

**Boys, Productive Pedagogies and Social Justice**

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Paper presented at the AARE Conference,  
University of Western Sydney,  
27<sup>th</sup> November – 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2005

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### Introduction

Since the mid 1990s the education of boys has come to dominate the education gender agenda in Australia. However, whilst the concern during much of the 1990s was largely to be found in newspaper articles and current affairs programs, alongside an explosion in pop psychology style books about boys, there has since the turn of the century been an increase in policy concerns about boys, and related issues. For instance, there have been national policies such as the *Boys' Lighthouse Schools Project* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003a); *Success for Boys* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003b); and the parliamentary inquiry, *Boys: Getting it Right* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002; for critiques of this inquiry see Mills, Martino, Lingard, forthcoming) and some state led initiatives such as Queensland's *Male Teacher Strategy* (Education Queensland, 2002; for a critique of this policy see Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2004). It is unfortunate that this recent policy agenda, which has real material effects in terms of drawing resources away from initiatives relating to girls and other equity areas, has been cloaked in a victim politics. Such a politics has worked to construct boys as an equity group requiring affirmative action and special treatment. This construction has led to a plethora of pedagogical and structural remedies supposedly designed to address boys' disadvantage (see for example, Gurian & Ballew, 2003; Lillico, 2000; Ykema, 2002). There have been numerous critiques of this tendency both in Australia and overseas (see Martino & Meyenn, 2001; Epstein, Elwood, Hey & Maw, 1998; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Lesko, 2000, Skelton, 2001; Francis, 2000; Francis & Skelton 2005; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). We do not wish to cover this territory again, however through social justice lenses that disrupt the victim politics of current gender debates, we want to foreground those educational issues that do involve boys – both as a social group (Young, 1990) and as particular boys – and to consider what may be effective ways of addressing such issues through the classroom without ignoring the ways in which advantage is distributed within the current gender order.

Indeed we argue throughout this paper that 'privilege' as it relates to gender has to be a key concern of the pedagogical decisions made in relation to the teaching of boys. However, at the same time, the ways in which some boys experience discrimination based upon factors such as race/ethnicity and sexuality, alongside some boys' failure to live up to idealised forms of masculinity, and many boys' experiences of powerlessness by being discriminated against because of their youth (McLean, 1997; Denborough, 1996; Mills, 2000) , have also to be considered. A pedagogy for boys thus has to be able, as Yeatman (1995) argues, to develop a language for talking about multiple differences at one time. We have found the productive pedagogies framework useful for promoting such work. In this paper, and drawing on social justice principles, we consider the ways in which the productive pedagogies framework can be utilised in the teaching of boys whilst at the same time raising some concerns about the ways in which such a pedagogy might be used to reinforce problematic constructions of masculinity.

## Do we want boys to change?

Becky Francis (2000, 129) asks an important question in relation to the current gender debates on boys' education: 'Do we want boys to change?'. This question, Skelton (2001, 171) argues should inform any gender equity program in schools. This is clearly a key question for what Marcus Weaver-Hightower (2003) has referred to as the current 'boy-turn' taking place in gender debates in education. There are sections of the boys' lobby that have created boys as the new victims of schooling and argue that schools and classroom practices need to change in order to make schools more 'boy-friendly' (Gurian, 1999; Donnelly, 2004; Biddulph, 1997; Pollack, 1999; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Hoff Sommers, 2000; see Mills, 2003 for a critique of several of these works). However, there are other arguments present within this debate that suggest that boys are their own worst enemy – and that it is traditional forms of masculinity – encapsulated in terms such as 'laddishness' (see Francis, 1999; Jackson, 2002) – that are the problem. Research that we have been involved in tends to suggest that the latter is the case. However, we are mindful that some of the current anti 'laddish' discourses tend to demonise non-Anglo and/or working class boys (see Francis, in press). Thus, in considering issues facing teachers in the teaching of boys, we have sought to both avoid constructing boys as victims and to avoid victimising boys both as a social group and as individual subjects.

Our approach is one that claims that boys as a social group do need to change. Here we draw on social justice and feminist principles to highlight the imperative of problematising elements of traditional masculinity (Alloway et al. 2002; Lingard et al. 2002; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Keddie 2006). Such principles are framed within broader conceptualisations of justice that acknowledge how gender intersects with social processes in ways that produce cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect within an enduring patriarchal world that continues to associate successful masculinity with power, domination and non-emotion and to devalue and demean activities connoted as feminine. (Connell 2000; Kenway & Fitzclarence 1997; Fraser 1997; Keddie 2005). In schools we see this cultural domination and disrespect in the unacceptably high levels of violence, sexual harassment and homophobia perpetrated by boys and the overwhelming domination of boys in terms of disciplinary measures (see for example Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Mills 2001; Mahony, 1985; 1998; Skelton 2001).

