CHAPTER 1 – LINKING INTRODUCTION

Portfolio outline

This professional doctorate portfolio provides a deep understanding of a school environment, specifically related to the connections between peer relations and masculinity. The thesis of this portfolio is that the nature of experiences encountered in the social and learning environment at school shape the social development of students. The term *thesis* is used here as 'describing the overall argument advanced in the folio' (Walker 1998:94) with the school experience of boys in the Middle Years central to my research interest. This portfolio varies from the standard format of a single project because it was guided in its structure and approach by Maxwell (2003) recognising more than one research project may be relevant to a teacher/researcher undertaking professional doctoral research.

The two research projects of this portfolio investigated aspects of student social practices and how they shaped, and were shaped by, the school environment in the case school. Relationships between peers are social practices as are the enactments of masculinity at school (Connell 2000:18). The issues are timely and relevant with implications beyond the school because these concerns are themselves timeless and important for young Australian males. Research projects investigating peer relations and masculinity at school were selected because they were encountered daily in my role as the Head of Middle School. It was the objective of this research to develop a better understanding of these two issues. An imperative for this research is to provide a school environment enabling boys to be engaged in school.

This portfolio combines a mini-dissertation on each of the two research projects with a linking paper drawing together the research investigating the complex relationship between the construction of masculinity and peer relations amongst Middle School boys. Figure 1.1 *The portfolio structure* (p2) provides a visual representation of its overall structure. The arrows indicate the general flow of the portfolio and the connections between its four parts and sub sections. Figure 1.1 may assist the reader as a guide to the unorthodox structure of this portfolio.
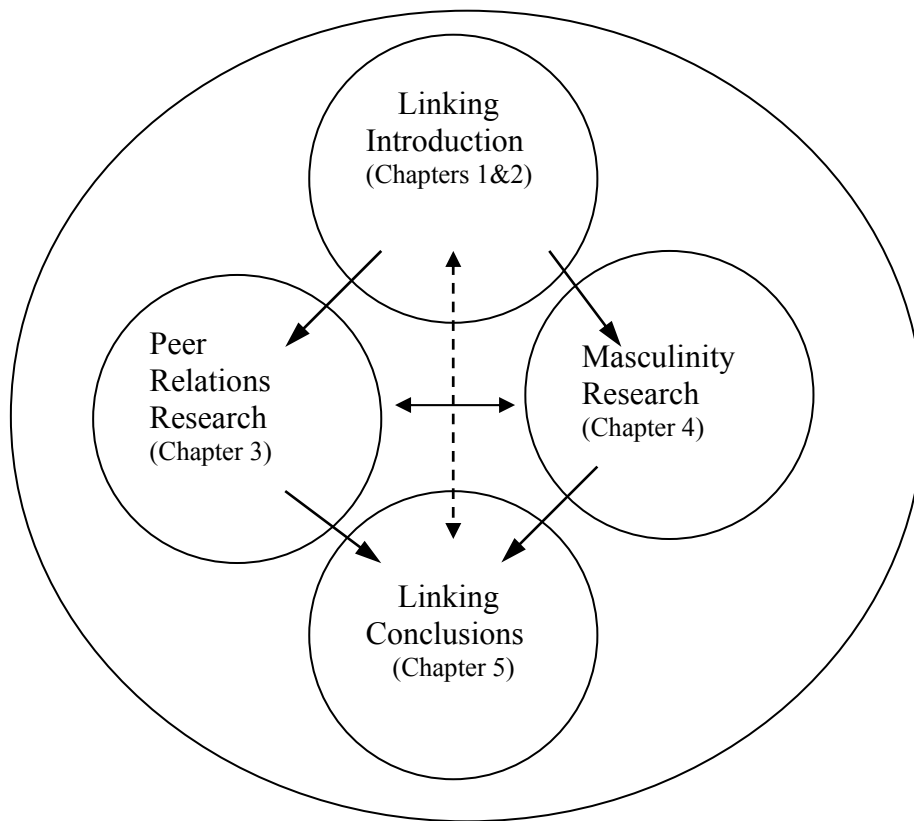
Figure 1.1   The portfolio structure

In its early stage the conceptualisation of the portfolio's research projects was assisted by the work of West (1999) who brought together the issues of masculinity, school environment and boys' achievements at school in a way that I had not previously encountered in the literature. West argues the need for more research into school culture in regard to masculinity, academic achievement, the role of sport and the teaching of boys. The two research projects of this portfolio were devised partially in response to this need.

Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1995) informed this study. Ecological theory recognises a dynamic context for students' development influenced by external forces of change from the wider society, internal shifts in peer group composition, sporting interests, as well as individual social and physical development. A better understanding of the meaning of "environment" and its importance on student development in this study can be obtained by drawing on the ecological theory of the developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) outlined later in this chapter.

The audiences for this research are the doctoral examiners, the School Council (the governing body), the School Executive, professional colleagues and the wider school community including parents and students. Each audience requires a different approach

when reporting on the research methods and findings. This requirement has been obvious on the occasions in the course of the research where aspects of this research have been presented to conferences at school, parent seminars, School Council and at external conferences (Miller 2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2007).

My position in the research

My position within the school has had an impact upon the investigation of peer relations and masculinity. Similarly, it was the responsibilities of my position that brought these two research issues to my attention. Consequently, this position needs to be identified.

Through the course of the research I was the Head of Middle School in an Australian independent boys' school. I have 20 years experience in secondary geography teaching and professional experience in a range of positions of responsibility in a number of schools. The primary responsibility of the Head of Middle School is to oversee the pastoral care of the Middle School students through dealing with a range of behavioural, social and academic issues as well as parental concerns and staff matters related to Middle School boys. The Head of Middle School is a member of the School Executive participating in whole school planning and strategic decisions while retaining a teaching commitment equivalent to 0.2 of a full teaching load. This teaching commitment comprised one Year 8 Geography class.

An ongoing awareness of my multiple roles as a teacher, researcher and a senior member of staff was necessary throughout the research projects. Although I understood my different roles in the process there was a possibility that other research participants (staff, students and parents) viewed and responded to me primarily in a senior staff role, rather than as an objective researcher. Awareness of this situation was maintained by me throughout the research. At the same time the fact that these areas were researched by a senior member of staff sent a message to other participants that these issues were considered important by the school. My imperative as a researcher was not to be objective but to better understand as well as improve aspects of the school in which I worked. The situation was addressed by providing information to participants in the lead up to and then throughout the research period in an attempt to ensure the purpose of the work and its relevance to the participants was well understood. It is my view that the roles of senior staff member, teacher and researcher should not be mutually exclusive and that this was well received in the context of these research projects in the case school. While my

position in the case school may have required some sensitivity by me to issues of power dynamics, my role in the school legitimised the research projects.

There is an expectation the Head of Middle School will lead initiatives to improve the quality of the learning environment for Middle School students by participating in the formulation of school policies, developing a positive educational climate and maintaining a constructive school ethos. These actions are internal to the school but reflect external influences such as wider socio-cultural factors and legislative obligations. In this context, it was appropriate for me to be the researcher with a view also to improve school-based strategies and interventions, thereby facilitating a *Quality Learning Environment*. The multiple roles I had in these projects as a school leader, researcher and teacher enabled me to effect real change with improved school practice as an outcome of the two research projects. The school is itself well suited to accommodate my dual role as a senior teacher and researcher because of its openness to research and a vibrant professional disposition. This aspect of the school environment will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

This research was conceptualised with a broader objective to improve the quality of the learning environment for Middle School students with particular attention to student peer relations and what boys do at school while recognising that the school environment is one amongst a number of contexts shaping the students' development. There is a clear link between this objective and the development of a *Quality Learning Environment,* one of the three dimensions recognised and described in the NSW Department of Education and Training's Quality Teaching Model (QTM) (DETNSW 2003:433). The QTM recognises 'a high quality learning environment has its own independent effect on the quality of work students are able to do' (DETNSW 2003:7).

In relation to the research focus, I identify strongly with Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow (1994:1) and the relevance of Mode 2 knowledge that 'is created in broader, transdisciplinary social and economic contexts'. The knowledge and understanding of what happens in the education of students is produced within the context of the school, as well as within a wider educational context constructed by other schools and educational institutions, in addition to broader social, historical and economic contexts. In this context, I identify with the explanation of Gibbons *et al.* of Mode 2 knowledge which has been helpful in understanding the significance of the practical experience and the creation of knowledge in schools that are outside 'a disciplinary, primarily cognitive context' (1994:1) where traditional Mode 1 knowledge is produced. It

is this understanding that has motivated an interest in and commitment to developing practical research questions within this workplace. A deeper understanding of practice and the ways of improving the educational experience of students at school were the main motivations for embarking on this project.

My academic interest in school interventions to incidents of peer relations has been long standing. This interest began as a class room teacher but was first investigated in professional studies during work at Nottingham University while studying for a Master of Education degree in 1992-93. In addition to this initial interest and investigation much time in my role as Head of Middle School was dedicated to dealing with issues of poor peer relationships between boys at varying degrees of severity. It is clear that bullying is a particular example of poor peer relations, but it occurs in the more severe cases.

The peer relations research project has the overall imperative to continue to develop a positive school environment. There were three aims to this project: to enhance my understanding of the school context in regard to the frequency, nature and extent of poor peer relations and bullying; to improve teacher interventions in incidents of poor peer relations; and, to develop a researched and consistent intervention. This approach arose from the perceived need for an ongoing and systematic evaluation of the frequency, nature and extent of poor peer relations and bullying as well as the evaluation of the effectiveness of intervention (Olweus 2004). In general, current school anti-bullying policies are recognised as needing to be interpreted and analyzed to see how they facilitate common practice at the school and to ensure the policy is implemented (Thompson 2004). As a result, the peer relations research project sought to improve relevant teacher practice and to develop policy at the case school.

As Head of Middle School I was constantly exposed to, and included in, the worlds of adolescent boys in which it was apparent that the peer relations of the boys are intertwined with their views of masculinity. The second research project had two aims: to explore the different social contexts encountered by boys where masculinity is constructed; and, the impact of different social contexts on boy's view of masculinities, with particular emphasis on the influence of the school environment. The background to this research was a professional interest in how adolescent boys move between, and deal with, the interplay of the various social contexts of their home, friends, school with the wider world influenced by an adolescent popular culture. All these contexts appear to interact to shape the boys' views of themselves and others, specifically their views of masculinity.

Ecological theory helped to further explain why the environment within which students learn influences their social development.

Peer relations and views of masculinity are only two aspects of many social practices in a school environment and they are not necessarily the most important. It is not the intention of this portfolio to establish peer relations or masculinity at school as of any greater importance than other social practices at school. Other social practices include the construction of views to femininity, rituals and attitudes towards religion, creating a sense of community, celebration of achievement and many others. An ecological perspective explains that all of these social practices interact and shape the social environment of students at school (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1995).

Research questions

In light of the context of this research, combined with the range of interests I had as the Head of Middle School it has been important to devise precise research questions to guide my research. The following research questions were devised for each of the research projects.

Research project 1 - Year 8 Peer Relations: improving practice through an Action Research project.

1. How can teachers' investigations and interventions in bullying, and in incidents of poor peer relations, amongst Year 8 students be improved?

Research project 2 - Year 9 boys' views of masculinity.

1. What are the boys' views of masculinity?
2. What factors influence the boys' views of masculinity?
3. What is the influence of the school experience on the boys' views of masculinity?

Research context

Although the current research was confined to the Middle School, the wider school environment needs to be outlined as it sets a context within which the Middle School operates, the place in which the experiences of the student occur and the research has been undertaken.

The work of Hargreaves (2003) is especially useful in placing the current research in a global context. Hargreaves positions education centrally in the preparation of young people for the dynamic world of the knowledge society in learning communities. This is done in a way that acknowledges a need for depth in values and experience of collaboration through schooling (Hargreaves 2003:27). This view was an important influence on my research into the experience of boys in the Middle School.

The case school

In the same way that my own position needed to be revealed, the character of the school needs to be described and analysed as it provides the context for the research.

The case school was an Australian, urban, independent, Anglican school drawing over 1900 students from an area of socio-economic affluence. There are three parts to the case school. There is a Junior School for Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 (approximately 300 boys) and the secondary school comprising a single-sex Middle School for Year 7, 8 and 9 boys (approximately 615 boys) and a co-educational Senior School of Year 10, 11 and 12 (approximately 360 girls and 630 boys). There were approximately 70 boarders in Years 10, 11 and 12 (i.e. there are no boarders in the Middle School or Junior School).

The character of the case school is revealed through the unique combination of physical space and location, organisation and management, vision and philosophy statements, pastoral care organisation, curriculum, co-curricular experiences, rules and regulations, teaching staff and the resulting learning environment. A short description of these nine aspects follows.

Physical space and location

All three sections of the school are located on the one 20 hectare site in a suburban area. The school's extensive grounds are very well maintained and well equipped. In short, the school provides a spacious, well resourced, well maintained and aesthetically pleasing physical environment.

The school site is located within walking distance from a major railway station that serves as a junction of two main railway lines in metropolitan Sydney. Therefore, most students travel to school by train on one of the two railway lines.

Organisation and management

The School consists of three parts. These are the Junior, Middle and Senior Schools. The Junior School is closely aligned to the secondary school in matters related to policy, student enrolment procedures, maintaining goal congruence and general planning relevant to the school as a whole. The three Heads of School meet twice a term with the Principal, the Deputy Principal, Dean of Enrolments, Senior Counsellor and the Chaplain for this purpose. This group is the School's Executive team. School governance is overseen by the School Council. The role of School Council is to establish and maintain the general policy framework within which School practices take place. The Principal is the staff representative to School Council and oversees the operational issues of the school with the School Executive.

The Junior School is located at one end of the large site, separate from the secondary school. The Junior School enjoys autonomy in its daily scheduling for its 12 classes in Years 3 to 6. The Junior School boys also have their own library, tuck-shop, computer facilities and playing areas. The only facilities shared across the school are the music building, the swimming pool, some sports fields and the school chapel.

The secondary school program is organised into the six year groups (Years 7 to 12) with teaching undertaken in subject department areas. There are differentiated locker rooms for Middle and Senior School students and some age related socialising areas (such as separate tuck-shops and a Senior School Common Room). This means that secondary aged students (Middle and Senior School) share space as they move between lessons in the course of a day but they have segregated locker areas and generally go to different places at recess and lunchtime to eat and to socialise. However, there are some common open areas where Middle and Senior School students congregate during their breaks resulting in some socialisation between the two parts of the secondary school. Therefore, although the Middle School is single-sex the presence of girls in the Senior School produces a different feel to the school when compared with other boys' Middle School environments in single sex schools.

School Vision and Philosophy statements

The school's statement of vision and school philosophy underpins the approach to addressing bullying and peer relations. Figure 1.2 *The case school vision and philosophy* (p9) reproduces the vision and philosophy statement. This statement is on public display in numerous places throughout the school such as in the offices of all senior staff

members, including the office of the Head of Middle School, as well as prominently displayed on the outside of the student diary used by each student.
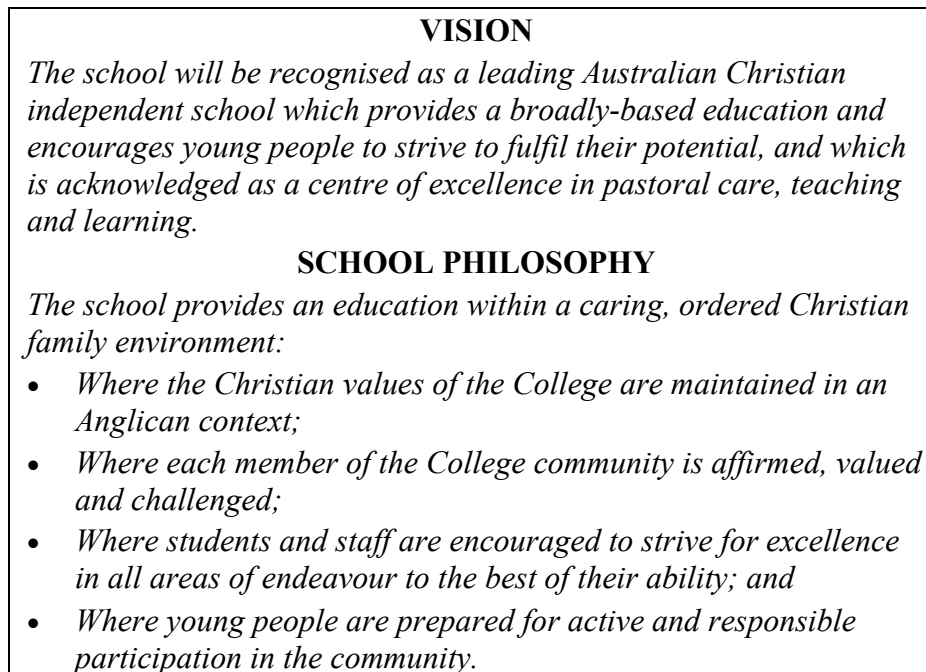

VISION

The school will be recognised as a leading Australian Christian independent school which provides a broadly-based education and encourages young people to strive to fulfil their potential, and which is acknowledged as a centre of excellence in pastoral care, teaching and learning.

SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

The school provides an education within a caring, ordered Christian family environment:

- *Where the Christian values of the College are maintained in an Anglican context;*
- *Where each member of the College community is affirmed, valued and challenged;*
- *Where students and staff are encouraged to strive for excellence in all areas of endeavour to the best of their ability; and*
- *Where young people are prepared for active and responsible participation in the community.*

Figure 1.2   The case school vision and philosophy

The school philosophy is intended to lay the ground-work for a positive social environment at school influencing, in this case, approaches with student relationships in general and bullying in particular. The challenge for the school is to live up to the ambitious objectives of this statement through school practices.

Pastoral care organisation

The secondary school pastoral care system is divided into eight Middle School "Houses" (each comprising approximately 75 boys) and 16 Senior School "Tutor Groups" (each comprising approximately 60 students). Pastoral care in the Junior School is the responsibility of the designated class teachers in each Year from Year 3 to Year 6. There are two Year 3 and two Year 4 class teachers as well as four Year 5 and four Year 6 class teachers. It is school policy that the Junior School class teachers are the first person for parents to contact on any student matters. The Middle School Head of House and the Senior School Tutor fill this role in the secondary school. The Head of House or Tutor is crucial in the understanding of each student and their circumstance in their House or Tutor Group. As the first point of contact with the school each Head of House or Tutor is expected to liaise between students, parents and staff on any issue related to student welfare. Matters may be referred to the relevant Head of School as is considered appropriate by a Head of House or Tutor, teaching staff, students or parents.

