: Beyond Structural Reforms

Introduction

Since the early 1990s through to this moment, in the nations of the global north issues on boys' education have been placed firmly on the policy agenda, as well as exercising the minds of many practitioners and parents. Such concerns have not been restricted to these nations (see, for example, Jha and Kelleher, 2006), despite the clear issues for girls in all countries, but especially so in many countries of the global south. There are many similarities that cut across the various boys' agendas in the global north and south. However, this book is concerned with the ways in which the boys' debate has led to various structural reforms in English-speaking countries. The reforms in these countries are not identical, though, there are specificities connected to the histories and cultures of national and local systems and schools, policies and practices. For example, Australia, where since the 1970s there has been significant state engagement with gender equity, has seen a policy refocus on boys to the neglect of girls. Furthermore, in contrast to the largely symbolic, albeit important, girls' policies of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the various national boys' policies have been supported with substantial federal government funding. However, in Canada, which also has a federal political structure, education remains the jurisdiction of provinces, which has led to a more piecemeal approach to the emerging issues in boys' education, while many of the issues confronted have been the same. In the US the boys' agenda has largely been one of race, while the issue of boys' education generally has had little impact upon policy development. Unlike Australia and Canada, where there has been some concern over boys' social outcomes, in England the agenda has been very much concerned with boys' achievement in national tests

and external exams. However, in all of these locations there has been a concern over boys' literacy performance, reflecting the contemporary fetish of education systems with literacy testing as an outcomes accountability measure of school performance, what Comber and Hill (2000) have called the literacization of contemporary education policy. There has also been an almost universal concern about boys' behaviour in school reflected in data on high rates of misbehaviour, dropouts, expulsions and suspensions in schools. Interestingly, the various engagements with the boys' debate have often received bi-partisan political support in many countries.

However, despite these variations on a theme, most of the responses to the boys' agenda in these countries have been focused on implementing structural changes in systems and schools. For example, systems have sought to develop specific boys' policies and to attract and recruit more male teachers, whilst schools, often in response to their readings of policies or media constructions of boys' issues, have instigated 'boy-friendly schooling' and implemented single-sex classes in co-educational schools. Rarely has there been a focus on pedagogical practices that recognize the connections between performance and the construction of gender (Keddie and Mills, 2007), whilst the focus on male teachers has tended to emphasize the embodied presence of males rather than the significance of their pedagogical practices (Mills *et al.*, 2004). The focus on male teachers has also moved attention away from the gender-segmented nature of teaching and leadership in schools and education systems with men still dominating leadership positions and men in female-dominated segments often experiencing a glass-escalator effect in terms of careers (Williams, 1992). There has also been a neglect of subject choices, which remain highly gendered with more, mainly middle-class, girls now studying maths and sciences at senior levels, but boys still choosing subjects associated with masculinity and technical-rational epistemologies. Furthermore, many of these responses have been grounded in a competing victim syndrome and a recuperative masculinity politics, both of which in simplistic fashion essentialize the binary categories of boys and girls. The competing victim syndrome works to marginalize and silence issues of concern about girls' educational experiences, while constructing boys as the new disadvantaged. Recuperative masculinity politics fail to problematize dominant constructions of masculinity, and indeed perpetuate them. Such a politics also works against a recognition of the differences amongst boys related to the social organization of masculinity, which Connell (1995) has described as the interplay of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and

marginalized masculinities. Issues of poverty, sexuality, race/ethnicity, disability matter for boys *and* girls; their intersections also need to be considered and taken account of in relation to systemic and school-based responses to the boys' debate (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003).

We not only recognize the significance of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1992), unifying the category of women, in the construction of the feminist agenda around the structural inequalities facing girls and women in schools, but also realize that a similar discursive strategy of strategic essentialism has been used to different ends in the boys' debate, within which boys have been constituted as a single undifferentiated disadvantaged category. This discursive work, which essentializes boys and men, has occurred at a time when more individualized politics have been ascendant, associated with the self-responsibilization and self-capitalization of neo-liberal politics (Rose, 1999). We would also note that there was by and large a neglect of homophobia in the earlier feminist-framed interventions, as well as a silence about these matters in contemporary concerns about boys.

Just as the focus on girls' schooling was linked to a feminist agenda, the concern for boys in schools is also linked to a broader men's movement. This movement is not one-dimensional, but involves a range of groups such as the mythopoetic, men's rights and pro-feminist groupings, who have concerns over different aspects of gender politics and its impact on the well-being of boys and men. The mythopoets have tended to focus on archetypal and 'deep' masculinities, which they argue have been thwarted by feminism and industrialization and need rejuvenation through male bonding and homosocial connectedness. The men's rights movement sees men as victims of feminism, specifically affirmative action, and also of the legal system, especially in relation to child custody and access after divorce. Related to both the mythopoetic and men's rights movements have been moral concerns and panics about absent fathers and single mothers, with the call for more male teachers sometimes being a response to such expressed anxieties, a chromosomal response to deep cultural changes. In contrast, pro-feminist politics is built on a male alliance with women in addressing misogyny, sexism, homophobia and femophobia, with the additional requirement for men to engage in some reflexivity about their complicity in an oppressive gender order. Differences within pro-feminist politics turn on whether or not the focus is on working with women or changing men (Connell, 1995; Seidler, 2006) and on which feminism to be 'pro' (Lingard and Douglas, 1999).

There are also structural contexts to these men's movements, including the complex interplay of the global and the local in economic and political terms. Here we see an emergent global economy with new relations between the so-called 'knowledge economies' of nations of the global north and the relocation of many manufacturing industries to the developing nations of the global south. The knowledge economy and enhanced service sector within Western nations have seen increased demands for different skills developed through education, often encompassing enhanced literacy skills or multiliteracies and emotional intelligence, dispositions most often associated with femininities in dominant gender orders, nationally and globally. Such changes have been associated with a perceived 'crisis of masculinity' (Weaver-Hightower, 2003a). These structural changes in labour markets and economies are most often bleached from considerations of men's movement politics, and also from public policy responses to boys' education. Significantly, and in contrast to the crisis of masculinity in the nations of the global north, for many nations of the global south, gender equity remains focused on girls and access to primary education as manifest in the *Millennium Development Goals* of the UN (see Unterhalter, 2007). However, as Jha and Kelleher (2006) indicate in their report on boys' underachievement in British Commonwealth countries, concerns about boys are increasingly evident in countries as diverse as Australia, Jamaica, Lesotho and Samoa.

