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Common, distinct and differing perspectives on the education of boys – an analysis of contributions to the 2000 Federal Government Inquiry into the Education of Boys - part of the symposium "Have male identities been adequately addressed in the policy and practice of boys' education?"

Abstract

Policy making and practice for gender in schools is undergoing substantial change as the focus has shifted in recent years from girls to boys. It has been argued that social policy makers in all fields need evidence from a variety of sources to make informed decisions about social policy and program implementation. There should be ways of characterising, comparing and contrasting differing perspectives from the public, the media, practitioners and researchers so that their similarities and differences can be laid open for inspection and therefore provide broad, deep and useful information to policy makers and implementers.

A relatively new approach to reviewing and synthesising literature has been claimed to have the potential to provide more useful information to social policy makers about 'what works' than traditional methods of reviewing literature. It is an 'argument catalogue' developed by the Canadian Network for Knowledge Utilisation.

This paper describes a study examining a sample of submissions to The Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into the Education of Boys. A comparative analysis of these submissions, which represent views from all interested sectors, including individual parents and teachers, parent bodies, teacher professional bodies and unions, government departments, and researchers, has the potential to significantly inform current discussions of boys' education and attempts to reform gender equity policy.

The paper outlines the methodology of developing an argument catalogue which synthesises and codes the arguments contained in a sample of submissions to the Inquiry into the Education of Boys. It offers the preliminary findings from utilising this approach as one way of dealing with the complexities facing research on policy and practice in this highly contested field.

Background and aims of the study

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

Concern about girls' education in Australia, as in other Western countries, grew during the 1970's from the second wave of feminist activism and widespread social movements for change in the status of women. One of the major drivers of the social movement was the disparity in women's economic and social status compared to men. The policy making around girls' education was therefore located within equity frameworks that saw education as a means to an end, the end being equal access for women to the economic and social benefits of society already enjoyed by men. Significantly, the commonwealth government took leadership on national policy making in this area, despite education largely being the responsibility of the various state and territory governments in Australia. A commonwealth report *Girls, School and Society* (Schools Commission1975) argued the case for equity for girls and women in schooling and society that was subsequently enshrined in policy. The National Policy for Girls was developed in1987, followed by the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997. An attempt was made to broaden gender policies to include boys in the 1996 Gender Equity Framework for Australian Schools. This policy still stands.

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

The *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* laid the groundwork for this focus on statistical evidence when national reporting frameworks linked to it, for the first time, required reporting of statistical data. Literacy and numeracy levels, performance on key employment related competencies and student pathways were expected to be reported on in the annual National Reports on Schooling in Australia (Daws, 1997). This focus on 'evidence' represented a shift in policy making that has been occurring in most social policy fields throughout the last decade. The reporting of statistical data was increasingly required of all government agencies in line with a trend towards a more 'evidence-based' approach to social policy planning and decision making. This trend has often been associated with neo-liberalism and the international rise of the new right policy agenda (Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor, 2005).

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

The National Reports on Schooling in Australia and Australian Bureau of Statistics Data Cubes on schooling factors also indicate that there have been significant changes to numbers of girls choosing particular science subjects and higher level maths subjects; to the numbers of young women entering university and to the range of courses chosen by women at university in the past ten years (Cumpston and Smith, 2003; DETYA, 2000). Clearly, girls have made many gains since the inception of the National Action Plan and while inequalities still exist, the national gender equity policies and strategies are widely considered to have been successful for girls in a number of ways (Daws, 1997). Yet the hope espoused in the

1975 Schools' Commission report that increased access to and outcomes from the broadest range of educational opportunities would result in wider social change has not yet been fully realised.

There has also been more than a decade of government, academic and practitioner activity about boys' education since the 1996 policy attempt to bring together issues for boys and girls into one gender equity policy document, yet we are no closer to a consensus on these issues. The social theory driven approach to girls' education and the ad hoc experimental approach to boys' education, both driven by the federal government do not seem to have produced a consistent approach to gender across the states and territories.

The linking of gender to social disadvantage, espoused by the 'which boys' which girls' approach to the evidence of academic and social outcomes in the 1996 policy, has drawn attention to important social issues such as the large gap between outcomes for indigenous students and others and the importance of poverty in school outcomes. However, it seems to leave little space for a new engagement with gender itself, particularly to a nuanced examination of gender identities.

Critics of the 2006 policy point to the lack of inclusion of a post-modernist theoretical perspective that would give more weight to an individual boy's or girl's experience of gender in their lives (Daws, 2004). One criticism of the focus on wider societal factors is the inability of many of the educational programs and practices to move beyond a critique of society towards actions that support boys' and girls' positive educational and life choices in concrete ways. School programs seem to have difficulty in encompassing the real life concerns and dilemmas of modern girls and boys who are living in a world of changing employment opportunities and demands, juggling personal and gender identity issues in their decisions about careers, in the full knowledge of the need for two incomes for families to afford housing and educational expenses, the need to make child-bearing and care decisions, and to balance work and family responsibilities as the roles of men and women become increasingly blurred.

Emerging discussions about an emphasis on difference, on the inter-relatedness of sex and gender, on incorporating new knowledge of neurological and biological differences and on approaches that frame difference and diversity, including gender as a positive identity framework cannot easily be accommodated within the current policy frameworks. In New Zealand a strengths based approach to male identity has been suggested in government reports on youth development (Barwick, 2004). In the USA practitioners and commentators are exploring gender differences in brain development that may influence learning and pedagogy (Gurian and Stevens, 2007; Sax, 2006). While a positive sense of gender identity has been suggested as important, systematic approaches to gender difference and in particular to positive male identities have not yet been fully explored. Boys' education remains a highly contested field without clear policy guidance that fully reflects recent interest in the education of boys and with a plethora of different practical programs and approaches being used in different context with a great degree of variance in demonstrated success. There appears to be little agreement and no clear ways to incorporate disparate approaches. There is a danger, that without a systematic agreed way to deal with gender issues in schools, that gender is by default being removed from the policy making agenda altogether.