There are three Chaplains in the Chaplaincy Team. The Chaplains to the Middle and Senior Schools are both ordained Anglican ministers while the Junior School Chaplain is not. All Chaplains are qualified teachers and they participate in the student welfare programmes at the school.

There is a difference in tone between the three sections of the school but most rules apply across the school. The difference in tone is brought about by subtle differences in the way students and teachers relate to each other reflecting age relevant approaches taken by staff. The intake of girls at Year 10 level is a key factor in determining the approaches adopted by teachers in Senior School lessons. In particular, the level of formality tends to decrease in Senior School lessons compared to that utilized within a boys only, and younger, Middle School. For example, there is an expectation that Middle School boys will stand to greet a teacher when they arrive at a classroom, even if the teacher is visiting the class in the middle of a lesson. This is not an expectation of Senior School classes upon the arrival of a visiting adult. Also, student diaries are more closely monitored in the Middle School than the diaries of Senior School students. Consistent with good practice (Hawkes 2001; Lillico 2004; Lashlie 2006; Nagel 2006) the Middle School provides boys with an environment that is ordered, structured, with clear boundaries to student conduct and appropriate consequences when these boundaries are explored by the students. At the same time, the Middle School learning environment provides the boys with a huge range of activities to pursue outside the classroom such as sport, outdoor activities, clubs and societies as well as extension opportunities in curriculum related areas such as science, performing arts, visual arts, English, foreign languages and mathematics. In general, greater self-determination and preparation for life-long learning are the reasons for a less formal learning environment in the Senior School. This is acknowledged on the school's website and in the prospectus as the reason for the changes in approach within different parts of the school.

Curriculum

The students at the case school have high academic aspirations as do their parents for them. The school's academic record is very strong with typically about one third of Year 12 students attaining a University Admission Index Rank Score of greater than 90 (Kefford and Field 2007). Retention rates at the Year 10 level are normally 100% with all students in recent years graduating Year 12 with a University Admission Index. It is not

surprising to find that progression to tertiary education on completion of Year 12 is an aspiration for nearly every student in the Senior School (Kefford and Field 2007).

Secondary School students have a high level of choice in their elective subjects in Years 9 to 12. While all boys in Years 7 and 8 undertake a common course there are opportunities for students to select three elective subjects in Year 9, two in Year 10 and then their own selection in Years 11 and 12 to meet New South Wales Board of Studies requirements and tertiary aspirations. The timetable is student centred and as a consequence electives are not selected by students from columns which may eliminate the combination of some elective subjects. Students make their selection by nominating a fourth course preference in Year 9 and a third course preference in Year 10. The timetable is constructed to meet student demand for subjects. The large size of the total school population means the students' first preferences are accommodated nearly all the time. This practice sends the students a clear message that anything can be done at this school and they are not constrained by timetable limitations, as is the case in most secondary schools.

The popularity of different elective subjects provides some insight into student perceptions of subjects and school culture. Selection of elective music is high and it is interesting to note that drama has been the most popular elective in Year 9 for two consecutive years with about half (100 drama students) of the Year 9 boys choosing to include it amongst their three electives. The drama numbers remain high through Year 10. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for students through the academic and co-curricular program.

Co-curricular experiences

The co-curricular experiences of the students at the school include optional participation in drama performances and music, a range of clubs and societies, debating and public speaking as well as compulsory sport and outdoor education activities. All students at the school are required to participate in two sports a year.

The range of choice increases as the students move through the school. This requirement to participate means there are many teams in a given sport, enabling students to participate at a level commensurate with their level of skill, fitness and motivation.

The annual Middle School House Competition is held over the course of the year. This competition includes ten sports and two other activities (chess and debating). The House Competition provides opportunities for maximum participation by Middle School boys

with points awarded for participation in an activity. The success of a House can depend on the willingness of its members to participate in an event. This has built a culture where boys will participate in an activity or sport in which they may not otherwise engage.

The school's website identifies the desired experience of its students and this is not limited to academic achievements. This supports Hallinger (1997:28) who identified the 'non-cognitive outcomes' of schools as having 'not received enough attention in Western schools in recent decades'. These are directly addressed by the school. The school philosophy acknowledges a concern for 'the notion that schools have an explicit role in shaping the culture' (Hallinger 1997:28). At the core of this are Christian values. They are made explicit in the routine of the school and the associated inclusion of a wider community. The expectations of students and the way that they are managed when they are in breach of those expectations is an important part of the learning process for each student. Principles of natural justice, due process, mutual respect and tolerance are expected by everybody in their relationships and treatment at the school. Lessons on values, moral and ethical issues are demonstrated through the management of pupils in the inevitable event of problems encountered at school. There is a strong sense of "the way we do things here" that creates an expectation that students, parents and staff will be valued and listened to at the school.

Rules and regulations

The school has conservative expectations of student uniform and conduct. The School Code of Behaviour is stated in the School Diary, issued to each student (Appendix 1). This School Code of Behaviour contains conservative policies related to the way all students wear their uniform, haircuts and general conduct. These regulations on uniform are enforced and there is a clear expectation amongst the school community as to the way students of this school will look. I have been frequently reminded of these expectations when parents and members of the general public send unsolicited email and telephone messages about student conduct or presentation on their way to and from school as well as when they are away from school on weekends. These calls demonstrate wider expectations of the way students of the school behave and represent the school beyond school hours as well as an expectation of the influence the school will have on their general conduct.

Teaching Staff

There is approximately 220 academic staff at the school. The staff are highly qualified and well maintained in their professional learning. There are five members of staff holding

doctorates from research in education and 25 per cent of the academic staff have a Masters' degree in professionally relevant areas.

The staff gender composition is not typical of the wider teacher population. There is approximately 65 per cent male and 35 per cent female teachers on staff with no clear gendered division of subject departments. This means the Middle School boys can expect to have a roughly even split between male and female teachers, although all the Heads of House are currently male.

Resulting learning environment

The case school provided the physical context within which the research has been undertaken and it served to shape the experiences of the students in relation to both peer relations and masculinity. The importance of context, or "environment", upon the development of young people is central to ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 2005).

The school is a vibrant professional educational environment striving to be a strong leader in education and the development of educational practice. The school is what Gibbons *et al.* (1994:5) might describe as a 'transdisciplinary' context. There are four distinct features to 'transdisciplinarity'.

First, the school has an evolving framework to guide problem solving. Particular issues are managed and resolved by the practitioners with the solutions often being the creative combination of existing knowledge (principles, rules and precedents) with research theory. Teachers make daily decisions related to management of student welfare, behaviour, peer relations management, teaching and learning, utilizing existing frameworks (school based policies on such matters or educational theories) and combine them with experience to guide them in their problem solving.

The second feature integral to 'transdisciplinarity' is the actions within the school comprise both empirical and theoretical components. Empirical evidence may be externally or internally created, perhaps through examinations or research, and actions may arise from personal theories based on a practitioner's experience. Nevertheless, decisions based on evidence are an important way to arrive at solutions to complex problems in schools. Evidence obtained internally has been supported by external theories as well as personal theories held by staff, resulting in a positive change in the educational experience of Middle School boys. This research extends the process described by

Gibbons *et al.* (1994:5) to enable a deeper understanding of the boys' middle school experience as well advance school practices.

The results of research undertaken at the school have been communicated to those who have participated in the process of all research undertaken at the case school. Knowledge is shared both formally and informally with stakeholders. Formal channels with staff for the current research included presentations at internal professional learning days (Miller 2005c; 2006b) and with parents at evening parent forums (Miller 2006a; 2006c; 2007). Informally, knowledge is shared in conversations with and amongst staff, with parents as well as with students in the course of a school day. The School Principal actively manages the responsible dissemination of and discussion of the outcomes of school based research findings with the school community.

The fourth element in the Gibbons *et al* model is "dynamic". Any solution can serve as a precedent or the basis of an experience to 'become the cognitive site from which further advances can be made […] where this knowledge will be used next and how it will develop are as difficult to predict as are the possible applications that might arise from discipline-based research' (Gibbons et al 1994:5). The creation of new knowledge and improved understanding through new experiences is valuable as a precedent as well as means to inform decisions in the future. Unique situations demanding informed responses occur in all areas of a school's activities. Arriving at deeper understandings of a school through research and the application of new knowledge assists in coping with the dynamic nature of schools. Changes in practices or policy resulting directly from the research findings may also fuel the dynamic nature of the school.

The context of the case school is unique. These eight aspects of the school reveal its character to be a well resourced, conservative learning environment. Ecological theory has informed this study, explaining how the experiences of the boys in the school context can shape their development.

Ecological Theory – An Overview

> *The characteristics of the person at a given time in his or her life are a joint function of the characteristics of the person and the environment over the course of that person's life up to that time* (Bronfenbrenner 2005:108).

Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), and its more developed form of bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 2005), inform the focus of this study of aspects of a

school's environment. Ecological theory explains patterns in human behaviour rather than simply testing aspects of human behaviour. It led to a theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1995). The significance of interaction between people and their environment is at the heart of this theory.

> Human beings create the environments that shape the course of human development. Their actions influence the multiple physical and cultural tiers of the ecology that shapes them, and this agency makes humans – for better or for worse – active producers of their own development (Bronfenbrenner 2005:xxvii).

This explanation is not suggesting that individuals necessarily have the power to control their own development. It suggests experiences in life combine to influence human development through the environments they create and within which they live. People, therefore, are able to shape the development of others through the social, political and physical environments they construct for other people in families, community groups and wider communities. According to this theory the experiences of students in a school environment can influence their development while interacting with other environmental and biological influences on development.

Ecological theory positions a child's development within a unique context shaped by a system of relationships in their environment. Originally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified four nested structures constituting the environment for a person at a point in time. These structures were designated as the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem* and *macrosystem*. Later, a fifth structure, *chronosystem*, was included to add a temporal component to the theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; Bronfenbrenner 2005).

A *microsystem* is perceived as an immediate setting in which an individual lives and interacts. There is more than one microsystem simultaneously encountered by a person. These include the family, peers, school, community groups and neighbourhood. The *mesosystem* is the product of the inter-connecting aspects of the microsystem. For example, the mesosystem is the context produced by the interaction between school and family, families and neighbours, peers and family or a more complex simultaneous interaction of more than two microsystems such as school, family and peers in any one context. The mesosystem for a Middle School student at the case school would include connections between home, school, peer groups and other groups they engage in their social lives. This means the mesosytem is a system of interacting microsystems (Bronfenbrenner 2005:46).

The next level is the *exosystem*. This is the social setting in which individuals do not have an active role yet it influences their experiences. This includes a situation created because of experiences outside of the home influencing domestic life such as the influence of parental employment on a child in a family. The exosystem for a child is also influenced by active involvement of people from the child's own world as well as from any social institution that makes decisions affecting the conditions of family life (Bronfenbrenner 2005:46).

The *macrosystem* incorporates the political philosophy and wider societal attitudes, ideologies and principles underpinning social interaction in a society. The legal system, religious beliefs and national cultural identity may be components of a macrosystem while the final level in the model is the *chronosystem* bringing a temporal component to the model. The chronosystem is the pattern of environmental events over the course of life, recognising that the contexts of individuals can change over time resulting in significant changes to the overall environment they experience (Bronfenbrenner 2005:119).

According to ecological theory people do not have the same experiences because they interact with different social and physical environments, unique in their relation to the individual's experience. In other words:

> Ecological theory presumes that simultaneous with development in language, cognition, social competence and physical integrity, children also accommodate to their immediate social and physical environment. This environment, in turn, is mediated by more remote forces in a larger society (Swearer and Doll 2001:9-10).

Ecological theory enables the school environment to be seen as a component of a child's complex social world, interplaying with other contexts to shape his/her experiences and development in regard to approaches to learning in general but specifically related to peer relations and masculinity in this research. The ecological model has the developing person at its centre with these nested structures shaping the total environment she/he experiences.

Learning environment

This research was also conceptualised with the broader objective to understand and assist in the continued improvement of the learning environment for Middle School students. There is a clear link between this objective and the *Quality Learning Environment* which is one of the three dimensions recognised in the NSW Department of Education and Training's Quality Teaching model (QTM) (DETNSW 2003). The dimension of *Quality Learning Environment* in the QTM recognises the importance of an environment that is

directly supportive of learning (DETNSW 2003:14). The context of the learning environment described by the QTM is at the classroom level. The current research portfolio extends the *Quality Learning Environment* dimension of the QTM beyond the confines of the classroom to include the wider school environment where many social and learning experiences are encountered by students.

Within any learning environment there are elements of social support to maintain high expectations of student performance, students' self-regulated classroom management and student directed learning (DETNSW 2003:14-19). The current research investigated ways of improving student engagement and social support in the case school through intervening in and investigating reported bullying cases as well as providing a greater variety of learning experiences for boys at school.

The QTM itself recognises four key aspects of social support at school for student achievement at a general, cultural level. The four key aspects are:

- Teachers listened to students;
- Students made friends with peers from diverse backgrounds;
- Student were not put down by other students; and,
- Students were treated fairly by their peers and by adults (DETNSW 2003:16).

These four key aspects of social support encouraging student engagement were a feature of the current research. These strategies for social support identified in the QTM have informed the approaches taken as a result of the research to create a more positive learning environment providing students with positive social experiences at school. Huppert (2005) makes the connections between positive emotions, cognition, behaviour and health, identifying the need for schools provide a positive social experience for students for their long term benefits.

Social relationships and the need for social support are most clearly exemplified in bullying situations. Defining bullying and raising awareness of the issue for schools as well as encouraging schools to act against bullying was a focus of research by Besag (1989). Since then there has been a dramatic increase in the body of knowledge on the phenomenon of bullying, especially lead by Olweus (1993; 2004). The ongoing work in Australia of Rigby (1996; 2000; 2002a; 2002b; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2007) explains the complexity of the phenomenon and the theoretical context of its occurrence has been

influential in my thinking and the development of my practice at my school in recent years.

Recent practical guides to direct school practice (Elliott 2002; Garbarino and deLara 2002; Rigby 2003b; Smith, Depler et al. 2004; McGrath and Noble 2006) as well as more sophisticated approaches, such as the excellent Friendly Schools Project (Cross, Hall et al. 2004), have assisted greatly in understanding the issue of bullying in schools and the general development of interventions to incidents of poor peer relations. There are now many resources available to teachers and school leaders to guide the construction of policies as well as to inform practice addressing peer relations and bullying in schools.

Current guides to address bullying in schools recommend that sustainable interventions require a supportive school environment rather than just single campaigns against bullying (Roland and Galloway 2004; Galloway 2004b). As a result, it is anticipated that school anti-bullying policies will have school culture at their centre for the foreseeable future, directly addressing the social environment of the school. This requires a clear understanding by school leaders of the relationship between school policies and practices related to incidents of poor peer relations and bullying. These policies and practices in dealing with bullying will be as influential upon the school environment as will the relationships between pupils themselves.

Linking peer relations and masculinities

The two studies in this portfolio are linked as elements of the school environment. Ecological theory helps to explain how the experiences of individuals vary as a result of their unique social experiences in a variety of social contexts, *microsystems*, and a resulting *mesosystem*. Peer relations and masculinity are both social practices of a school, influenced by the microsystem of the school environment. Connell (2005) recognises that gender is the product of social practices in specific contexts. There is no doubt that the nature of peer relations means it is inherently a social practice and school is an important place where social relations are performed and developed.

The concept of power also links the two studies of this portfolio. Bullying is described as 'cruel and repeated oppression by the powerful over the powerless, without any justification at all. It is gratuitous violence, physical and psychological' (Rigby 2007:11). Masculinity is explained to be socially constructed as a product of a gender order containing hierarchies of values, attitudes, activities, positions and events (Connell 2005).

The relative position of an activity is maintained in a hierarchy through some power over subordinate activities. An explicit connection between bullying and masculinity is made by Garbarino and deLara (2002:72): 'The bully is a kind of hero in our society. Our culture defines masculinity as connected to power, control and dominance. The concept of power we admire is power over someone else'. This statement suggests that for boys to enact a certain kind of masculinity in our society they demonstrate power over other people. The most obvious way to achieve this is through physical strength and aggression. The concept of power warrants consideration in these studies because it is a key issue for both bullying and masculinity.

Foucault's concept of power (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998) has been useful for understanding boys' use of power. Foucault reverses the traditional belief that knowledge is power and looks for power in how people effect knowledge to intervene in social affairs: 'Foucault's concept of power gives attention to its productive dimensions, such as how power works through individual actions to vision and re-vision our "selves" as acting, thinking and feeling persons' (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:17). These actions, thoughts and feelings take place in, and are influenced by, the social environment. An ecological perspective suggests the experiences of power by the students in the microsystem of a school will influence the way they deal with power in other areas of their lives such as at home or with peers. The research projects were designed to investigate the boys' experiences at the case school in regards to peer relations and masculinity which are two ways that boys experience power.

The issues of peer relations and masculinity are closely linked in the existing literature in a variety of ways. The construction of masculinity is recognised as a powerful component of harassment and bullying in schools by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:187) while the importance of a 'cultural circle' of the peer group and their social interactions is seen to be a key influence in the construction of masculinity by the group members (Swain 2006a:334). Furthermore, Meyenn and Parker (2001:171) identify that: 'discussions of discipline, bullying and playground violence must be embedded in, and interrogated from, positions which acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between boys, schooling and the construction of masculinities'. Peer relations and the peer group are intertwined with the construction of masculinity. It is difficult to ascertain which comes first, the view of masculinity or the way peers relate to each other, or whether they develop discursively in particular microsystems of family, peers and other external microsystem of the members of the school community. The interactions of these as the boys experience differences and

similarities within and between microsystems influence development at the mesosystem level. The focus of this research is on how the school environment influences the experiences of the boys in regard to peer relations and the construction of masculinity.

The school environment is shaped by the unique combination of many aspects which influence the experiences of students and creates their mesosystem. Furthermore:

> Schools are located in and shaped by specific sociocultural, politico-economic, and historical conditions: individual personnel, rules, routines and expectations, and the use of resources and space will all have a profound impact on the way young boys (and girls) experience their lives at school (Swain 2006a:333).

In this quotation Swain describes an ecological perspective and the significance of the microsystem of the school on its students. The experiences of peer relations and masculinity at school will result from the unique combination of rules, expectations and resources. These may be different from home and other microsystems.