The so-called 'New World order' post September 11 has also had serious implications for gender politics, globally, nationally and locally, helping to instantiate a new (re)masculinized world gender order (Connell, 2005) and making us aware of the global and diasporic relations of gender. More specifically, US unilateralism has manifested in a hyper-masculinized diplomacy (Ducat, 2004) in respect of the *othered* Muslim world and, in the process, intensified a new Orientalism towards both Muslim men and women (Massad, 2007). This has venerated a kind of whiteness and Western constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Accompanying this veneration has been a tendency to accentuate racialized femininities, as well as to simultaneously elide and intensify constructions of racialized masculinities, while at the same time demonizing both. For instance, this has been manifested in media constructions of veiled Muslim women as victims of Islamist patriarchy. It has also resulted in the demonization of Muslim men. This relates to an enhanced fear of difference, encapsulated in contemporary critiques of multiculturalism, in the UK especially in relation to the so-called

'home-grown' terrorists, and less space for reinvigorated anti-racist policies in education.

This raises important questions about masculinities and race more broadly. For example, in the UK, Canada, France and the US there has been a concerted public panic about gang-related violence and crime amongst African and African-Caribbean boys. One outcome has been the demonization of Black boys, demonstrating yet again another failure to deal with the construction of masculinities and complex class-based dynamics surrounding gang-related activities and violence in urban and edge city settings. What often gets emphasized as the source of the problem is the absence of male role models in these boys' lives (absent fathers and absent male teachers), rather than a complex and nuanced analysis of the intersections of race, class, masculinities and sexualities. And in the English context the achievement fetish of education policy and school practices inhibits the capacity to engage in such analysis and implement effective change on the basis of it. Interestingly in Australia, the federal government's *Success for Boys* programme does make mention of the oppression that Indigenous boys face within the current Australian context. We would stress, though, that it is imperative to address the dire educational experiences of Indigenous girls as well and thus reject a competing victim syndrome approach.

Recognition of these emergences has been tellingly absent from the boys and schooling debate and policy-related discourses. Here there has been an almost obsessive focus on oppression in *othered* communities within Western nations and in the Muslim world at large, in the process denying the realities of ongoing and new forms of sexism and misogyny in the West, a category also requiring persistent deconstruction. Post-colonial analytics have to be added to the tool kit for understanding the emergent global gender order and changes in national gender orders as a necessary precursor to the construction of effective policies and practices in education for addressing the educational needs of all boys and girls (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2008).

Clearly, to be effective such policies and practices need to take a 'Which boys? Which girls?' stance, acknowledging differences amongst both boys and girls. We note our vehement rejection of the stance of *Boys: Getting it Right* (House of Representative Standing Committee, 2002) report in Australia, which somewhat acerbically observed that feminist and pro-feminist scholars, along with certain policy makers and the teacher unions, had used this approach to deny that boys were experiencing any problems in school, thus rejecting the 'common sense'

assumption that boys are essentially different from girls and that they were in trouble in education. This report, alongside other discourses in other countries of the global north, has also overstated many of the gains of the feminist movement's agenda in education (see AAUW, 1998; Bouchard *et al.*, 2003; Francis and Skelton, 2005). This is not to say that that agenda did not impact positively upon education. It did.

However, the main beneficiaries of this feminist agenda in education have been middle-class girls, who now compete effectively with middle-class boys for top school results and in universities, where now approximately 50 percent of students in medicine and law are female (Collins *et al.*, 2000). We note, though, that talk of the feminization of university education sometimes fails to acknowledge the gendered impact of the inclusion of teacher and nurse education in universities on reforms over the last 20 years or so. While there has been some convergence in the educational careers of middle-class girls and boys, there has been a divergence between such girls and boys and those from less-privileged backgrounds, with teenage mothers from working-class backgrounds often experiencing many disadvantages when compared with their middle-class counterparts at university (Walby, 1997), thus reinforcing the need for a 'Which boys? Which girls' perspective in considerations of education policy and practice (Collins *et al.*, 2000; Lingard *et al.*, 2002). We would note, though, that this convergence has not translated into comparable incomes and career opportunities for young men and women post education and that child bearing and rearing still impact in much greater ways on women than on men. Further, we would also stress these changes have not necessarily addressed issues such as racism, sexual harassment, sexism and homophobia in schools and universities (Dorais, 2004; Macgillivray, 2004; Noguera, 1997, 2008).

Despite these continuing gender-based inequalities, there is also a way in which an emergent post-feminist politics evident within, for instance, raunch culture and new versions of girl power (Levy, 2005) constructed as emancipatory for women does not necessarily work in the interests of girls and women. For example, women's bodies and desires continue to be commodified and constituted by the male gaze (Tincknell *et al.*, 2003). This is not to deny girls' and women's agency, but highlights the extent to which residual, dominant, emergent and contested masculinities continue to surreptitiously shape and affect both men's and women's lives in the New World gender order. This illuminates the importance of recognizing that boys' educational issues are relational with those of girls. Thus, there has to be a recognition, often ignored within most sections of the boys' lobby, that boys' educational issues are

entwined with those of girls'. In a more theoretical way, we would also note the relational character of masculinities and femininities. These complexities are rarely represented in media coverage of men's and women's issues.

The media has played a significant role in popularizing girl power and representing this as evidence of girls' emancipation within a post-feminist politics. At the same time, the media has also been central in the construction and take-up of the boys' debate in education, helping to create a moral panic and concern amongst politicians, parents, policy makers and pedagogues. Stories about boys' education circulate and flow across the globe through syndicated columns and concentrated media ownership. Such flows can be seen to be part of what Bourdieu (1998) calls 'circular circulation' to refer to the way a story represented in one media outlet is taken up by others, for example from newspaper to newspaper, to radio and TV, within and across nations. In Australia prior to the *Boys Getting it Right* report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002) a policy vacuum saw media constructions about boys' education almost assume the status of *de facto* policy, especially given restructuring and devolution in the state schooling systems and weakened central policy articulations about gender equity (Lingard, 2003). The media stories, while of course not all of a piece, tend to push a competing victims account and a construction of boys as the new disadvantaged in schooling, and often articulate a men's rights and mythopoetic politics, while also speaking of a post-feminist era. At the same time, policy development processes themselves in education have become more 'mediatized' (Fairclough, 2000; Lingard and Rawolle, 2004), with policy release becoming synonymous with media release and the implied readership of policies being the general public rather than the profession, perhaps limiting the opportunity for serious engagement with such complex issues as those associated with the boys' debate and taken up in this book.