Our approach is also one that suggests both schools and classrooms, where they are not doing so, have to change to meet the needs of all students, including boys of various ethnicities, sexualities and physical abilities. Here we acknowledge that there are ways in which *some* boys are not served well by many aspects of the schooling process (see for example, Sewell, 1997; 1998; Connolly, 1998; Wright, Weekes, McGlaughlin & Webb, 1998; Simpson, McFadden, & Munns, 2001). That it is only some boys who experience school as such makes it difficult to make claims about boys without also asking 'which boys?' are we talking about (Teese et al., 1995; Lingard et al, 2002; Connolly, 2004; Francis, 2000). For instance, Connolly (2004) demonstrates the differences in the sorts of pressures that are faced by middle class and working class young boys in two different Belfast schools. These include their exposure to sectarian violence, poverty and health issues. Then there are the differences that are placed upon boys of various ethnicities and

religions (see for example Sewell, 1997; 1998; Archer, 2003). In a recent paper Becky Francis (in press) notes - What much of the current research shows us is that it is difficult to speak of 'boys' and 'girls' without taking into account differences *amongst* boys and girls as well as differences *between* girls and boys. As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) ask 'so what's a boy?'

The differences amongst boys thus make it very difficult to identify a pedagogy that is appropriate for *all* boys. Therefore, we recognise that it is dangerous territory to suggest that there may be a pedagogy that is specific to the teaching of boys. For such a claim has the potential to be read in similar ways to those essentialising pedagogies shaped through the boys as victims discourse (see for instance Gurian & Ballew, 2003). In avoiding such pedagogies we have turned to the productive pedagogies model. This pedagogical framework has been demonstrated to provide a high quality education for *all* students (Education Queensland, 2001; Hayes et al., 2006; Lingard et al., 2003). However, the principles of this framework can be applied to the specifics of boys' education (see for instance, Lingard et al., 2002; Martino & Berrill, 2003; Keddie, 2006). In this paper we outline some of the concerns we have about boys and their schooling and suggest some ways that productive pedagogies can be utilised in gender just ways. In so doing we focus on teaching boys both about notions of social/gender justice, and the responsibilities such notions imply for living in a democratic society.

We do not make this suggestion based upon supposed essentialised or biological differences between boys and girls, but upon the basis of the different pressures relating to normalised constructions of being a boy or a girl (see Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005) and the different social and political positioning of boys and girls within gendered relations of power operating within schools and the broader society. In considering a pedagogy for boys we turned to the framework provided by the model of productive pedagogies as its social justice focus takes into account issues of difference and power relations within and beyond the classroom. The QSRLS (Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study) research that led to the development of productive pedagogies stressed the importance of providing *all* students with intellectually challenging work that was connected into their worlds, was delivered in a supportive classroom environment that also recognised difference (Education Queensland, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. However, what this might look like for different groups of students has not been detailed. For instance, such classroom practices are likely to be different for Australian Indigenous students, Muslim students in the UK, and working class boys in large metropolitan centres – and of course for different groupings of students within those broad groups of students. In this paper we want to go some way to considering how such a pedagogy might be useful in the teaching of boys by exploring the dimensions of the productive pedagogies framework. This framework consists of four dimensions – supportiveness, connectedness, valuing and working with difference, and intellectual quality. We take each of these dimensions in turn.

## **Supportiveness**

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<sup>1</sup> In later work by some of the researchers from this team, the term 'recognition of difference' was renamed 'working with and valuing difference' (see for example, Hayes et al. 2006)

We begin the section on productive pedagogies with a discussion of supportiveness. Within much of the productive pedagogies work there has been a tendency to begin with the dimension of intellectual quality. This has had the effect of prioritising this dimension over the other three. We are well aware of the importance of providing students with intellectually challenging classrooms. However, the take up of this approach has at times taken a conservative turn in forgetting the importance of relationships. To some extent the focus on academic achievement over social relationships is what adults have constructed as important, not students. For many students when considering what they most want from a teacher they identify someone who prioritises relationships with students (see for example, Lingard et al., 2002). To some extent the valorisation of the intellectual over the emotional in much of the current move towards pedagogical reform has a masculinist tinge to it (Shank, 2000). As Shank says in her critique of the emphasis on rigour in Ted Sizer's work in the US:

(Rigor is) not easily applied to a stroll or frolic in the woods, dancing expressively, exploring the artefacts in a museum, listening to music, creating a design, adjusting procedures to a particular situation, or envisioning possibilities. It is also unfitting to socially oriented activities, activities requiring nurturance and caring: being a good neighbour, parenting, being a friend, attending the sick, or listening patiently. Lastly, rigor is not applicable to the realm of emotions or aesthetic experience: one doesn't laugh or cry rigorously, nor is one rigorously moved by a painting, words or music. (2000, 219)

We thus begin with supportiveness and relationships, for as Darling-Hammond (1997, 134) states: 'Relationships matter for learning'. The importance of relationships to students has also been noted in numerous other studies – see for example, Lingard, Martino, Mills & Bahr (2002).

Whilst not wanting to construct boys as victims, there are many boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds who have disengaged from schooling. Whilst the same is true of girls from such backgrounds, for many of these boys their disengagement is grounded in a masculinity politics that positions them in an antagonistic relationship with the formal processes of schooling (see for example, Epstein, 1998; Mills, 2001; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Francis, 1999; Jackson, 2002). In our experience, it is in classrooms where there are high levels of support that students, both boys and girls, are most engaged (see for example, Mills, 2001; Lingard et al., 2002; Hayes et al., 2006).