The social context seems crucial to both masculinity and peer relations. A social context will have patterns of normal behaviour that are important influences shaping the behaviour of boys in that context. Ecological theory recognises this importance and firmly places students at the centre of interacting influences shaping their experiences at school.

This first chapter has outlined the broad background to this portfolio, the research questions, my position in the research as well as the research context. The next chapter provides an overview of the research methods for these projects before the two projects are presented in the Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 5 the conclusions of the two projects are brought together and applications for practice in school indicated.

CHAPTER 2 – RESEARCH METHODS: AN OVERVIEW

Research Paradigm

In this portfolio multiple realities, the co-creation of understandings by the researcher and respondent as well as naturalistic methodological procedures are featured. This means that the research is firmly placed in a constructivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:21). I concur with the constructivist view of knowledge where 'a process of discovery underpins the research enterprise [and] meaning is described, interpreted and constructed through the eyes of the researcher or the participants in the investigation' (Gerber 2000:18).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) provide a comprehensive explanation of the nature of a constructivist approach. The influence of my values in the inquiry, my research methodology and a relativist ontology are all recognised by Guba and Lincoln (1989) to be characteristic of a constructivist paradigm. The research has not been undertaken in an environment where there can be a clear cause and effect relationship between incidents and issues, where there is an objective posture maintained by me, as the researcher, or where the research environment can be cleared of confounding variables as is required by a conventional paradigm (Guba and Lincoln 1989:85-89). The data of the current research were collected, and all participants are part of, a true-to-life case study with significant implications for the research environment and its future.

Both research projects of this portfolio were undertaken in this paradigm. However, the projects differ in their approach. Action research was the most suitable approach for the research on peer relations because of the imperative to improve teacher practice related to the issue in the case school. A more exploratory approach to the social research was undertaken for the investigation of Year 9 boys' views of masculinity to facilitate a deeper understanding of the boys' views, factors influencing their views and the school's role in constructing their views. As foreshadowed in Chapter 1, the knowledge generated in the course of this research was and will continue to be, fed back to the school community as a means of informing the stakeholders of the progress made in addressing issues connected with peer relations and masculinities at school, as well as to assist in the planning for future improvements in practice.

Research Design

The research design, overall, is case study which includes two related projects. This case study can be classified as 'instrumental' because it 'provides insight into an issue' (Stake

2000:437). The school itself (as the case) is the context for the investigation of peer relations management and boys' views of masculinity. The two research projects are linked to the overarching theme of the portfolio, that the nature of the social and learning environment at school shape social development of students. These studies within the one school provide a detailed description of that school's practices as outlined by Toulmin (cited in Young 2000:531) and opportunities for 'reflective transfer' (Schon 1995:31) by audiences beyond the school, through their own generalisations (Stake 2000).

Methodology

The methodology for this research was multi-method in nature. The complexity and reality of practice and the research questions identified suggested the use of both quantitative and qualitative tools. Throughout the two research tasks I aimed to maintain a high degree of 'openness' (Gerber 2000:23) in methodological objectivity by 'doing justice to the object of the research; being without dogmatic theoretical viewpoints or technical incompetence; and, focusing consciously on one part of the world' (Gerber 2000:23). This was best achieved by using a multi-method approach.

Gerber (2000:29) cites Brewer and Hunter (1989:36-38) as supporting the use of a multi-method approach recognizing the increased feasibility of verifying and validating theories. A multi-method approach fits comfortably with the actual mode of operation of a teacher in daily professional practice where many aspects of a student's world are brought together to inform the evaluation of a student's particular situation. For example, monitoring the progress of a Middle School boy at my school would involve the use of quantitative information such as his grade averages on semester reports and his detention history in conjunction with qualitative information. In addition teacher observations of progress and application, as well as information obtained at parent and student interviews regarding other areas of a student's life would contribute to student progress profiles. This combination of qualitative and quantitative information related to a student's development at school is an important approach for tracking pupil progress over time and to construct a full understanding of their situation. Once this is achieved, then effective strategies can be undertaken to support students and guide their progress. The strategies subsequently implemented can be reviewed and evaluated with changes made, as required. This approach to collecting information on student progress naturally extends to a multi-method research approach in this portfolio and incorporates an ecological perspective acknowledging the interaction of different environments experienced by a single student.

Research Tools

The methodology of both studies included the use of a range of research tools. This method allows for the implementation of triangulation involving the 'use of multiple and different sources, methods, and perspectives to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research problem and its outcomes' (Stringer 2003:57).

The decision to employ qualitative tools (such as focus groups, interviews and journal writing) and quantitative tools (such as questionnaires and incident recording) enabled a more detailed exploration of the research questions by employing complementary perspectives on the questions addressed. Details of the research tools used in each study and the justification for their inclusion are provided in Chapters 3 and 4 as a part of the explanation of the methodology for each study.

The research method for both projects employed the same paradigm and research design but with variations in methodology. The two projects were independently conceptualised with the aim to investigate the differing issues related to each project requiring differences in methodology. The first of the two research project was an action research study developing staff practices in regard to intervening in incidents of poor peer relations and bullying. The second research project investigates masculinity in the Middle School with specific reference to Year 9 boys' views, the factors influencing their views and the role of the school in the construction of their views. The following two chapters present the two research projects as mini-dissertations before moving on to Chapter 5 – Linking Conclusions.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH PROJECT 1: YEAR 8 PEER RELATIONS

This chapter has been divided into three sections. Section 1 is an introduction including: the background to this study; a description and justification of the strategy of inquiry; details of the multi-method approach to data collection; and, tools used to analyse the data. Section 2 provides a detailed reconnaissance incorporating the literature context relevant to defining bullying, theories to explain bullying, the impact of bullying, teacher approaches to dealing with bullying and a general evaluation of these approaches. The reconnaissance also includes a detailed investigation of the school context as it relates to this issue. Section 3 details the action taken in the course of the action research cycle and the outcomes of this project.

Section 1 - Introduction

Australian research shows that in contemporary society approximately one in five Middle School aged students are bullied each week through one or multiple forms of bullying behaviour (Rigby 2007). The issue of peer bullying in schools has been recognised for a long time. The classic novel *Tom Brown's School Days* (Hughes 1857) portrays a violent and fearful experience for a boy attending school in Victorian England. Some connection between schools of the era and contemporary schools remain in nomenclature of school organization, due to the influential educational reforms of Sir Thomas Arnold, Headmaster at Rugby School in the mid nineteenth century. Ironically, Arnold's Rugby was the school attended by the fictitious Tom Brown. In the story, Tom Brown's father presents bullying as an inevitable part of the school experience. Other than his own wits and social skills, Tom Brown had nothing to support him at school. His father's warning to be wary of bullies was inadequate when Tom was tormented at school by Flashman, the school bully.

By the 1930s, little had changed in the approach to bullying in schools. In an educational psychology textbook of the time Wheeler and Perkins (1932) assert that:

> Ordinary teasing, especially on the part of boys, is a common expression of aggressiveness. When it is a source of difficulty in school situations, the victims of the teasing can usually be taught to laugh their way to freedom, or effectively to ignore the teaser. It should be explained to them that the teasing is done for its effect, it will cease (Wheeler and Perkins 1932).

This view is recognised as typical of views at that time presenting bullying as a normative social experience (Jeffrey, Miller et al. 2001:144). The attitudes towards bullying

expressed by Wheeler and Perkins (1932) and in *Tom Brown's School Days* (Hughes 1857) were made seventy-five years apart. Approximately seventy-five years later, it should be of concern if anyone in education held the same view offering no strategies or interventions to support young people who are subjected to teasing or bullying.

The peer relations study was guided by a key research question:

> *How can teachers' investigations and interventions in bullying, and in incidents of poor peer relations, amongst Year 8 students be improved*?

The central problem under investigation is not bullying, *per se,* but how teachers can effectively investigate and intervene in incidents of poor peer relations, which may or may not include bullying.   The term "peer relations" has been used in the title of this mini-dissertation and in the action research question because "peer relations" is able to embrace a wide range of interactions between students at school. Not all incidents of negative or poor peer relations are necessarily bullying *per se* as they might be low-level playground squabbles that may be on the edge of, but not comply with, the prevailing definition of bullying, especially in relation to repetition. The role of power, nature and frequency of incidents between peers and their perceptions are the determining factors in ascertaining whether an exchange is bullying. Each of these factors will be considered later in this chapter.

It is desirable to establish a school environment in which the teachers, and the students as well, develop attitudes and create conditions that reduce the frequency and severity of bullying incidents. Therefore, a prime objective of the present study is to develop a strategy for staff intervention into incidents of poor peer relations that serves to resolve problems and helps to build a positive school environment. This intervention is the product of the detailed investigation of the nature of the problem of poor peer relations at the school as part of the situational analysis. Students' experiences of interventions to incidents of reported poor peer relations at school are influenced by the staff practice, as well as the school policies and general school environment that has been described in Chapter 1. This study focuses on Year 8 for two reasons. First, in the conceptualisation phase of the research it was a shared view of Heads of House that most of their time was spent dealing with peer relations issues amongst students in Year 8. Second, in an effort to keep the study manageable only one year group could be included.

Strategy of Inquiry – Action Research

This project is a multi-method action research case study combining data collected over a thirteen month period from October 2005 to November 2006. An improvement in professional practice was an imperative for this study, as outlined in Chapter 1. Given my position as the Head of Middle School and the research questions to be addressed action research was considered to be the most appropriate approach for this project.

A plethora of literature exists that has developed my understanding of action research (Schon 1995; Wadsworth 1997; Stringer 1999; Greenwood and Levin 2000; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Newman 2000; Smith 2001; Stringer 2003). In general, action research is in response to the needs of a specific context in which improvement is an imperative. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) provide a detailed review of a number of variants of action research. They state:

> Action research takes a variety of forms. It is not a unitary approach. In our view, its evolution has owed more to the press of the contexts in which it has been practised than to the working out of some set of problems immanent in action research understood as a research method (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000:593).

Work by Greenwood and Levin (2000) on action research as social research reinforces the importance of this context. This is explained in their definition of action research as:

> Research in which the […] value of research results are tested through collaborative insider-professional researcher knowledge generation and application processes in projects of social change that aim to increase fairness, wellness, and self-determination (Greenwood and Levin 2000:94).

This definition is aligned with my research question (p25) and my core motivation to improve the quality of the learning environment and the student experiences in the Middle School.

The typical process of an action research study is explained as a 'spiral' (Wadsworth 1998; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Smith 2001; Maxwell 2002; Stringer 2003) preceded by a reconnaissance from which come the action research questions. Common elements in the literature are the inclusive nature of action research and a sense of action research being undertaken in the real educational contexts. These common elements are described by Maxwell (2003:3): 'The process remains connected to the situation and the initiator of action research will sometimes (perhaps preferably) draw those involved in that situation into the action research process'. The process may be owned as well as managed by the participants but it is generally understood to involve an ongoing non-linear cycle of

planning, implementation, evaluation/reflection and re-planning. This spiral was recognised as being distinctive to action research by Lewin (cited in Smith 2001) in its earliest stages in the 1940s and it has continued to be the defining element of an action research approach. A process described in this way may have no clear conclusion. In fact, it is apparent there is no requirement for the process to end even though the action researcher may choose to end it. There is a clear assumption that practice can be improved and it is always evolving in a dynamic context. In this case, action research can go on revisiting central questions over time and devising new context-appropriate actions. The key to each of these descriptions is the action research process as systematic inquiry to provide new knowledge and understanding enabling the development of improved practices (Stringer 2003:13).

The adoption of an action research process sits comfortably with teachers as it is closely aligned to normal practice and has been recognised by teachers as of great value (Seider and Lemma 2004). However, the need for greater rigour and depth through the systematic collection and analysis of data over time presents the greatest challenge to teachers as action researchers. The action research model provides a template for teachers to follow when investigating issues in their schools and facilitating positive change to professional practice.

A conventional research tradition is recognised as seeing itself as 'proceeding from point A to point B along a straight line – commencing with a hypothesis and proceeding to a conclusion which may then be published in a journal' (Wadsworth 1998). This conventional approach is less desirable for this study because of my imperative to improve professional practice *in situ* as an outcome and in the course of the research project. More importantly, action research includes a reconnaissance as integral to the process allowing data to be generated to address the research question which emanates from the reconnaissance. Action research is 'derived from a research tradition emphasizing cyclical, dynamic, and collaborative approaches to investigation' (Stringer 2003:13). This process provided the most suitable means to research peer relations in this particular study and to facilitate improvement in a school.

This study deviates from the classic action research format (Wadsworth 1998; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Smith 2001; Maxwell 2002; Stringer 2003) because of the nature of the research question devised. The research question did not propose to implement a particular strategy that remained unchanged and evaluated at the completion of the action

research cycle. The research question is concerned with developing an approach to improve teacher practices. This project relied on an interactive process in the course of the action research cycle to inform the evolution of the improved professional practice. In effect, data collected during the action research cycle was part of an ongoing situation analysis involving evaluation, reflection, planning for change and implementation. Consequently, this study contained many small action research spirals developing the practice in the course of the action research period.

Data Collection

The complexity and reality of practice demanded a mixture of quantitative and qualitative tools to investigate the research questions. Throughout the research I endeavoured to maintain a high degree of 'openness' (Gerber 2000:23) and methodological objectivity by 'doing justice to the object of the research; being without dogmatic theoretical viewpoints or technical incompetence; and, focusing consciously on one part of the world' (Gerber 2000:23). This was best achieved by undertaking research using a multi-method approach as is it more easily able to meet the needs of the stakeholders and the research environment.

Permission from the school to undertake the research project was obtained from the Principal, followed by a presentation to the School Council (Miller 2004). University ethics clearance to undertake this research was obtained in October 2005 with the commencement of data collection in November 2005. Data collection concluded at the end of November 2006. A summary of the data collection sequence is provided in Appendix 2. The following section outlines each of the tools used in this project.

Quantitative tools

There were two quantitative tools used in this study: a questionnaire; and, incident records.

Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaire (PRAQ)

The PRAQ is an established instrument measuring the nature and extent of bullying in schools. It is a questionnaire constructed by Rigby (1998) that is straight forward to administer with different questionnaires for students and parents. The PRAQ has had extensive use throughout Australia since 1996. Over time this questionnaire has been completed by 50 000 respondents in all states of Australia enabling national norms to be developed for student responses. There are no such norms available for parent responses.

The PRAQ form for students is included as Appendix 3 and the PRAQ form for parents is included as Appendix 4.

The PRAQ was distributed twice in the course of the action research cycle of this study to boys and parents of the Year 8, 2006 cohort. The questionnaire was distributed in Term 4, 2005 (when the boys were in Year 7) and again in Term 4, 2006 when the same cohort was near the end of Year 8.

In October 2005 and October 2006, the parents were notified in writing of the intention to distribute the PRAQ to the boys. The students were given direct notification of the questionnaire by me in the Middle School Assembly held on the Friday of the week immediately before the questionnaire was distributed. The notification was very explicit about the connection between the questionnaire, my research, my ethical responsibilities and doctoral studies at UNE. The boys and parents were told there was no obligation to participate, there was no penalty for non participation and they could withdraw voluntarily at any time.

The parent questionnaire was mailed out, whilst the students completed their questionnaire at school. All student participants completed the questionnaire in a twenty minute period at the same time during the school day. Questionnaire completion was overseen by a member of the teaching staff who would normally be responsible for the boys in that time slot. Upon completion, the questionnaires were returned to me for analysis. Questionnaire data were tabulated using tabulation tables provided in the PRAQ package (Rigby 1998).

All parents of the Year 8, 2006 cohort were individually invited in writing to participate in the PRAQ (Appendix 5). Parents received a cover letter, a copy of the parent PRAQ and an addressed reply paid envelope to assist the return of the completed questionnaire. The cover letter provided details of the reasons for the research, Human Ethic Research Committee approval number and UNE contact details for use in the event of concerns about the research.

Peer Relations Incident Tally Sheet (P.R.I.T.S.)
PRITS was a tally of incidents involving Year 8 2006 boys reported to me as Head of Middle School over the five term period commencing in October 2005, concluding at the end of November 2006. The information recorded included the date of the incident, the location of the problem/incident, the source of the information (parent, student, teacher or

member of the public), repeat reporting or first time reporting and the action taken. No information was recorded that could identify an individual in an incident. The template for the PRITS is shown in Appendix 6.

These data were used for reflection on and analysis of intervention to incidents reported to me as the Head of Middle School. These data provide an important basis for understanding the realities of my dealings with incidents of poor peer relations and bullying amongst Year 8 2006 boys.

Qualitative tools

There were three qualitative tools used in this study: a reflective journal; staff interviews; and student focus groups.

Reflective journal

A reflective journal of 220 pages in a standard exercise book containing approximately 75 entries was compiled in the course of the thirteen month action research period. The journal was initiated very early in the process of conceptualizing the study, well before the commencement of data gathering and maintained for over a year following the completion of other data gathering. In general, the journal entries recorded the processes towards developing practice through the research project. This journal was a key component of this action research project enabling writing to be a method of inquiry (Richardson 2000) resulting in improved analysis and understandings of actions, literature, meetings with colleagues, parents and students as well as general experiences related to the study. The personal journal allowed reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-for-action (Schon 1995). The journal also provided an important site for the synthesis of thoughts as journal entries were regularly reviewed, cross referenced and placed within a wider context of thought and analysis of professional practice.

Interviews

A total of six staff participated in semi-structured taped interviews averaging approximately thirty minutes duration in this study. Five Heads of House and the Senior Counsellor were interviewed in March of Term 1 2006. A copy of the questions asked in these interviews is included as Appendix 7. These interviews provided important data during the action research cycle, informing the development of an effective intervention to reported incidents of poor peer relations and bullying. The purpose of each interview was to enable staff to:

- share their understanding of the nature and scale of peer relations problems at the school;
- discuss perceptions of the school environment related to this issue;
- reflect on their practice in dealing with peer relations problems amongst Middle School boys;
- reflect on changes to practice they have noticed since the development of the current anti-bullying policy; and,
- provide input as to how they perceived the general practice could improve.

Interviews were digitally recorded onto a laptop computer and key points in response to each question were noted in the course of the interview. These notes were important to the analysis of the interviews' content.

Stringer (2003:64) asserts that interviews are:

> The principal means by which we are able to hear the voice of the other and to incorporate their perspective in the inquiry process. The interview process, however, also provides opportunities for participants to revisit and reflect on events in their lives, and in the process, to extend their understanding of their own experience.