The boys' education debate and gender policies in general are inextricably linked. Two central issues remain unresolved. The first is whether boys' issues can be incorporated into a

gender equity framework designed for girls. The second is whether the state and school reporting and accountability requirements around boys' and girls' outcomes could provide useful hard evidence for practitioners of the variety of gendered educational needs and of successful ways to meet these.

There remains a policy vacuum in gender equity and in systematic strategies to meet the gendered educational needs of both boys and girls and of the differing groups within each sex. As a long-term advocate for boys' education, involved in teacher professional development to enhance boys' outcomes without disadvantaging girls, I am concerned that Australian school systems still do not have gender policies and practices that can ensure that all boys and girls are enabled to reach their potential.

An examination of the recent literature on the education of boys reveals a wide variety of opinions, approaches and theoretical frameworks, often competing and overlapping within any one document. There has been prolific discussion and debate on the issues surrounding the education of boys and its relationship to the education of girls in the public, media, practitioner, academic and policy making arenas, particularly in the last ten years.

In seeking to make sense of this wealth of data, a standard review of published articles in academic journals and of published research reports is inappropriate, as these articles only represent a small sector of the discussion on educating boys. An approach that would encompass and give weight to all views expressed about this public issue of concern to all sectors of society is needed. Weaver-Hightower (2002) delineates four types of literature: popular-rhetorical; theoretical oriented; practice oriented; and feminist and pro-feminist responses. In categorising and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of these writings on what he terms the 'boy turn', he points to the disconnections between public, academic, theoretical and practitioner writings.

Weaver-Hightower and other social policy theorist have emphasised the power of the media in shaping public opinion, educational debate and policy making; in creating 'moral panic' or problems and then finding solutions within a particular right-wing social agenda. Yet to date there has been little in depth analysis of the full range of media articles or of public views on boys' education. For example, many theorists quote only headlines, not the full content of media articles.

Social policy theorists (Lingard and Douglas, 1999; Blackmore and Thorpe, 2003) have highlighted the interest in boys' education in terms of a backlash against the feminist focus on girls' education. Yet they also note that social theorists are in danger of ignoring and alienating parents and teachers who have real concerns about the education of boys. Critiques within social policy theory argue that more attention needs to be paid to the complexities of the real issues facing practitioner activists for policy and practice change within policy sociology (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2002). There is a need for an approach that could bring the insights of policy theory, and of policy makers, public commentators, researchers and practitioners together to shed light on ways forward for boys' and girls' education.

A new methodological approach
A relatively new approach to reviewing literature, an argument catalogue, has been developed by the Canadian Network for Knowledge Utilisation (CanKnow), in response to the need for research to inform and provide guidance to practice and policy making in applied fields such as education (Abrami, Bernard and Wade, 2006).

An argument catalogue "is a systematic compilation of views on a topic from various documented sources…"(Abrami, Bernard and Wade, 2006, p418). The methodology of an argument catalogue involves developing an appropriate coding mechanism that can take account of this variety of sources that is quantifiable and also summarises the major messages from the documents in a qualitative way. It was considered a very useful approach to reviewing evidence of the current and emotive issue of boys' education which could do justice to and shed light on the variety of views evident in the various discourses. In applying the methodology of argument catalogue to a review of submissions to the Inquiry into the Education of Boys, this paper draws heavily on the work of CanKnow, particularly as described in the 2006 paper by Abrami, Bernard and Wade.

This paper describes the processes of developing an argument catalogue as a methodology for reviewing recent Australian and international literature on the education of boys. The focus of this paper is the processes used in the methodology and on useful preliminary findings.   In this paper, an analysis of a representative sample of submissions to the 2000 Federal government Inquiry into the Education of Boys is used to investigate the suitability of the methodology of an argument catalogue for an applied field such as the education of boys. The purpose of this literature review for which the argument catalogue may be a useful methodological tool is: to identify the recent and current evidence regarding outcomes for boys at Australian primary and secondary schools; to synthesise the major issues and theoretical concepts raised in public, government policy, practitioner and research documents regarding these outcomes; to identify common and dissonant assumptions and gaps in these documents; and to identify the most promising lines of inquiry for addressing the issues raised.

The federal inquiry
In response to growing community concerns about the education of boys, the Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training convened an Inquiry into the Education of Boys which reported its findings in 2002. The terms of reference for the inquiry were to:
  ❖ "inquire into and report on the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling; and
  ❖ the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness."
 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, p.xi)

 Two hundred and thirty one written submissions were received by the inquiry. These submissions represent views from all interested sectors, including individual parents and teachers, parent bodies, teacher professional bodies and unions, government departments, and researchers. The submissions to the inquiry in 2000 offer the researcher a significant body of evidence and a clear snapshot of public, practitioner, academic and policy making discourses at the time. A comparative analysis of these submissions, through the methodology of an argument catalogue has the potential to inform the current discussion of boys' education and current attempts to reform gender equity policy.

