Embedding masculinities within a gender conscious relational pedagogy to transform education with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage

Hamilton, A., Morgan, S., Harland, K., & Murphy, B. (2024). Embedding masculinities within a gender conscious relational pedagogy to transform education with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage. *Pedagogy Culture and Society*, 1-21. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2024.2301726

Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal

Published in:
Pedagogy Culture and Society

Publication Status:
Published online: 05/01/2024

DOI:
10.1080/14681366.2024.2301726

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document Licence:
CC BY-NC-ND

General rights
The copyright and moral rights to the output are retained by the output author(s), unless otherwise stated by the document licence.

Unless otherwise stated, users are permitted to download a copy of the output for personal study or non-commercial research and are permitted to freely distribute the URL of the output. They are not permitted to alter, reproduce, distribute or make any commercial use of the output without obtaining the permission of the author(s).

If the document is licenced under Creative Commons, the rights of users of the documents can be found at https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk

Download date: 26/04/2025

Pedagogy, Culture & Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpcs20

Embedding masculinities within a gender conscious relational pedagogy to transform education with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage

A. Hamilton, S. Morgan, K. Harland & B. Murphy

To cite this article: A. Hamilton, S. Morgan, K. Harland & B. Murphy (05 Jan 2024): Embedding masculinities within a gender conscious relational pedagogy to transform education with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage, Pedagogy, Culture & Society, DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2024.2301726

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2024.2301726

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 05 Jan 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rpcs20

PEDAGOGY, CULTURE & SOCIETY
https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2024.2301726

Embedding masculinities within a gender conscious relational pedagogy to transform education with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage

A. Hamilton [a], S. Morgan [b], K. Harland [c] and B. Murphy [d]

[a]TBS Research Associate, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Ulster University, Belfast, Northern Ireland; [b]Lecturer in Community Youth Work and TBS Research Lead, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Ulster University, Belfast, Northern Ireland; [c]TBS Research Consultant, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Ulster University, Belfast, Northern Ireland; [d]Academic Business Development and Widening Access and Participation, Ulster University, Belfast, Northern Ireland

ABSTRACT

Responding to a persistent gap in policy and practice, this paper offers a new *gender conscious relational pedagogy*, directly informed by boys and educators who have participated in Ulster University's longitudinal 'Taking Boys Seriously' research in Northern Ireland. The development of this pedagogy is grounded in the authentic voices of boys from disadvantaged communities whom despite encountering multiple models of masculinity within a contested society, are rarely provided with opportunities to explore and better understand these in relation to themselves and others. Transcending the boundaries of formal and informal education, we have found this gender conscious relational pedagogy to be highly significant in re-engaging boys in education, increasing their participation, confidence, emotional support, behavioural management, critical thinking, and reflexivity. Our work contributes to a gender-transformative research agenda (Keddie and Bartel 2021) committed to an emancipatory praxis that engages intentionally with boys and educators to examine gender socialisation processes with a focus on masculinities, re-shaping power relations within contextual educational communities, and improving educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for disenfranchised adolescent boys and ultimately all learners.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 31 October 2023
Accepted 27 December 2023

KEYWORDS
Taking boys seriously; gender transformative pedagogies; masculinities; gender conscious relational learning; compounded educational disadvantage

Introduction

Globally, a general and persistent trend is observed where boys from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are a key demographic most likely to be labelled as *under-achievers* based on low attainment in nationally standardised exams and subsequent under-representation in higher education (Moss 2023; OECD 2015; Tazzyman et al. 2022; Welmond and Gregory 2021). Socio-economic status, ethnicity, and gender are amongst the most consistently documented features of educational research (Early et al. 2023;

CONTACT A. Hamilton a.hamilton@ulster.ac.uk TBS Research Associate, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Ulster University, 2-24 York Street, Belfast BT15 1AP, Northern Ireland

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Strand 2014), and while access to education for girls remains a pertinent concern, boys are more commonly at risk of 'repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels and having poorer learning outcomes in school' (UNESCO 2022, 14). Many children and young people grow up and exist within a context of conflict and warfare which further impacts upon education. Save the Children (2023) estimates that worldwide 468 million or more children live in areas affected by armed conflict. In Northern Ireland, young people continue to be impacted by sectarianism, sectarian interfaces, symbolic and actual violence, legacies of a brutal conflict, paramilitary influence, normative masculinities, and segregated educational structures with 93% of young people attending predominantly Catholic or Protestant schools (Harland and Scott-McKinley 2018). Academic selection adds to the highly stratified nature of schooling in Northern Ireland, distinguished by grammar schools which typically use admissions tests compared with secondary schools which are open to all (Milliken, Roulston, and Cook 2021). This selective system has been found to favour those families with a tradition of academic success and the financial means to pay for private tuition and test preparation and therefore works to reproduce educational privilege and disadvantage (Leitch et al. 2017; Sullivan 2020). Education other than at school (EOTAS) centres provide a flexible curriculum that focuses on social, emotional, behavioural, and well-being issues with young people who have disengaged or been excluded from their registered school (EA 2020). The Department of Education also funds a statutory and voluntary youth service. Youth work as informal education has been heavily utilised in our research methodology and is founded on key processes of conversation and dialogue, relationship building, participation, and experiential learning (Hammond and McArdle 2023).

This paper draws upon most recent findings from longitudinal research spanning 17-years in Northern Ireland. In particular, the article presents how these findings led to the development of a *gender conscious relational pedagogy* informed and trialled by over 120 educators and 440 boys who have been identified as experiencing *compounded educational disadvantage*.[1] The intersection of poverty, conflict legacies, and masculinities have emerged through our research as core features of better understanding and applying a broader social analysis of gender-attainment gaps in education (Evans, Akmal, and Jakiela 2021; Rowley et al. 2020) with adolescent boys.

Gender and education

Gender is not an attribute of individuals, rather a multidimensional concept produced through everyday social practices and interactions (West and Zimmerman 2009) whereby gender is learnt and 'performed' (Butler 2010; Stahl and McDonald 2022). Intersubjective encounters strongly influence how people define themselves in relation to others and the social roles they fulfil through what Richardson (2015, 10) identifies as 'the process of becoming gendered'. However, gender categorisation remains problematic in education research, often situated within an 'empirical context . . . wherein dualistic productions of gender remain determinedly and overtly inscribed' (Francis and Paechter 2015, 783). Without critical examination, educational institutions can perpetuate the status quo and fail to understand the ways in which they reinforce, perpetuate, and normalise existing gender-fixed roles, behaviours, and attitudes (Ward 2018). For instance, within educational policy gender equality is often considered one dimensionally, suggesting that

gendered problems are perceived to be statistical relating to academic uptake and performance of one gender over another (Flood 2015; Forde 2014). The narrow focus on academic attainment offers a limited insight into the experience of learners in classrooms and the 'performativity' of gender in school settings.

Feminist scholarship has significantly progressed critical perspectives on gender pedagogy and education, examining patriarchal systems that reproduce power and powerlessness in our society (Turner and Maschi 2015). Furthermore, feminist theories have given prominence to *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 2017) where gender differences and inequalities are analysed alongside categories of 'class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and so on' (Keddie, Flood, and Hewson-Munro 2022, 149). Gender is constructed not as separate to, but within the conditions of racial, religious, ethnic, and social exclusion within diverse cultural contexts (Koutsouris, Anglin-Jaffe, and Stentiford 2020) and is embedded within areas of inequality, power relations and patriarchy (Sudderth 2020; Vannera, Holloway, and Almanssori 2021). Understanding this intersectionality is crucial for finding the place whereby change or transformation might occur (Morgan and McArdle 2018; Walsh and Harland 2021). Spurred by feminist thinking, an influx of theoretical literature has emerged critiquing complex multi-faceted concepts of masculinities and what it means to be male (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005; Messerschmidt 2018). Central to this has been Connell's 2005 strongly influential notions of multiple and hierarchical masculinities which she maintains are not static and vary according to context. Laurie et al. (2021, 77) note how Connell's work emphasises that 'theories of masculinity should contribute towards the larger feminist project of addressing inequalities and dismantling gender hierarchies'. Multiple models of masculinities that boys encounter in their communities and schools have emerged as central concerns in our research connected with how these young men form identities and conduct themselves within various social spaces (Harland and McCready 2015). Enactments of masculinities are shaped by social pressures to conform with gender norms or perceived opportunities to resist and counter heteronormativity (Gough, Milnes, and Turner-Moore 2021).