Across the nations of the global north a consultancy industry has also grown up around the boys' agenda, demanding its continuation because of a vested interest in it. A number of what Mills (2003) has called 'backlash blockbusters' such as Bly's (1991) *Iron John*, Gurian's (1999) *A Fine Young Man: What Parents, Mentors, and Educators can do to shape Adolescents*, Biddulph's (1997) *Raising Boys*, Pollack's (1999) *Real Boys Rescuing our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, Kindlon and Thompson's (1999) *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* and Hoff Sommers's (2000) *The War against Boys: How misguided feminism is harming our young men* have also helped to construct the boys' agenda and at the same time

served to shore up this consultancy work and the demand for it, as have the media stories referred to above. More recently the work of Leonard Sax (2005, 2007) in the US and Canada has been appropriated in much the same way where concerns about the *boy crisis* and boys' at risk status *vis-à-vis* their participation in school continue to garner media attention (see Tyre, 2006; Weil, 2008). At times, some of this work has had effects in the nations of the global south, for example in the participation of Caribbean principals in the professional development work on boys' education of the Gurian Institute at Harvard University. This industry has also focused on independent, sometimes elite, all boys' schools, which have used the boys' issue to remarket themselves in a time of consumer choice and competition between schools (see Mills, 2000a). Some independent all girls' schools have likewise used the 'boys as trouble' discourse to market themselves as havens for the education of girls (see Mills, 2004). Within heavily marketized schooling systems such as that in England, girls are often seen as more attractive to government schools which are positioning themselves in a competitive performance market. Girls' better behaviour is also seen as a plus in the image management of schools in such markets (Francis, 2006; Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995). This marketization also legitimates the boys' consultancy industry.

The above concerns have been remarkably absent in the take-up of the boys' debate at policy level and in schools. A purpose of this book therefore is to demonstrate the shortcomings of approaches which are not cognizant of these issues and which focus on structural change alone – for example boys' policies, more male teachers, single-sex classes and boy-friendly schooling – which is not to say that new policy frames are not required. In our view, the boys' education debate demonstrates yet again the significance of social class and poverty to educational opportunities for both boys and girls. Indeed, in this age of the so-called 'evidence-based policy' in education, it is important to note that the debate has *not* precipitated a refocus on poverty or race in education and when it does, as is the case with media-driven representations of black boys in the US and Canadian contexts, it is often plagued or fuelled by a recuperative masculinity politics which fails to address complex issues related to intersections of class, race, gender and sexuality in the lives of minority students of both genders. This, perhaps, once again demonstrates that policy is not so much based on research evidence but is an articulation of particular, often unsubstantiated, value systems. Our call for a politics of recognition and one of redistribution (Fraser, 1997) has implications for both policies in education systems and for practices in schools. In particular, it requires more sophisticated knowledges about

gender, and the politics of difference and redistribution, which policy makers and those working in schools need so as to be able to address adequately educational issues for boys (and girls) in socially just ways. We have referred to these elsewhere as 'threshold knowledges' (Martino *et al.*, 2004) and see them as central to effective policy and practice for policy makers and practitioners. Indeed, Kenway *et al.* (1997) have drawn attention to the pivotal role of teacher knowledges in gender equity reform, as well as the necessity for these matters to be part of the curriculum of schooling:

Knowledge is the core work of schools. Teachers are expected to know their subjects and to know about knowledge, learning and learners. Fundamentally, the teacher's job is to enable students to become knowledgeable. But what do we mean by 'know' and what do we mean by 'knowledge'? And what do they have to do with gender reform? What knowledge about gender are our students supposed to acquire and how are they to acquire it? And what do teachers need to know and do in order to assist in this process? What do students do with what we teach them in school? What do we teach them about gender that we don't know we teach?

(Kenway *et al.*, 1997, p. 66)

One goal of this book, thus, is to address the significance of knowledge about gender in relation to its impact upon educational policy, and pedagogy and practices within schools.

The book also raises important questions about the purposes of schooling and its role in transforming society and the gender order in socially just ways. Our underpinning desire in this book is for the promise of schooling to align with the reality and experiences of all girls and all boys. Our locations across three nations at the time of writing this book have strengthened our awareness of the need to 'deparochialise' (Appadurai, 2001) our perspective and knowledge about boys' education, as well as about theory and research. We are aware of the close interdependence of nations in this era of globalization, the circulation of globalized policy discourses and flows of media stories about boys, and the related need to reject implicit assumptions that the social today is simply synonymous with nation. We also understand how new technologies which overcome space and time constraints allow the play of the imagination linked to the construction of identities, which today are not necessarily grounded within the confines of the nation (Appadurai, 1996). Our approach in this book then has been informed

by our various locations and histories, our recognition of the multiple changes wrought by globalization, as well as our previous collaborative research projects. On our collaborative research, we would make specific mention of our federal government-commissioned research, published as *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys* (Lingard *et al.*, 2002), and our Australia Research Council Grant, *Productive Pedagogies, Schools and Gender Reform*. This book is an outcome of that latter research project.

Marcus Weaver-Hightower (2003b), in an extended and critical literature review of materials relating to what he calls the 'boy turn' in educational research, policy and practice, has classified this literature into four categories. These include what he classifies as the 'popular-rhetorical literature' to refer to Mills's 'backlash blockbusters' mentioned earlier and some media representations; 'theoretically oriented literature', which encompasses Mac an Ghail's (1994) and Connell's (1995) ground-breaking work on the social construction of masculinities; 'practice-oriented literature', which he suggests is responsive to practitioner and public concerns and which tends to be less theoretical in orientation; and 'feminist and pro-feminist' approaches, including Epstein *et al.* (1998), Lingard and Douglas (1999) and Mills (2001), which critique the moral panic about boys and the backlash, anti-feminist character of the popular-rhetorical writings. Our stance is to reject the popular-rhetorical literature not only for being, as Weaver-Hightower (2003a, p. 474) puts it, 'frequently essentialist', 'prone to antifeminism and conservative politics' and also 'prone to biological determinism', but also, in our view, for failing to take account of differences and inequalities within the categories of boys and girls, as illustrated by the work of McCreedy (2004) and Kumashiro (2001) in the North American context. Furthermore, its recuperative character is anathema for a socially just gender reform agenda. We utilize the theoretically oriented literature, as well as feminist and pro-feminist work, while also seeking to contribute to better practices in relation to pedagogies and assessment and policy development. We recognize, as Weaver-Hightower (2003b) suggests, that both the theoretical and the (pro)feminist literatures do not really engage with practitioner concerns in a direct way – we seek to overcome this shortcoming. However, our stance is not one of tips or quick fixes for teachers or, for that matter, tips or quick fixes for policy makers; rather we hope we contribute to the necessary threshold knowledges for both in relation to both policies and pedagogies for achieving better educational outcomes for all boys and girls and for a more socially just gender order. As

Raymond Williams (1983) insightfully put it, such a progressive project is about making hope practical, rather than making despair convincing. In our view, research and theory can only ever inform policy making and practice, rather than tell both what to do. We need to understand the local specificities of practice. This is why we prefer 'evidence-informed' to 'evidence-based' to refer to the research/practice relationship in both a pragmatic and a normative sense and why we see professional conversations about the matters raised in this book as important to better policies and practices.