This paper outlines the utilisation of the methodology of an argument catalogue which synthesises and codes the arguments contained in a sample of submissions to the Inquiry into

the Education of Boys, as well as the preliminary findings from the initial analysis. For the purposes of this paper, a sample of seventy three submissions, representing approximately twenty five percent of the written submissions received was analysed in order to develop the argument catalogue and undertake preliminary analysis to test the coding categories for internal and external validation.

Methodology

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

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

Abrami, Bernard and Wade (2006) identify at least seven stages involved in an argument catalogue. These are:
      (1) formulating the purpose and research question(s);
      (2) locating and retrieving documents;
      (3) including and excluding documents;
      (4) creating an Argument Catalogue codebook;
      (5) coding documents;
      (6) analysing and interpreting data; and
      (7) disseminating the results.

The processes of steps one to six utilised in developing an argument catalogue for a literature review on the education of boys are described. I focus on the processes of steps four and five to illustrate the strengths and challenges of using the argument catalogue methodology in this context.

Steps 1 and 2
The purpose of this literature review of a sample of submissions to the inquiry is: to identify the recent and current evidence regarding outcomes for boys at Australian primary and secondary schools; to synthesise the major issues and theoretical concepts raised in public, government policy, practitioner and research documents regarding these outcomes; to identify common and dissonant assumptions and gaps in these documents; and to identify the most promising lines of inquiry for addressing the issues raised.

Written submissions to the inquiry are available on the website:
http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/eofb/subs.htm
For the purposes of this paper, a random sample of approximately twenty-five percent of submissions was chosen by numerical order of their appearance on the website. On examination of these, it was ascertained that they did not proportionally represent all categories of author types. Therefore, further choices were made, simply by selecting the next submission in the numerical order that fitted each category, to ensure that all source categories of submission: public, practitioner, academic and policy makers were represented

in the sample proportional to their overall representation in the inquiry. A total of seventy three submissions were examined and analysed for this paper.

Step 3 - including and excluding documents

A deliberate decision was made to undertake a literature review about educating boys which investigated the submissions to the inquiry, as they presented an already existing source of rich data of views from all interested sectors, including individual parents and teachers, parent bodies, teacher professional bodies and unions, government departments, and researchers. All submissions were from people or organisations with enough interest in the topic to write to the inquiry. As such, no submission to the inquiry was excluded in the first instance. Given that all submissions were relevant, they also offered an opportunity to test and fine tune the categories and coding criteria for other discrepancies or inconsistencies. A twenty-five percent random sample of the submissions was chosen as a large enough sample to be coded and analysed in the time-frame for submission of this paper, and which would reveal the strengths and challenges of the methodology. Eventually, all submissions will be included in a wider literature review, as will a range of other relevant literature from all source categories.

Reliability is also an issue in the analysis of submissions to the inquiry. This study was conducted by one researcher, the author of this paper. There were severe time constraints on the study, therefore double coding of all submissions was not possible. I developed the coding system and subsequently conducted all the coding. However, to establish reliability for selection and coding, it is important that at least two trained individuals working independently be involved (Abrami, Bernard and Wade, 2006). A representative sample of 10 per cent of submissions in each author category was checked against the coding of five informed research colleagues. Both author category coding and thematic coding categories were compared. A further four longer submissions were then coded by two trained colleagues. The consistency of rating was 80%. However the discussion before and after the blind coding by the five informed colleagues revealed a variety of interpretations of the same data and lead to the conclusion that it would be useful to double code a larger sample of the submissions. The difficulty for coders in this exercise was that they were not familiar with the range of submissions so found it difficult to judge the small sample. For double coding of a larger sample, each coder would need to be familiar with the range represented in the submissions and it would be necessary to develop very explicit criteria for each category. Discourse analysis would be a useful approach to a deep content analysis of the documents in the full study.

Creating an argument catalogue codebook

Abrami, Bernard and Wade (2006) argue that there are three codebook possibilities when dealing with diverse data. The three types are: 1. a common code book for all data; 2. separate and unique codebooks for each source to allow for differences such as length, frequency of publication, the nature of data; and 3. a mixed codebook with a core of codeable items plus items to reflect differences. As it was important to acknowledge the uniqueness of each of the different sources, yet still have rigorous and reliable methods of comparison, I chose to develop a mixed codebook.

Quantitative coding and analysis

An initial quantitative analysis of all submissions to the inquiry by author type was undertaken, which involved quantifying the number of submissions to the inquiry into several categories of author types.

No of submissions to Inquiry *
19	Academics/universities/faculties
15	Governments/departments
109	Individuals
10	Private/independent schools
62	Representative bodies
9	State schools
7	Name withheld
231	TOTAL

* Some people/institutions made more than 1 submission

Of the individual submissions, 71 were from men and 46 were from women, with some authors making multiple submissions. To further categorise and code these submissions, six author categories were identified as a reflection of the range of groups who made submissions to the inquiry and as a representation of the range of discourses in the area of boys' education at the time. The categories were: (1) public, (2) practitioner, (3) policy makers and (4) academic. Additional categories of (5) primary research and (6) literature reviews, were also identified as worthy of distinct categories representing a different type of discourse. Each submission was read in full and a decision made as to the most appropriate category based on the inclusion criteria below. Submissions were then coded into these pre-determined categories.

Inclusion criteria for author categories
The inclusion criteria for each category are:
(1) Public: includes people or groups who are not directly involved in delivering educational services or in the education industry. The sub categories are: individuals, parents, parent bodies, special interest groups or lobby groups, e.g. Institute of Men's Studies, non-government service organisations, e.g. Scouts Australia.