Staff interviews served to assist in the situation analysis and provided me with a better understanding of approaches taken by staff when dealing with incidents of poor peer relations. The information obtained in the interviews informed the actions taken to improve staff intervention to incidents of poor peer relations amongst Middle School boys with the aim to improve and maintain positive experiences for students.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were used in preference to individual student interviews for two reasons. First, given my position at the school, I felt the presence of a group might make the participants more at ease and allow for a more natural conversation on peer relations. Second, individual interviews are very time consuming and logistically difficult in a busy school schedule. Focus groups enabled the participation of a larger number of student participants in this research with minimal disruption to their pre-standing school or personal commitments. The use of focus groups is well supported and widely used by qualitative researchers. They are recognised to be useful as a means to providing rich data (Fontana and Frey 2000:652) and 'provide insight into the range and depth of opinions, ideas, and beliefs about a research topic, rather than providing information about the number of people who hold a particular view' (St John 1999:420).

Focus groups provided a forum for open discussion of issues arising from data gathered elsewhere in this research while engaging a large number of people in the research. The focus group discussion also developed ideas and enabled individuals to explore their experiences (Stringer 2003:76). 'They gain increased clarity and understanding of […] issues and develop the productive personal relationships so important to the effective enactment of action research' (Stringer 2003:78-9). In addition, focus groups 'are used to gain a clear view of the thinking, language and reality of the participants' world' (Morgan and Krueger 1993, cited in St John 1999:420). The nature of peer relations means it was important for the boys' experiences to be heard and understood for effective interventions to be devised. Focus group data provided both baseline data at the commencement of the research cycle as well as ongoing situation analysis to monitor the situation amongst the boys and effects of intervention over time.

The practical aspects of time and scheduling the meetings amongst other commitments had an impact on the number of focus groups and the frequency of meeting. Stringer (2003:76) emphasizes the time and place of the meetings must be conducive to the process. Due to school co-curricular commitments on other weekday afternoons, Friday afternoon was the best time to schedule meetings.

Two groups of students provided a check and balance on each other especially in the event of a dominant view expressed by a domineering participant. Fontana and Frey (2000:652) state 'the results cannot be generalised; the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, and the group may be dominated by one person; and *groupthink* is possible outcome'. Both focus groups comprised twelve Year 8 2006 boys.

Focus group participants were chosen at random when the boys were in Year 7 2005. Both focus groups met on four occasions of 45 minutes during the four school terms commencing in Term 4 2005 to Term 3 2006 inclusive.

After informed consent was obtained from both the boys and their parents a follow-up letter was mailed to the participants' parents at the start of each term in which the meeting was to be held. This letter stated the date of the scheduled meeting so they would be aware of the extension of their son's time at school on that day and re-stated the HREC information from UNE. The focus group conversations were digitally recorded onto a laptop computer and later transcribed. The smallest focus group involved six participants

and the largest was twelve with an average attendance of eight students. A copy of the information sheet read to each group at the start of every session is included as Appendix 8. The questions used to guide the focus group conversations are included in this portfolio as Appendix 9.

Analytical Tools

Qualitative data

The focus group and interview transcripts were initially analysed individually and manually to identify themes, to obtain data and to monitor actions. I undertook a manual analysis of interviews and focus group transcripts by summarising main discussion points on the completion of my typing of transcripts. Themes were identified in these discussion points and used as the basis of data analysis.

Quantitative data

Descriptive statistics have been used for data analysis of the PRAQ data, PRITS data and journal entry analysis. The norms for the PRAQ are also presented in this way, enabling comparison.

Descriptive statistics are recognised to be limited to the data at hand and do not involve any inferences or potential for generalisation (Walsh 1990:3). Their use in this research was appropriate because of the research design with data and research questions particular to this case study. The generalisation of findings is not an objective of this research project so inferential statistics are not appropriate in this project.

All data collected from the national PRAQ and reported in the results of this study as "Norms" were obtained between 1993 and 1997 (Rigby 1998). The results presented as "Norms" in this study are for a subgroup within Rigby's earlier research of boys aged 13 to 18 years old. The sample size on each questionnaire item in the earlier research was approximately 16 000 participants. There are some differences between the approaches taken in the collection of the current research data and the Rigby data. Rigby (1998) generally collected data approximately half way through the year and in a variety of types of schools including fifty-one co-educational secondary schools, four co-educational all-age schools, two co-educational middle schools, eight boys' secondary schools, two boys' all-age schools and two boys' middle schools (Rigby 1998:6). The sub-group of 13 to 18 years of age has been used as the "Norms" because they most closely relate to the current research where approximately 33 per cent of the participants were 13 years old at the time

of the first PRAQ in November 2005 and all had turned 13 years old with approximately 33 per cent of participants aged 14 by the same time the following year when the PRAQ was repeated.

Rigby (1998:4-5) outlines six 'Preliminary cautions' to users of the "Norms". The nature of the research environment of the case school means three of the cautions are directly relevant to the current research. First, the level of bullying tends to decline from Year 4 to Year 12 at school although there is typically an increase in bullying when a child leaves primary school and enters secondary school. The first year of secondary school varied in the national data between Years 7 and 8, depending on the State of the questionnaire participants. The first year of secondary school in this study is Year 7. The "Norms" stated in this section are for boys across secondary school, yet the participants at the case school are closely positioned in age to the peak of bullying incidents upon entry to secondary school. It is reasonable to expect that the "Norms" for the frequency of incidents of bullying will be lower than the case school because of the age of the participants contributing to the figures.

The second caution is that patterns of bullying tend to vary in different types of schools, with higher levels of physical bullying present in boys' schools than co-educational or girls' schools. Rigby describes the school structure as having an impact on the nature of peer relations and the incidence of bullying. The gender composition of a school may have an impact on the reliability of a comparison between the all boys' case school in the current research and the wider figures. Finally, the schools contributing to the national PRAQ data were self-selecting because they chose to undertake the survey to discover what was happening between students in the school as well as to commit some financial resources to doing so. Nevertheless, these figures provide useful data for a general comparison of the case school cohort in 2005 and 2006 and a wider group of schools attended by students of similar age across Australia.

Section 2 – The Reconnaissance

The reconnaissance for this research project is detailed in this section. This included the relevant literature, and the context of the school as it specifically related to bullying and peer relations. The initial situational analysis incorporated the baseline data provided by a questionnaire and focus groups in Term 4 2005 with reflections on current policies and practices, analysis of the process of conceptualizing the study as recorded in my reflective journal. Baseline data were supplemented by subsequent student focus groups, staff

interviews and PRITS data gathered through the course of the action research cycle to provide ongoing situation analysis to inform the evolution of practice.

Literature context

Literature addressing bullying provides the main guidance to teachers in relation to dealing with incidents of poor peer relations and was an important component of the reconnaissance in this study. The literature on bullying is a major component of the research because it provides an important background to my professional practice and understanding of bullying *per se* and patterns of behaviour in peer relations amongst boys of the Middle School.

School bullying is widely recognised as a problem with implications extending beyond the school context. Further literature on the nature and prevention of bullying at school appears beyond the educational discourse as both a health issue (Galloway 2004a) and associated with criminology (Morrison 2002; Rigby 2003a). Bullying is described as 'a social evil' (Rigby 2007:11) and 'a pressing social problem' (Yule 2004).

The realisation of the impact of bullying on young people around the world is further demonstrated by the establishment of the *Kandersteg Declaration Against Bullying in Children and Youth* (Appendix 10) in June 2007. The Declaration and its inclusion of 'Considerations' outlining the situation and 'Actions to be taken' to address the problem demonstrates a significant step advancing the global discourse on bullying. This literature does not identify bullying behaviour as originating in the microsystem of school but it recognises the school years as an important developmental phase in life for young people and those who experience bullying at school can encounter long term disadvantages. As a consequence, there have been significant developments in the approach to dealing with bullying among children at school.

Research into bullying and the development of interventions to address the problem has increased considerably over the last twenty years. Olweus (1993; 2004) pioneered research into bullying in Norwegian schools nearly thirty years ago by investigating the problem and recognizing a need and ways to address it. In Australia, Rigby (Rigby and Thomas 2003; 2003a; 2003b; 2004; 2007) has made an enormous contribution to the discourse on bullying through research into its occurrence and by developing resources to guide schools in the development of anti-bullying practices and policies. In the last six years there has been a plethora of work by other researchers and many practical

suggestions dealing with bullying in schools by Coloroso (2004), Elliott (2002), Garbarino and de Lara (2002), Geffner and Loring *et al.* (2001), Griffiths (2003), McGrath and Noble (2006), Pikas (2002) and Roberts (2006). All of this literature has been influential in developing an understanding of the nature of the issue and how responses to it vary slightly from place to place. More recently, British research (Smith, Depler *et al*. 2004) is recognised by Rigby (2007:14) as significantly influencing practice in interventions in Australian schools. As a result, classroom teachers and school administrators have a wide range of domestic and international research to draw upon in the process of improving practice and developing policies relating to poor peer relations and bullying in schools.

A discussion of cultural character of the countries where the research originates is absent from the literature. The absence of this discussion leaves the reader to assume the approaches to dealing with bullying are universally applicable and not dependent on the socially constructed differences of context in which they are developed. Alternately, the reader can adopt a pick-and-choose approach, reading the literature and incorporating approaches to bullying considered by the reader to be worth a try in their context. An ecological perspective on the issue suggests the experiences of children at school will be shaped by interacting environments at a range of levels. The current study was positioned within an Australian macrosystem and further modified by the nature of the school itself and the students within it. Generally, the bullying literature ignores the relevance of a macrosystem and variations between cultures of different countries. Sensitivity by teachers to differences between the macrosystems and school microsystems in which approaches to bullying are developed must be maintained as approaches to bullying are considered for implementation in a school.

What is bullying?

Bullying has been variously defined (Olweus 1993; 2004; Rigby 2007). Key components of definitions of bullying are the elements of repetition and physical or psychological harm inflicted by one or more people. A definition of bullying relevant to the school context is:

> A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed,
> repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or
> more other students (Olweus 1993:9).

This definition includes intentional action on the part of one or more perpetrators in the form of verbal, physical or emotionally harmful actions. The intention here is to exclude 'the occasional non-serious negative actions that are directed against one student at one

time and against another on a different occasion' (Olweus 1993:9). These sorts of one-off actions include teasing and taunting amongst friends or peers at school.

Bullying is not only evident amongst school children in our society. This broader definition of bullying is my preferred definition in the current research:

> Bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons (Rigby 2007:15).

The recognition of a power imbalance in bullying is an important inclusion in this definition as it positions the incident amongst a number of other interactions involving people, the culture of an organization, values and expectations. This definition can be applied in schools equally well to relationships between students as it might be applied to relationships between students and teachers at school or even between adults in different contexts, such as the workplace.

A problem with definition

Although one researcher will classify some incidents of poor peer relations as teasing and not constituting bullying (Roberts 2006) another considers all incidents of poor peer relations as incidents of bullying but with varying degrees of severity (Rigby 2007). Roberts (2006:13-15) describes the difference between bullying and teasing. He outlines the Teasing-Bullying Continuum and describes what bullying and teasing 'are not' (Roberts 2006:15-18). This explanation is helpful as it explains a difference between teasing and bullying, but in the heat of the moment it is not unusual for an incident to be presented by an aggrieved student or parent as a straight forward case of bullying. The discrepancy is an important one in practice, however it is recognised that even low level incidents of poor peer relations warrant an appropriate intervention and hence their inclusion in the title and the question.

The problem with the term "bullying" has important implications for this study. The understanding of "bullying" varies amongst parents and students. There is often a problem in practice using the word "bullying" to describe the behaviour to the students involved, and their parents. It has been my experience that the use of the word "bullying" is often emotionally charged, especially for parents (*Reflective journal – December 2005, March 2006, December 2006, April 2007*). The word is highly emotional and troublesome, even problematic, when used from the outset in an approach to resolve problems between boys. Most reported incidents are clearly incidents of poor peer relations but they may or may

not constitute bullying by any definition. The use of "bullying" can become an issue of greater significance than the behaviour under investigation and be a distraction, especially if it is used prematurely before the exact nature of the relationship is understood. For these reasons it has been the common practice for "peer relations" to be used at the outset of an investigation of a reported situation between two students at the case school in preference to "bullying" although the literature more liberally uses "bullying" to describe poor relations between peers.

Forms of bullying

There are a number of types of bullying behaviour generally experienced by students. Figure 3.1 *Classification of forms of bullying* is a modification of a summary from Rigby (2007:20).

	Forms of bullying	Forms of bullying
	---	---
	Direct	**Indirect**
Physical	• Hitting • Spitting • Kicking • Pushing • Throwing objects	• Getting another person to assault someone
Non-physical Verbal	• Verbal insults • Name calling • Menacing phone calls • Threats of violence	• Persuade another person to insult someone • Spreading malicious rumours
Non-verbal	• Threatening and obscene gestures	• Removing and hiding belongings • Deliberate exclusion from a group or activity
Cyber	• On line (chat room) insults • Text messages • Menacing emails • Menacing messages	• Hate websites • Hurtful videos and pictures posted

Figure 3.1   Classification of forms of bullying

This summary distinguishes between two main classifications of bullying as physical and non-physical forms. There are sub-categories of direct and indirect forms for both physical and non-physical bullying. The severity of an incident involving any of the forms listed in this figure is not considered. Thus, Figure 3.1 does not give an indication as to the relative severity of each form. So called "Cyber bullying", incorporating the use of

electronic means of communication, is not included in Rigby's original summary figure but it has been added here because it is a relatively new form of bullying with approximately 14 per cent of Australian children targeted (Campbell 2005 cited in Rigby 2007:112). It has become important to include the issue of cyber bullying in any discussion of bullying or poor peer relations because of the emerging prevalence of electronic means of communication between young people.

Each form of bullying is reported with different frequencies. Rigby's research (1998; 2007) provides data for the frequency of bullying incidents in Australian schools. These results were obtained from over 6000 boys and 2500 girls in sixteen schools in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland in 1993 and 1994. Table 3.1 *Forms of bullying experienced 'often' during the school year* summarizes the most comprehensive data available for Australia.

Table 3.1   Forms of bullying experienced 'often' during the school year

Reported experience	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Called hurtful names	12.6	11.5
Teased in an unpleasant way	11.3	10.6
Left out of things on purpose	5.8	9.5
Hit or kicked	5.9	2.9
Threatened with harm	5.4	3.2

Source - Rigby 2007:34

The similarity of results between boys and girls in forms of bullying experienced often is interesting. The two most frequently reported experiences for both boy and girls are being called hurtful names and teased in an unpleasant way. For bullying of greater severity but lower frequency it is more common for girls to undertake a form of psychosocial bullying through deliberate exclusion while boys are more likely to adopt physical forms of bullying as more severe incidents of lower frequency (Rigby 2007).

Although there are some gender differences in the incidence of bullying and poor peer relations, Rigby (2007:41) found no consistent differences in the frequency and nature of bullying incidents between Australian coeducational and single sex schools. Similarly, the size of the school does not appear to have any bearing on the incidence of bullying. The differences in the incidence of bullying between schools has been attributed to community factors such as socio-economic status of families, but there is no direct evidence in Australia to support this suggestion (Rigby 2007).

The severity and nature of the incidents of all forms of bullying is another consideration. Roberts (2006:15-16) explains the existence of 'the teasing-bullying continuum'. This continuum begins with 'mild behaviours' including dirty looks, gossiping, minor pushing and shoving, name calling, threats to reveal secrets, public embarrassment and taunting that are more typical of teasing than bullying *per se*. At the next level are 'moderate behaviours' including more and ongoing intentional physical contact, public exclusion, stealing of possessions, threats of harm, intimidation, demeaning acts and extortion. 'Severe behaviours' are likely to be violations of criminal law or regular and routine intimidating behaviours, ongoing extortion, inflicting of physical harm and destruction of property. This continuum does not prescribe the course of action to take but it guides consideration of what bullying is and what bullying is not which may be useful when determining the approach taken in a school in response to an incident.

For Rigby (2003b:35) all negative social interaction between children may be considered as a form of bullying making a continuum with bullying at one end and teasing at the other unnecessary. Rigby considers bullying to vary in severity as determined by the nature of the action, the frequency of the bullying acts and the duration of the bullying. On some occasions the vulnerability of the individual targeted may need to be taken into account to ascertain the level of severity. For example, negative behaviour of a given form may be of greater consequence (or nastier) if directed at a more vulnerable person than similar behaviour toward an individual of less vulnerability.

In general, the severity of an incident can be classified as low severity, an intermediate level of bullying or severe bullying with incidents of low severity as the most common with decreasing occurrence of incidents of a higher severity. Rigby (2003b:36) provides guidance as to how incidents classified at these different levels can be approached in schools. Rigby recognises the inherent injustice in treating a single thoughtless incident of teasing in the same way as continual physical assault necessitating considered approaches to each incident, although he would regard both as bullying.

It is necessary to adopt a definition of bullying in the current research because it establishes the framework for understanding incidents and dealing with problems between peers in the Middle School. It is, however, not always easy in practice to judge from a first report the level of severity of an incident, hence the need for data gathering. A detailed understanding of the incident and the people involved needs to be developed through gathering accurate information. This is important because the circumstances of

the incident will influence the most appropriate course of action to take. The severity can be ascertained through information collected in an investigation and a better understanding of the relationship between the incident participants.

It seems that "bullying" is the more extreme behaviour of poor "peer relations". Using the term "peer relations" allows an intervention without having to wait for a situation where it is clear that bullying, by all definitions, is occurring. In other words, the nature of poor peer relations is shown through bullying behaviours with varying degrees of severity. Alternately, positive peer relations are shown through pro-social and supportive behaviours between students. As already discussed, the use of the term "poor peer relations" in practice can take the heat out of the situation, especially where parents are involved.

While Rigby's research findings (1998; 2007) have been, and continue to be, very informative their age means they are nearing the end of their usefulness and relevance for current research. This is a minor problem for this study but in the absence of anything more recent it is necessary to draw on this extensive data previously collected by Rigby. In the decade since data were collected there have been many significant developments in school policies associated with bullying, programmes to assist effective school intervention and wider social developments changing the way bullying is viewed including perceptions of what constitutes bullying (McGrath and Noble 2006).

An understanding of the current theories to explain incidents of bullying is useful in this study. These theories are an important component of the situation of this research as they have contributed over the years to the development of my understanding of the nature of bullying at school. These theories can also assist understanding of incidents of poor peer relations which may, in some cases, develop into bullying.