Background to the 'boy turn'

Globalization has been mentioned to this point or at least alluded to. This is a complex phenomenon, often inappropriately reified in social science explanations of multifarious contemporary social change. Suffice to say here that, in the context of a post-Cold War world and the collapse of the socialist command economies, globalization has most often manifested as neo-liberal market economics globally with resultant effects on inequalities between and within nations. As a consequence, the post-Second World War welfare state has been reconstructed as a post-welfare or competition state (Cerny, 1990), largely seeking to ensure national economies are competitive globally. Education has taken on particular policy salience here, as has a new individualism which amongst other things is also attached to globalized consumer capitalism, which works with, reflects and helps to constitute new masculinities and femininities. As Edwards (2006) and Connell (2005) both note, globalized consumer capitalism has supported the rise of the new lad and to a lesser extent the new man through magazines and other media.

In this global setting, the nation state has been restructured under new public management, which now sees the state in the nations of the global north, in policy terms, steer at a distance through centre/practice relationships of strategic plans and indicators. We need to recognize that the state has a gender regime and gendered divisions of labour and power, and it both constitutes and regulates gender, as well as being a site of political mobilizations around gender (Connell, 2002, pp. 103–104). As Connell (2002, p. 8) notes, the movement of greater numbers of women into the public sphere as an outcome of second wave feminism has occurred just when the state sphere itself is being reduced through privatizations, public/private partnerships and other such public sector reforms. These 'reforms' have had serious gendered effects.

Connell, for instance, states that 'Neo-liberal economic strategies, deregulating markets, reducing taxes and government services, and transferring resources to private businesses have meant a major relocation of power into corporations and market mechanisms dominated by men' (2002, p. 8). The new centre/school relationships in education systems, part of state restructuring, also have gendered effects (Blackmore, 1999; Lingard and Douglas, 1999), with a (re)masculinization of the centre and feminization of what we might inappropriately describe as the periphery, that is the core practice of education – teaching in classrooms. This structural backlash (Lingard and Douglas, 1999) has also had effects on women who achieve senior positions at the policy-making centre (Blackmore and Sachs, 2007) and also enlarged the emotional labour demands upon those at the periphery, as devolution – central to the restructured state – has constituted education as a 'greedy institution' (Franzway, 2001).

The new performative state has also witnessed the rise of a whole audit industry of quality assurance, performance indicators and test measures (Power, 1997), with and through which the 'centre' in education departments and ministries steers professional practice at school sites. These developments have been described as 'policy as numbers' (Rose, 1999). In those education systems which have also introduced parental choice and quasi-markets, this mode of steering has been intensified, sometimes leading to 'performativity', impression management, being seen to perform and the thinning out of school purposes and professional practices (Ball, 2006). At the same time, there has been a literacization of education policy, with a 'back-to-basics' or 'forward to fundamentals' approach, which prioritizes literacy and numeracy, particularly at the primary level. These policy developments and plethora of performance, achievement and attainment data, set against broader gender politics, have been one central factor in the boy turn, as such data across the nations of the global north tend to document the negatively skewed results of boys and the positively skewed results of girls. In terms of literacy, and its centrality to the new knowledge and/or service economy, boys also do worse than girls with negatively skewed results. The nations of the global north have developed large service sectors and seek to become knowledge economies with gender almost irrelevant in a sense to employment and with a need for multiliteracies, with manufacturing being moved off-shore to the global south, where wages are lower. Other factors such as social class, 'race' and ethnicity interweave with gender to complexify the data picture available to the performative state. Our position would be that such data really once again demonstrate the

salience of social class as a/the major determinant of school performance on all of these measures. Policy for a number of reasons has picked up on gender and focused on boys, while we would argue that such gender-disaggregated data have simultaneously confirmed and challenged the view of failing boys. We would also raise the issue of 'which boys and which girls' so as to avoid gender essentialism.

As already noted, education has become central to national economic policies, while the economic well-being of nations is today often measured and assessed through comparative global measures of the quality of school systems, universities and other educational institutions and of comparative educational performance across nations (Brown *et al.*, 1997). This global context has also witnessed the rise of global measures and indicators of performance of various kinds, which also contributes to debates around gender, schools and schooling policies. Educational indicators at the European level linked to the Lisbon Declaration of 2000 of Europe's goal to be the strongest knowledge economy on the planet by 2010 are a good case in point. These developments can be seen as policy as numbers globalized and are complementary to national performativities already discussed.

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is perhaps the best known of globalized policy as numbers developments, but even the OECD has a range of other indicators used for comparative measures of education and training systems across its 30 member nations. In the 2006 PISA, 57 nations participated in tests of literacy, numeracy, science and problem solving taken by students at the end of compulsory schooling, at about age 15 years. The tests are created by commissioned expert agencies and are (supposedly) non-nationally curricula bound. Rather, PISA purports to measure the capacities of a sample of students at the end of compulsory schooling to apply school knowledges in a number of real-life situations, framed by OECD's policy commitment to lifelong learning. In the 2006 PISA, 27 nations in addition to the 30 OECD member nations participated. It appears that in the next scheduled PISA in three years about 100 nations will participate, thus demonstrating its enhanced significance and global reach. Now, this is not the place to debate PISA, but rather to recognize that it appears to constitute the emergence of a global space of equivalence and a commensurate space of measurement of school performance, and has become a powerful policy tool within participating nations in the context of globalization and emergent knowledge economies. PISA also collects background data on students' schools and families, including socio-economic status (SES). PISA results allow systems to

be classified as to their 'quality' in terms of actual comparative performance, and how equitable they are in terms of the distribution of scores and in relation to the effects of social class on performance. All of this is done comparatively on a global scale, well illustrating Novoa and Yariv-Mashal's (2003) point about comparison as central to new forms of governance and also their point that today the 'global eye' assists the 'national eye' in such governance. All of this can be seen to be a part of what Nigel Thrift (2005) has described as 'knowing capitalism', the use of social science and management theories and methodologies to help run the contemporary world. Of course, such knowledge utilization is mediated by power and vested interests, which is very evident in the usage of data in relation to issues of boys' education.