In arguing for the creation of a supportive classroom, the productive pedagogies framework suggests that students be given a voice in the classroom in order to have some say over the direction that activities take within various units of work; that explicit criteria be provided to students so that expectations are clear; and that a classroom environment where students are prepared to take risks with their learning is created. The elements that make up the productive pedagogies dimension of supportiveness within the work conducted by the QSRLS thus include:

Student direction of activities  
Explicit criteria  
Social support

In the QSRLS report the research team commended the observed teachers for their care for students as ‘care’ is central to good teachers’ work (Education Queensland, 2001). However, as Hargreaves (2003, 47) has stated, ‘Care must become more than charity or control: it must become a relationship in which those who are cared for (pupils or parents) have agency, dignity and a voice’. We agree that giving students a voice in their schooling is important (although we are aware of some of the problematics associated with this, see for instance Ellsworth, 1989). Many of the disengaged boys that we have come across feel angry at the system and the formal structures of the school. There often feel that they have no voice, that they are often punished unfairly and that no one in the school cares about them (see for example, Mills, 2001). To some extent these concerns can be justified. We, like many others, have witnessed the authoritarian structures within some schools that seek to stifle any dissent (see for instance, Mills, 1996; 1997). And, as Darling-Hammond (1997, 138) has noted: ‘Authoritarian systems that rely on heavy-handed sanctions ultimately increase the level of student alienation and misbehaviour and reduce possibilities for addressing problems constructively.’ Furthermore, teacher-student relationships characterised by traditionally authoritarian masculine modes of relating can reinforce traditional versions of gender (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). In developing positive and mutually supportive relationships the importance of breaking down the power imbalances between teachers and students is particularly important given many students’ resistances to being overpowered and controlled (Keddie & Churchill 2004; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). In this regard, boys’ social and behavioural outcomes are likely to be enhanced through democratic disciplinary approaches that focus on teachers sharing power and authority and position students with greater legitimacy and agency in their everyday school lives (Lingard et al. 2002; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003).

However, whilst recognising that students, including boys, have to be heard within schools, we are tentative in our suggestions that a focus on re-engaging boys through a concern about their views may have negative consequences for girls. We are not suggesting that the harassment of girls or female teachers, sexist and homophobic jokes and comments, or the domination of classroom and playground space should be tolerated. Rather, we are suggesting that a democratic classroom (and school) environment be created where all who are participants in the everyday life of school are treated with respect. Such respect requires that boys be taught how to be members of a democratic environment within which power differentials based upon class, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and physical (dis)abilities are challenged (see Mills, 2001). Learning how to become a member of a democratic classroom does not, as with most academic and social dispositions, come naturally, such skills have to be explicitly taught.

Much has been made about the need for explicit criteria in the classroom and the ways in which those familiar and at ease with the mores and nuances of what makes a ‘good’ student are at an advantage over students who are not at ease with the schooling process

(Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cope & Kalantsiz, 1995). For these latter students the need for explicitness has been stressed. This means making it obvious to students what is expected of them. These expectations have to be both related to their schoolwork *and* to their performances of gender – and here we broaden the notion of a ‘good student’ to include one who is concerned not just about academic achievement but also with being a positive member of a democratic community.

In relation to schoolwork, being explicit means the actual teaching of those skills necessary to achieve good academic results. There is a growing body of literature and line of thought that suggests that current practices in classrooms are not ‘boy-friendly’. For instance, in *Boys: Getting it Right* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002) the claim is made that current assessment practices and syllabus requirements relating to the use of literacy and oral skills work against the interests of boys. This has led to calls to change assessment and pedagogical practices to meet the supposed needs of boys. Notwithstanding the problematics of such thinking in terms of essentialising all boys’ learning orientations as similar, we would argue that many of the skills and knowledges demanded by new syllabuses are particularly important for boys. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is integral to the development and maintenance of supportive and mutually respectful relationships. We recognise here that the masculinising practices that cause *some* boys to struggle with communication, also endorse harmful and ineffective modes of communication that may, for example, be based on physical or verbal domination. In this respect, where we differ from some in the boys’ lobby is that we argue that this does not mean that boys should then be expected to communicate less – rather the skills of communication need to be explicitly taught to those boys who struggle with such performances.

The focus on explicitness in much of the productive pedagogies work has tended to be on the expectations of school work. This is of course important. However, we want to add that such an explicitness has to take into account how boys currently engage with each other, girls and teachers. This will mean the explicit teaching of boys about gender. We have observed schools that have good academic, and indeed some good social, outcomes for boys where gender is not made explicit (Lingard et al., 2002). However, from our observations of boys in action there is very little disruption of dominant ways of being masculine without some intervention into the masculinising processes. There is also a need for care here. For instance, as Francis (2000, 134) indicates, drawing on the work of Pickering (1997), sometimes a focus *on* gender differences can actually inhibit boys’ achievements. Such a focus may well contribute to boys’ understandings of themselves as ‘different’ in various situations. For example, a focus on encouraging boys to read may well contribute to the construction of the perception that it is not ‘normal’ for boys to read. Furthermore, in one interview conducted as part of another study (Lingard et al., 2002), a group of boys told one of us how angry they became when regularly being told that the girls at the school across the road were doing better than them. These were all high achieving boys. Thus, whilst we would argue that gender has to be made explicit in the classroom, such explicitness needs to be done in ways that do not tap into essentialist discourses about gender or be framed within a competitive framework.