(2) Practitioner: includes people or groups directly involved in delivering educational services. The sub categories are: individual teachers; groups of teachers; individual schools; groups or clusters of schools; professional associations and representative bodies such as teacher unions.

(3) Policy maker: includes people or groups directly involved in decision making about the delivery of educational services. The sub categories are: federal and state government departments of education; and submissions from system level bodies such as Council for Government Schools, Catholic Education Office or Association of Independent Schools. It also includes a submission from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.

(4) Academic: includes people or groups directly involved in research or research based professional development about the delivery of educational services. The sub categories are: university researchers, schools or faculties; and research-informed commentators such as consultants, writers in the field, professional development consultants and program developers.

(5) Primary research: includes commissioned research; research papers and reports; and peer reviewed articles either included in or attached to submissions.

(6) Literature Reviews: include any systematic or criterion referenced review of current literature on the topic of boys' education.

There was considerable overlap within the first two categories, and some overlap in the other categories. For example, many individuals identified as both a parent and a teacher. For individual submissions, the inclusion criterion for each category was the first identifier used in the submission. So if a submission began "I am a mother of three boys, aged 9, 7 and 1 and I am a teacher and have been for approximately 8 years…" the submission was coded as belonging to the public group in the sub-category of parent. If a submission began "As a teacher of 35 years experience in disadvantaged schools and a father of two sons", it was coded in the practitioner category, sub-category individual teacher. Some academics entered individual submissions and some on behalf of their institutions. Overlaps in the categories were noted in the numerical analysis of submissions.

Submission Length and Logic:
One of the challenges of an argument catalogue is the issue of how to compare very different types of documents. The length of the documents is the first indication of difference. Submissions ranged from a couple of paragraphs in length to thirty five pages. Some were lengthy and also provided attachments that were substantial academic papers or policy documents. The length of each paper was recorded.

After careful reading of a number of submissions, patterns in the internal logic of submissions were identified by the researcher. A coding system was devised that took account of the internal logic of each paper, no matter what the length. In this way, the length and type of submission became less important for further analysis than the internal logic and content. This approach enabled the main concerns and strategies offered to be compared across author categories.

The submission logic coding categories are:
Concern 0 (C0) – presented a personal view without addressing issues or providing ideas for strategies to address issues.
Concern 1 (C1) – raised specific issues relating to the education of boys
Concern 2 (C2) – raised specific issues relating to the education of boys and offered ideas for strategies to address issues.
Concern 2 with Expert Judgement (C 2XJ) - raised specific issues relating to the education of boys, offered ideas for strategies to address issues and gave an analysis of evidence for strategies.

Submissions from the public, largely from parents, generally fell into the categories C0, C1 or C2. These submissions were often short, on average being one or two pages long. Submissions from practitioners, academic contributors and policy makers usually fell into category C2 or C2XJ. On average, practitioner submissions were also short, between one to ten pages long. Academic and policy maker submissions tended to be longer, up to thirty five pages, and/or to have attachments included.

Submission Logic

C0 Submissions that fell into the C0 category presented a personal view without addressing issues. An example of this category was a two paragraph submission from a separated father who expressed anger that he was denied access to his children. Submissions in this category were excluded from the content analysis as they largely reflected a personal story or grievance without specifically addressing the issues of the inquiry and therefore could not be compared for content analysis with the other categories.

C1 Submissions that fell into the C1 category raised specific concerns or issues relating to the education of boys, yet did not offer any suggestions or strategies to address the issues raised. An example of this category was a one page submission from a concerned citizen who knew of seven young men from economically and culturally advantaged backgrounds who were not fully engaged in or able to take advantage of their education, raising the concern that boys' education was not exclusively an issue related to socio-economic disadvantage (Legg, L, 2000, Submission 29). Submissions in this category were also excluded from the comparative content analysis as although they specifically addressed the issues of the inquiry, they did not offer any suggestions for strategies to address the issues and therefore could not be compared for complete content analysis with the other categories. They were however included in the numerical frequency analysis of issues raised.

C2 While many members of the public did not claim to be experts in the field, the submissions in this category were a considered response to the issues, often based on personal experience of school or school systems for their children. They outlined their concern, raised specific issues relating to this concern and were able to offer possible strategies to address their concerns that logically flowed from and were connected to the issues they raised. Submissions in this category offered a useful comparison to submissions in the other categories and were therefore included in the qualitative comparative content analysis. An example of this category was a submission from a mother whose concern was that her two sons were experiencing difficulty in literacy and suggested that it was very important that appropriate programs were put in place early so that all boys could take full advantage of educational opportunities (VanLangenberg, C, 2000, Submission 17).

C2XJ Submissions in this category raised specific issues relating to the education of boys, offered ideas for strategies to address issues and gave an analysis of evidence for strategies. For practitioners, many submissions in this category described strategies or activities undertaken at a specific school that they considered or had demonstrated were successful for engaging boys. For policy makers and academics, submissions in this category usually identified and analysed evidence of specific concerns and offered a theoretical framework for addressing the concerns. All submissions that were placed in the C2 or C2XJ categories were then further analysed using a comparative, qualitative analysis described later in this paper.

Quantitative Analysis

Of the seventy-three submissions analysed for this paper, thirty-nine were from the public, twenty-five were from practitioners, four were from policy makers, and five were academic contributions. Eight were placed in categories C0; nine in C1; twenty three in C2; and twenty nine in C2XJ. The quantitative analysis reveals that the vast majority of submissions from all author sources: public, practitioner, policy makers and academic had an internally consistent logic. The majority addressed the terms of reference of the inquiry; raised issues related to it and suggested strategies for addressing the issues in ways that were consistent with the concerns raised. Further, many submissions from all author categories gave some personal or professional analysis of the evidence discussed in order to substantiate their suggestions for

specific strategies. This quantitative analysis lays the foundation for a further comparative quantitative analysis of the suitable submissions - that is all submissions in categories C2 and C2XJ.