Theories to explain bullying

Seven theories developed over the last twenty years to explain the prevalence of bullying in schools and society are discussed in this section. The theories are: ecological theory; dominance theory; developmental theory; personality theory; genetic predisposition; social prejudice; and, group dynamics. All of these theories are included because they provide useful explanations for the occurrence of bullying incidents in different contexts. Also, despite the independent presentation of each theory, in practice they are not mutually exclusive. These theories combine to provide an overall understanding of bullying and how it varies in different circumstances.

- Ecological theory of bullying

The social environment in which children develop relationships with their peers has been identified as influential on the way peers relate to each other (Walker 1988; Salmivalli 1999; Slade 2002; Swain 2005; Roberts 2006; Rigby 2007). A school is such a social environment and an important microsystem in a child's world. Ecological theory can incorporate the other theories of bullying.

On a daily basis young people are influenced by, and simultaneously interact personally with, multiple social environments. These social environments include the microsystems of family, school, their peer group(s) and wider social contexts. Rigby (2007:70) presents an explanatory diagram presented here as Figure 3.2 *Model of factors influencing children's peer relations* (p43) that can be interpreted in the ecological framework. In this model the nature of child's peer relations are explained to be shaped by the interplay of three non-school influences and three school related influences. The three non-school influences are the socio-cultural environment experienced by a child, their basic personal characteristics and their family experiences. Ecological theory explains how the family microsystem , with particular reference to the style of parenting, interact with the microsystem of personal characteristics as well as the mesosystems and macrosystem of the wider socio-cultural environment are all influences originating beyond school. The three school influences are the school ethos, educational climate, school policies and practices combining to compose the microsystem of the school.

Basic
Personal Characteristics

Socio-cultural
Environment

Family
Experiences

**Mode of relating to
others in school**

School Ethos

Educational
Climate

School Policy on
Bullying/Harassment
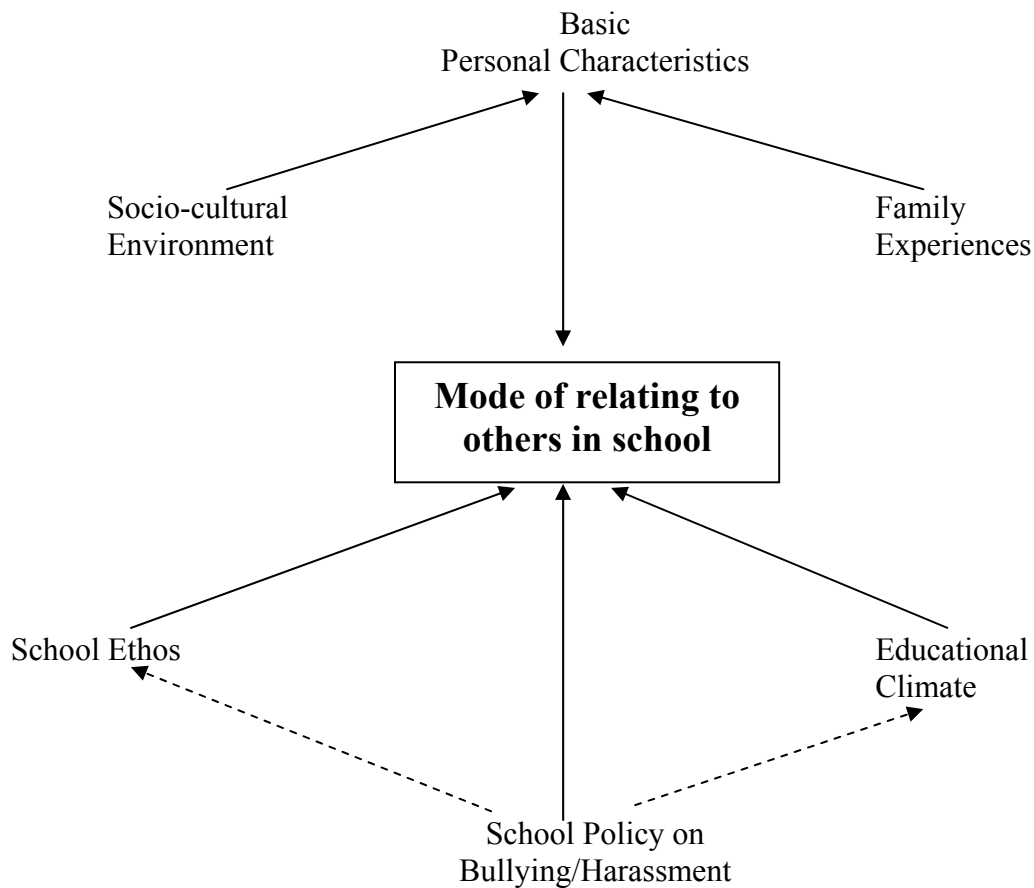
(Source - Rigby, 2007:70)

Figure 3.2   Model of factors influencing children's peer relations

Rigby's model complements ecological theory and provides a framework for a discussion of the role of schools in influencing the mode of relating between students in school. Schools can do little about external influences but they can determine the nature of the experiences at school through policies and practices relating to bullying. The first component of School Ethos can be supported by the educational climate valuing learning to create a positive school environment and the site of positive experiences for students. 'School ethos' is described as 'the attitudes, expectations and norms relating to student behaviour at a school […] can vary widely between one school environment and another and may change radically over time' (Rigby 2007:80). The school ethos related to bullying are the attitudes held by the school community, in general, through staff, students and parents to pastoral care and support for its members, particularly regarding typical patterns in the way peers relate to each other at the school. The dynamic nature of school ethos is important, suggesting it can change in response to other influences. A school ethos indifferent to bullying behaviour can be changed to a more proactive attitude. The

cautionary note is that the opposite is also possible. School ethos is an important component of a child's experience of school as a microsystem.

The second component of the child's experience of school as a microsystem is 'educational climate'. The 'educational climate' of a school is described as 'the nature and quality of the school environment as it pertains to the what and how of formal instruction and learning' (Rigby 2007:81). The notion of an 'educational climate' centres on attitudes towards academic achievement but extends beyond curriculum to include prevailing pedagogy practised by teachers and co-curricular opportunities at school. These wider experiences influencing attitudes to learning include extension opportunities related to the curriculum, sport, performing arts programmes or other learning activities contributing to a positive educational climate. It is reasonable to expect that a 'learning community' (Hargreaves 2003) would be a positive educational environment because of the value placed on learning and the development of knowledge. A school with many and varied learning opportunities willingly engaged in by students would conform to a positive educational climate and a microsystem that has positive influences on a child's development.

School policies are the third element internal to schools in Rigby's model. A policy to combat bullying and harassment is central to school responses to incidents of bullying (Sharp 2004). The process from the conceptualisation through to the agreed procedures and the necessary in-school consultative process is also an important component of the school ethos (Thompson 2004:27) resulting in an increased awareness of the issue and a discourse on how to address the problem. However, the existence of the policy itself is not sufficient to ensure an impact on the frequency of bullying. The need for schools to support the policies with a number of ongoing practices is emphasized by Thompson (2004). He identifies nine practices to complement an anti-bullying policy. These practices include the following:

- A named anti-bullying project team with a specific leader or co-ordinator;
- Ongoing and regular quantitative assessment of incidence of bullying;
- Regular review of anti-bullying policy;
- Review reported to senior staff;
- Transparency in the process and dissemination of review results to the whole school;
- Timetabled space for new pupils to learn about the school's anti-bullying policy;
- Timetabled space for older cohorts to have 'refresher' teaching and apply the principles of a low-bullying school to their new position in the school;
- An induction programme for new staff; and,

- Access to training programmes for new staff wishing to increase their skills in pastoral care and anti-bullying pastoral procedures (Adapted from Thompson 2004:31).

Thompson (2004:31) states that the ongoing effectiveness of anti-bullying procedures is dependent on the organizational priorities of the school managers. It is ineffective to have an anti-bullying policy in place unsupported by practices that are reviewed for their effectiveness and relevance. The third element of school policy, how it is devised, implemented, monitored and reviewed is an important internal element influencing the experience of students at the school.

Roland and Galloway (2004) attribute differing degrees of the incidence of bullying in schools to the social environment of the school as created by a caring, pro-social and well supervised environment. They assert:

> There will be less scope for bullying in the schools with better quality of care, supervision and social relationships. Moreover, the modelling of pro-social behaviour by the majority of pupils would be likely to reduce the social skills deficit of the potential bullies (Roland and Galloway 2004:36) .

This quotation is describing the intersection of the three school-based sources of influence on peer relations for young people in Rigby's model (2007:70) and a part of the school environment at the *mesosystem* level of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 2005). The level of care and nature of modelling of pro-social behaviour by teachers and students will largely be determined by the school ethos and school policies relating to pupil management, especially in regard to the use of power and authority in the Rigby model. The nature of supervision of students will be influenced by the policies as well as school ethos. The level of supervision will be determined by the resources committed to student supervision while the manner it is undertaken by those with the responsibility for supervising students will be influenced by school ethos.

Rigby's (2007:70) explanatory model *Factors influencing children's peer relations* (Figure 3.2) fits comfortably within an ecological framework. The ecological theory outlined in Chapter 1 (pp14-16) can be applied to bullying in the following way:

> A bullying interaction occurs not only because of individual characteristics of the child who is bullying, but also because of the actions of peers, actions of teachers and other adult caretakers at school, physical characteristics of the school grounds, family factors, cultural characteristics, and even community factors (Swearer and Doll 2001:10).

Bullying occurs because of the interplay of many factors. These factors can be school-based, external to school or attributed in part to the personal characteristics of the children involved. All these factors are part of the children's world, contributing to their social and physical environment and their experiences. The physical aspects of space combine with the social interactions of people within a space, as well as the organizational nature of a place in the form of its structures and policies. These influences combine to determine the character of 'place' in a school, the quality of the learning environment and the nature of the experience of 'place' for the students attending the school. This perspective relates to bullying and other events of poor peer relations as it does with many other events at school in a student's experience.

There are six assertions made by Swearer and Doll (2001) underlying the dynamics of school bullying and victimization in a bioecological theory. These assertions are:

- Bullying must be defined as a constellation of behavioural interactions;
- Internalizing disorders contribute to bullying and victimization but are too-often overlooked;
- Families must be active partners in anti-bullying interventions;
- Anti-bullying interventions must interrupt and neutralize the peer support for bullying behaviour;
- Bullying interventions must alter the responses toward bullying of teachers and other supervising adults; and
- Anti-bullying interventions require changes within the upper reaches of administration to have a lasting impact (Swearer and Doll 2001:11-18).

The school environment and the experiences of students as a result of the way they interact within the environment are the key to the adaptation of ecological theory to bullying at the case school. Ecological theory acknowledges the importance of the intervention as a part of the social environment because the approach taken to incidents of poor peer relations or bullying is an influence upon school ethos and school policies. The influence of the approach taken by a school is overlooked by other explanations. The nature of the approach taken in an intervention in a bullying incident is one component of a ecological model interacting with other sources of influence for students to determine the nature of their experience at school. This influence positions the school with a capacity and responsibility to undertake practices that contribute positively to the experiences of students in an effort to produce a quality learning environment. Ecological theory is the more powerful theory because the theories that follow have a place within the ecological framework, explaining bullying rather than the general incidence of poor peer relations and bullying.

- Dominance Theory

Dominance theory is focussed on power between peers. Pellegrini (2004) recognises a struggle for social dominance amongst middle school boys, in their adolescent years. Boys who are unfamiliar with each other seek to achieve higher status through exercising their dominance over their peers. This theory is supported by Australian data for students at the same stage of schooling (Rigby 2007:116). Dominance theory accommodates the preferred definition of bullying in this research, accounting for bullying as the means to create a power imbalance in social relations amongst peers. However, this theory is very limited as it suggests the only reason for bullying behaviour is the pursuit of power. In that dominance is a psychological construct this theory emphasizes the psychosocial dimension of bullying at the expense of the social. Other theories suggest the circumstances are more complex than this.

- Developmental Theory

The advancement of years and normal maturation is another theory to explain the occurrence of bullying. The changes in bully/victim problems as a function of age are well documented (Olweus 2004; Rigby 2007). However, developmental theory can be seen to suggest that bullying behaviour is a function of age and that children grow out of it. This theory has been explained as:

> Awareness that over time children normally acquire greater emotional stability and think more realistically about how they can cope with those who might threaten them, might lead us to predict that children would report being bullied less and less as they got older (Rigby 2007:117).

Roberts (2006:21) acknowledges the relevance of age, asserting 'puberty is the most likely time for an individual to be bullied'. For most adolescents puberty occurs around the time of entry to secondary school and could account for the reversal in the downward trend in the frequency of bullying incidents through the second half of primary school to the increased frequency of bullying upon entry to secondary schools in Australia (Rigby 2007:116). Again, other theories suggest influences on adolescent behaviour are more complex than simply physical and emotional attributes of the age.

This is a simplistic theory accounting for incidents of bullying because of changes associated with both physical and emotional maturity resulting in the development of improved social skills with age. A further limitation of developmental theory is that it does not account for bullying behaviour in adults.

- Personality Theory

There are many personality theories. In general, 'they posit that individuals differ from each other in having certain characteristics evident in the different ways they tend to think, feel and behave' (Rigby 2007:118). This can extend to typologies and sub-types of bullies and victims for person-centred conceptualisations of bullying.

Typical bullies can be described as having 'an aggressive reaction pattern combined (in the case of boys) with physical strength' (Olweus 1993:35). Generally, bullies have been attributed the following personal and personality traits of:

- Aggression (to adults and peers);
- A positive attitude towards violence;
- A positive view of themselves;
- Impulsiveness;
- Larger size and strength than peers;
- A need for power over and dominance of others;
- A lack of empathy; and,
- Low in cooperation (Adapted from Olweus 1993; Coloroso 2004; Rigby 2007).

Bullies work in groups or individually and may have some or all of these traits. Some students who participate in bullying behaviour would not normally take the initiative individually and demonstrate few, if any, of these traits (Olweus 1993). Other incidents of bullying might be undertaken by a student individually or in a group as a part of more general pattern of rule breaking and antisocial conduct with peers as the focus of their attention. It is clear the effort to attribute personality traits to bullies requires consideration of a range of attributes bullies may pertain.

By contrast, typical victims have been attributed the personal and personality traits of:

- More anxious and insecure than normal;
- Cautious, sensitive and quiet;
- Low self esteem;
- Introverted;
- Poor social skills;
- Viewed by peers as "different";
- Physically less strong than their peers; and,
- Few friends (Adapted from Olweus 1993; Roberts 2006; Rigby 2007).

Two sub-types of victims are identified. They are the passive or submissive victims and provocative victims (Olweus 1993:32-33). The passive victims tend to lack physical strength and presence, signalling to others that they are insecure, worthless and they will not effectively retaliate if they are attacked. Provocative victims are typified by anxious and aggressive reaction patterns. It is argued these students provoke their peers by irritating them and causing tension around them resulting in negative reactions from peers.

The presence of provocative victims in a group changes the dynamics of the bully/victim problems from the problems in a group with passive victims (Olweus 1993) because the provocative victims pursue the negative attention of their peers and cultivate patterns of poor peer relations. Identifying the cause of the problem, and the perpetrator is less straight forward when provocative victims are involved.

The person-centred view of bullying in personality theory creates a false dichotomy between bullies and victims, not accounting for children who move between the two groups as bullies and victims (Swearer and Doll 2001) or clearly identifying the role of non-participants who witness the incidents as bystanders. However, the generalisations of personality theory are helpful in identifying students who are more at risk but the understanding of the people involved in these incidents should not be limited to the terms of "bully" and "victim" (Rigby 2007). There are many individuals who are exceptions to these generalisations and all bullies are not the same, nor are all victims the same. The generalisations are a useful aid but this theory does not adequately explain many aspects for the occurrence of incidents of bullying between peers.

- Genetic Predisposition

Genetic psychologists are recognised to have accumulated good evidence to suggest that people are predisposed from birth to think, feel and behave in certain ways with implications for whether a person is more or less likely to bully others or be bullied (Rigby 2007:119). Some people might be more inclined to bullying behaviour because they have a diagnosed conduct disorder (Roberts 2006:56) while others might be predisposed to victimization because of another kind of genetic make-up.

Recently, there has been a great deal of attention given to Asperger's syndrome and bullying (Heinrichs 2003; Dubbin 2007). Young people with this neuro-biological disorder are in a position of considerable disadvantage with their peers because they have difficulty understanding social cues. This is one disorder that places people in a position that they are genetically predisposed to victimization because they often display the characteristics of typical victims outlined on the previous page.

It is clear that genetic disposition is not the singular reason for a person being a victim or bully but they can be influential for some incidents. There are many other factors contributing to the occurrence of such events and how they are handled. The nature of the social environment is known to influence how a child is affected if they to have a genetic

predisposition to being a bully or a victim with lower incidence of bullying for children with Asperger's syndrome in positive social school environments (Rigby 2007). This theory does not take this important environmental consideration into account.

- Social Prejudice

The sixth theory that has developed to explain bullying is the theory of social prejudice. Subordinated social groups on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, social class, sexual orientation or gender are at a disadvantage because of their less powerful social standing. Social prejudice is not uniform, even though there may be a dominant culture establishing a social hierarchy at a wider scale. It has been recognised that some attempts to identify racial or ethnic prejudice as a determining factor for bullying have been unsuccessful (Rigby 2007:121). This is not denying many incidents of victimization, harassment and bullying on the basis of membership of a subordinated social group. On its own the theory of social prejudice is inadequate to explain many bullying incidents where it is clear that social subordination is not an issue, as is the case amongst people of the same social standing where there are power relations in the environment that are considered by ecological theory.

- Group Dynamics

The final theory to explain the occurrence of bullying is group dynamics. Groups of young people with similar interests are important to individuals and their identity. These groups may be formed on the basis of sporting interests, ethnicity or other interests.

Gang or mobbing behaviours are examples of groups of individuals banded together for a common purpose which is not the common good (Roberts 2006:57). This sort of behaviour is more antisocial than standard groups of peers with natural cliques and groups.

The group dynamic can be used to explain incidents of 'billy-cart bullying' (Griffiths 2003) where groups of people banded together to tease an individual over time. The magnitude of the event is greater because of the number of people involved, despite the low level of each individual's contribution. Membership to the group may demand compliance by individuals within the group, resulting in some individuals participating in incidents they would not have initiated on their own. These participants may be labelled as 'passive bullies' (Olweus 1993:34) rather than bystanders.