One aspect of the gendering process that we feel does need to be made explicit in order to create a supportive classroom environment is the relationship between dominant forms of masculinity and academic success. There is evidence to suggest that some boys are afraid of being seen to work hard in case their masculinity is brought into question (see for example, Renold, 2001; Epstein, 1998; Mills 2001; Francis, 2000; Jackson, 2002). To some extent this fear can be experienced by middle class boys as well as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (although usually with very different effects). For example, many of the middle class upper primary school boys in Renold's (2001) study who were achieving academically often joked and mucked around in class in ways that worked to deflect attention away from their success (see also Cohen, 1998). As Renold states:

I suggest that the jokers' injection of humour into classroom life was also a way of securing an academic identity that did not equate with academic success or studiousness with 'square' or 'geek'. Humour or 'having a laugh', thus went some way to dislocate academic effort from academic success (Renold, 2001, 374).

Her research also showed that whilst some of the boys equated striving for academic success with femininity – and hence ridiculed studious boys, often by utilising homophobic discourses – some also tended to denigrate and belittle the achievements of girls. Providing a supportive environment in which boys can achieve and do so without putting down each other or trivialising girls' successes requires a classroom where risk taking is encouraged and valued by *all* students and where 'put-downs' of any kind are not tolerated (see Rose, 1995). Creating such an environment requires that understandings of 'difference' play a major role in the classroom practices of teachers.

### **Understanding Difference**

The difference dimension of productive pedagogies has been the one aspect of the model that has been the source of much debate. In the original QSRLS study very few of the items that make up this dimension were observed in classrooms in any great detail. The study noted that this was not that teachers were not committed to valuing students' difference – just that at times they were afraid of getting it wrong – this was especially the case in relation to Indigenous issues (Education Queensland, 2001). The non-appearance of some of these items in the QSRLS research appeared to contribute to the NSW decision in its construction of the Quality Teaching model (closely related to the productive pedagogies framework) to remove the difference dimension and to spread some of the items across other dimensions and drop some items altogether from the model (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). Furthermore, in work that has retained this dimension, complete with all of the original items, it has changed from being titled 'recognition of difference' to 'engaging with difference' (Lingard et al., 2003) and then subsequently to 'working with and valuing difference' (Hayes et al., 2006). These various name changes represent the difficulties with 'difference'. Davina Cooper (2005) in her discussions on diversity and equality indicates some of the problems with expressions such as 'valuing diversity'. For example, questions relating to whose diversities are worthy of support and whose are not have to be confronted. In this paper we have decided to refer to this dimension simply as 'difference'.

In the productive pedagogies framework the following items make up the difference dimension:

- Cultural knowledges
- Inclusivity
- Narrative
- Group identities
- Active citizenship

We do not intend to unpack each of the items in this dimension in great depth in this paper, although in regards to the teaching of boys we would argue that all of them are important. They are important in that their presence in the classroom can go a long way to problematising those dominant constructions of masculinity that hinder the learning and social well being of the boys performing these masculinities, and other boys and girls who are subjected to their often oppressive behaviours. Within much of the current literature on boys there has been a focus on providing boys with role models that will enable them to visualise other ways of being male. This has been most evident in the call for more male teachers (see for example, Gurian, 1999; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Education Queensland, 2002; for critiques of this approach see Francis & Skelton, 2001; Skelton 2001; Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2004; Martino & Frank, 2006)

However, as Skelton (2001) has noted there are many problems with role model theory – in particular it fails to take into account power relations in the school, classroom and the wider society. Classroom practices that work with the difference dimension enable the exposure of students to understandings of the ways in which power works to construct particular forms of domination and subordination. Its presence in classrooms will also enable students to become aware of the ways in which various other factors including gender, race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status affect gender constructions. To a great extent the presence of this dimension in a classroom enables teachers to teach for democracy, that is to provide boys with the skills and knowledges necessary for them to act as responsible members of a democratic community. For as Darling-Hammond (1997, 141) has noted: ‘If schools are to be agents of democracy, they must provide access to knowledge that enables creative thought and access to a social dialogue that enables democratic communication and participation.’ And: ‘Education for democracy requires more than equal access to technical knowledge. It requires access to social knowledge and understanding forged by participation in a democratic community’ (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 142).

The cultural knowledges item within the productive pedagogies model encourages the valuing of non-dominant cultures within the classroom. For boys who feel marginalised within the school, due to their performance of what Connell (1995) refers to as subordinate and marginalised masculinities, this is a critical aspect of productive pedagogies. Its presence will have the potential to create an environment where boys who are prepared to resist dominant representations of masculinity can feel safe *and* it can help to construct an environment where boys whose displays of particular forms of

masculinity damage their and others learning can be challenged. This item encourages, as mentioned in the previous dimension of supportiveness, explicit teaching about masculinity and the doing of gender. Understanding cultural knowledges also facilitates an understanding of the ways in which class, religion, ethnicity/race, sexuality and so on affect gender. The teaching about such things is of course not easy and there is a danger of lapsing into a 'we're all individuals discourse'. As most social research demonstrates, the communities and contexts which gendered, raced, ethnicised, sexualised people inhabit contribute significantly to the development of a person's various identities. It is this importance of being a member of various communities that is foregrounded in the productive pedagogies element of group identities in a learning community.