Table One: Author and submission logic categories

Author categories	No. in each author category	Average Length of submissions		No. in each Submission Logic Category	
Public	39	1pg	16	C0	8
		2 pgs	11		
		3pgs	4	C1	6
		4pgs	2		
		5pgs	1	C2	18
		<5 pgs	5		
				C2XJ	7
Practitioner	25	1pg	6	C1	3
		2 pgs	7		
		3pgs	4	C2	5
		4pgs	2		
		5pgs	3	C2XJ	13
		<5 pgs	3		
Policy maker	4	Under 5	3	C2XJ	4
		Under 35	1		
Academic	5	Under 10pgs	4	C2XJ	5
		Under 20pgs	1		

Qualitative Thematic Analysis: Categories and Coding

Comparing very different submissions again raises issues of consistency in coding for a content analysis. How can a two paragraph plea from a mother concerned about her son's literacy and suggesting he would benefit from a male role model at school to model the love of reading, be meaningfully compared with a lengthy analysis of state wide statistics within a specific theoretical framework?

First, I examined each submission with regard to the issues or concerns raised in the submission; the underlying theory, assumptions behind or explanations for the concerns raised; the critical factors contributing to or causing the concern; and strategies suggested to address the issue. In this way the arguments contained in every submission could be synthesised and compared consistently using the same criteria for each. As each submission was read in full, key words and concepts were noted and a thematic coding category system devised as similarities and frequencies in the words and concepts emerged. This is known as 'emergent coding'. The advantage of emergent coding is that it represents what actually exists in the literature, not just what was predicted to exist. A disadvantage is that it can be idiosyncratic and subject to coder bias (Abrami, Bernard and Wade, 2006). Reliability is again the key issue, which was to a certain extent addressed by the cross coding of a sample of submissions by trained colleagues. This issue will be further addressed in the subsequent coding and analysis of the wider literature.

Another disadvantage of this methodology is that the emergent coding can become difficult to deal with in the analysis, as there is almost no limit to the categories that can be discerned. This issue also emerged in this study, as several different codes were needed to adequately capture the depth of content to enable comparison across author categories. However, the process of developing the coding categories ensured that a fuller appreciation and analysis of the concerns from all author categories became possible. Coding of all submissions was done manually by the author. This proved to be very time consuming as each submission had to be carefully read and analysed in detail.

Secondly, the four aspects of each submission: the issues or concerns raised; the underlying theory, assumptions behind or explanations for the concerns; the critical factors contributing to or causing the concern; and strategies suggested to address the issue, were examined as to their topic content. Initially three content categories emerged: Identity, which covered ideas about being male; Learning, which covered ideas about teaching and learning and Relationships, which covered ideas about the social and emotional or affective domains. However, it became apparent that a further category 'Systems' was also needed to cover ideas about school systems. These content categories appeared to adequately describe two aspects of the submissions: the issues or concerns raised and the critical factors contributing to or causing the concern. To a certain extent they also described the content of the strategies suggested. So the initial thematic content coding categories that were used for this investigation were: Identity, Learning, Relationships and Systems. The question asked to categorise a submission into each category was "Are the concerns raised and the critical contributing factors primarily about Identity, Learning, Relationships or Systems or some combination of these?" Themes that were covered within these content categories are outlined in Table 2 overleaf.

Table Two: Thematic categories for Content

Topic Category	Themes within topics
Identity (I)	Male characteristics Differences between boys and girls: physical, developmental, interests, social Male role models Gender based subject choices Male interests Motivation Personal characteristics Cultural, geographical, socio-economic identity factors Sexuality Self concept Self esteem
Learning (L)	Literacy Pedagogy Assessment Differences between boys and girls in learning Male learning styles Learning styles/teaching styles Teacher activities Teaching/school structures related to learning
Relationships (R)	Peers Teacher/student Fathers Male role models School/community Parents
Systems (S)	School system Government vs private Single-sex vs co-educational People in control of system Gender in control of system Systemic changes needed

Additional thematic content codes

Further coding categories were needed to more fully capture the content of two aspects of the submissions: the underlying theory or assumptions behind the explanations for the concerns; and the strategies suggested. These two content categories needed to be able to capture and describe the arguments in the submissions that attributed explanations, reasons or underlying causes for the issues and also apportioned responsibility for dealing with the issues or for the suggested changes needed. Whether explicitly stated or not, each author was working on some assumptions or theoretical basis when describing the issues they raised and in suggesting strategies to deal with the issues. For the purposes of future analysis, I wanted to be able to compare the range of strategies suggested by each of the author groups and determine where there was overlap. I was particularly interested in the degree of overlap in the suggested strategies among the authors who held differing theoretical positions or assumptions.

With a focus on the content of these two aspects, a further pattern of themes emerged in the theoretical arguments or underlying assumptions made in the submissions. When raising concerns, many submissions, particularly those from the public and practitioners, assumed as self-evident that boys as a group, or particular groups of boys were underachieving on key academic indicators. Many also mentioned or assumed social impacts. Some mentioned statistical or anecdotal evidence of underachievement explicitly and some gave a detailed analysis of statistical evidence. If evidence of outcomes was either assumed or explicitly mentioned, the submission was coded as 'E' for evidence-based. To be categorised in this code group a submission needed to give an analysis or description of an observable situation.

