Taking Boys Seriously: the next steps (TBS 2)

- Increasing Attainment
- Raising Aspiration
- Promoting Positive Attitudes

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The ‘problems’ the new research is trying to address

- Low attainment among young males from MDM Decile 1 communities
- Their lack of aspiration, self-belief and self esteem
- Their low levels of Higher Education participation
- Deficit-model thinking and the pathologizing of low attainers
Key aspects of the new study

- Builds on the (2012) seminal study “Taking Boys Seriously” by Ken Harland & Sam McCready
- Mindful of the context within which this low attainment occurs
- Recognises the value of youth & community work
- Masculine identities and their impact on learning
- Aims to inform policy, practice and training
NI male/female GCSE performance 2017/18
5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English & GCSE maths 2017/18
HE participation among MDM Decile 1 males in Northern Ireland

- Data show a significant under-participation of young MDM Decile 1 males in HE
- Across NI, participation rate of young MDM Decile 1 males is around 2% - an equitable proportion would be around 5%
- Data suggests these young males are both unqualified and uninspired to participate in HE
- Non-continuation rates are also higher for this social group
Learning barriers for boys

- Motivation
- Falling behind their peers
- Literacy & numeracy deficits
- Boredom & distraction
- Being unprepared for key transitional stages
- Construction of masculine identities (Harland & McCready, 2012)
The construction of masculine identities

- The centrality of schools in the regulation and reproduction of masculinities (Younger & Warrington, 2005)
- Boys establishing self-esteem through social interaction not academic performance (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012)
- The adoption of ‘laddish strategies’ (Stahl, 2017)
- Maintaining a ‘macho image’ (Renold, 2004)
- Boys perceiving education as a feminine activity (Blanchard et al., 2017)
Acknowledging the context within which working class male under-performance occurs

- Poverty and low attainment
- Problematic conceptualisations of ‘achievement’ & ‘underachievement’
- Issues within the school curriculum
- Class-based inequities in the current education system
Poverty, deprivation & low attainment

- The poorest children have the lowest level of attainment
- Educational deficits emerge early & widen throughout childhood
- Limited parental support
- Negative community norms (Leitch et al., 2017)
- Levels of Child Poverty in the UK
Problematic conceptualisations of ‘achievement’ & ‘underachievement’

- Monologic focus on individual attainment
- Socially constructed / class-based conceptualisations of ‘achievement’
- ‘Underachievement’ as a label
- The neglect of structural and institutional barriers (Gillies, 2008)
Issues within the school curriculum

- Assumed engagement (Young et al., 2014)
- Insufficient flexibility in the curriculum (Barrow, 2015)
- Perceived relevance of the curriculum (HoC, 2014)
- Disconnect between curriculum and boys’ own life experiences and aspirations (Harland & McCready, 2012)
The current education system

- Middle class values & working class identifications
- Class-based inequities
- Pathologising the low attainer
- (an education system) “specifically geared to differentiate and separate, to select and reject, to reward and promote, on the grounds of attainment” (Gillies, 2008: 14)
Our case study projects and pilot interventions

- Initial focus in North Belfast Schools and Youth Work organisations
- E.g. Belfast Boys Model – pastoral care and efficacy of existing school-community linkages
- E.g. Monkstown Boxing Club – Box Clever project
- School-based interventions using Youth Work methodologies
- Community Learning Hubs
Emergent themes in the early data

- The value of youth work methodologies
- Support during key transition stages
- Early identification of learning barriers
- Helping boys develop and sustain higher levels of resilience
- Promotion of a positive and solution-focused narrative around boys and education


References (2)