Multiple masculinities

Reflexive scholarship seeks to resist perpetuating pathologizing narratives whereby 'violence, sexism, and homophobia are understood as working-class boys and men's response to powerlessness' (Roberts and Elliot 2020, 88). Such pejorative conclusions can be attributed to misunderstandings and partial applications of Connell's (1987) original and reformulated (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) concept of hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities are defined as 'configurations of social practice' that legitimise the dominance of certain men over others and over women shaping what is seen as 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' gendered behaviour (Messerschmidt 2019, 90). Nonhegemonic masculinities are categorised by Connell (2005) as *complicit*, those who do not enact the hegemonic ideal but benefit from it; *subordinate*, those who enact forms of masculinity which defy and resist hegemonic patterns; and *protest*, those who occupy marginalised social positions with diminished access to economic or political power. Roberts

(2013) infers that *protest masculinities* is a concept continually deployed to categorise working-class boys in education, obscuring heterogeneity of this demographic.

Hegemonic masculinities are often conflated with behaviours and traits that are most celebrated and asserting of dominance in particular social contexts (Messerschmidt and Messner 2018). Messerschmidt (2016) adds to the debate via categorising *dominant*, *dominating*, and *positive* masculinities as nonhegemonic practices. *Dominant* masculinities are represented by those perceived most popular and privileged by others. *Dominating* masculinities are displayed in assertions of authority, non-compliance, and uncompromising attitudes. *Positive* masculinities are enacted by those who participate in practices that serve to challenge gender hierarchies and transform inequitable gender relations. These distinctions have been useful in positioning an appreciation of multiple masculinities alongside our own conceptual developments of *compounded educational disadvantage* and *relational education* at the centre of a *gender conscious relational pedagogy*. While this paper is not an explicit contribution to defining or debating the merits of labelling masculinities in particular ways, we position this literature as significant for educators, researchers, and young people to grapple with as they develop a more critical gender consciousness.

Gender-conscious practice

Despite a proliferation of research on gender, masculinities, and education, little has been written specifically about the development of gender-conscious pedagogies with adolescents. Keddie's (2022, 402) work on engaging boys in a gender transformative pedagogy is a notable contribution emphasising the 'emotional intensities and discomfort' of approaches that involve confronting 'masculine entitlement' and creating spaces for shared expressions of vulnerability. Cuesta and Witt (2014, 13) discuss the use of gender-conscious pedagogy as part of gender studies courses in higher education adopting a feminist epistemology focused on 'putting gender matters on the agenda, promoting reflections about and analysis of societal problems, as well as discussing the meaning and limits of "normality"'. In the context of early years education, Warin and Adriany (2017, 375) propose a *gender flexible pedagogy*, a concept which 'implies teachers' consciousness of their own gender behaviours' and 'the need for responsiveness to children's gender behaviours in order to open these up'. Our own earlier work derived particularly with reference to informal education outlines a *lens model* of gender conscious practice (Morgan and Harland 2009) providing a practical framework for educators to engage critically with gender and move towards personal, social, and political transformation. Offered here is the advancement of a *gender conscious relational pedagogy* that has been devised and tested in situ by educators and adolescent boys who have typically been marginalised within their schools and communities. It is a pedagogy that speaks to educators in both formal and informal education settings who have reported feeling uncertain and ill-equipped to address pressing themes of gender and masculinities in their everyday practice. While developed with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage, educators have highlighted benefits of this approach for all learners.

TBS Methodology

The Taking Boys Seriously (TBS) longitudinal research spanning 17-years (2006–2023) has focused on transforming policies, pedagogies, and practice to improve social and educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly for boys experiencing what we term *compounded educational disadvantage*. These boys are often represented in media and education discourse as ‘problematic’ and ‘underachieving’ (Roberts and Elliot 2020). A core ethical commitment of TBS has been to challenge that narrative and adopt strengths-based language and approaches with boys who have been subject to generational cycles of educational inequality and who have had limited opportunities to shape new pedagogies. We focus specifically on findings from the past 5 years of research that have focused attention on the crucial role, and untapped potential, of critically engaging boys with themes of masculinities, identity, culture, and conflict as a core aspect of their education and learning.

Between 2018 and 2023 a participatory and action-oriented approach has been led by the researchers in partnership with a committed cross-sectoral steering group.[2] This group, representing hundreds of schools and a range of local youth organisations, has facilitated the authentic engagement of boys and educators across the diverse formal and informal education sectors. Initially, three collaborative case studies (2018–2020, overviewed in Table 1) were established involving formal and informal educators and adolescent boys in communities marked by multiple deprivation and conflict legacies. Data were collected from teachers, youth workers, boys, and parents generating rich insights on productive and enabling processes of working relationally and holistically with boys.

Through the case studies, educators and boys tested and shaped new methods of practice and their insights subsequently led the research team to develop a set of relational principles, outlined in Figure 1 (Morgan, Harland, and Stanton 2021).[3] These principles were generated inductively from a process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) and designed with gender conscious practice in mind, drawing on key concerns related to masculinities and boys’ experiences of education within a contested society. Value was placed upon the subjectivity and years of experience of the researchers and steering group as an ‘analytic resource’ in approaching the data and identifying ‘patterns of shared meaning cohering around central concept[s]’ (Braun and Clarke 2021, 330–331). While the development of the principles was led by the researchers and steering group, the initial formulation of these were tested out in-situ by an educator from one of the case study sites working with a group of 12 boys over a period of 6 weeks,

Table 1. Data collection across collaborative case studies.

	Case Study 1: Partnership between all-boys school and voluntary youth project	Case Study 2: Partnership between co-educational school and local boxing club run by youth workers	Case Study 3: Partnership between co-educational school and voluntary youth project	Total
Interviews	6 interviews with school & community leaders	3 interviews with school & community leaders 3 parent interviews	6 interviews with school & community leaders	18
Focus Groups	2 focus groups with boys	3 focus groups with boys	4 focus groups with boys	9
Participant Observation	3 classroom sessions 3 homework revision support sessions	1 pupil/parent meeting 2 sessions with educators and boys	1 pupil/parent meeting 3 sessions with educators and boys	13

Figure 1. TBS principles of relational education.

running focus groups and practical sessions based on the principles (Hamilton et al. forthcoming). This educator then reported back to the research team and steering group on the boys' reflections on the principles which was largely positive with some refinements suggested. Captured in each of the 10 principles is the importance of relational and holistic ways of engaging with boys who articulated the value of connecting learning to issues within their community, culture, and society. Boys reported that opportunities to talk about these themes had been absent from their education and both educators and boys felt there were limited spaces in formal education to explore the impact of gender upon their lives and development.