Many submissions, particularly those from practitioner representative bodies, policy makers and academics explicitly stated the theoretical framework they were using. This was particularly notable for those who were using the well known social construction of gender theories that underpin current policy documents of the commonwealth and all states and territories. Some submissions, particularly from academics, also explicitly mentioned sociological theories of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. In contrast to these were submissions underpinned by a critique of the widespread use of these theories and an assumption that decision makers used these theories to the detriment of boys and boys' educational and social outcomes.

There were also submissions that explicitly used the broad equity framework embodied in the Adelaide Declaration for Schooling that acknowledges the potential for differential schooling outcomes for students from particular backgrounds.

All submissions with these underpinnings from a sociological theoretical position or explicit critique of power relations were categorised as Theory Sociological (TS). Table Three shows the range of categories used.

Table Three – Sociological Theory Categories

Sociological Theory	Description
1. social construction of gender	1. Theory of gender as a social category which is constructed through society and institutions, sometimes actively by individuals. Analysis of gender power relations in society and between men and women.
1.a equity theory	1.a Analysis of structural inequalities in society and education, gender linked with race, class ethnicity, indigenous identity to affect educational outcomes. Some analysis of relative importance of each factor to school outcomes.
2. masculinity theory	2. sociological/psychological explanation of limiting/limited nature of male identity. 'hegemonic' masculinity and its detrimental effects on male identity for individuals and groups and men as a whole.

3. masculinist	3. Specifically anti-feminist critique of gender regime/theories/activities in schools or school systems, which suggests feminists are in control and policies to favour girls have been to the detriment of boys. Some analysis of statistics as evidence that girls strategies not needed.
4. system critique – argument of difference	4. Critique of gender policy and activities in schools or school systems that suggests both boys and girls have differing, not necessarily competing needs which should be encompassed in different ways in policy and practice.

Also evident was a strong theme of theoretical underpinnings or assumptions drawn from theories of learning. In this category were the discussions of discipline specific approaches to learning, such as specific approaches to literacy. There was also a strong theme of learning differences between boys and girls, or of learning differences amongst groups of students, including discussions of learning difficulties or special needs. Submissions using these theories were categorised as TL.

Table Four: Learning Theory Categories
1. Discipline specific e.g. literacy approaches;
2. gender differences in maturation, development and learning
3. early intervention - learning difficulties, special needs
4. Specific pedagogical approaches/models
5. Critique of specific pedagogical approaches/models

To analyse the theoretical concepts or assumptions, the question I asked was, 'What are the underlying theories/assumptions/explanations for the phenomena described?' To be coded in a theory category a submission needed to contain an analysis or explanation based on established theories or critiques of these theories.

There were a large number of submissions particularly from the public and practitioners that did not explicitly use these theories, but seemed to draw upon assumptions, models of practice, or sets of practice principles gained from their personal or professional expertise or understandings of 'what works'. There was a strong theme amongst these submissions that boys themselves and the teachers, parents and systems that supported them could deal with the issues they faced and that there were already many examples of boys doing well, successful boys' programs, and schools that had dramatically changed underachievement of groups of boys for the better. It was often asserted within submissions of this type that these initiatives or personal or community strengths should be drawn upon in formulating any future policy and practice. The general assumptions underpinning these submissions seemed to cluster into a category of 'strengths perspective' or 'strengths based practice' (Saleeby, 2006). This framework, widely used in social work, social services and positive psychology

is not widely used in educational policy and practice, but seems to have great applicability to the tone and content of these submissions. Three major principles of strength-based practice identified by Saleeby (2006) were evident in a range of submissions and therefore were categorised by these, represented in Table 5.

Table Five: Strength-based Practice Categories
1. Pedagogical approaches or programs that explicitly recognise and build on existing capacities of individuals, families and communities, including school communities.
2. Consultative processes - consulting with groups concerned with recognition of ability to make decisions and change with a positive orientation to future.
3. Holistic approaches to issues with a recognition of transformation or regeneration within personal, friendly, respectful, supportive and collaborative relationships.
4. Critique of current pedagogy and teaching practices offering suggestions for strategies in 1, 2, or 3.

In contrast to these approaches, some submissions focused on the perceived deficits of the target groups or schools described and strategies suggested involved a range of activities 'done to' the target group in order to change that group. There was little sense of consultation processes or involvement in decision making and often a focus on the negative. These submissions were categorised as Deficit focused (D).

Finally many submissions offered approaches or strategies that were broad, with a multi-faceted or multi-disciplinary approach to addressing concerns raised. These were categorised as (M)

The questions asked to determine coding were as follows:
Are the strategies suggested informed by discipline specific (DS) or multi-dimensional/multi-disciplinary theory/assumptions (M)?

Who or what do they suggest has main responsibility for change or main need for change?
Do they identify strengths in this target groups/those responsible(S)
Do they focus on deficits in this target groups/those responsible (D)
Do they use strengths to address problems or perceived deficits? (SBP)

To summarise the content coding categories, all four aspects of submissions were coded according to the content categories of identity, learning, relationships and systems. As well submissions were coded according to theory or assumption categories which were: Evidence-based, Theory-based, Strengths-based practice or Deficit-focused. If submissions contained suggestions for strategies, they were coded according to the strategy categories: Discipline specific or Multi-dimensional/multi-disciplinary; strength-based practice or deficit-focused.