Once again, this is a useful approach to explain some incidents of bullying but it is inadequate on its own as a means of explaining bullying in a range of contexts. Ecological theory can explain the importance of group dynamics by recognizing the peer group as another microsystem contributing to the mesosystem, influencing a child's experiences and shaping their behaviour to some degree.

The seven theories to explain bullying discussed in this section assist in understanding the reasons for poor peer relations and bullying incidents in schools but ecological theory is the most powerful theory because it best incorporates many explanations for bullying behaviour in different contexts. Not only is the nature of bullying influenced by the environment within which the students relate but also the impact of bullying and approaches in dealing with it, are mitigated by the environment.

The impact of bullying

The impact of bullying varies, depending on the circumstances and the people involved. There are three general categories of students who may be affected by bullying. These are the bullies, the victims and bystanders who witness the bullying but do not become directly involved.

The long and short term impacts of bullying on victims are well documented (Olweus 1993; Rigby and Slee 1993). The negative impact on the self-esteem of victims is clear, especially in the short term (Rigby and Slee 1993). Other impacts on victims include social isolation, school absenteeism, negative educational consequences through the combined effect missed school and poor self-esteem, poor health and even suicide (Rigby 2007).

The influence of a negative school experience can have a long term impact on a person subjected to bullying behaviour at school. There is the suggestion that children bullied at school grow up to have children who are more likely than their peers to be the targets of bullying (Farrington 1993 citied in Rigby 2007:59). Also, the tendency for victims of school bullying to experience depression in their adult life and have difficulties in forming close social relationships has been documented (Gilmartin 1987; Dietz 1994 both cited in Rigby 2007). Both a generational continuity of victims and long term social problems for victims of bullying are undesirable in any social context.

Negative effects are not reported to be experienced by all victims of school bullying. In fact, 36 per cent of boys bullied at least once a week reported that they 'weren't really bothered' by bullying (Rigby 1998; 2007). This response has been attributed to either the personal characteristic of resilience by a victim or the social need to maintain status and not admit to weakness but maintain toughness (Rigby 2007:49). It is unclear as to whether the nature of the school environment influenced this result. Regardless of the reason for the statistic, it shows there are no certain outcomes from bullying for victims, even anticipating the negative impacts. However, it should be remembered that 64 per cent of victims reported negative affects. If to be the target of bullying behaviour is to increase the chances of the development of these negative consequences, then there is an imperative to improve school practices to create a positive social environment where fewer students experience the long or short term negative consequences of bullying. There are no positive consequences for victims shown by the research in this reconnaisance.

Bullying behaviour also has long term negative effects on those initiating the behaviour. The negative long term impact on bullies include increased risks of violence and abuse in later life resulting in criminal records (Olweus 1993; Roberts 2006; Sourander, Jensen et al. 2006) as well as a greater degree of depression than is found in those who did not bully others at school (Dietz 1994, cited in Rigby 2007:65).

Bullying can have an impact on bystanders who are not the target of bullying but are witnesses to it. These children are 'vicarious victims' (Roberts 2006:33) who may feel unsafe as a result of bullying incidents or less sensitive to their occurrence. Either outcome is not desirable. The impact on these children may be to decrease the quality of their experience of the social environment at school and school in general.

Recognition of the culture of peer relations as an aspect of bullying has developed in the last decade from the more individual pupil focus evident in the early to mid 1990s when many school policies and practices were first developing (Sharp 2004:24). This represents a significant shift from the dyadic focus on incidents of bullying and the characteristics of bullies and victims to a whole group process in which many children play a role, as participants or bystanders. Attention to the psychology of bystanders is recognised as important because they become passive observers of the victimization of others and peer reactions may sustain bullying (Jeffrey, Miller et al. 2001). Finnish research found that few bystanders seek to assist the victim but when a peer interrupts and discourages the bullying it stops in 50 per cent of the cases (Salmivalli 1999). Recent Australian research

has suggested that friends are an important influence in the decision to act positively as a bystander (Rigby and Johnson 2006). The impact on bystanders of bullying is unclear, however, peers are a crucial component of the mesosystem that is the social environment experienced by a child at school. Peers and the school ethos need to be utilized in a positive way towards reducing incidents of bullying in schools.

The possibility of significant social and health consequences for children involved in bullying at school have contributed to the imperative of the current research to develop strategies in the case school to reduce the number of incidents and their impact on those involved.

Teacher approaches to dealing with bullying

Defining bullying is the first part of the problem. A bigger issue for practitioners, such as teachers, is identifying the degree of the problem and responding appropriately. Teacher attitudes to bullying are an important part of the school experience for students and the perception of which incidents of poor peer relations require intervention.

> It is hard to learn that though we have a word for a thing, that word can mean different things to different people. It is not easy to differentiate between degrees of bullying severity, but we are being forced to recognise that unless we try to do so, we may well end up either ignoring the problem of adopting the kind of unreflecting and obsessive narrow mindedness that is conveyed by the so-called 'zero tolerance' policy, and this can lead in practice to the most absurd miscarriages of justice (Rigby 2007:111).

The circumstances of every incident of bullying follow different patterns. Ongoing low level bullying warrants a different response to one-off incidents of the same severity. The vulnerability of the victim as well as other factors need to be taken into account when a judgement is made by a teacher about the culpability of an offence (Rigby 2007). It is clear that the decision to intervene and the course of action taken by a teacher rely heavily on their judgement, guided by school policies and precedent. The school ethos will also be influential because it will be a feature of the environment of the school.

Teachers may be reluctant to intervene in cases of bullying for three reasons (Rigby 2007:270-271). First, it is difficult to assess the seriousness of incidents because of their complexity making it unclear as to whether the incident was provoked, who was actually involved and whether there has been an over-reaction. Second, teachers may be uncertain as to whether their intervention will make matters worse or better. Third, a teacher may lack the necessary training and skill to intervene appropriately. There are a number of

standard approaches available for teachers as individuals to employ or for schools to stipulate.

Standard approaches for teachers to use as interventions to bullying can be classified into two general categories. These categories are punitive/consequence approaches and non-punitive/humanistic approaches. Both approaches 'aim to achieve behavioural change for the individual while keeping schools and communities safe' (Morrison 2002:2). Each approach is outlined in detail here because it has informed the practice in the course of the current research. The practical aspects of each approach are considered in an effort to improve the effectiveness of staff interventions in incidents of poor peer relations, in the context of the case school.

- Punitive/consequence approaches

This is a conventional approach to bullying following a traditional school document titled something like *Student Code of Conduct* or *Behaviour Management Policy*. In these documents consequences are typically predetermined and stated with student accountability for their behaviour as the key value (Morrison 2002). With this approach students are punished for their behaviour employing strategies such as time-out rooms, isolation from peers, withdrawal of privileges, detention and exclusion (suspension or expulsion). This approach is reliant on the established authority of the school and the legitimized power of teachers to deprive students of some level of liberty or for students to experience some inconvenience as a result of their antisocial behaviour at school.

A punitive approach continues to be evident in many schools (Rigby and Thomas 2003) with statements of the course of action and consequences frequently outlined in the school's anti-bullying policy. These policies are described as adopting 'a highly legalistic approach' (Rigby and Thomas 2003:18) with negative consequences for behaviour at different levels of severity. The consequences stated are considered to be the disincentive for a student to engage in antisocial behaviour and to be a bully. The severity of the consequence is intended to be consistent with the severity of the bullying behaviour shown. In this approach, bullying is likely to be treated the same as any other action at school involving the breaking of rules.

There are two main arguments for a punitive approach to bullying. First, it ensures that action is seen to be taken by the school. Second, it is easy to make clear statements about what will happen if students bully so there is an awareness of the consequences (McGrath

and Stanley 2006:190). In most schools there is a great deal of pressure on teachers to be seen to take decisive action against the perpetrators of antisocial behaviour. This pressure typically comes from parents of victims and colleagues who are looking for a consequence for poor behaviour and a belief that bullies should be held accountable for their behaviour (McGrath and Stanley 2006). Each school will vary in their environment resulting in varying degrees of pressure on teachers as determined by the interplay of school ethos with the wider socio-cultural environment and family experiences. School policy on bullying should guide the course of action taken by teachers in the school. Also, a school policy will interplay with the school ethos and educational climate to shape the mesosystem that is the whole school environment relating to peer relations in general and in dealing with bullying specifically.

Punitive approaches ensure teachers retain power through the process of gathering information in an investigative stage and then have their power confirmed by the decision about the punishment as well as its implementation. A school with an ethos where power is held in the hands of the institution and not devolved to the community is likely to adhere to the punitive approach.

Despite the continued widespread use of a punitive approach in schools there are a number of arguments against using it to deal with bullying incidents. These are:

- Not all incidents of bullying can be covered by rules;
- Teachers must investigate thoroughly to ensure accurate information is obtained before imposing punishments;
- Students punished for bullying are likely to seek retribution on their victim. The tendency of many bullies to be impulsive and lacking in empathy suggests they are more likely to do this;
- Punishment can make the recipient more angry and less thoughtful;
- Isolating bullies through exclusion does not develop a sense of community and repair relationships; and
- Punishment can demonise a student, damaging their reputation and facilitate a downward behavioural spiral (Adapted from McGrath and Stanley 2006:190-191).

Research into the effectiveness of punitive approaches provides mixed findings. Olweus (1993) reports a 50 per cent reduction in victimization in Norwegian schools but research following similar procedures in the USA, Canada, England, Flanders and Germany reveal more modest results (McGrath and Stanley 2006).

There appears to be a relationship between school environment and the effectiveness of a punitive approach. Rather than these results condemning the use of punishment, they reaffirm the statement made earlier in this section that practitioners need to know the

circumstances of the incident. If the socio-cultural environment, as explained in the model by Rigby (2007:70), influences the nature of peer relations then it is plausible the socio-cultural environment will also influence the effectiveness of interventions in a school. Ecological theory can be used to explain the relative effectiveness of interventions in different contexts rather than assuming that some approaches are more effective than others in all school contexts.

As a result of its strong traditional position and some favourable research in support of its use the punitive approach to bullying has not been abandoned in Australian schools. There has been, however, a tendency for it to be blended with non-punitive/humanistic approaches in many schools (Rigby and Thomas 2003). This was, and remains, the situation in the case school.

- Humanistic approaches

Humanistic approaches usually employ a non-punitive philosophy for treating incidents of bullying as an alternative to the punitive philosophy underpinning the punitive approach. Humanistic approaches involve the students who have been involved in the bullying by utilizing problem solving and counselling to bring about a change in behaviour. Accordingly, humanistic approaches value compassion while a punitive approach values accountability (Morrison 2002:2).

There are three main humanistic approaches presently available to schools outlined in the following section. These approaches are restorative practices, no blame and shared concern.

Restorative Justice Approaches

The basic rationale for this approach is that 'bullying is wrong and wrongs should be acknowledged and righted by those who commit the wrongs' (Rigby 2007:272). In effect, restorative justice is 'a form of conflict resolution and seeks to make it clear to the offender that the behaviour is not condoned, at the same time as being supportive and respectful of the individual' (Morrison 2002:1). The ideas of support and respect for everyone involved are central to this problem-solving approach.

Restorative justice approaches require a significant shift from the philosophy of the conventional punitive approaches to bullying because restorative approaches not only hold wrongdoers accountable for their actions but provide support for the community affected

by these actions in a manner not addressed by punitive approaches (Armstrong and Thorsborne 2006). Restorative justice approaches can involve community conferences, small group or individual conferences and classroom conferences when addressing incidents of bullying. The common element of a conference, regardless of the number of people involved, is that the bully meets with the victim and is confronted with evidence of the harm they have inflicted. There is scope to include peers or parents who have become involved and are looking to support the victim over the harm caused by the bullying behaviour (Armstrong and Thorsborne 2006).

This approach is a relatively recent development. It is suggested this approach should operate within a whole school model of restorative justice for relationships such as the model proposed by Morrison (2005, cited in Armstrong and Thorsborne 2006:178). The process towards a whole-school model requires the simultaneous development of appropriate curriculum as well as a relational approach to problem-solving so staff and students have the necessary skills to manage relationships in healthy ways (Armstrong and Thorsborne 2006:178).

The skill and character of the facilitator is recognised to be of significance in determining the effectiveness of restorative justice approaches. The facilitator of conferences needs to be a highly skilled practitioner and 'it is likely to be more effective in cases in which the teacher has persuasive moral authority and is seen as being more concerned about promoting positive relations between students than in imposing sanctions or punishment' (Rigby 2007:273).

Another important aspect of this approach is the willingness of the victim to confront the bully in a conference on their own or with other people. In some cases this would be a very challenging scenario and require careful planning and implementation to ensure no greater harm was done.

No blame/Group Support Approach

Originally called "No Blame" this approach is now also known as the "Group Support Approach". This approach emphasizes group awareness of the situation and collective responsibility for the outcome of changes in behaviour. The approach outlined by Maines and Robinson (1992) has been summarized (McGrath and Stanley 2006:193; Rigby 2007:218-219) and can be presented in five steps.

The essence of this approach is that no one is blamed for the behaviour and it places the responsibility for the change on the bullies, with the expectation of cooperation. The impact of the behaviour on the victim is presented as the problem and relies heavily on the development of empathy by members of the support group.

An obvious problem with this approach is the reliance on perpetrators changing their behaviour following the group meeting in addition to developing empathy for the victim that was lacking before the intervention. This approach relies heavily on the nature of relationships within the peer microsystem and assumes it will be sufficiently positive to influence the experiences. Evaluation of this approach is lacking but it is considered likely this approach will work with some students (Rigby 2007).

Shared Concern Method

A succinct summary of this approach is:

> The shared concern method aims at breaking up the bully group through individual talks with its members in a genuine two-way communication by eliciting a shared concern about bullying and preparing a shared conflict solution in group talks with the victim (Pikas 2002:310).

This approach was developed by Anatol Pikas (1989) as the Common Concern Method and renamed with some slight alterations to the Shared Concern Method (Pikas 2002), as it is now known. Although the general approach is unchanged, it is described by different researchers with differing numbers of steps. Five phases to the approach, with some sub-steps, are proposed by the architect of the Shared Concern Method, Anatol Pikas (2002:313-318). These five phases are: Interview the suspected bullies; interview the victim; a preparatory group meeting with former bullies exclusively; a summit meeting; and, follow-up.

The general process outlined by Pikas (2002) has been an important influence on practice in the case school. The Shared Concern Method has been blended with aspects of no-blame and restorative justice as well as a punitive approach to develop a standard format for investigation and intervention into incidents of poor peer relations in the context of the case school.

I had four concerns with using Shared Concern as the sole approach to incidents of poor peer relations and bullying at the case school. First, there is no account for how the interviewer has become aware of the circumstances requiring the implementation of this approach. The notification of incidents of bullying in the current research were obtained

from many sources, such as the victim, bystanders, parents, teachers or other adults who witness evidence of poor peer relations. The reliable information for Shared Concern seems to be gathered from the bullies in the first interview. It is this information that is then taken to the victim in the second phase of the process. The variability of sources of information and levels of reliability make it difficult to proceed straight to the suspected bully following this procedure to the letter.

Second, in arguing against collecting initial information from the victim Pikas (2002:314) asserts that 'this makes it inevitable that when an individual talks with the bullies to begin, you take the role of the persecutor against the alleged bullies'. However, this is dependent upon the skill and personality of the interviewer. The interviewer needs to maintain objectivity in this meeting and give due consideration to the bully's version of events in the manner desired by Pikas (2002). The assertion of inevitability of persecution discounts the capacity for the interviewer to detach from the situation and to deal objectively with the issues associated with identifying the problem.

Third, the approach assumes a consistently favourable response from the suspected bully(s). They may have been mistakenly included in the behaviour or even falsely accused. Alternatively, they may have no desire to help the victim and may be oppositional in the meeting. In my experience it is a rare for the interviewer to encounter oppositional conduct but they may demonstrate a low level of cooperation. A reconsideration of the approach and how the Shared Concern method can be further implemented is required when participants are uncooperative.

My final concern is that this process is very time consuming. The frequency and nature of incidents within a Middle School of over 600 boys makes it impractical to engage a five stage process for every reported incident of poor peer relations.

As a consequence of these concerns about adhering to the pure form of Shared Concern and as a product of the research undertaken in this project, a new approach to investigating and intervening in incidents of poor peer relations and bullying is needed.

General evaluation of effectiveness of non-punitive approaches

A summary of arguments for and against the use of non-punitive approaches are provided by McGrath and Stanley (2006). The arguments supporting non-punitive approaches are summarized as follows:

- Teacher focus on the overall negative situation means it is not necessary to build up a strong case before intervening;
- Some schools recognise that students may not be aware of the seriousness of their bullying actions making it sensible to take a problem-solving and awareness approach;
- In the absence of blame, students are more likely to privately accept personal responsibility for their actions and enhance their feelings of empathy;
- Non-punitive approaches are less likely to place the victim at risk of retaliation than are punitive approaches;
- No negative sanctions are used, so no student can be unfairly punished; and,
- Non-punitive approaches utilize the power of the peer group to support a classmate (Adapted from McGrath and Stanley 2006:192-194).

This summary provides an important justification to teachers for using non-punitive approaches when intervening in incidents of poor peer relations and bullying. However, this is a more sophisticated approach than a traditional approach of punitive actions against the perpetrator(s). The internal elements of school policy, educational climate and school ethos recognised in Figure 3.2 (p43) will determine the nature of interventions.

The non-coercive use of power is a feature of humanistic approaches. Power is largely released by humanistic approaches from the school, and its teachers, to the students involved in the bullying. This movement of power is facilitated by appropriate and supportive school policies. The school ethos and policies work together in the school environment to enable the success of this approach at school.

A summary of objections to the use of non-punitive approaches includes the following:

- Bullies are shown to be less empathic than other children so they are less likely to be motivated to change their behaviour by humanistic approaches;
- Given the level of suffering of their child the parents of victims can react negatively to approaches of non-blaming where no-one has to accept responsibility;
- Some parents and teachers question the basic assumption of the approach believing there should be consequences for bullying others;
- Teachers may not always believe that students would respond constructively to the plight of the victim, even though they said they would;
- Non-punitive approaches take a lot of time to complete;
- The success of humanistic approaches relies on the skills of the facilitator, particularly the quality of genuineness; and,

- The anxious nature of many victims means it may be very threatening for them to participate in a group meeting that includes their attackers, but they have problems saying "no" to a request to do so. (Adapted from McGrath and Stanley 2006:194)

In balance, the arguments for non-punitive methods of dealing with incidents of bullying are described as strong but the research evidence is currently moderately persuasive (McGrath and Stanley 2006:199). As a result, school anti-bullying policies indicate the widespread practice of blending non-punitive approaches with a punitive approach in schools (Rigby and Thomas 2003). Neither a punitive or non-punitive approach is generically preferable because each situation is different. The school ethos and policies, as well as the manner in which the approaches are applied, will be important in determining their success in any given school environment.