Following the case studies, the TBS principles were tested through a regional trial in 37 educational settings including schools, youth organisations, and EOTAS centres, involving 562 participants. The trial was both to test out the applicability and impact of the principles in a wider range of educational contexts as well as to identify if these 10 principles appropriately captured core considerations for engaging effectively with boys. There was overwhelming positive feedback from educators and boys affirming the set of 10 principles as a comprehensive and useful framework bringing together key ideas underpinning effective educational practice. The only suggestion for change that came from participants was to develop more 'boy-friendly' language. As the research proceeds, the research team are considering ways of working alongside boys to develop an alternative version of the principles more accessible for adolescents. Over 12-weeks educators adopted the role of action researchers and engaged in a process (outlined in Figure 2) of intentionally applying the TBS principles. The findings outline how the trial informed the development of a gender

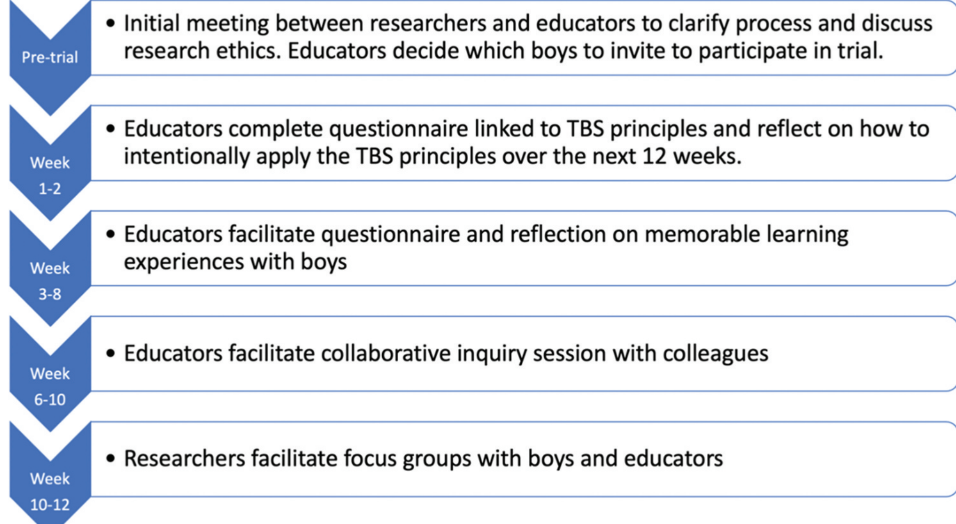

Figure 2. Trialling process.

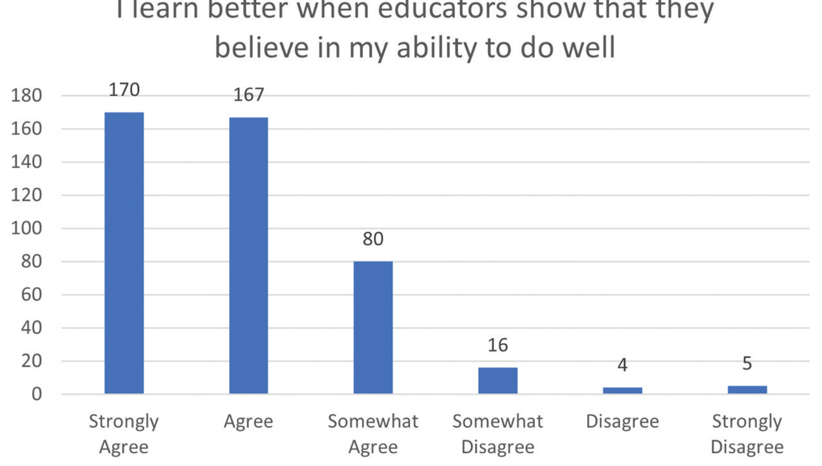

Figure 3. Believing in Boys.

conscious relational pedagogy that positions critical engagement with masculinities, compounded educational disadvantage, and relational approaches as central to engaging holistically and effectively with adolescent boys, especially those who feel misunderstood and unappreciated in their schools and communities.

Questionnaires based on the principles were completed by boys ($N = 442$), educators ($N = 93$), and student youth workers and teachers ($N = 15$). Data on *memorable learning experiences* was collected from 145 boys. Eight focus groups were facilitated with boys and eight with educators. Just over half (19) of the 37 research sites were in the lowest four deciles as measured by the Multiple Deprivation Measure which assigns scores across seven domains including income

deprivation and education, skills and training (NISRA 2017). Twelve of the participating schools had over 40% of their pupil population with Free School Meal Entitlement.

Findings

Findings from the trial are presented under the following key themes that emerged from this phase of the research.

Working relationally with boys

The nature of relationships between boys and educators was a major determining factor affecting boys' views, beliefs, and attitudes towards school. Boys have consistently reported that when they get on well with an educator, they are more likely to enjoy that subject. Figure 3 shows that three-quarters (76%) of 442 boys who participated in the trial agreed or strongly agreed that they learn better when educators believe in their ability to do well. A further 18% somewhat agreed with this statement.

Boys appreciated when educators took time to get to know them as individuals, were interested in their lives outside of school, believed in them, gave them encouragement, and treated them with respect, particularly as they matured through adolescence. This was communicated succinctly by Colin (14) who simply stated, 'I learn better if I feel I'm seen and heard'. Boys also reported frustration that some relationships with educators were strained and often broke down completely, particularly when an issue was not quickly resolved which negatively influenced their attitudes towards that teacher and the subject. Educators identified working relationally with boys as a defining feature in improving attendance levels, increasing self-confidence, motivation, knowledge, and higher levels of participation. Julie, an EOTAS educator, attributed these improvements to an overarching sense of belonging where, by participating in the research, 'boys no longer saw themselves as misfits'.

Working relationally does not negate the role of the educator in managing behaviours and emotions. Rather, the principles provided a framework for educators to help boys better understand pressures that may impact on how they may feel. John, a senior teacher in a grammar school, highlighted that:

> Focusing on spending time with the boys and listening and responding to their voice was really beneficial as they were willing to speak more openly about their emotions. This approach encouraged boys to share more personal experience and be willing to discuss sensitive and controversial issues such as their experiences of living in a divided society, experiences of male violence, paramilitary threat, identity, and sectarianism.

Craig, a youth worker, reflected:

> I can't emphasis enough how massive it was for our group to sit in the room and have conversations about mental health, being a young man in their community, and challenging sexism and sectarianism.

This process also challenged educators to reflect upon their own taken-for-granted gender stereotypes about boys and gender. A school principal reflected in a focus group with her staff:

> Being involved in the trial and working within the principles challenged my own gender perceptions and stereotypes and made me think more carefully about my language and how I talk to boys. I even found myself with my own kids that the expectation for my daughter is higher than for my son and I struggle with that because it shouldn't be.

Another teacher explained:

> I found myself falling into predetermined notions of how boys should be managed. I now focus less on ensuring I cover everything I planned to teach as I know this focus does not work for most of these boys. I now spend more time listening to issues that boys think is important and connecting this into the subject that I am teaching.

Emotional learning

Boys spoke of social pressures to conform with culturally expected emotional response patterns. Gender ingrained ideas such as 'men have to be strong mentally' (David, aged 13) and 'men shouldn't cry or show emotional weakness' (Josh, aged 16) were prominent throughout the trial. Ryan (15) shared 'it's so expected that men don't talk about their emotions, and you see it really puts pressure on you not to talk about how you feel'. Questionnaire responses from boys starkly evidenced how little emotional support boys access, particularly within formal education. Figure 4 highlights that 323 of the 442 (73%) boys aged 12–17 reported rarely or never talking to a teacher in school about their emotional state when feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Figure 5 further indicates that 45% of respondents felt they rarely or never got the emotional support they needed in school when feeling down.