For boys in schools, the identities shaped and policed within peer group communities is, as the work, for instance, of Hickey and Fitzclarence (2004) indicate, critical. As they say, '...we have become increasingly convinced that peer group affiliations and commitments are often foremost in the decision-making processes of young people' (2004, 52). And it is well established that male peer group affiliations are particularly potent in endorsing and indeed escalating harmful and restrictive versions of masculinity (Connell 2000; Martino 1999; Keddie 2003). However, drawing on the research of Keddie (2003) with 7 and 8 year old boys, they comment on how teachers often break up peer groups in class as a pedagogical technique, often to the extent that the peer group is sometimes not even recognisable. However, these peer groups were clearly recognisable in the playground where they contributed significantly to the marginalisation of 'othered' boys and of girls. Hence, they argued that:

If schools are to take seriously their role in the development of responsible decision making then current pedagogic approaches to denying or diluting groupness need to be rethought. Indeed, while pedagogies of separation continue to dominate mainstream education, peer groups will continue to exist as the natural enemy of teachers. (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004, 61)

It is clearly our experience, that the 'group' cannot be ignored in the classroom. We are aware that there are times when teachers do need to break up particular arrangements of students that are disruptive to the learning of students and to provide students with broader connections with other members of their classroom group. However, at the same time students need to 'learn' how to function in their peer groups in ways that are not oppressive to others. This again means making gender explicit and working to disrupt those gender constructions that have negative consequences for them and for others. This can be difficult territory for some teachers who feel that they are lacking in knowledge about particular kinds of difference. It also again raises questions about which differences to value and which differences matter.

Archer's (2003) study of Muslim masculinities in Britain is illuminating here in regard to which differences mattered to the students in her study. In her work the boys identified more with being Muslim than with being British, or indeed than with having a heritage from any particular location such as Pakistan. However, this was quite different for the girls who were more likely to describe themselves as British than Muslim. Her

observations suggest that for many of the boys in her study, constructing themselves as 'hard' Muslims was a way of disrupting those discourses constructing Asian men as weak and 'effeminate'. As she says, 'The discursive 'talking up' of violence, action and 'hardness' through religious idealism and martyrdom...evokes a particularly potent, powerful form of masculinity' (2003, 53). This masculinity, she observes, was not only constructed in response to racism, but also within a patriarchal framework that idealised hardness and power over women. In this context, problematic classroom behaviours could be read as a resistance to being constructed as non-masculine. However, disrupting those Muslim masculinities that are damaging the academic and social learnings of others poses particularly difficult tasks for the teacher in the current climate where young Muslim men are increasingly regarded with suspicion.

Here we find the work of Bronwyn Davies particularly useful. Like Davies (1993, 1), we want to explore 'the radical possibility of giving children the capacity to disrupt the dominant storylines through which their gender is held in place'. The narrative item within the productive pedagogies model is a method through which those masculinities marginalised by, for instance, racist discourses, can be troubled. This item can work to encourage the development of boys' capacities for expressing their own feelings and for expressing empathy and emotional connectedness with others (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997; McLean, 1997). Kenway and Fitzclarence talk in this regard of developing a 'pedagogy of emotions' and highlight the significance of teachers (particularly within the context of what they describe as the 'emotional neutrality' and 'hyper-rationality' of schools), disrupting traditional versions of masculinity as emotionally neutral or distant through boys' exploration and understanding of the powerful feelings that are implicated in some of their behaviours and interactions (such as suffering, fear, anger, rage, shame and humiliation, jealousy, revenge and remorse, as well as joy and pleasure). Kenway and Fitzclarence describe this exploration and re-storying process – 'narrative therapy' (after White & Epston 1990) - as working to reconfigure many males' deep emotional investments in the discourses of hegemonic masculinity. Certainly their work makes a strong case for moving beyond the constraints of rational pedagogic practice to pedagogies that are more sensitive to the reflexive and dynamic nature of humanity and social life (Kenway & Fitzclarence 1997). As Fitzclarence (2000) argues, hyper-rationalistic (and masculinist) solutions (such as strict codes of behaviour and regimes of discipline and control) applied to deeply emotive issues (such as aggression and violence) are inadequate because they define students' identities clinically within conservative, narrow and incomplete paradigms and:

...fail to account for the multiplicity and complexity of human behaviour. As such rational inquiry becomes an ideology that fails to acknowledge that human behaviour does not always follow a rational and predictable path. (2000: 151)

Through feminist lenses facilitating a 'pedagogy of emotions' that explores and values the world of feelings can be seen as central to disrupting the pedagogies of rationality likely to install and perpetuate masculinist ways of being. This will enable a space for deconstructing and re-imagining some of the dominant storylines that narrow boys' options.

However, in engaging in various narrative work, that focuses on boys as different from girls – as well as different from each other – there can be a danger of lapsing into what Lingard and Douglas (1999) have referred to as the ‘male repair agenda’. In order to help boys develop the skills and knowledge to contribute to a more just society this has to be avoided. Instead, boys have to be provided with opportunities to see how they can contribute to the development of a democratic society. Within the classroom context this means, that their group identities need to be recognised and that they be provided with opportunities to engage with the curriculum as an active citizen. As Beane and Apple (1999, 11) have argued, ‘Those involved in democratic schools see themselves as participants in communities of learning. By their very nature, these communities of learning are diverse, and that diversity is prized, not viewed as a problem’. However, as they note, these schools also have a shared purpose that involves removing barriers to inequities (1999, 12), thereby avoiding the traps of the victim politics espoused by sections of the boys’ lobby. For many of those in schools who seek to promote such active citizenship there is a need to consider the broader society. Such a consideration requires classroom work to be connected to the broader society.

