Educating boys: What’s your problem?

A field and discourse analysis of Boys’ Education in Australia from 1996 to 2006

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Thesis submitted for a Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed:
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This Bourdieusian and *Strategic Action* field analysis and Critical Language Analysis investigated the Australian field of boys' education in the turbulent period from 1996 to 2006. The study indicated that the focus on boys' education created shock waves that reverberated through the hierarchical layers or sub-fields of practice, research, policy and politics in the somewhat autonomous field of gender equity in education. The findings of this research suggest that there were two major factors in the field's vulnerability to incursions. The first was the nature of the field structures, as players in each layer of the field were unable to understand or accommodate the logic and purpose of other layers and players operated from positions of incumbent or challenger, thereby leading to fractures in the purpose of the field. The second major factor in the field's vulnerability to incursion was logical inconsistencies in the dominant discourses of the doxa of the field. The conclusions reached in the thesis indicate that, although there has been little sustained activity in boys' or girls' education since 2007, gender considerations continue to be important in education. Although positioning any group as disadvantaged is dangerous, the field of equity in education could be reinvigorated by renewed focus on the complexities and intersections of differences and identities and a reconsideration of the concept of the disadvantaged subject. A policy, research and practice agenda with a focus on the inter-connection of positive aspects of identities as well as a critical examination of where these interconnections lead to disadvantage would be useful. Envisaging and focusing on these intersections as similar to a magnetic force field of factors rather than as dichotomies or static jigsaws could reinvigorate the field and allow for international cooperation and collaborations to investigate how issues arise, how discourses about them get transferred and how global movements for change occur. This conceptualisation could have application to many fields.