Boys spoke of appreciating educators during the trial who gave them opportunities to talk about their emotions and how they felt. Jack (14) for instance, noted 'I was able to talk to my teacher and they listened to my feelings and the things I had to say'. This

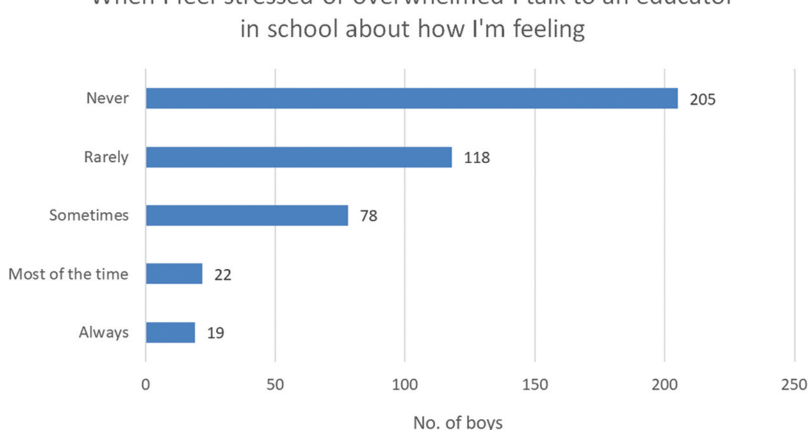

Figure 4. Boys talking about emotions.

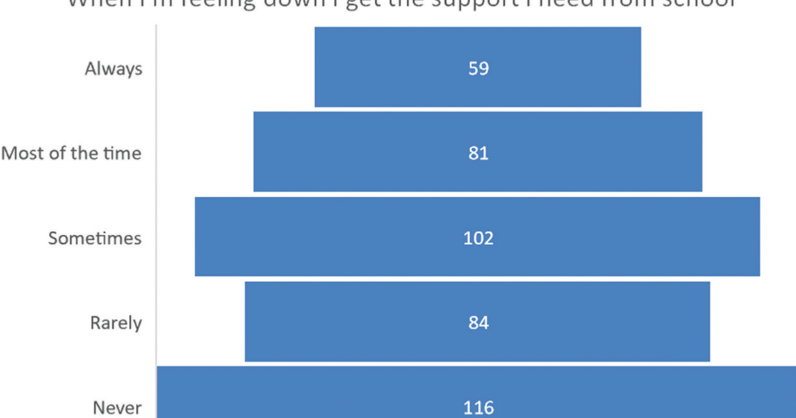

Figure 5. Levels of emotional support reported by boys.

was in stark contrast to their typical experiences in formal education. The trial prompted educators to think about their own teaching and how they present themselves in the classroom, being more open to sharing aspects of their own lives and experiences. A vice principal noted how they now model an approach of 'sharing a bit about yourself and your own life so the boys can relate to you and build a connection'. Many educators acknowledged the lack of opportunities in schools for boys to discuss emotions and highlighted the need to develop more talk-based strategies that foster emotional openness and empathy as well as supporting boys to regulate and manage their emotions.

Reflexive and critical engagement with masculinities

Throughout the trial, connecting and engaging with multiple models of masculinities enacted in families, communities, schools, and youth settings, was found to be central in developing a more critical gender conscious relational pedagogy with boys. This was evidenced by the extent to which boys appreciated being provided with opportunities to explore masculine identities and cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man. Boys spoke of rarely being given opportunities in school to explore social issues and enjoyed discussions around living in a divided society and perspectives on male violence and paramilitary influence which was often prominent in their community. Reflecting on this, Conor (15) reported the 'importance of having conversations with educators about what it means to be a man' but he added 'this doesn't really happen in school, but it should definitely be done more often'.

Eoin (12) articulated:

> The most important thing for educators to keep in mind when working with boys is to help them understand how to be a man and learn about different types of violence and how to keep safe. Before this we were never taught about gender or violence even though we live in a place where there's been lots of violence.

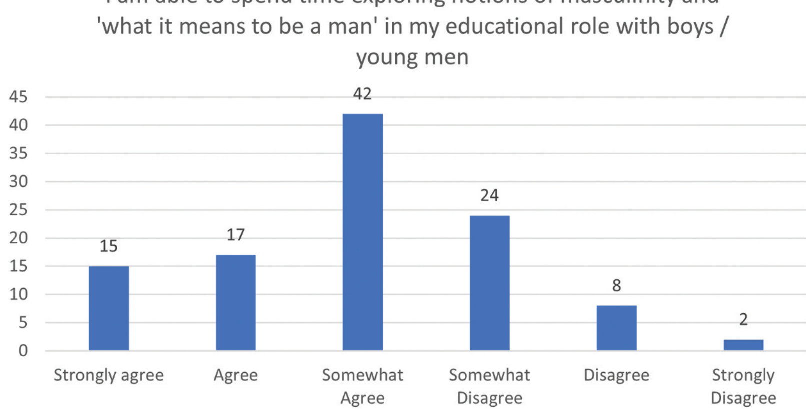

Figure 6. Exploring masculinities in educational settings.

Boys spoke highly of teachers and youth workers who encouraged them to talk more openly about potentially controversial and sensitive issues around how gender socialisation, historical and cultural beliefs and expectations about men and women had shaped their identities, behaviours, and relationships. Reflecting on her work with boys who have been excluded from school, Julie asserted:

> Understanding masculinities is inextricably linked to the communities some of the boys and young men come from and the male role models that they see in those communities. It's trying to help boys dismantle that concept of what it means to be a man in their local community.

However, as Figure 6 indicates, many educators felt there were inadequate opportunities to discuss themes of masculinities and adolescent development with boys in relation to their community and school experiences. While it is encouraging that 30% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in Figure 6, there remains work to be done to increase this, especially when considering a potential self-selection bias in the sample where educators volunteered to be involved in a research initiative titled Taking Boys Seriously.

The principles helped inform and shape a pedagogical framework for educators to engage reflexively and critically with masculinities, reflecting on their own gendered experiences and developing strategies for facilitating this reflexive work with boys. By intentionally creating co-learning spaces educators and boys felt safe and more confident to explore contentious themes of masculinities, identity, and culture. Emer, a teacher in a secondary school, noted, 'it's like holding a mirror up to the boys and getting them to reflect on their beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes and how this impacts upon others'. Addressing complex issues and cultural norms enabled boys to reflect at a deeper level on how they relate to other boys and girls. Educators reported this was beneficial in supporting boys to reflect more deeply on gender relations and stereotypical attitudes within their communities and educational context. Aisling, in response to derogatory language towards women and sectarian attitudes expressed by several young men, suggested:

> It's about getting curious. Asking the boys 'what does that mean to you? Why do you feel the need to say that?' Asking them 'does it make you feel more of a man to say that and act like that?' But to do this with empathy and understanding and curiosity because we don't always know a young man's external experiences or learnt behaviours.

This practice of unearthing the heard and unheard voices of boys, of supporting them to confront the contradictions in their language and behaviours, and to do so in a way that communicates respect was recognised as 'very challenging and skilful' yet essential to the development of a gender-conscious relational pedagogy. Helen, a teacher in a Grammar School, admitted:

> Sometimes it's easier to pretend you don't hear the innuendos and banter amongst the boys' but through engaging with the TBS principles I was more conscious and intentional in taking time to address these issues.

Educators also expressed a lack of a gender focus within pre- and post-education training and appreciated how the principles got them thinking about a gender pedagogy that changed their approach and thinking about teaching and engaging boys. For example, Kirsty, a geography teacher, reported 'It made me reflect deeper on how to teach topics making links to gender, masculinities, and the boys' everyday lives. What was important was that the boys really engaged with these topics'. George, a senior teacher, spoke of how engaging in the research has impacted upon:

> the overall atmosphere and ethos of the school and making the shift towards a greater emphasis on teacher-student relationships and connecting learning to pressures boys experience in schools and in their communities.