To date PISA results have demonstrated that the Scandinavian countries, particularly Finland, Iceland and Sweden, have high quality and equitable systems. PISA data can also be disaggregated according to gender with some significant gender differences across nations. To hugely oversimplify, the Scandinavian countries with strong welfare states and low Gini coefficients of inequality do well in terms of quality *and* equity, while the Anglo-American style systems are quite inequitable in terms of social-class effects, with reasonably high quality outcomes. In Iceland, girls performed better than boys on all measures, including all measures in maths – the only society to do so (Jóhannesson, 2006). There was also a significant performance gap between boys and girls in maths in rural areas in favour of girls (see Jóhannesson *et al.*, 2009), provoking speculation as to explanations concerning changing and developing national and micro gender orders. Finland, in the three PISAs to date, has demonstrated high quality and equity, but the disparities that exist are ones linked to ethnicity and gender, so that ethnic-minority boys and girls in the rural and isolated north perform much worse than boys and girls in the metropolitan cities. The PISA data and analysis of it are most useful in a number of ways. The data clearly demonstrate the need for both redistributive and recognition policies in schooling (Fraser, 1997); that is, policies which not only target social-class based inequalities, but also recognize differences across the categories of girls and boys, such as their inflection by ethnicity. The data also demonstrate the specificities of national gender orders and the interplay of the global, national and local (Connell, 2002). All such data, at both national and global levels, allows the category of boys to be made visible and the plurality of masculinities within these gender orders made evident, a point to which we will return.

All of these developments adumbrated to this point have affected and reflect changes to what Connell (2002, 2005) has called 'the gender order', including the gendered division of power, the gendered division of labour, emotional/sexual relations (cathexis) and symbolic politics related to gender. Masculinities and femininities as socially constructed have been destabilized, as have sexualities, in a mix of contested gender and sexual politics. In Giddens's (1990) account, detraditionalization has occurred, which has challenged dominant constructions of masculinities and femininities and the family. Beck (1992), in talk of 'choice biographies' for the privileged of the nations of the global north, linked to a rampant individualism in a context of risk, also indicates another aspect of the destabilizing of traditional practices of masculinity and femininity and of sexuality. Retraditionalization has, of course, been one defensive political response to this situation and, as Faludi (2007) has shown, 9/11 worked against feminism in media responses seeking to reinscribe older, more traditional constructions of gender, of both masculinities and femininities. Faludi describes older frontier masculinities and nurturant, dependant femininities. But, of course, there is much contestation around these matters. In this complex and contested context, in the nations of the global north men's politics of various kinds, both pro- and anti-feminist, have arisen and feminism has bloomed into various kinds, despite some talk of a post-feminist era. It is in this complex and contested context that the boy turn in schooling has occurred.

These changes have been accompanied as well by changes in theorizing about and understanding the gender order and masculinities and femininities, both globally and nationally, and the associated gender regimes within various institutions, including the state and schools. We recognize, though, that theoretical and empirical work on the relationships between the global and the construction of gender, specifically masculinity, is in its early stages (Kenway *et al.*, 2006). Kenway and her colleagues (2006) have written at length about how the mobilities and flows of various kinds associated with globalization have affected local lives and identities, helping to reconstitute masculinities beyond the metropolis. In their analysis, they recognize the reconstitution of space and place in the context of globalization and also recognize the need for research methodology cognizant of new globalized spatial relations and thus draw upon Burawoy and colleagues' (2001) work on global ethnography, which recognizes methodologically the need to eschew the assumption of the social as synonymous with nation state and to consider the interplays of global forces, connections and imagination.

Kenway and her colleagues also work with a concept of globalization as the stretching out of social relations.

Globalization theorists such as Appadurai (1996, 2006) and Castells (1996) have argued that mobilities, networks and flows are central features of contemporary social relations and need to be a focus of analysis. These concepts have implications for the nature of power, which Castells suggests is now located, rather than situated or pinned down, in flows, and for understanding changes to the gender order. He suggests capital now exercises power through flows and networks, while labour tends to be more place dependant and thus in a weaker position *vis-a-vis* capital. There are gendered aspects to these flows and mobilities, as well as to locatedness within the local, perhaps somewhat akin to older gendered public/private divisions.

Mac an Ghail and Haywood (2007) have surveyed these social changes in what they call, after Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992), 'late modernity' and considered the necessary theoretical and epistemological responses for understanding gender, as well as documenting the nature of the empirical changes globalization and late modernity have provoked. Here we note that talk of a gender order and a pro-feminist politics are for them associated with modernism and the gendering of modernity, as is also implied by Edwards (2006). Seidler's (2006) position is similar in his critique of Connell's structuralist account of the gender order and masculinities, which he argues denies the politics of the personal to men. The Seidler/Connell division here turns on Seidler seeing the need for men to work on changing themselves, what Connell sees as a 'therapeutic approach', and Connell stressing the need for men to support women to change the gender order, while seeing dangers in a male-focused men's movement.

Aspects and residues of the modernist gender order remain, but a new order is also emerging. In this context, Mac an Ghail and Haywood see gender as a central lens to make sense of the huge social changes accompanying globalization and the condition of late modernity, what some others would call 'post-modernity' (Harvey, 1989; Lyotard, 1984). Indeed, they state, 'We suggest that at this current historical juncture the category gender has become a lens to make sense of wider social transformations' (p. 4). They speak of a 'cultural flashpoint' to encapsulate the tensions, the interweaving between the gendering of modernity and that of late modernity, and identify two elements of this cultural flashpoint. The first element refers to the transformations being experienced and which talk of a 'masculinity crisis', a 'backlash against feminism' and a 'politics of recuperative masculinity'. These are matters

we have written about at some length in relation to gender and schooling (Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Martino and Meyenn, 2001; Mills, 2001). The second element recognizes that the crisis referred to in the first is actually 'perceived and mediated' through gender. Thus Mac an Ghail and Haywood (2007, p. 4) note, 'In other words, the language of gender is increasingly used as a central means by which men and women articulate their understanding of being subjects in and objects of a world in flux' (p. 4). Thus they argue that 'in the twenty-first century, gender and sexual identities have come to speak a wider sense of social (dis)location in globally-based, post-colonial, (de)industrializing societies' (p. 5). Gender has entered everyday, everynight discourses, while the changes that this lens seeks to clarify require new theoretical approaches.