Preliminary Findings and Conclusions
There was considerable overlap in the themes for the identified concerns and critical factors relating to those concerns throughout all submissions and across all author categories. This overlap suggests that there were common shared concerns and general agreement that there were issues in boys' education that needed to be addressed by educational decision makers and practitioners and were supported by the public. These concerns were shared by the public, practitioners, policy makers and academics alike. There seemed to be general

agreement that there was substantial evidence justifying the concerns, although there was a range of interpretations and analyses of this evidence. Literacy attainment, school retention and early leaving, suspension and truancy, Year 12 performance, subject choice and post school outcomes were suggested as important academic indicators of boys' achievement. Social indicators such as physical health and mental health indicators, accidents, deaths, suicide rates, drug use, assault and incarceration rates were also considered important by a section of the submissions. These indicators are well supported by robust research indicating that there is evidence for a justifiable concern for the education of those boys who are over-represented in these statistics. The links between early literacy attainment and later success and retention at school were made by many, as were the links between school completion and positive employment and health outcomes. Many submissions in all categories recognised the complexity and inter-relatedness of the issues by suggesting that a combination of identity, learning and relationship and system factors were critical.

The main themes and strategies that were identified and summarised by the final report to the inquiry (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002) were evident in the sample of submissions analysed in this paper. The labour market, social and gender equity policy context; curriculum and pedagogy issues including literacy and numeracy; and the connections to schools, teachers and male role models were all important themes. However, the content analysis revealed evidence of a greater emphasis on certain themes by certain author groups. Also evident were particular types of inter-relatedness between the themes emphasised by some author groups. Taking into account the proportions of the number of submissions in each category, it was clear that there was a more extensive overlap between the public and practitioner submissions in relation to the themes emphasised, than there was between those groups and either the policy makers or academics. Similarly, there was a more extensive overlap between policy makers and academic submissions than between them and the public or practitioner group. The public submissions seemed to be concerned about boys in a holistic way, including both social and academic concerns and linking these together as a general concern about how boys were coping in the wider world. The emphasis on aspects of male identity illustrates this.

Among public submissions, there was a strong connection made between identity and relationships, with many submissions suggesting that the critical factors effecting boys' achievement were related to identity issues and that the most effective strategies to overcome problems were in the relationship category. A very strong theme among these submissions was that boys needed more male role models in schools, either teachers or other older men who could model appropriate behaviour and learning and connect with them on a personal level.

While the majority of concerns in the practitioner group were a combination of factors, there was a similar emphasis on identity factors within this group, who tended to link identity and learning in combination, even when addressing a specific issues such as literacy. There was often mention of the need for male teachers to specifically teach boys relationships skills, particularly those of self-control and of accepting responsibility.

"Schools need to help these boys discover a masculinity that is not formed at the expense of other people. This places considerable responsibility on schools to provide a balance in male role modelling, quite difficult in a feminised workforce." (NSW Secondary Principals Council, Sub. 51)

The concept of particular male learning styles was a recurrent theme which was often linked to particular teaching strategies and the need for either single sex classes or for more male teachers as learning role models. Practitioners often emphasised the need to gather local or school based evidence and develop local or school based strategies. Several mentioned particular programs that were demonstrated as successful in their school.

Among policy makers, there were submissions from State, Catholic and Lutheran school systems. All submissions acknowledged the complexity of the issues and offered a combination of identity, learning and relationship and systems factors as critical factors. However, there was great a diversity of approaches to the issues, from a broad philosophical discussion of education in the context of societal changes as a whole, to a statistical analysis of the evidence base for the current academic situation of boys, to a Christian philosophical approach to education. There was a wide variety of theories and explanations offered, often with one submission drawing on more than one theoretical position. Generally, policy making submissions did not tend to emphasise particular practical strategies or approaches which were so evident in the public and practitioner submissions. While four submissions is a representative sample of the number of policy making submissions received overall, it is a small number for comparison purposes. These submissions represent a great diversity and divergent views. It is not clear whether this divergence will be evident across the whole group of policy making submissions. This diversity and divergence was also evident among the five academic submissions, which also drew from a wide range of theories. There was general consensus about the need to gather evidence and a strong theme of the need to conduct more research in this group. One submission which was an analysis on homophobia and its effects on all boys, not only boys who identified as being homosexual, clearly identified identity concerns while the others discussed a combination of all factors.

Table Six: Author type by concern and critical factors

Concern/critical factor	Public N. 39	Pract. N.25	Pol. Maker N.4	Academic N.5
Identity	12	5	0	1
Learning	2	5	0	0
Relationships	0	1	0	0
Systems	6	2	0	0
Combination	20	12	4	4

When a content analysis of the theory or assumptions in the submissions was undertaken, another division between the public and practitioner submissions and the policy and academic submissions was evident. Public and practitioner submissions tended to be more critiques of current sociological theories than supporters of them and also tended to draw more on models of practice than theory based analysis for their suggested strategies. Academics on the other hand, tended to be supporters of current theories, with these four policy makers evenly divided between supporting and critiquing current theories. See table Seven overleaf.