Discussion

TBS is a research project that has purposefully sought to re-balance power relations in educational settings by elevating the voice of boys facing compounded educational disadvantage and, in the process, disrupting traditional asymmetries between educators and young people (Luguetti et al. 2023). Listening and responding to boys' voices provided 'unique and valuable perspectives' (Vanner and Almanssori 2021) and a richness drawn from their grassroot experiences within the communities in which they lived. Bourke and Loveridge (2018) identify listening to learners as an educational, social, and political process which fosters personal growth and a greater sense of identity. This process enabled educators to recognise their role in nurturing 'critical hope' (Schwittay 2023) and lead the way in responding to adolescent boys' needs for a pedagogy that appreciates and engages with complex social, emotional, cultural, and gendered lived experiences (Smyth, McInerney, and Fish 2013). The findings presented in the article are intertwined with three core conceptual developments which have underpinned our gender conscious relational pedagogy – compounded educational disadvantage, relational education, and engaging reflexively with multiple masculinities.

Firstly, 'compounded educational disadvantage' was coined as new terminology that offers an alternative to the deficit language of 'underachievement', pointing to systemic and culturally ingrained issues that require holistic pedagogical and policy responses with boys in education rather than a simplistic analysis of boys' academic

performance versus that of girls (Flood 2015; Forde 2014). The concept better captured the intersectionality of gender that accounts for multiple historical, cultural, and structural issues that impact upon certain boys' starting points and opportunities. For example, in Northern Ireland, the experience of relative poverty coexists with lower levels of educational attainment compounded by three decades of historical conflict legacies expressed through routine confrontation of threatening and restrictive constructions of masculinity (Morrow and Byrne 2020). Increased understanding of how compounded educational disadvantage is experienced by boys focused the attention of educators in responding not only pastorally but through pedagogy. For instance, when polarised cultural contexts are accounted for the affective dimension of education with boys becomes increasingly salient (Zembylas 2017). Therefore, integral to our gender-conscious relational pedagogy is an emphasis on cultivating emotional learning spaces that reconnect a boy's learning with embodied feelings and personal and cultural experiences (Gough 2018; Randell et al. 2016). Searching for a deeper understanding of the complex and challenging contexts confronting these boys' lives highlights the necessary relational nature of gender-transformative pedagogies (Keddie 2022) and situates educational practice within a broader framework of gendered social relationships, hierarchies, and movements towards greater social and gender justice (Flood and Howson 2015; Keddie 2022; Vives-Cases 2023).

Secondly, 'relational education', as defined through TBS, relates to, and resonates with an expansive scholarship of relational pedagogy (Biesta 2004; Hickey and Riddle 2022; Reichert and Nelson 2018). Furthermore, it intersects with pedagogical approaches that situate emotions, connectedness, identity-work, critical thinking, and exploration of masculinities as core to meaningful engagement with boys (Keddie and Bartel 2021; Reichert and Keddie 2019; Stahl, Keddie, and Adams 2023). Relational education positions relationships at the heart of learning (Bingham and Sidorkin 2004; Willis 2022) focusing on an educator's skills and competencies in building trust and empathy that ensure boys' voices are heard, valued, and responded to (Aspelin and Jonsson 2019). Emphasis is placed on rebalancing power relations in educational settings and developing a culture of participative democracy achieved through shared learning, conversation, reflective dialogue, discovery, informed thinking and action, that involves young people in decision-making processes (Charteris and Smardon 2019; Hickey and Riddle 2022). Where educators position themselves as co-learners, willing to learn from, as well as teach, a more authentic educational relationship is forged (Reichert and Nelson 2018). This is crucial for boys on the margins of education who through our research have reported feeling more valued, have a greater sense of belonging, use their voice more, and become more engaged with their education when educators approach them in relational ways.

At a structural level relational education challenges the compulsive utilisation of exam results as the predominant measure of success in formal education and seeks to re-centre the social, emotional, physical, mental, and intellectual growth of each learner (Evans 2017; Owens and de St Croix 2020). In cases where educators focus only on academic competencies and exam results at the expense of these broader holistic needs, boys are more inclined to disengage (Stahl 2022). Educators reported that focusing on relationships, as opposed to didactic teaching styles, enriched boy's learning, and led to increased opportunities for conversational, experiential and co-learning participatory processes (Biesta 2004; Hammond and McArdle 2023; Hickey and Riddle 2022).

Thirdly, engaging reflexively with multiple masculinities is the crux of a critical approach found to be crucial for engaging meaningfully with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage (Scholes 2019). Themes of gender, masculinities, identity, and culture are elided in formal education, particularly throughout adolescence, when boys would benefit from unpacking these complex issues with educators who care deeply about them (Stahl, Keddie, and Adams 2023). In the Northern Ireland context, experiences and responses to male violence illustrate how growing up in a divided and contested society presents boys with many contradictory and conflicting messages whereby certain masculinities eulogise violence, some are complicit with violence, and others condemn it (Ashe and Harland 2014; Ellis 2016; Morris and Ratajczak 2019). This context is further confounded within deprived communities across Northern Ireland that continue to disproportionately experience conflict legacies of social segregation, economic deprivation, higher rates of male suicide than in other parts of the UK, and residual paramilitarism (Gray et al. 2018; Leitch et al. 2017). Conflict legacies emanating from the protracted violence of 'the Troubles' (1969–1998) and responses to subsequent intergenerational trauma have been argued to perpetuate the internalisation of violence amongst boys and young men towards their own bodies rather than inflicting violence on others (Gallagher and Hamber 2015). This phenomenon is not unique to Northern Ireland, and the prevalence of encounters with violence and subsequent physical and mental health impacts for adolescent boys is widely documented (Ellis 2016; Inckle 2014; WHO 2015).

By intentionally embedding masculinities within their pedagogical approaches, educators emphasised the importance of cultural histories and masculine identities embodied and expressed or repressed in educational settings (De Boise and Hearn 2017; Pearson 2023). Furthermore, comprehending culturally situated masculinities was pivotal to understanding contradictory internal pressures that many boys feel regarding the construction of their masculine identities and what it means to be a man (Harland and McCready 2012). This developmental process requires space for educators to better connect with the socio-political and cultural contextual realities of those they are working with by demonstrating curiosity and openness to co-learning with boys. Equipped with these perspectives, educators are better positioned to support boys to critically question culturally ingrained norms in relation to gender, masculinities, violence, emotions, aspirations, educational trajectories, relative poverty, and power dynamics within community spaces and educational settings (Nielson et al. 2023; Way et al. 2014). In practice, this moves education towards an application of a Freirean critical pedagogy which 'begins by simply questioning everyday life's taken-for-grantedness to see the contradictions we live by more clearly in order to act for change' (Ledwith 2016, xi).

Throughout our research, emphasis has been placed on learning from boys and valuing their perspectives, beliefs, and ideas. The TBS principles have been generated as a practical framework for developing a gender conscious relational pedagogy that relies on interpersonal dialogical processes where educators co-participate with learners (Reichert and Nelson 2018). Learning why boys behave in certain ways and understanding their stress triggers and anxieties enables educators to respond in thoughtful ways that speak to boys' intuitive sense of unmet needs (Reeves and Le Mare 2017). As educators applied the principles, listened, and responded more intentionally to boys, they reported feeling better informed to connect learning to boys' community and cultural backgrounds and broaden the contextual relevance of education as a transformative tool within boys' immediate environments and further into their futures (Pilkington 2018). Building on

Keddie's 2022 work that makes explicit the deep emotional connections that shape complicity with, and defensiveness of, a sense of masculine entitlement, our gender conscious relational pedagogy invites educators to first engage reflexively with their own social and cultural gendered experiences (Morgan and Harland 2009) and to facilitate this process in a sensitive and responsive way with boys.