In terms of this new theory, Mac an Ghail and Haywood juxtapose materialist and post-structuralist theoretical approaches. The first might also be described as structuralist, as evidenced in Connell's concepts of gender order and gender regime to refer respectively to the gendered configurations of societies and organizations. Materialist or structuralist theory sought to understand structured, centred, almost fixed and stable 'bases of social power', for example talk of a patriarchal gender order. In contrast, post-structuralist theory identifies the limits of fixed gender categories of men and women, masculinities and femininities and seeks to deconstruct and inflect them through considerations of their intersection with social class, 'race', ethnicity, disability and sexuality. We would also suggest that these intersections or inflections need to be seen globally, such that global flows of people or diasporas also result in hybrid ethnic identities, which also inflect masculinities and femininities in particular ways. As Bauman (1998) has suggested as well, mobility/immobility has today become another dimension of inequality with the privileged able to move the disadvantaged located in or bounded to one place. This dimension also has a gendered element to it. Mac an Ghail and Haywood see the categories of difference (social class, 'race', ethnicity, disability, sexuality) as inflecting each other, rather than accumulating. It is this recognition of difference which provoked the development of the concept of 'strategic essentialism' developed by the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1992). She recognized that politically at times it is necessary to speak of 'unified' categories, for example the category of women, to make political claims on the state. It is interesting that on the anti-feminist, men's rights side of contemporary men's politics such strategic essentialism has also been utilized effectively in a political sense (Robinson, S., 2000). Post-structuralist

theorizing also works with a concept of power more derived from Foucault than from Weber and Marx, which tends to underpin structuralist theorizing. This Foucauldian account sees power as relational and distributed, rather than as so much centred and possessed, and in the context of globalization can also be seen to be linked to flows and mobilities across national borders.

Our theoretical position is aligned with that of Mac an Ghaill and Haywood in that we see the need to work across both theoretical conceptions, structuralist and poststructuralist, as a way to understanding contemporary social changes to the gender order. In seeking to work together structuralist and poststructuralist theorizing, we also recognize that 'post' is a precocious prefix (Gregory, 2004) with multiple meanings, as is so evident in the ambivalence of the concept of post-colonialism. We would make the point, though, that this synthetic theorizing raises some difficulties for the state and the politics of policy making in respect of gender. The more complex the theory, the more difficult is the translation, if that is an appropriate descriptor, of research and theory into policy and practice.

We consider it to be the case that there have been some educational advances made for girls in the global north, including Australia, during the last few decades (Arnot *et al.*, 1999; Collins *et al.*, 2000; Lingard *et al.*, 2002). These have resulted from the engagement of second wave feminism with policies, pedagogies and other practices in education and should be recognized and celebrated. These advances are reflected in the enhanced retention of girls in upper secondary schools and enhanced participation in universities, with the numbers of girls in both upper secondary schools and universities now exceeding boys. However, we would stress that these increases in numbers have not made either schools or universities more 'female friendly', nor have they drastically altered the gendered curriculum or eradicated sexual harassment, and girls' participation is still heavily gender inflected; that is, females dominate the numbers in languages and humanities subjects in upper secondary schooling and education, nursing and arts degrees at universities.

There is some evidence to suggest that girls are challenging boys to top academic performance across most subject domains, including now maths and sciences, while boys' overall performance tends to be negatively skewed and girls' positively skewed in most subjects. Girls now choose a wider range of subjects in the senior years of schooling than do boys, whose subject choices still seem to be circumscribed by certain subjects being regarded as masculine. This change for girls

reflects the success of the earlier feminist-inspired 'girls can do anything' project. In our Australian research (Lingard *et al.*, 2002) we found one private all boys' school which recognized boys' narrowed subject choices and thus required all boys in senior schooling to choose across a range of humanities and sciences subjects as part of, they claimed, a broader project of remaking masculinity in the context of broader social changes, including those precipitated by globalization.

We acknowledge that the picture of this gender change becomes more complex when one considers the intersection of gender with a range of other factors such as social class and ethnicity. Indeed, the evidence is that boys from low socio-economic backgrounds, and especially Indigenous boys in Australia, are doing poorly in educational terms. We note here the poor educational performance of boys of African-Caribbean descent in the UK as well, and also the low school achievement of poor black boys in the US, where boys and schooling tends to be a 'racialized' issue (Ferguson, 2001; Lopez, 2003). The significance of social class to school performance appears to be the case across the nations of the global north. For example, in contemporary Scotland there is a targeting of a so-called NEET group in public policy, young people (both male and female) not in education, employment and training, in recognition that such young people come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and tend to be 'reproduced' into such circumstances. We also note that poor and Indigenous girls in Australia are not doing well at school. We also recognize that advances for girls and women have been much greater for those from middle-class backgrounds and as yet have not resulted in women having equal pay with men, nor similar career opportunities. What we have is something of a 'gender convergence' (Walby, 1997) amongst middle-class girls and boys in educational but not in income and career terms, simultaneous with some increased polarizations within both genders (Walby, 1997). For example, teenage mothers from poor families remain very disadvantaged in respect of education and labour markets and Indigenous girls in Australia are not doing well. In terms of gender differentiation post school, there is actually some evidence from Australia that male/female pay differentials have worsened over the last decade or so (Summers, 2003). Additionally, women are still outnumbered by men in governing positions and also in leadership and senior positions in big firms, with labour markets remaining heavily gender segmented. The gains in schooling for middle-class girls have not as yet converted into gender equalities in respect of post-school opportunities, incomes and careers (Collins *et al.*, 2000). There appears to be more post-school gender equality in those societies which have

instigated family-friendly employment policies and paternity as well as maternity leave, as is the case, for example, in contemporary Iceland and some other Scandinavian countries.