### **Connectedness**

Much has been made of the way in which current school curricula do not connect in with the lives of boys. These criticisms have usually been framed within a discourse that suggests that such a connectedness exists for girls (see for example, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). Hence, there have been numerous instances where in attempts to engage boys in the learning process, that is making the curriculum and pedagogies ‘connected’, there has been a reinforcement of traditional forms of masculinity (see for example Connolly, 1998; Francis, 2000; Skelton 2000; Martino 1999; McGregor & Mills, 2006; Roulston & Mills, 2000). For instance, it was brought to our attention by a senior policy officer in an Australian department of education, that one advocate for boys has been showcasing an on-line magazine for boys that will help them to enjoy reading. This magazine has pictures of scantily clad young women draped over cars, alongside other material about ‘chicks’, sport and cars. This form of reading material serves to reinforce narrow definitions of what it means to be a boy (including holding misogynist attitudes towards women and girls). This also, rather ironically, serves to reinforce those attributes amongst some boys that have caused them to already disengage with the learning process – it also serves to limit their life experiences and breadth of knowledge about the world. Do we want, for instance, to encourage boys who spend most of their free time playing football to then only read about football? There is often the presumption that at least boys are reading. This is true. We are prepared to accept that it is useful for boys to develop the technical skills of reading by reading material in which they are already interested (however, not misogynist and homophobic materials). But, as most teachers know, reading is more than just a technical skill, it is also an intellectual practice where readers make assumptions, hypothesis as to meaning, are emotionally affected, engaged, intrigued etc. Teaching reading has to involve students being exposed to a wide range of ideas and thoughts to expand students’ knowledges. Solely focussing on students’ technical skills involves low

expectations of students. Like most educationalists we are aware that high expectations are required of students if they are to achieve highly – and the converse is true - low expectations of students are likely to lead to low achievement (see Lingard et al., 2003 for a discussion of teachers and expectations).

Making classroom practices connected need not only relate to that which students are already interested in. There is of course value in building on students' background knowledge, there is a significant body of research that makes this point (Newmann and Associates, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997). However, 'connectedness', as indicated by the productive pedagogies research, also involves connecting to 'real world' issues and problems, and, drawing upon the problem-based learning literature (see for example, Ashman & Conway, 1993; 1997), launching classroom units with the intent to engage with such problems. Further, such a connectedness is facilitated when there is an integration of knowledge as the solution of most problems requires the synthesis of different disciplines.

The productive pedagogies framework thus identifies four items that make up this dimension:

- Background knowledge
- Connectedness to the world
- Problem-based curriculum
- Knowledge integration

At the beginning of this section, we indicated some of our concerns about attempts to achieve connectedness by reinforcing dominant constructions of gender. We are likewise concerned that an emphasis on connectedness might lead to creating a curriculum that fails to challenge students. This is particularly likely to be the case when the curriculum is designed to accommodate the needs of low achieving students. For instance, we would be concerned about the introduction of vocational education programs as a means of engaging low achieving boys when such programs fail to engage boys at an intellectual level. However, this is not to say that vocational education programs cannot be built around intellectually challenging work. For instance, Rosenstock and Steinberg (1999, 66) provide an example of a high school in the United States, that was primarily a technological school, delivering a vocational education curriculum that sought to cognitively challenge students. This school also drew heavily upon principles of a democratic curriculum that sought to encourage students to make an impact upon the world. They state that at this school teachers sought to

...counter the reduction of education to job training (Davis et al. 1989, p. 109) that only 'erects more barriers to high-quality education for low-income students' (Rosenstock 1992), and to broaden creative intellectual work for all students. Rosenstock and Steinberg (1999, 66)

This provision of challenging work is critical to the improvement of educational outcomes for students. We do want to stress the importance of providing students with

material that engages their interest. This is particularly important for those students, many of them boys, who have clearly disengaged from the learning process. For as Darling-Hammond (1997, 109) has argued: 'Just creating interesting tasks for students is not enough, however.' It is also worth noting the observations of Apple and Beane (1999, 119) in relation to those schools in their book that were making a difference to students' academic and social outcomes:

The curriculum in all of these schools is based on the belief that knowledge comes to life for students and teachers only when it is connected to something that is serious. Rigorous intellectual work is prized, not for the sake of symbolic standards or agreeable publicity, but because of its ability to make a difference in how we understand and act powerfully on the social world in which we live. (Apple and Beane, 1999, 119)

The importance of linking a connected classroom with intellectually challenging work is further emphasised by Darling-Hammond:

Active learning aimed at genuine understanding begins with the disciplines, not with whimsical activities detached from core subject matter concepts as some critics of hands-on learning suggest, and it treats the disciplines as alive, not inert. Schools that teach for understanding engage students in *doing* the work of writers, scientists, mathematicians, musicians, sculptors, and critics in contexts as realistic as possible, using the criteria of performance in the disciplines as standards toward which students and teachers strive. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 107)

As with the productive pedagogies work she claims there has to be a focus on developing students' 'deep-understanding' in worthwhile and meaningful contexts and that that will require students having to use 'higher-order cognitive functions, taking students beyond recall, recognition, and reproduction of information to evaluation, analysis, synthesis, and production of arguments, ideas and performances'. These concerns of Darling-Hammond are taken up in the intellectual quality dimension of the productive pedagogies framework.