Our intention is not to reinforce gender as a restrictive concept, rather to acknowledge that for the majority, if not for all, gender remains a strong determining feature of lived experience and inevitably impacts upon life opportunities (Zhu and Chang 2019). Our study positions gender within a wider socio-political and cultural context, which we have termed 'compounded educational disadvantage', whereby poverty, a selective education system, conflict legacies, and multiplex understandings of masculinities bear heavily on certain boys as they navigate adolescence (Randell et al. 2016; Stahl 2020). Educators intentionally investing in relationships, demonstrating dignity and respect, listening to the voice of boys, and engaging them as co-learners, transformed the educational experiences of boys and young men who had often felt disempowered in their schools and communities (Ingram 2018; Simmons, Connelly, and Thompson 2020).

Through extended engagement with boys and educators, our research confirms experiences of a 'plurality and hierarchy of masculinities' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846) that morph across contexts and present contradictions for boys as they encounter different masculine norms in the various spheres of school, family, community, and peer groups. While the literature on hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities is a useful theoretical and conceptual lens, multiple labels of masculinities as dominant, complicit, subordinate, protest, positive, toxic, or healthy (Connell 2005; Waling 2019) can add confusion rather than clarity for both educators and boys as they start to critically engage with ideas of gender. Therefore, we have used the term 'normative masculinities' as a foundational concept that invites reflection and discussion on the ways in which masculine norms and stereotypes impact upon social relationships and generate a sense of accepted and sanctioned ways of thinking, being, and behaving.

Conclusion

The TBS participatory action research presented in this paper adds to recent debate about gender transformative pedagogy and practice (Keddie 2022) by broadening and reframing the discourse surrounding boys' educational attainment through a new pedagogical framework. In Northern Ireland, gender does not feature as a core consideration in initial teacher training or ongoing professional development and is not taught as part of the school curriculum. This reflects an absence of gender-specific strategies in policy and practice. Feminism has emphasised the importance of the social, political, and economic structures that impact upon human societies. In Northern Ireland, gender intersects with ethnicity, socio-economic background, and complex issues associated with narrow masculine expectations and beliefs within a divided and contested society. Subsequently, the concept of compounded educational disadvantage was developed through our research, adding nuance and clarity to the unresolved issue of persistent low academic attainment for certain demographics of adolescent boys.

Educators who participated in the study embraced the TBS principles and embedded these within their own educational settings. This became the basis of a gender conscious

relational pedagogy with an emphasis on co-learning and situating boys' community, cultural and educational experiences at the heart of pedagogical approaches. A key strength of the principles is that they are not prescriptive. While the study was targeted specifically towards boys, educators involved in the trial reported that principles and pedagogy could be adapted to suit all learners and learning contexts.

We have been encouraged by many positive outcomes across the education system in Northern Ireland with the Education Authority placing the principles at the centre of a new toolkit for maximising boys' potential situated within the Fair Start policy strategy 2021. The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is identifying enabling factors across the Key Stage 3 curriculum for educators to implement the TBS principles. More recently, the Education and Training Inspectorate has committed district inspectors to working alongside schools and youth projects in supporting the next phase of TBS, from 2023 to 2028. These developments have come from significant time, energy, and investment from boys, educators, and a committed steering group, alongside the researchers in working towards systemic educational change for and with boys experiencing compounded educational disadvantage.

Notes

1. Compounded educational disadvantage was a concept co-produced with boys and educators through our research. It captures the multiple and overlapping systemic issues that create barriers for particular boys and makes educational progress more difficult. In Northern Ireland these include poverty, a selective education system, conflict legacies, and culturally inscribed normative masculinities. Factors feeding into compounded educational disadvantage will vary by context, and the emphasis is on structural concerns rather than pathologizing boys through a focus on individual 'lack' or 'deficits'.
2. Research ethics throughout the full life cycle of TBS have been approved and updated as necessary by Ulster University's Research Ethics Committee (REC/18/0095).
3. The full set of principles can be accessed at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1511242/UU-TBS-Principles.pdf

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to express their thanks and gratitude to all the boys, teachers, youth workers, schools, youth organisations, and steering group who participated in the research and contributed to the development and direction of our gender conscious relational pedagogy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

A. Hamilton http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9547-7957
S. Morgan http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9160-8999
K. Harland http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0341-4706
B. Murphy http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6150-1576

References

Ashe, F., and K. Harland. 2014. "Troubling Masculinities: Changing Patterns of Violent Masculinities in a Society Emerging from Political Conflict." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37 (9): 747–762. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.931210.

Aspelin, J., and A. Jonsson. 2019. "Relational Competence in Teacher Education. Concept Analysis and Report from a Pilot Study." *Teacher Development* 23 (2): 264–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2019.1570323.

Biesta, G. J. J. 2004. "'Mind the Gap!' Communication and the Educational Relation." In *No Education without Relation*, edited by C. W. Bingham and A. Sidorkin, 11–22. New York: Peter Lang.

Bingham, C. W., and A. Sidorkin, eds. 2004. *No Education without Relation*. New York: Peter Lang.

Bourke, R., and J. Loveridge. 2018. *Radical Collegiality Through Student Voice: Educational Experience, Policy and Practice*. Singapore: Springer.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2021. "One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis?" *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18 (3): 328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238.

Butler, J. 2010. "Performative Agency." *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3 (2): 147–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2010.494117.

Charteris, J., and D. Smardon. 2019. "Student Voice in Learning: Instrumentalism and Tokenism or Opportunity for Altering the Status and Positioning of Students?" *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 27 (2): 305–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1489887.

Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and Power*. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, R. W., and J. W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19 (6): 829–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639.

Crenshaw, K. 2017. *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York: The New Press.

Cuesta, M., and A. K. Witt. 2014. "How Gender Conscious Pedagogy in Higher Education Can Stimulate Actions for Social Justice in Society." *Social Inclusion* 2 (1): 12–23. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v2i1.30.

De Boise, S., and J. Hearn. 2017. "Are Men Getting More Emotional? Critical Sociological Perspectives on Men, Masculinities and Emotions." *The Sociological Review* 65 (4): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026116686500.

EA (Education Authority). 2020. "EOTAS Placements for Post Primary Pupils." https://www.eani.org.uk/services/post-primary-behaviour-support-provisions/eotas-placements-for-post-primary-pupils.

Early, E., S. Miller, L. Dunne, and J. Moriarty. 2023. "The Influence of Socio-Demographics and School Factors on GCSE Attainment: Results from the First Record Linkage Data in Northern Ireland." *Oxford Review of Education* 49 (2): 171–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2022.2035340.

Ellis, A. 2016. *Men, Masculinities, and Violence: An Ethnographic Study*. Oxon: Routledge.

Evans, R. 2017. "Emotional Pedagogy and the Gendering of Social and Emotional Learning." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38 (2): 184–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1073102.

Evans, D. K., M. Akmal, and P. Jakiela. 2021. "Gender Gaps in Education: The Long View 1." *IZA Journal of Development & Migration* 12 (1): 1. https://doi.org/10.2478/izajodm-2021-0001.

Flood, M. 2015. "Men and Gender Equality." In *Engaging Men in Building Gender Equality*, edited by M. Flood and R. Howson, 1–33, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Flood, M., and R. Howson, eds. 2015. *Engaging Men in Building Gender Equality*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Forde, C. 2014. "Is 'Gender-Sensitive education' a Useful Concept for Educational Policy?" *Cultural Studies in Science Education* 9 (2): 369–376. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-012-9432-0.