However, advances for *some* girls and women have sparked an interest among the global northern nations in raising boys' achievement in relation to that of girls in a context of the so-called 'post-feminism' (Brooks, 1997) and a backlash against feminism (Faludi, 1992; Lingard and Douglas, 1999). Here we need a nuanced account of backlash – there have not been univocal backlashes to such changes and many, both men and women, see equal opportunities in education and the workplace as important and progressive political gains (Connell, 2005). However, such policies have also been rearticulated in a more individualistic fashion under pressures from neo-liberalism writ globally and from new state structures. As Connell (2005, p. 254) observes, equal employment opportunity under such pressures has become an 'individualizing principle rather than a principle of group advancement'. Some time ago now, Goode (1982) spoke of the 'decreasing marginal utility of males in the labour markets and economies of western nations to pick up on the changed skills sets of jobs emphasising "brain" over "brawn"'. Non-nuanced backlash arguments can also be used to suggest the earlier gains of feminism were easily achieved. This is patently not the case. As Jill Blackmore (1999) has argued, opposition to feminist politics and gains for women has always been there, but is less apparent at a time of strength of feminist politics, and comes to the fore again in times of resentment and rapid change, risks and insecurity, as we would suggest is the case in the present globalized post-9/11 world. And as Sally Robinson (2000, p. 4) notes, when suggesting that backlash is perhaps too oversimplified a concept, current gender politics are as much about the 'power to represent the normative' in the context of the rise of identity politics.

The rise of recuperative masculinity politics (Lingard and Douglas, 1999) of particular kinds – which seek to reconstitute male as norm and return to a pre-feminist gender order, and consist of mythopoetic and men's rights strands (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1995) – has in some ways epitomized 'backlash' politics. These forms of backlash have read small gains for women and girls as large gains (Faludi, 1992), while seeking to constitute men and boys as the new disadvantaged. In a most insightful analysis, Sally Robinson (2000) has written in the US context about how what she calls an 'identity politics of the dominant' was utilized by white men in response to perceived challenges to male dominance by a range of identity politics movements to do with women, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity, disability and so on, to name

and mark white men as disadvantaged, and which in so doing paradoxically helped to further unmask the invisibility of male power. This backlash, and in particular the mythopoetic strand of it, found fertile soil in middle-class homes, where men did feel challenged by feminism; in households where single mothers were unsure about how to engage with their sons; amongst some feminist women who wanted their sons to change; and amongst middle-class and working-class men alike, whose jobs or career preferences were being challenged by women and equal opportunity legislation. The impact on education of this identity politics of the dominant in Australia, North America and the UK can be seen in the movement to increase the numbers of male teachers in schools through affirmative action, to recognize that boys and girls have essentially different learning styles and needs, and in the desire to *remasculinize* classrooms and pedagogies in *boy-friendly* directions (see Sax, 2005, 2007).

But why are middle-class girls now doing better in the global northern school systems and seemingly, on the surface at least, outperforming boys? Educational factors have contributed here, as well as broader social changes and politics (Arnot *et al.*, 1999; Arnot and Miles, 2005; Mills *et al.*, in press; Weaver-Hightower, 2003a). We contend that the impact of the feminist movement has been one very positive contributor in the advances to date, through raising teachers' awareness that gender and its construction have to be the key concerns at all levels of schooling, from policy through to practice. However, the impact of feminism in schooling has worked in multiple ways through policy and various commitments within schools with changing emphases at various times and in various places, even in the same country (Cohen, 1998; Hayes, 1998, 2003; Kenway, 1990). As Kenway and her colleagues (1997) noted in an Australian study of policies for girls in schools, such policy implementation often included a focus on boys as well. Similarly, we have found that some schools in their localized practices have taken a nuanced 'which boys, which girls?' response to the contemporary policy focus on boys. Policy intention has been mediated at local sites, a confirmation perhaps of a view of policy refraction in implementation as a positive sign of progressive professional mediation.

Unfortunately and inappropriately in our view, though, much contemporary educational policy today throughout the nations of the global north works with the assumption that the feminist project has been completed, and in some more rabid arguments that it has 'gone too far' (Yates, 2000), and that boys are the new disadvantaged in schooling. Amongst those arguing boys as the new disadvantaged there

is a tendency not to disaggregate the performance and achievement data – politically their position is one of strategic essentialism. However, we can confidently say that there is overwhelming evidence that middle-class boys are still doing well in school and certainly still doing very well after graduation from university in labour markets and have good career opportunities and that it is boys (and girls) from poor families who are the most disadvantaged in education. This picture is complicated when we also take account of ethnicity and ‘race’. There is also a global and gendered dimension to these differing career opportunities. This class-based differential in education and career opportunities appears to be the case, inflected in specific ways, in most nations of the global north. Now, while this has always been the case, the situation has probably been worsened by changes in labour markets, the complexifying of transitions to jobs, increased school retention and credentialism, and the implementation of neo-liberal competitive and individualistic educational reforms as education policy responses to globalization. Many of Paul Willis’s (1977) working-class boys now learn not to labour in countries such as Australia. Further, we acknowledge that the negative evidence regarding boys and schooling, such as boys’ levels of suspensions, expulsion, bullying, disruptive behaviours of all sorts, does need to be addressed in both education policy and schooling practices (Jóhannesson, 2004; Keddie, 2003, 2006; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Mills, 2001). These behaviours have negative effects on other boys and girls in school and are often expressed through misogyny and homophobia. It is also important to draw attention to how zero-tolerance approaches to creating safe schools in Canada and the US have resulted in further discriminating against and demonizing minority boys (see Solomon, 2004; Verdugo, 2002).

These social changes considered so far have affected schooling and gender policies in nations around the globe and across the north/south divide, but always in vernacular ways, reflecting specific histories, cultures and politics generally and in relation to gender.

Conclusion and structure of the book

In this introduction we have traversed many of the factors contributing to the take-up of boys’ education in both policy and practice since the early 1990s. We embrace Weaver-Hightower’s (2003a) assessment of the ‘boy turn’ in gender and education research. We agree with him that the role of both media representations and popular-rhetorical books mentioned earlier and parental concerns and pressures can be