Table Seven: Author type by Theory/assumptions

Theory/ Assumption	Public N. 39	Pract. N. 25	Pol. Maker N. 4	Academic N. 5
Sociological				
S1	1	1	1	1
S1a	0	3	1	2
S2	1	1	0	1
S3	3	3	0	0
S4	6	3	2	0
Learning				
L1	0	0	0	0
L2	2	5	0	1
L3	0	2	0	0
L4	1	6	0	1
L5	1	3	0	0
S-b-prac				
Sbp1	2	7	0	2
Sbp2	0	0	0	0
Sbp3	2	7	1	1
Sbp4	1	0	0	0
DF	1	1	0	1
Evidence-based	0	8	2	4

In summary, there was evidence of competing theoretical positions, which illustrates that the issues involved in the education of boys are indeed contentious. There is also evidence of extremes in positions. However, there was much less evidence of extreme views than I expected given the propensity of policy literature to claim 'a moral panic' or 'explicit backlash politics'. Furthermore, some interesting unexpected patterns emerged. Three submissions that took the rather extreme masculinist position (S3), when discussing concerns and critical factors, moved to a system critique and an argument of difference (S4), when discussing possible strategies. This suggests that there may be more common ground amongst groups taking very divergent positions when it comes to practical strategies and solutions. Interestingly, some suggestions from policy makers and academics who urge a continuation of the current gender equity framework are very similar to those who urge an overhaul of the current framework. There is evidence that there is both a fear of extreme positions and a rather rigid adherence to particular theoretical positions which is clouding the large areas of common ground amongst those holding differing positions, particularly when it comes to practical strategies or solutions.

Practitioners tended to utilise learning theories more than any other group. Another interesting pattern emerged when analysing data from this group. Those submissions that emphasised gender differences in maturation, development and learning (L2) when discussing the issues and critical factors, tended to move towards specific pedagogical approaches or models (L4) when discussing strategies. This seems to indicate that there is a fairly well articulated body of practitioner knowledge or beliefs about effective teaching practices for boys as a group that is not so evident in current policy documents. This was

particularly evident when submissions linked these specific pedagogical approaches with a critique of current practices (L5), as many did.

Conclusions

The methodology of the argument catalogue has proved to be a very useful method for comparing diverse sets of literature. While initially very time-consuming, in that it requires reading a large number of documents before coding categories and coding books can be set up, the process of developing the categories ensures a detailed analysis of the data is undertaken in the first instance. The subsequent comparison revealed common themes and areas of difference across author categories that are extremely useful for further analysis. There is a now a way forward for a more detailed discourse analysis of themes within and between author categories to further explore common patterns and differences in discourses. This approach could be utilised to analyse the wider literature on educating boys, beyond the submissions to the inquiry.

Argument catalogues provide important ways to explore similarity and differences in a variety of author categories. The use of the code books uncovered areas of common ground and areas of difference in more nuanced ways than has been discussed in the previous literature on boys' education. There is a need for more analysis of the wider literature using this approach. The current policy and practice documents of state and federal education departments and systems and the body of published academic and practitioner literature in the field can be analysed using this methodology. The reports on the two large federally funded programmes in boys' education, the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Project and the Success for Boys Programme have been recently published. They document the types of strategies taken up by schools and evidence of their effect on outcomes for boys. It appears that the government took up those more specific and easier to implement strategies, such as literacy programs for small groups of boys, rather than those more widely supported by the public and practitioner submissions, particularly those around male identity and male role models. An argument catalogue would shed further light on this. It gives the ability to map the overlap between the discourses and the areas where there is no overlap. An argument catalogue that could make sense of and draw together the similarities and lay bare the differences in public, practitioner, policy and academic discourses would be an important contribution to the field.

The emergence of the category of 'strength-based practice', which seems to offer nuanced ways of recognising the importance of attention to both the positive qualities and the limitations of male identities within teaching and learning relationships and draws on community and parental resources, shows great potential. It appears that further research in this area could bring together the disparate discourses in the field and link those legitimate parental and practitioner concerns with the more theoretically driven policy and academic discourses. Attention to practical ways of involving greater numbers of appropriate male role models towards specific socially desirable ends that improve boys' outcomes without disadvantaging girls could be the catalyst for this.

The field of educating boys remains highly contested. Unlike girls' education, the links between a social movement, education practice, education policy and demands for wider social change, can not be so easily made. There seems no clear way forward within current policy frameworks.

The findings of this study suggest there is a large and legitimate body of parent and practitioner concern that link male identities to practices and policies in schools. This has not been adequately addressed in system responses, including gender equity policy so far. The characterisation of advocacy for attention to boys' education as merely or predominantly a product of an anti-feminist, right-wing backlash has alienated some parents and practitioners and there is evidence that some parents and practitioners consequently and perhaps unfairly see feminist theoretical positions as either unnecessarily defensive and/or as irrelevant to the current concerns about boys' education. Equally, there was evidence of an acknowledgement of gender as a set of relational interdependencies, (Weaver Hightower, 2003), which calls for attention to differing needs at particular moments in time or context and for different strategies to address specific gendered issues. It seems possible through further research into theoretically and empirically informed strength-based practice to move beyond the 'competing victim syndrome' of boys versus girls, or of 'which boys versus all boys' to give agency to all boys whatever their social contexts as well as attention to the specific needs of severely disadvantaged groups. There is potential for research that identifies the relationships between identity, learning, relationships and systems that will enable all students to develop strong gender identities that do not depend on disempowering others. Some research in this area is already occurring (Mills and Keedie, 2005). If education is to be truly transformative for all students, more focus should be placed on gender identities, as a whole school approach. The danger of ignoring male identities and the approaches of strength-based practices that support students to explore them is that we will continue to divide boys and girls and particular groups of boys and girls, leaving advocates in an endless competition for limited resources. The divide between policy and practice and theory and practice will grow into an impossible gulf, reducing policy to an irrelevant folder on the shelf while teachers are unsupported in their complex jobs of being teacher, mentor and role model to all students. The findings of this study support the possibility that we can address the gender identities and learning needs of specific boys and all boys, of boys and girls; that we can be pro-feminist and pro-boys.

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