Francis, B., and C. Paechter. 2015. "The Problem of Gender Categorisation: Addressing Dilemmas Past and Present in Gender and Education Research." *Gender and Education* 27 (7): 776–790. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1092503.

Gallagher, E., and B. Hamber. 2015. “Addressing the Psychosocial Needs of Young Men: The Case of Northern Ireland.” In *Psychosocial Perspectives on Peacebuilding*, edited by B. Hamber and E. Gallagher, 71–116. Switzerland: Springer.

Gough, B. 2018. *Contemporary Masculinities: Embodiment, Emotion, and Wellbeing*. London: Palgrave.

Gough, B., K. Milnes, and R. Turner-Moore. 2021. “Young masculinities across five European countries: performing under pressure.” *Journal of Youth Studies* 24 (1): 77–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1695763.

Gray, A. M., J. Hamilton, G. Kelly, B. Lynn, M. Melaugh, and G. Robinson. 2018. *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number Five*. Belfast: Community Relations Council.

Hamilton, A., S. Morgan, B. Murphy, and K. Harland. Forthcoming. ““Taking Boys Seriously: Utilising Participatory Action Research to Tackle Compounded Educational Disadvantage.” *Action Research*.

Hammond, M., and E. McArdle. 2023. “Conversation in Youth Work: A Process for Encounter.” In *Child and Youth Services*. Advance Online Publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2023.2279305.

Harland, K., and S. McCready. 2012. *Taking Boys Seriously: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland*. Jordanstown: Centre for Young Men’s Studies. https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/taking-boys-seriously-%E2%80%93-longitudinal-study-adolescent-male-school-life-experiences.

Harland, K., and S. McCready. 2015. *Boys, Young Men and Violence: Masculinities, Education and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Harland, K., and A. Scott-McKinley. 2018. “Youth Work Practices in Conflict Societies: Lessons, Challenges and Opportunities.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Youth Work Practice*, edited by P. Alldred, F. Cullen, K. Edwards, and D. Fusco, London: Sage. 501–514.

Hickey, A., and S. Riddle. 2022. “Relational Pedagogy and the Role of Informality in Renegotiating Learning and Teaching Encounters.” *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 30 (5): 787–799. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1875261.

Inckle, K. 2014. “Strong and Silent: Men, Masculinity, and Self-Injury.” *Men and Masculinities* 17 (1): 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X13516960.

Ingram, N. 2018. *Working-Class Boys and Educational Success: Teenage Identities, Masculinities, and Urban Schooling*. London: Palgrave.

Keddie, A. 2022. “Engaging Boys in Gender Transformative Pedagogy: Navigating Discomfort, Vulnerability and Empathy.” *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 30 (3): 401–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1977980.

Keddie, A., and D. Bartel. 2021. “The Affective Intensities of Gender Transformative Work: An Actionable Framework for Facilitators Working with Boys and Young Men.” *Men and Masculinities* 24 (5): 740–759. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X20930058.

Keddie, A., M. Flood, and S. Hewson-Munro. 2022. “Intersectionality and Social Justice in Programs for Boys and Men.” *NORMA* 17 (3): 148–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2022.2026684.

Kimmel, M. S., J. Hearn, and R. W. Connell. 2005. *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233833.

Koutsouris, G., H. Anglin-Jaffe, and L. Stentiford. 2020. “How Well Do We Understand Social Inclusion. In Education?” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 68 (2): 179–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1658861.

Laurie, T., C. Driscoll, L. Grealy, S. Tang, and G. Sharkey. 2021. “Towards an Affirmative Feminist Boys Studies.” *Boyhood Studies* 14 (1): 75–92. https://doi.org/10.3167/bhs.2021.140106.

Ledwith, M. 2016. *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire into Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Leitch, R., J. Hughes, S. Burns, E. Cownie, C. McManus, M. Levers, and I. Shuttleworth. 2017. *Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation*. Belfast: The Executive Office. https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/investigating-links-achievement-and-deprivatioasn-iliad.

Luguetti, C., J. Ryan, B. Eckersley, A. Howard, S. Craig, and C. Brown. 2023. ““Everybody’s Talking About Doing Co-Design, but to Really Truly Genuinely Authentically Do It [. . .] It’s Bloody Hard@: Radical Openness in Youth Participatory Action Research.” *Action Research*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/14767503231200982.

Messerschmidt, J. W. 2016. *Masculinities in the Making: From the Local to the Global*. London: Rowan & Littlefield.

Messerschmidt, J. W. 2018. *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Messerschmidt, J. W. 2019. "The Salience of "Hegemonic Masculinity"." *Men and Masculinities* 22 (1): 85–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18805555.

Messerschmidt, J. W., and M. A. Messner. 2018. "Hegemonic, Nonhegemonic, and "New" Masculinities." In *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, edited by J. W. Messerschmidt, P. Y. Martin, M. A. Messner, and R. W. Connell, 35–56, New York: New York University Press.

Milliken, M., S. Roulston, and S. Cook. 2021. *Transforming Education in Northern Ireland*. (Transforming Education). Integrated Education Fund. https://view.publitas.com/integrated-education-fund/transforming-education-in-northern-irelandbriefing-papers-collection/page/1.

Morgan, S., and K. Harland. 2009. "The 'Lens Model': A Practical Tool for Developing and Understanding Gender Conscious Practice." *Youth & Policy* 101:67–81. https://www.youthandpolicy.org/y-and-p-archive/issue-101/.

Morgan, S., K. Harland, and E. Stanton. 2021. *TBS Principles*. Belfast: Ulster University. https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1511242/UU-TBS-Principles.pdf.

Morgan, S., and E. McArdle. 2018. "The Alchemy of Work with Young Women." In *The SAGE Handbook of Youth Work Practice* edited by P. Alldred, F. Cullen, K. Edwards, and D. Fusco, London: Sage. 298–313.

Morris, E. W., and K. Ratajczak. 2019. "Critical Masculinity Studies and Research on Violence Against Women: An Assessment of Past Scholarship and Future Directions." *Violence Against Women* 25 (16): 1980–2006. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219875827.

Morrow, D., and J. Byrne. 2020. *Countering Paramilitary & Organised Criminal Influence on Youth: A Review*. Belfast: Corrymeela. https://www.corrymeela.org/cmsfiles/Countering-Paramilitary-and-Organised-Criminal-Influence-on-Youth—FULL-REPORT.pdf.

Moss, A. C. 2023. *The Disconnect Between Quality and Inequality: An Analysis of the Gaps in Educational Outcomes Achieved by Free School Meal-Eligible Students in English Higher Education*. Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute. www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-disconnect-between-quality-and-inequality.pdf .

Nielson, M. G., C. L. Martin, L. O. Rogers, S. L. Johnson, C. F. Miller, and H. Berendzen. 2023. "Exploring Young Men's Experience of Resistance to Masculine Norms." *Emerging Adulthood* 11 (2): 365–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211072933.

NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency). 2017. *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 (NIMDM 2017)*. NISRA. https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017.

OECD (The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). 2015. *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence*. PISA: OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264229945-en.

Owens, J., and T. de St Croix. 2020. "Engines of Social Mobility? Navigating Meritocratic Education Discourse in an Unequal Society." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 68 (4): 403–424. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1708863.

Pearson, R. 2023. "Masculinity and Emotionality in Education: Critical Reflections on Discourses of boys' Behaviour and Mental Health." *Educational Review* 75 (6): 1101–1130. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1987390.