### **Intellectual quality**

The intellectual quality dimension of the productive pedagogies framework stresses the importance of all students being presented with intellectually challenging work (Hayes et al., 2006; Lingard et al, 2003; see also Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2003). This need for intellectually challenging work for all students has been emphasised in other research (notably Darling-Hammond, 1997; Newmann & Associates, 1995; Sizer, 1996; Apple & Beane, 1999; Boaler, 2002). For instance, Newmann and Associates' (1995) notion of 'authentic pedagogy', which informed much of productive pedagogies work, underlined the need for all students to engage in higher order thinking and to acquire a depth of understanding and knowledge of important disciplinary concepts. And, Darling-Hammond (1997) highlights the need for active in-depth learning alongside other factors, such as an appreciation for diversity and support for democratic learning. The elements of

intellectual quality as suggested by the productive pedagogies model can be seen to have their roots in such work. They include:

- Higher order thinking
- Deep knowledge
- Deep understanding
- Substantive conversation
- Knowledge as problematic
- Meta-language

As with this previous research, we argue that all students, boys *and* girls, be provided with intellectually challenging work. Contrary to some claims that have been made by sections of the boys' lobby, we do not believe that 'boys need better pedagogies than girls' (see various submissions to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). However, in relation to boys' education we want to stress that challenging work is of particular importance for boys from traditionally underachieving backgrounds, that is Indigenous boys in Australia, Black boys in the UK, and boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds generally. As mentioned earlier, we are concerned by the move towards 'boy-friendly' curricula which has the potential to treat various groups of boys as deficit by watering down the curriculum for these boys. For instance, in various research projects, we have observed boys and girls in streamed classes who are presented with low grade work based on the filling in of simplistic worksheets (Hayes et al., 2006; Lingard et al. 2003). We have also observed schools making various structural changes, such as single sex-classes, in order to cater for the supposed needs of boys (see for example, Martino, Mills & Lingard, 2005; Charlton, Mills, Martino & Beckett, forthcoming). Without accompanying changes to the pedagogy, these structural changes are unlikely to make any difference whatsoever to boys' academic achievements.

Within much of the literature on teaching boys, there is an argument that boys struggle with the complexities of a postmodern curriculum where there are multiple answers to problems (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). Criticism of supposedly postmodern curricula has been a recurring theme in various conservative commentaries on contemporary education (see for instance Donnelly, 2004). However, this is a very limited, and limiting, view of education and its purposes, and of knowledge itself. As Hargreaves (2003) has argued, we now live in a *knowledge society*, and schools need to be equipping students for life in such a society. This knowledge society, Hargreaves argues, is both creative and destructive. It is creative in the sense that competitiveness between corporations and various national economies is driven by creativity and ingenuity. However, this drive accompanied by a desire to maximise profits and one's self interests inevitably leads to a breakdown in social cohesion and increasing gaps between the rich and poor. Thus, teaching students to live in this knowledge society, he argues, will require teachers to encourage the development of students' creativity and ingenuity *and* 'to teach a set of values, dispositions and senses of global responsibility that extend beyond the bounds of the knowledge economy' (Hargreaves, 2003, xix). Working to promote students' creativity and ingenuity will

involve intellectually challenging them through the promotion of ‘deep cognitive learning’ that involves higher order thinking work linked with particular understandings of knowledge as not fixed – but socially produced – and in the process learning how to create new knowledges.

The productive pedagogies’ concern with ‘deep knowledge’, ‘deep understanding’ and ‘problematic knowledge’ will serve to do just that, in that these items encourage teachers to take into account those social theories which challenge the ‘fixicity’ of knowledge and to ensure that students become immersed in the relevant disciplinary fields. Here students are encouraged to treat knowledge as a social and political construct. This can be applied to maths and science (see for example, Boaler, 2002; Hanrahan, 2005), as well as to the arts and humanities. Hence, we recognise that such learning has to be across the curriculum and for all students. However, such kinds of learning should not be restricted to disciplinary knowledges, but also the ways in which such knowledges are shaped by dominant understandings of, for instance, gender. Working with boys to challenge such understandings of gender will assist boys coming to terms with what it means to be male in a knowledge society.

Challenging students ‘normalised’ views of gender will require significant analysis of various gender theories. The work of Bob Connell (1995), has been key in shaping current understandings of masculinity. In particular his concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, whilst not uncontested (see Donaldson, 1993), has been useful for describing those forms of masculinity in various contexts that are valued as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ ways for men and boys to be. This concept of hegemonic masculinity is represented in what Warren (2003) refers to as the ‘imagined sense of masculinity’ that exists amongst the ten year old boys in his study. In this research, he asked boys and girls to state what was good about being a boy or being a girl. The responses from the boys indicated that they interpreted this question as being what was good for boys as a social group rather than for themselves. Hence, for many of these boys, being a boy was perceived to be good because boys are good at football – such comments were made by boys who are both good and bad at football (see also Mills 2001). Warren suggests that these forms of response can ‘be understood as giving us a ‘semantics of gender’ (2003, 9). It is such a semantics of gender that, he argues, constructs ‘masculinity’ as coherent, unitary and continuous (2003, 11). A major intellectual task for boys and girls in schools is thus to trouble this ‘semantics’ for both masculinities and femininities. Such a troubling opens up other possibilities for being a boy or a girl in school.