exaggerated in understanding contemporary gender politics in education, but note the salience of the media in the Australian context in the responses of many schools located in systems which have evacuated social justice policy concerns and devolved more authority to schools. Interestingly, Weaver-Hightower also argues that feminist examination of the social construction of gender precipitated concern about masculinities. This development is very obvious in the work on gender theorizing of Connell (1987, 2005). Weaver-Hightower also suggests that the policy focus of feminist-inspired school reform on the performance gaps for girls, especially in maths and science, subsequently contributed to a concern over boys' performance. We would suggest that this was also a result of the narrow definition of success implicit in the earlier programmes. New Right and neo-liberal reforms in government have also contributed to the boy turn according to Weaver-Hightower. This is especially so in England, where market reforms have established a quasi-market in schooling which has been accompanied by league tables of performance as a guide for the exercise of parental choice. These data have demonstrated the negatively skewed performance of boys on literacy measures and in related subjects. We would also see these developments as linked to new public sector managerialism, which steers at a distance through performance measures. Weaver-Hightower also lists explicit backlash politics as an important factor, often associated with the 'crisis of masculinity' discourse. Success of second wave feminism in respect of equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation also contributed to the rise of backlash politics. Finally, he outlines how economic and workforce changes, manifest as expanding service and declining manufacturing sectors in the nations of the global north, have also contributed to a perceived 'crisis of masculinity' in their demand for new kinds of skills and dispositions and framed the boys in education debate. We agree with Weaver-Hightower's exhaustive adumbration of the etiologies of the boy turn. Our agreement here means that policies and practices geared to more gender just schooling and society need to be underpinned by an understanding of these interwoven etiologies. There are thus no quick fixes to the issue of boys' education and we must work to keep issues of girls' education on the agenda as well, while recognizing the different educational experiences and opportunities of different groups of girls and boys. These differences need to be understood in relation to the complex intersections of race, class and sexuality in addressing questions related to structural inequality and disadvantage in terms of how they impact on students' participation and engagement with schooling.

We move next in Chapter 2 to a consideration of the current policy context around boys' schooling in many countries of the global north; we include Australia here. We show how the policy uptake has not been consistent amongst these countries. However, the boys' agenda in many of these countries has bitten and is showing signs of becoming regarded as a legitimate concern for schools. We illustrate how this concern is tied to a broader phenomenon of a politics of resentment, which includes a masculinist resentment towards feminism, and perceived feminist successes, for example changes in family law, girls' education and so on. We argue that these have been over-read in terms of exaggerating feminist achievements in transforming public institutions, such as schooling, and as having been achieved at the expense of addressing the needs of men and boys. This over-reading has worked to fuel concerns about the feminization of men and boys, that is that men and boys have become too like women and girls and that men no longer know how to behave as their moorings to traditional forms of masculinity have been severed. Within this notion of crisis there are romantic notions of what it once used to mean to be a man. Removed from these discourses is any analysis of issues of differences amongst men and boys which prevents a more complex understanding about the social relations and practices of masculinities. In analysing the various policy contexts of these countries we pose the question 'Who wins and who loses from this current policy moment?'

This question also helps to frame the other chapters in this book which focus on the various ways in which the boys' agenda has been taken up in schools. We identify a number of key issues in boys' schooling, for example boy-friendly curriculum, single-sex classrooms and male teachers, and provide an analysis of these in terms of the ways in which they further or hinder a gender justice agenda. In so doing we overlay our analyses with a multidimensional framework. This framework engages with empirical research into effective pedagogies, analytic perspectives on anti-oppressive education, and understandings of power relations and gender theory.

In Chapter 3 we explore the implications of the calls for more boy-friendly schooling. We show how schools are already very 'boy-friendly' and that such approaches often work with essentialist notions of masculinity. We argue that such approaches can have negative impacts on girls and some boys in schools. We note how many of these approaches also work with a deficit model of boys and that such a model is likely to hurt the already most disadvantaged boys in schools. We pay particular attention here to attempts by schools to keep boys active, to

'masculinize' the so-called 'feminized areas' of the curriculum and to reculture the schooling environment to make it more boy-friendly.

In Chapter 4, along similar lines, we show how some schools have instigated single-sex classrooms as part of making schools friendlier to boys. Where this has occurred there have often been attempts to provide boys with a pedagogical approach that is grounded in normalized constructions of masculinity. In this chapter we identify the ways school-based structural reforms of this kind, which are based upon a particular construction of masculinity, work against the interests of gender justice, including the interests of some boys, and against the interest of girls and women.

A further suggestion for making schools friendlier to boys has involved attempting to recruit more male teachers into schools, in particular into primary schooling. We take up this issue in Chapter 5. Our particular focus here is on policy responses to this concern. We suggest that many of the claims on the male teacher debate are grounded in a form of masculinist politics that claim that boys can learn what it means to be a man only from other men. Again, in unpacking these debates we are confronted with limited understandings of being a man. The calls for more male teachers construct male teachers in essentialist terms. Hence, male teachers are expected to provide boys with models of what it means to be a normal boy. Such expectations demonstrate limited understandings of gender theory and power relations within particular contexts. We show in this chapter the impact that these calls for more male teachers have on existing male teachers, female teachers and students, both boys and girls, in schools.

Throughout the early chapters in this book we demonstrate the problems of working with essentialist and homogenized understandings of masculinity. In Chapter 6 we provide a more nuanced analysis of how masculinities are performed and constructed by examining boys' peers groups. In this chapter we show the diverse ways in which boys engage with each other, with girls and the schooling process in general. We suggest in this chapter that any work with boys that is likely to produce gender just outcomes has to have an understanding of the ways in which various masculinities and femininities are positioned against and alongside each other.

The book concludes with suggestions for a way forward through the boys' debate that recognizes that some boys do experience particular forms of oppression, albeit not *as* boys but as particular kinds of marginalized boys, and that recognizes the importance of challenging dominant constructions of masculinities for girls and female teachers.

We argue in this chapter that in challenging such constructions of gender pedagogy matters, and we make suggestions as to what an anti-oppressive pedagogy might look like within the context of boys' education and that will simultaneously work in the interests of all students.

In presenting our arguments in this book, in some places we construct narratives about the issues concerned. (Charlton *et al.*, 2007; Lingard *et al.*, 2002, Martino *et al.*, 2004; Martino *et al.*, 2005) In the construction of these narratives we draw upon our vast experience of working with schools; observing teachers; interviewing principals, teachers, students (boys and girls of a variety of ages), policy workers, parents and other stakeholders; delivering in-service programmes in schools; and working in the policy domain. These narratives are a composite of this work. They tell a story of the attempts that some schools have made to address issues of boys' education and of the efforts of those who have sought to resist the excesses of such reforms. These composite narratives allow us to explore many of the issues in depth in ways that show the breadth in which the boys' agenda has been taken up in schools. Elsewhere we have written about individual schools and some of the ways in which the boys' debate has impacted upon them (see Martino *et al.*, 2004, 2005; Mills *et al.*, 2004; Charlton *et al.*, 2007). Whilst these schools, primarily Australian schools, have provided interesting case studies in and of themselves, they are also indicative of more widespread practices occurring in schools in our various locations in North America and the UK as well as Australia.

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