Pilkington, R. 2018. "Reconceptualising Practitioner Knowledge." In *Paulo Freire and Transformative Education: Changing Lives and Transforming Communities*, edited by A. Melling and R. Pilkington, 167–173. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Randell, E., L. Jerdén, A. Öhman, B. Starrin, and R. Flacking. 2016. "Tough, Sensitive and Sincere: How Adolescent Boys Manage Masculinities and Emotions." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 21 (4): 486–498. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2015.1106414.

Reeves, J., and L. Le Mare. 2017. “Supporting Teachers in Relational Pedagogy and Social Emotional Education: A Qualitative Exploration.” *International Journal of Emotional Education* 9 (1): 85–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103813.

Reichert, M. C., and A. Keddie. 2019. “Helping Schools Foster Healthy Masculinities.” *Men and Masculinities* 22 (5): 914–916. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X19875493.

Reichert, M. C., and J. D. Nelson. 2018. “I Want to Learn from You: Relational Strategies to Engage Boys in School.” In *The Crisis of Connection: Roots, Consequences, and Solutions*, edited by N. Way, A. Ali, C. Gilligan, and P. Noguera, 344–362, New York: New York University Press.

Richardson, D. 2015. “Conceptualising Gender.” In *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*, edited by V. Robinson and D. Richardson, 3–22. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Roberts, S. 2013. “Boys Will Be Boys … Won't They? Change and Continuities in Contemporary Young Working-Class Masculinities.” *Sociology* 47 (4): 671–686. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512453791.

Roberts, S., and K. Elliot. 2020. “Challenging Dominant Representations of Marginalized Boys and Men in Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities.” *Boyhood Studies* 13 (2): 87–104. https://doi.org/10.3167/bhs.2020.130207.

Rowley, K. J., C. C. Edmunds, M. J. Dufur, J. A. Jarvis, and F. Silveira. 2020. “Contextualising the Achievement Gap: Assessing Educational Achievement, Inequality, and Disadvantage in High-Income Countries.” *Comparative Education* 56 (4): 459–483. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2020.1769928.

Save the Children. 2023. “468 Million Children Live in Conflict Zones.” https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/new-figures-millions-of-children-live-in-conflict-zones#:~:text=Save%20the%20Children's%20annual%20estimates,living%20in%20a%20conflict%20zone.

Scholes, L. 2019. “Working-Class boys' Relationships with Reading: Contextual Systems That Support Working-Class boys' Engagement With, and Enjoyment Of, Reading.” *Gender and Education* 31 (3): 344–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1533921.

Schwittay, A. 2023. “Teaching Critical Hope with Creative Pedagogies of Possibilities.” *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 1–19. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2187439.

Simmons, R., D. Connelly, and R. Thompson. 2020. “'Education Ain't for us': Using Bourdieu to Understand the Lives of Young White Working-Class Men Classified as Not in Education, Employment, or Training.” *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 25 (2): 193–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2020.1742992.

Smyth, J., P. McInerney, and T. Fish. 2013. “Blurring the Boundaries: From Relational Learning Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Engagement for Disengaged Disadvantaged Young People.” *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 21 (2): 299–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2012.759136.

Stahl, G. 2020. “'My Little Beautiful mess': A Longitudinal Study of Working-Class Masculinity in Transition.” *NORMA* 15 (2): 145–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2020.1729572.

Stahl, G. 2022. “'They Make Time for you': Upwardly Mobile Working-Class Boys and Understanding the Dimensions of Nurturing and Supportive Student–Teacher Relationships.” *Research Papers in Education* 37 (6): 975–991. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2021.1905705.

Stahl, G., A. Keddie, and B. Adams. 2023. “The Manosphere Goes to School: Problematizing Incel Surveillance Through Affective Boyhood.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 55 (3): 366–378. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2097068.

Stahl, G., and S. McDonald. 2022. *Gendering the First in Family Experience: Transitions, Liminality, Performativity*. Oxon: Routledge.

Strand, S. 2014. “School Effects and Ethnic, Gender and Socio-Economic Gaps in Educational Achievement at Age 11.” *Oxford Review of Education* 40 (2): 223–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.891980.

Sudderth, L. K. 2020. “Creating Safe Space in a Challenging Landscape: Empowerment for Rural Women in Nicaragua.” *International Journal for Crime, Justice & Social Democracy* 9 (1): 7–12. https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v9i1.1493.

Sullivan, A. 2020. "What Do Cohort Studies Reveal About Grammar Schools, Higher Education and Social Mobility?" In J. Furlong and I. Lunt edited by. *Social Mobility and Higher Education: Are Grammar Schools the Answer?*. Occasional Paper 22 Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute 31–36.

Tazzyman, S., L. Bowes, A. Stutz, G. Birkin, and L. Peck. 2022. *Understanding Widening Participation in Northern Ireland*. CFE Research & Department for the Economy. October 27. https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/understanding-widening-participation-northern-ireland.

Turner, S. G., and T. M. Maschi. 2015. "Feminist and Empowerment Theory and Social Work Practice." *Journal of Social Work Practice* 29 (2): 151–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2014.941282.

UNESCO. 2022. *Leave No Child Behind: Global Report on boys' Disengagement from Education*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381105.

Vannera, C., A. Holloway, and S. Almanssori. 2021. "Teaching and Learning with Power and Privilege: Student and Teacher Identity in Education About Gender-Based Violence." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 116:116. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103755.

Vanner, C., and S. Almanssori. 2021. "'The Whole truth': Student Perspectives on How Canadian Teachers Should Teach About Gender-Based Violence." *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 32 (1): 21–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.2007987.

Vives-Cases, C. 2023. "Positive Masculinities and Gender-Based Violence Educational Interventions Among Young People: A Systematic Review." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 24 (2): 468–486. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211030242.

Waling, A. 2019. "Problematising 'Toxic' and 'Healthy' Masculinity for Addressing Gender Inequalities." *Australian Feminist Studies* 34 (101): 362–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2019.1679021.

Walsh, C., and K. Harland. 2021. "Research Informed Youth Work Practice in Northern Ireland: Recommendations for Engaging Adolescent Boys and Young Men." *Child Care in Practice* 27 (2): 107–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2019.1612734.

Ward, M. R. 2018. "Educational Trajectories and Different Displays of Masculinity in Post-Industrial Wales." *Wales Journal of Education* 20 (1): 5–25. https://doi.org/10.16922/wje.20.1.2.

Warin, J., and V. Adriany. 2017. "Gender Flexible Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education." *Journal of Gender Studies* 26 (4): 375–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1105738.

Way, N., J. Cressen, S. Bodian, J. Preston, J. Nelson, and D. Hughes. 2014. ""It Might Be Nice to Be a Girl. . .then You Wouldn't Have to Be Emotionless": Boys' Resistance to Norms of Masculinity During Adolescence." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 15 (3): 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037262.

Welmond, M. J., and L. Gregory. 2021. *Educational Underachievement Among Boys and Men*. Washington, D.C: World Bank Group. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/111041644611110155/educational-underachievement-among-boys-and-men.

West, C., and D. H. Zimmerman. 2009. "Accounting for Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 23 (1): 112–122. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243208326529.

WHO (World Health Organisation). 2015. *Preventing Youth Violence: An Overview of the Evidence*. Geneva: World Health Organisation. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/preventing-youth-violence-an-overview-of-the-evidence .

Willis, A. 2022. "Teachers Prioritise Relationships Over Curriculum for Student Well-Being." In *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*. Advance Online Publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2022.2055116.

Zembylas, M. 2017. "Teacher Resistance to Engage with 'Alternative' Perspectives of Difficult Histories: The Limits and Prospects of Affective Disruption." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38 (5): 659–675. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1132680.

Zhu, N., and L. Chang. 2019. "Evolved but Not Fixed: A Life History Account of Gender Roles and Gender Inequality." *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (1709). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01709.