All of these approaches depend on reliable information and a judgement by a teacher before an informed decision can be made. Smith (2001, cited in McGrath and Stanley 2006:199) argues for the careful matching of approach taken to the situation of the incident and local school conditions. The reality of practice is such that different approaches will be effective in different circumstances based on the unique blend of severity of the incident, the number of the students involved, the personalities of the students involved, the previous relationship between the participants, the precise nature of the incident, standard school practices and the general school environment.

The challenge is for teachers to competently and effectively implement an approach that facilitates a positive outcome and contributes to a positive social environment at school. Rather then adhering to a particular model of intervention teachers require an excellent understanding of the incident and great skill with a variety of approaches when dealing with incidents of poor peer relations and bullying.

School programs and strategies to reduce bullying
The realistic view that 'bullying can be reduced but not eliminated' (Galloway 2004b:41) is justified on the basis of the difficulty of the position of the borderline between bullying and normal social interaction by children involving humour that becomes wounding, or rough and tumble that becomes aggression. The reality presents a problem for teachers and parents who want all children to be safe at school for all of the time. In practice, this seems unlikely. Never-the-less a 'road map' for achieving a reduction in the incidence of bullying in schools is provided by Rigby (2003a). Schools are recommended to adopt a whole school approach to intervening, develop an appropriate anti-bullying policy and to

ensure that effective strategies are in place applying both 'preventative and interventive measures' (Rigby 2003a:2). A whole-school approach addresses components of the school environment in an effort to reduce the incidence of bullying behaviour amongst its students.

The general school environment is identified as influential with the capacity of the school to deal effectively with bullying (Galloway and Roland 2004; Rigby 2006, 2007). Rigby (2006) lists eleven factors evident in the literature resulting in relatively good reductions in bullying in schools. These factors are that:

1. Teachers see the issue as important;
2. Teachers regard the level of bullying as unacceptably high;
3. Teachers are personally and emotionally concerned when they encounter cases of bullying;
4. There is a comprehensive staff involvement in the actual development of the school anti-bullying policy;
5. Teachers fully comprehend what is expected of them in the program;
6. Principals play a positive part in promoting anti-bullying procedures;
7. The school's anti-bullying policy is communicated to members of the school community, including parents;
8. Regular classroom meetings are held with children about bullying;
9. Curriculum-based work on bullying is being done with children;
10. Appropriate action is being consistently taken by schools when cases of bullying are identified; and,
11. There is good teacher management of classes leading to a cooperative classroom environment that promotes positive relations between students (Rigby 2006:11).

These eleven factors combine in a school to produce a social environment influencing the development of young people that is conducive to reducing the incidence of bullying. Unsurprisingly, teachers feature very strongly in these eleven factors contributing to the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to bullying.

Programs in schools to develop teachers' knowledge and skills related to bullying are, therefore, very important in the facilitation of advances in schools building an environment that is conducive to positive relations and a reduction of bullying behaviour. These programs need a holistic approach to build on the existing skill and knowledge of staff, help teachers to work more effectively and efficiently, lead to demonstrable change in the classroom and improve the quality of teaching and social relationships rather than simply complying with an external directive (Galloway and Roland 2004:43-44).

Whole-school programs have provided guidance for schools as they look to improve their school environment and address bullying at school. It is recognised these policies and

practices need to be reviewed every three or four years (Thompson 2004). There have been a number of whole-school programs with this objective that have been comprehensively evaluated by McGrath (2006). A summary of the general patterns they contain are relevant. The main focus of the whole-school programs has been to develop a school community, positive peer relations and teaching children social and emotional competencies by addressing student achievement, student safety and wellbeing at school (McGrath 2006:49) which is aligned with ecological theory. Although each program varies in its exact form they are recognised to be able to 'provide schools with powerful strategies for preventing and reducing bullying and antisocial behaviour and enhancing student wellbeing, positive and pro-social behaviour, and learning outcomes' (McGrath 2006:62). It is clear that conscientiously implemented school programs can have a significant impact on the social environment at school and consequently upon learning opportunities for the students of the school.

On the other hand, Pikas (2002:323-324) presents a number of concerns about existing strategies to reduce bullying behaviour and he is sceptical of whole school programs on two counts. First, he questions the validity of questionnaires used to collect data to evaluate the improvement in schools following the implementation of these programs. He asserts that sensitive pupils exaggerate their feelings of poor treatment by peers and victims deny they are being bullied. An additional criticism of questionnaires is they do not indicate which elements of the program brought about the improvement. This is a criticism of the method of data collection for evaluation of the program rather than the programs themselves. Pikas seems to consider evaluation as an important component of the programs. Second, Pikas asserts an attitude program to prevent bullying will only reach those who are predisposed to conforming to the norms of the adults. Students who are not aligned do not connect with the attitude program, believe it does not include them and they carry on regardless. This second objection to whole school programs denies the influence school environment can have in creating patterns of behaviour in relationships at school and focuses on recalcitrant behaviour. At the case school, questionnaires have provided useful snapshots of the situation over time.

Additionally, Pikas (2002) is also critical of the use of peer mediation and intervention, suggesting the authority required for people to conduct this role is open to abuse and peers are ineffective. His final concern is to point out the dilemma of playground supervision by adults: 'If [bullying] is mild and discrete, the guards cannot see behind their backs. If

it is effective, the situation in the school becomes like the atmosphere of a prison' (Pikas 2002:324).

These criticisms may be valid to Pikas because of his experiences but they may not be upheld in different social contexts where bullying occurs. Therefore, these criticisms do not invalidate the practices about which he is critical. Pikas' criticisms are useful warnings to be considered in the planning of interventions to reduce bullying that best suit the needs of the environment within which they will operate. In other contexts these practices need to be carefully considered before their incorporation into a whole-school plan.

In the absence of a formalized whole-school approach there are many problems when there is inconsistency of philosophy in the approach to incidents of bullying by teachers. This inconsistency can be, in part, a function of the difficulty for teachers in identifying appropriate intervention to incidents of bullying:

> Because they [types of bullying] differ with respect to motivation, intention, group involvement, degree of provocation, persistence over time and culpability, it is often sensible to treat particular cases in different ways (Rigby 2007:271).

The precise circumstances of bullying behaviours are recognised to be unique in some way. Therefore, it is not possible to apply a common approach as best practice to address the problem. Rather than a view of 'best practice' where there is the suggestion that only one approach is suitable, it is a matter of approaching a solution through 'informed practice' (McGrath and Noble 2006: xvi). The belief that no single view is sufficiently comprehensive in providing a definitive answer to what is "best practice" is shared by Rigby (2003a) who recognises the need for strengths and limitations of each approach to bullying and the appropriateness of its application to the particular incident to be considered before an approach is applied. This places a great importance on the practitioner to have awareness of the interventions available to them as well as a good understanding of the incident in question. A whole-school approach to bullying will avoid the problem of inconsistency as the key aspects of the general course of action to be taken will be predetermined. This should help to avoid some inconsistency in approaches to individual incidents.

Conclusion

The literature on bullying provides an important context to the understanding of the situation in the case school and ways to improve the quality of the learning environment for the students in the school and dealing with incidents of poor peer relations. The Rigby model (2007:70) shown in Figure 3.2 (p43) is an important component of this understanding as it can be interpreted to position bullying within the ecological framework. The model recognises the importance of environment in the way peers relate to each other as well as the effectiveness of interventions addressing incidents of bullying behaviour in that environment.

The type of intervention not described in the literature is a strategic teacher intervention that serves to interrupt the pattern of behaviour, collect information about the situation while supporting the victim and notifying the perpetrators of the inappropriate nature of their actions. Such an intervention would contribute to a positive environment modelling pro-social behaviour, appropriate use of power by teachers and positive relationships. This intervention potentially blends a punitive approach with non-punitive approaches while investigating an incident as a part of a whole-school approach to address bullying. This approach is also mindful of the four key aspects of social support (DETNSW 2003:16) presented in Chapter 1 of this portfolio. Moreover, the procedure also provides a way for the utilization of other situation relevant humanistic approaches to be comprehensively undertaken once a full understanding of the situation has been obtained. An intervention of this type is necessary in the case school.

The case school context

The general nature of the organisation and characteristics of the case school are detailed in Chapter 1 (pp6-14) and it is within this general school environment that this research project is located. In employing an ecological perspective to investigate peer relations, it is critical to establish the social environment experienced by the boys at the mesosystem level at school created by the combination of school practices, the approach by staff to poor peer relations, student perceptions of the issue and reports of incidents as well as parent perceptions. These factors combine to create the situation revealed in the reconnaissance of this action research project. The following part of this section on the reconnaissance discusses the unique aspects of the school context including: existing practices at the school; staff (specifically Heads of House); students (Year 8 2005); and, parents of boys in this cohort.

Existing practices at the school

In 2006 the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was commissioned by the case school's School Council to conduct the School Life Questionnaire (SLQ). The SLQ evaluates student satisfaction with their school recognizing this as a component of the school environment. The questionnaire was administered to all students at the school from Year 3 to Year 12 with the results analysed independently by ACER. The results of the SLQ were extremely positive across all parts of the school, regarding students' sense of connection to their school, their pride in the school and their perceptions of the quality of relationships with teachers and with one another. The SLQ independently confirmed the anecdotal view of many staff and parents that the case school is a place the students engage with and enjoy (Kefford and Field 2007). The strength of the pastoral care system in terms of both its structure and implementation by staff are key components in creating a positive environment described by the ACER research.

A whole-school approach addressing bullying has been in place in the case school since 1998 and has evolved over time, informed by developments in both research and literature. Over the last decade there have been developed a number of practices as part of a whole-school approach to reduce incidents of poor peer relations and bullying that have built on the school philosophy statement. These practices have included a one-off external assessment of the situation in the case school, the introduction of an anti-bullying policy, a "No Put Downs" policy and an internal biennial survey of the student population to monitor the situation. The combination of these actions has created a school environment in which there is a high profile of this issue. A brief outline of these previous actions is necessary because they are important aspects of the context of the case school for the current research.

In 1997 Ken Rigby was commissioned to undertake an external assessment of the nature of bullying at the case school using his Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaire (PRAQ) involving parents, staff and students of the school. It is beyond the scope of this project to provide a detailed review of the findings of the 1997 PRAQs. However, the findings suggested the situation at the case school was typical of many schools at the time in terms of frequency of low level incidents of bullying (teasing, name calling and exclusion) but lower than average frequency of higher severity incidents such as physical violence.

The PRAQ results informed the development of the first anti-bullying policy in the same year at the school titled *Policy on Bullying and Harassment*. This policy was in place from 1998 to 2004. The policy document and its contents were reviewed by a group of school teaching staff in 2004 to produce a revised statement titled *Dealing with Bullying and Harassment*. The approach of schools to anti-bullying policies developed in the 1990s emphasized the individual pupil as a victim or as a bully, whereas the current thinking has shifted to highlight the need to consider peer culture as a key aspect of intervention (Sharp 2004). The 2004 policy was more in accord with the latter ideas.

Additionally, the *ad hoc* practices (interventions) at the case school have changed since the creation of this first anti-bullying policy. These changes reflect wider development and information on dealing with the issues associated with bullying as well as professional learning by staff, especially Heads of House, as well as changes in response to experience and professional judgement by staff dealing with problems. Although formal in its presentation, the wording of the revised document was modified to have a clearer voice directed at students as well as an improved format to make it easier to follow. The document identifies common forms of bullying and harassment, recommends courses of action by bystanders or victims, outlines what is not bullying and makes reference to the use of punitive and non-punitive approaches. Specific aspects of these approaches are not stated in the policy. The scheduled review of the *Dealing with Bullying and Harassment* policy document for 2008 is consistent with recommended practice to review bullying policies at the conclusion of a four year period (Thompson 2004).

In 2001 a whole-school policy of *No Put Downs* was implemented. The statement "At this school no-one puts anyone down. We support and encourage each other so that we can all be ourselves" appears on an A4 sized laminated poster on display in every classroom and most offices around the school. This signage is supported by regular reminders by the Head of School in assemblies, Heads of House in House meetings and class teachers in general. *No Put Downs* is an omnipresent expression and has become a strong feature of the discourse at the school. This particular approach is scheduled to be reconsidered as a part of the review of the whole-school approach in 2008. There is a risk of the posters becoming a part of the landscape that they are not noticed or attended to by the students. This approach needs to be kept fresh.

Since 2003 there have been three biennial school-based bullying surveys of the entire school student population undertaken in Week 5 of Term 3. This survey is modelled on

the practice of another school in the same urban area and is a part of the whole-school approach to bullying. The survey will be undertaken in 2009 as a matter of procedure and as an ongoing commitment to monitoring bullying amongst students at the case school.

The biennial situation survey is overseen by the three school counsellors. Every student is invited participate by responding to three simple questions in the confidential written survey. The students are asked: "Have you been bullied?"; "Have you bullied others?"; and, "Name students you think are bullies or victims of bullying". The three school counsellors tally the information and determine patterns within it. All students named in the survey as bullies or victims more than three times are interviewed by the counsellors. The counsellors take a non-punitive approach with the students identified as bullies. They are informed that their behaviour has been identified by their peers as anti-social and they need to change their ways. Strategies to develop better ways of treating peers are given at that time to the bully by the counsellors. Students identified as victims are also interviewed by the counsellors with the view to gathering more information of their experiences and supporting them. The course of action from this point is determined by the counselling team and may follow an approach informed by one of or a combination of the humanistic approaches outlined earlier in this chapter (pp56-59). The general results of the student bullying survey excluding the names of the students involved are shared with the respective Head of School. A punitive approach may be used if bullies fail to respond to the initial humanistic interventions.

The three biennial student surveys have been well supported by the students, staff and parents. The first survey in 2003 presented some challenges to senior teaching staff as it required a shift in control of the information on bullying from teachers to counsellors and decisions on the approach to problems of peer relations and bullying reported in the survey from the Heads of School to the counsellors. A collaborative working relationship between the counsellors and senior teaching staff was in place as a result of the Heads of School and the counselling team previously working together on pastoral issues across the school.

Heads of House

Although a whole-school approach has been in place at the case school for nearly ten years, linking policies and day-to-day practices by staff in general, the approach taken by staff to intervene and investigate incidents of poor peer relations and bullying has been less clear. The nature of their key pastoral role requires that most of the investigations are undertaken by Heads of House, with more serious cases passed onto the Head of Middle

School. Staff interviews showed that the approaches varied from person to person based on their experience but complied with the expectations of the school vision and philosophy (Figure 1.2, p9). Depending on their skills and preferences some Heads of House were more likely to use punitive sanctions than others, while others have been more likely to use humanistic approaches or a blend of the two approaches.

To facilitate a better understanding of existing practice I produced a *Bully Action Flow Chart* (Appendix 11) in 2004 to describe the prevailing practice of Heads of House for intervening and investigating bullying. This document was presented to and discussed at a regular fortnightly meeting of the Heads of House and again at the staff interviews conducted in March 2006 as a part of this study. The approaches reported by Heads of House were not vastly different from each other. However, it was evident that little consideration had been given to the *Bully Action Flow Chart*, even though it had been available to the Heads of House for over twelve months. Each of the interviewees felt that this flow chart summarised a general common sense approach to investigating bullying typically practiced at the school (*Staff Interviews – March 2006*). All the Heads of House described their approach to intervening and investigating bullying as intuitive. They also recognised that their approach was informed by previous practice and a desire to have a positive social environment at school (*Staff Interviews – March 2006*). This finding was part of an ongoing situational analysis and suggested a need for a Head of House forum to refine approaches to investigating and intervening in incidents of bullying. The aim of this forum would be to provide approaches that might move Heads of House beyond the prevailing *ad hoc* and intuitive practice of the time.

Students

Student data contributing to the situational analysis (as baseline data for the action research project) was collected in the early stages of the action research cycle. Data was obtained from the parent and student PRAQs in November 2005 and two student focus groups in Term 4 2005. Tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 (pp70-75) summarize data gathered by the student PRAQ in November 2005 (n=182). These data provide an overview of the students' experiences and their perceptions of the situation of bullying in their cohort at school. The national data are shown as "National Norms" in the tables of this chapter and are a useful comparison to assist in determining the situation in the case school while considering the relevant cautions (Rigby 1998) presented earlier in this chapter (p34). These data are included again later in this chapter, in the analysis of the findings of this

study, for comparison between the initial situation and the situation at the end of the action research cycle.

Table 3.2 *Student happiness Y7 2005 summary* summarizes the responses of the boys to the seven point scale of happiness on the questionnaire. A rating of '1' was very happy and '7' was most unhappy with '4' indicating a neutral response. For simplicity, categories '1', '2' and '3' have been collapsed to form the group 'Better than neutral', category '4' has remained unchanged while categories '5', '6' and '7' have been collapsed to form the group 'Worse than neutral'.

Table 3.2   Student happiness Y7 2005 summary (%)

General Happiness	National Norms	Case Y7 2005
• Better than neutral	71.1	83.3
• Neutral	20.9	11.4
• Worse than neutral	8.0	5.3

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 Student PRAQ Q3

Table 3.2 shows a positive situation in the case school relative to the national norms. 83.3 per cent of the case respondents rated their level of happiness as 'Better than neutral'. This was higher than the national figures of 71.1 per cent. This high level of happiness is supported by a corresponding low level of unhappiness where 5.3 per cent of respondents in the participating cohort reported a level of happiness less than neutral, compared to 8 per cent nationally. These results suggest that positive emotions are likely to be displayed by the students at the case school. Consequently, students of this school may be more likely to demonstrate higher levels of resilience and to approach problems rather than avoid them (Huppert 2005).

Table 3.3 *Bullying experienced at school Y7 2005* (p71) combines a summary of responses to questions related to the frequency of bullying, the locations in which bullying was experienced and the nature of the bullying.