The metalanguage item of the productive pedagogies framework that encourages students to consider the role of language in the creation of ‘truths’ is critical for this troubling. Martino and Mellor (1995), for instance, provide a framework for assisting students to understand how difference and diversity can be produced and maintained, but also challenged and transformed through examining the socio-cultural production of knowledge. Their work focuses on facilitating student awareness of how language operates to produce particular (non-innocent) versions of reality, and more specifically, how texts and contexts work to construct and regulate particular (taken-for-granted) assumptions about gender that position people in inequitable ways. In challenging and

transforming these gender(ed) assumptions, their work illustrates the importance of students recognising how texts and contexts can be read or interpreted in multiple rather than singular ways. This process of critical analysis and deconstruction aims to make transparent the constitutive force of language and discourse – the mechanisms through which we are spoken into existence - and seeks to fracture the taken-for-granted truths that shape our identities (Davies 1997). Through these lenses, gendered assumptions can lose their apparent inevitability and thus some of their power to hold current relations in place because they become visible as fiction. This opens up possibilities for new ways of thinking, speaking and acting (Davies 1997).

Facilitating this critical and transformative process requires students and teachers to engage with gender theory to develop a reflexive awareness of how speaking-as-usual constructs themselves and others (Davies 1997). Moreover, breaking the ‘...enchantment of the compulsory struggle towards dominant and hegemonic forms of masculinity...’ requires acknowledging the ‘...desirability and joyful sense of power that boys gain from being positioned within dominant forms of discourse which hand them ascendancy over others’ (Davies 1997: 15). In assisting boys to explore different and more socially just ways of being Gilbert and Gilbert (1998: 247-48) make a crucial point:

In criticising dominant masculinity, we need to be able to replace it with a sense of being male to which boys can aspire. Ridding the dominant image of its worst excesses is important, but it needs to be replaced by some alternative vision and sense of direction. ...the central point is ... that certain values of dominant masculinity, like strength, courage, public leadership and independence can be interpreted and enacted in different ways (both positive and negative). The task is one of identifying the harmful and anti-social elements of any practice and ridding it of them. If the practice remains viable, well and good; if not, the loss is justified.

Within the context of exploring a broad range of possible ways of being male, the imperative here relates to teachers recognising and identifying affirmative or socially-just spaces and working with these spaces in connected and meaningful ways (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; MacNaughton 2000). This means teachers being able to draw on their gender knowledges to identify how students’ actions and silences either support or challenge inequitable gender definitions (MacNaughton 2000). In relation to broadening boys’ understandings of masculinity, teachers must make visible these challenges and position them as legitimate alternatives to hegemonic constructions (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). This is an ongoing challenge that involves facilitating boys’ awareness and appreciation that alternative ways of being can be rewarding and positive (Alloway et al. 2002; Davies 1993: 1997; Gilbert & Gilbert 1998) and continually encouraging boys to resist the dominant and perhaps more convincing and familiar social processes and discourses of masculinity that ‘speak them into existence’ (Davies 1993: 1997).

For some boys, creating this resistance may mean opening up possibilities for engaging in the academic curriculum of the school. We would also argue that a troubling of the ‘semantics of gender’ also provides opportunities for instigating a democratic curriculum into the classroom. Beane and Apple, (1999) describe such a curriculum thus:

A democratic curriculum invites young people to shed the passive role of knowledge consumers and assume the active role of 'meaning makers'. It recognises that people acquire knowledge both by studying external sources and engaging in complex activities that require them to construct their own knowledge. (Beane & Apple, 1999, 17)

The intellectual quality dimension of the productive pedagogies framework is thus crucial to the production of a democratic curriculum for boys that values diversity and social/gender justice.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have sought to tackle difficult questions arising out of concerns with boys' education. We do want boys to change. However, we also want schools and classrooms to change in ways that promote social justice as an ideal for boys. This will entail not only teaching about social justice, but also teaching in socially just ways. We have argued that the productive pedagogies framework provides a means of considering such practice. We do not want to victimise boys by suggesting that they are to blame for a society that discriminates against women and girls. However, we do want to challenge any sense of entitlement they might feel in relation to their privilege and to provide them with opportunities to actively resist that privilege. The productive pedagogies framework with its emphasis on 'supportiveness' ensures that those boys who do struggle with school are supported in their learning, whilst providing a classroom environment free from gender based put downs towards girls and boys who do attempt to engage with the learning process. The difference dimension of the framework helps to provide boys, especially marginalised boys, with a vocabulary for understanding oppression, theirs and others, and with opportunities to actively resist such oppressions. Trying to ensure that the classroom is connected to the students' worlds will also enable those students who have disengaged from the learning process to engage in relevant activities. And finally, the intellectual expectations of the productive pedagogies framework refuses to treat boys who are struggling with school as deficit, whilst at the same time encouraging all boys to trouble those aspects of masculinity which are damaging to them and to others. We are not suggesting that productive pedagogies are *the* answer to issues of boys' education. However, they can be used as a conversation starter about how to teach boys in socially just ways.

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