Table 3.3   Bullying experienced at school Y7 2005 (%)

Aspect investigated	National Norms	Case Y7 2005
Frequency of bullying		
• At least weekly	23	23
• Less than weekly	27.3	39
• Never	49.8	38
Location of bullying		
• Classroom	65	67
• Playground	90	89
• To school	29	40
• From school	49	50
Teased unpleasantly		
• Never	54.1	47
• Sometimes	35.3	39
• Often	10.6	14
Called hurtful names		
• Never	55.0	43
• Sometimes	33.6	45
• Often	11.3	12
Exclusion		
• Never	74.6	64
• Sometimes	19.5	28
• Often	5.9	8
Threats of harm		
• Never	73.3	79
• Sometimes	20.3	16
• Often	6.4	5
Hit or kicked		
• Never	70.9	64
• Sometimes	22.2	30
• Often	6.9	6

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 Student PRAQ Qs 5, 6 & 7

The figures for the frequency of bullying suggest that 62 per cent of boys in this cohort experienced bullying in some form over the last 12 months compared to approximately 50 per cent for the national data. Nearly a quarter of the respondents reported experiencing bullying on a weekly basis at the case school. This is a higher frequency than the national norms for boys 13 to 18 years of age.

The location of bullying behaviour (Table 3.3) indicates the incidence of bullying in the playground and in classrooms for this cohort at the case school is almost exactly the same as the national figures. Supervision of students appears to be the common component to these figures. The experiences of bullying while travelling "To school" are higher than the norms. The location of the school appeared to have implications for the patterns of

bullying recorded amongst these data. Most students at the case school travel to school by train unsupervised in large groups of students from a number of local schools. The routine of the day tends to have most students arriving at school at about the same time in the morning and limited to a couple of trains. The afternoon routine of sport training, music commitments and other activities means the students are more varied in their departure time from school resulting in less concentration of students for train travel home. This may account for the students experiencing fewer incidents on the way home from school.

In the focus groups the participants recognised that less bullying took place in the classroom in the presence of teachers. However, the boys spoke about the greater likelihood of incidents if the class was left unattended for a period of time (*Focus Group 4.1 – 25 November 2005*). These data combine to suggest that the absence of clear supervision for a period of time is more likely to result in bullying of some kind than if effective supervision is provided.

The most common forms of bullying by the boys of this cohort shown in Table 3.3 (p71) experienced at the end of Year 7 were teasing, name calling and exclusion. The less likely forms of bullying are threats of harm or actual acts of harm such as to be hit or kicked.

These PRAQ data are supported by data gathered in the student focus groups. *Focus Group 3.1* and *Focus Group 4.1* discussed the nature of teasing and name calling within the peer group. Six means of verbal teasing were described by the boys in these two conversations. These included:

- derivations of a boy's name to an unpleasant form;
- general "Put Downs", for example telling another boy that he is no good at something;
- making harsh comments about a boy's family members, especially a boy's mother or sister;
- unkind comments about personal characteristics, either physical or behavioural attributes; and,
- spreading rumours and repeating unfavourable stories about a peer.

The approach to staff intervention was discussed directly in *Focus Group 3.1.* The following extract from *Focus Group 3.1* (the names of participants have been changed) warns the witness about forming premature opinions and illustrates the difficulties faced by staff when intervening in incidents they investigate:

Liam	*It could be friends or it could be someone you don't like. You could walk up to them and not let them see you and just "bush" [push in the bushes] them.*
PDM	*What if a teacher comes to the two boys and says: "This is clearly an example of bullying" as he is pushing him. What do you think I should say? You be me…*
Liam	*Ask him why he would do that? And, what's going on between them?*
PDM	*So that would be the best question to ask first?*
Tim	*I reckon: "Why did you do it? Was it a joke? Or, are you not friends?"*
PDM	*So there are two questions: Why did you do it? And, are you friends?*
Tim	*Yes*
Len	*"Are you friends or not?"*
PDM	*You need to establish the nature of the relationship?*
Warren	*The person who is getting bullied might say: "Yes, we are friends" when they are really not. Lying so to protect themselves. So you could check with their friends later to see whether they are [friends] or not.*

This extract demonstrates the need for an incident to be investigated carefully and there needs to be open-mindedness by the staff member in the initial intervention, even if they witnessed the incident. The relationships between boys are complex and changeable. Any investigation and intervention needs to acknowledge this from the outset. This conversation is an example of the types of conversations that assisted in the evolution of the approach to intervening and investigating reported and observed incidents between students.

Focus group contributions also provided the best insight into the boys' perceptions of the reasons for bullying behaviour amongst peers at this school. Getting a response from the target of the teasing was the most common explanation for the bullying (*Focus Group 3.1 – 18 November 2005, Focus Group 4.1 - 25 November 2005*). It became clear through the conversations that the boys most likely to be teased were the ones who responded to the taunts of their peers. There seemed to be perverse pleasure for some boys watching a reaction such as a peer losing their temper. This outcome was common regardless of the method of teasing. For example, when explaining why boys might steal a pencil case Len said *"just to annoy them, just to get them angry"* (*Focus Group 3.1 – 18 November 2005*). In Focus Group 4.1 Nigel explained the main reason for teasing a peer is seeking a retaliatory response: *"They want retaliation out of you"* (*Focus Group 4.1 – 25 November 2005*). In the same conversation Matthew described the continuation of teasing, even though the perpetrators know the target is unhappy about it. Matthew said: *"they can see he is reacting and if you don't react people will do it less, because they find it more fun*

when they react" (Matthew, *Focus Group 4.1 – 25 November 2005*). These focus group

comments were typical of the explanations provided by the boys as to the occurrence of

low level incidents of verbal or physical nature. The boys most vulnerable to this are the

passive victims who lack social skills to deal with the attention of their peers or

provocative victims who seek attention from their peers (Olweus 1993).

Data in Table 3.4 presents student PRAQ figures showing details of the person to whom

boys disclose they have been bullied and the boys' perceptions of the consequence of

reporting bullying.

Table 3.4   Victim disclosure and consequences of disclosure 2005 (%)

Aspect investigated	National Norms	Case Y7 2005
Victim disclosure to		
• Mother	40.6	57
• Father	31.5	29
• Teacher/counsellor	30.6	19
• Friend(s)	56.7	63
Consequences of disclosure		
• Things worsened	NA	3.9
• No change	NA	35.9
• Things improved	NA	34.9
• Never disclosed	NA	23.4

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 Student PRAQ Qs 12 &13

The level of disclosure to mothers was nearly 50 per cent higher than the national norm

data while disclosure to teachers and counsellors at school was much lower than the

national norm. Friends also feature very strongly as the person(s) to whom boys in the

study disclose bullying experiences which is consistent with the national data. The

negative impact of disclosing for the boys in this study was limited with very few boys

reporting a deterioration in the situation as a consequence. Approximately one quarter of

the boys never disclosed being bullied while approximately one third of the boys

experienced an improvement and another third experienced no change in the situation.

Disclosure to teachers and school counsellors was much lower than I would have expected.

These data show there is a need to address the issue of disclosure and effective

intervention within the case study school.

Data for the boys' perceptions of teacher interest in stopping bullying is shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Perceived teacher interest Y7 2005 (%)

Teacher interest in stopping bullying	National Norms	Case Y7 2005
• Not really	15.1	16
• Only sometimes	23.5	19
• Usually	33.8	37
• Always	27.6	28

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 Student PRAQ Q14

The figures for the study were similar to the national data. This outcome was surprising because of the perceptions I held of the nature of the community and the ongoing efforts to address bullying at the case school. Student perceptions of teacher interest were clearly something to be addressed in the actions of this study.

Parents

The parent PRAQ responses (n = 132) also provided important information to assist in the reconnaissance for this action research project. The areas of particular interest were parent:

- perceptions of the peer relations in their son's cohort;
- perceptions of their son's relation with peers;
- views on the notification of parents if their son has been involved as a bully; and,
- expectations of action to be taken by the school.

The **parent perceptions of their son's relations** with peers as well as their perceptions of the general tone of relationships between boys generally (Table 3.6) and at the school (Table 3.7) are shown. There are no "Norms" available for the parent PRAQ responses.

Table 3.6 Parent views of relations between peers 2005 (%)

Parent Views	Y7 2005
Generally friendly	78
Sometimes friendly, sometimes not	22
Generally unfriendly	0

Source: 2005 Parent PRAQ Q2

Approximately four out of five participating parents perceive the relations between peers in their son's cohort to be "Generally friendly", one in five described them as "Sometimes friendly, sometimes not" and none felt the tone of the cohort to be "Generally unfriendly". This showed parents perceived positive relations between the boys in the cohort at the end of Year 7. Table 3.7 shows data for the more specific question asked of parents, about their child's relations with school peers.

Table 3.7   Parent description of their child's relations with school peers 2005 (%)

Parent Description	Y7 2005
Generally very happy	55
Usually happy	36
Happy about half the time	7
Usually unhappy	1
Generally unhappy	1

Source: 2005 Parent PRAQ Q4

Despite the parent perception of a generally positive tone amongst the cohort, it is apparent that two per cent of the boys in this cohort are perceived by their parents to be less than happy in their relations with peers for most of the time at school. The overwhelming perception is that nearly all the boys, nearly all of the time, have positive relationships with their peers. Combining the two sets of parental data shown in Table 3.6 (p75) and 3.7 (above) with the data in Table 3.2 *Student happiness summary Y7 2005* (p70) shows that although a positive peer environment prevails at the case school with boys who are generally very happy, and perceived by their parents as such, not all boys to have positive peer relations. This is an important consideration given the ecological perspective of this study where the experiences in the school microsystem are presented as important in shaping the student's development. Without addressing each case specifically it is impossible to know if the boys who are struggling with peer relations and their happiness at the case school would be happier anywhere else. These students must be taken into consideration in any action taken in this study because it is logical they are the students most likely to experience peer relations issues and encounter bullying.

Two other key points were revealed by the parent 2005 PRAQ responses. First, 98 per cent of the parents (n=132) supported the statement "Parents of the bully should be told". Presumably this response shows that parents want to know if their son is the perpetrator in bullying behaviour. Second, 84 per cent of parent respondents in 2005 endorsed the statement "The bully should be punished". The issues of parental understanding of what

constitutes bullying as well as appropriate forms of punishment are important. These data show the need for effective communication to parents of both the current school policy and practice in interventions.

Reconnaissance summary

The reconnaissance for this project enabled a deep understanding of the situation in regard to bullying between the students in the Year 8 2006 cohort at the case school. In the case school there was in place an active discourse on peer relations and bullying. The case school environment was conducive to improving an understanding of present practice and enhancing approaches to intervening and investigating incidents of poor peer relations and bullying. This responsive environment was apparent through the existence of a whole-school approach to bullying and a number of strategies in place, modified over time. Practices have been informed by published research as well as shared practices from other schools to address student bullying and peer relations issues.

The Heads of House and I are the key people responsible for intervening in and investigating bullying. Recently the school counsellors have had an increased role as a result of the biennial student survey. The practices employed to undertake these investigations and interventions were developed on an *ad hoc* basis by the Heads of House, although they tend to be aligned with the School vision and philosophy which seeks to establish and maintain a positive environment for the students with pastoral care as a priority.

The boys in this cohort reported high levels of happiness at school. This was supported by their parents' perceptions of positive peer relations amongst the cohort. However, bullying was reported to occur at least weekly by twenty three per cent of the students. The nature of bullying in this cohort was typically low level teasing, name calling and exclusion with infrequent use of threats of harm or actual incidents of physical harm. The bullying is also most likely to occur in unsupervised locations such as the playground, while travelling between home and school or when a teacher is absent from a classroom. Boys who experienced bullying were most likely to disclose this to their mothers or their friends, if they were going to disclose it at all. Teachers and school counsellors were the least likely people for the boys to disclose their experiences of bullying.

The large body of literature on bullying has significantly influenced my understanding of explanatory models of bullying. Ecological theory is the most powerful framework for

interpreting bullying in this study because it recognises the relationship between individuals, their biological make up, social and physical environment at school as well as influencing the experiences of students at school and their social development. International research into dealing with bullying in schools has produced many strategies to address the problem of bullying but guidance for teachers as how to best engage an initial investigation and intervention in bullying or situations of poor peer relations are lacking in the literature. This understanding determined the research question and the subsequent actions taken in the course of the project.

Research Question

It is clear from the reconnaissance that an improvement to the intervention and investigation of bullying and incidents of poor peer relations by teachers can be instigated at the case school. As a result the following research question was devised:

> ***How can teachers' investigations and interventions in bullying, and in incidents of poor peer relations, amongst Year 8 students be improved?***

It was my intention for this research project to address this question through actions. The practices associated with this process should contribute to a positive social environment at school between teachers and students as well as amongst students. The following section of this chapter discusses the actions taken in the course of this action research project.

Section 3 - Action taken in the action research process

The actions undertaken in this study have been with the aim of improving practice while building a positive school environment for students of the Middle School. The participative nature of this action research project is illustrated by the number of people and the means by which they have contributed to the research through involvement in these actions. The actions have included parents, teachers and students in a variety of fora providing feedback and assisting in the evolution of the practice by teachers in dealing with bullying. A detailed chronological outline of the actions taken in the course of this action research project is provided as Appendix 2 *Peer Relations Research: action summary* of this portfolio. Appendix 2 shows Term 4 2005 as the time of the initial reconnaissance with further data collection and the evolution of practice maintained through all five school terms of the action research cycle.

There are three levels of action in schools to prevent, intervene and respond to incidents of poor peer relations and bullying (Olweus 1993). These levels assist in the analysis of the

actions taken in this study. Figure 3.3 *Action summary: levels of action taken* categorizes the actions taken in this research project according to the three levels of action: the individual level; the House level; and, the school level. Each of these actions was discussed in student focus groups in the course of the action research cycle. The focus group conversations explored the boys' perceptions combined with ongoing reflection in the journal, professional dialogue with parents, students and colleagues to consider the effectiveness of the actions while guiding improvements in practice.

Individual Level	House/Class Level	School Level
• Approach to interventions and investigations	• Head of House training (internal conference and ongoing discussion) • Ongoing dialogue with Head of Middle School • Head of House Guide to Peer Relations Intervention	• Policy document • No Put Downs policy • Biennial student survey • Staff awareness • Parent awareness • Student awareness • Student perceptions (focus groups) • Middle School Orientation

Figure 3.3   Action summary: levels of action taken

Individual level action

The purpose of action at the individual level is to change the behaviour or situation of individual students (Olweus 1993:69) or members of staff. The emphasis on the practice by staff in their approach to intervening and investigating bullying and incidents of poor peer relations amongst students is guided by the research question for this study. Swearer and Doll (2001:14-15) describe staff practice that will contribute to the creation and maintenance of a positive social environment at school:

> Peer interventions must serve to interrupt the cycle of support and encouragement that peers provide for bullying by removing the peer audience, altering the peer contingencies for bullying that they observe, or challenging the peer attitudes that value power and dominance at the expense of tolerance and caring.

The six assertions (Swearer and Doll 2001:11-18) listed earlier in the chapter (p46) are directly addressed in this study through the development of a strategy for teacher intervention to reported incidents of poor peer relations. An approach to investigating and intervening in reported cases of bullying and poor peer relations has emerged and been refined in the course of this action research project. This approach is known as CEEVEC. The title of this approach is an acronym with each letter representing the first letter of the

phase in the approach, prompting the questions asked by the member of staff undertaking that phase of the intervention.

The CEEVEC approach is a humanistic approach involving a six phase conversation led by a member of staff with students individually. This approach is a strategic intervention for gathering information while interrupting the cycle of negative behaviour amongst students. This strategy has been refined *in situ,* informed heavily by the combination of literature, focus groups with boys, conversations with parents, professional reflection by staff, questionnaire data and personal reflection in my role as Head of Middle School. The evolution of CEEVEC can be traced in my reflective journal from the time it first appeared in a draft form *(Reflective Journal – 16 November 2005)*. The more refined six phases of the conversation with standard questions and statements are outlined in Figure 3.4 *The CEEVEC Approach*.

	Phase	Guiding Questions/Statements
C	**C**oncern stated	• Opening statement by staff: "I am concerned about how X is being treated by his peers."
E	**E**xtent determined (Investigation)	• What can you tell me about how X is being treated by his peers? • How do you treat X? • How does X treat his peers?
E	**E**mpathy sought	• How would you feel if you were X? • What would you want to happen? • Have you ever experienced this sort of treatment? • What did you do about it?
V	**V**alues reinforced	• Is this the way you expect people to be treated at this school? • Statement: "This is not the way we treat people here."
E	**E**xpectations stated	• What is a way forward with this situation? • Can you help to improve things? • Statement: "It is my expectation you will do as you have said."
C	**C**onsequences outlined	• Statement: "This conversation will be documented for reference at a later date, if necessary." • Further interventions or courses of action outlined at this time (i.e. what will happen next: punitive, Shared concern or a restorative approach?)

Figure 3.4   The CEEVEC approach

In the CEEVEC approach the investigation is the second of the six points of the conversation. In this approach, the investigation is interconnected with the other discussion points and is integrated with a general intervention strategy. The subsequent discussion points address changing the situation. These include seeking empathy, restating

school values followed by a clarifying statement of what is expected to happen in the future to address the particular situation or additional situations. Rather than simply collecting information alone CEEVEC has the desirable effect identified by Mellor (2003:71) of both interrupting the pattern of bullying behaviour and involving the victim, bully and bystanders in the discussion about the possible remedies. The conversation involves a teacher and a single student at a time. The information revealed in a conversation following this structure may vary, depending on the role of the interviewee in the incident and their level of cooperation. The one-to-one and non-accusatory nature of CEEVEC was supported by the boys in a focus group conversation and believed to be the best way to find out the reality of the situation (*Focus Group 4.4 – 11 August 2006).*

CEEVEC follows a procedure that is true to the character of a humanistic approach because it provides a way to understand and appreciate the needs of everyone involved in the problem and seeks to build relationships through a respectful two-way conversation led by a member of staff (Rigby 2007:213). The four key aspects of building social support (DETNSW 2003:16) discussed earlier in this portfolio (p17) as important in creating a quality learning environment are also evident in this approach. By conforming to these characteristics this approach seeks to provide a positive experience for all those involved and in doing so, contributes to a positive learning environment in the school. The skill of the interviewer and quality of relationships within the school community are also important because a poorly executed interview can create additional problems.

The CEEVEC approach is flexible in its application as a starting point in addressing peer relations. This approach is useful for situations at all levels of severity and provides teachers with access to accurate and detailed knowledge of the peer group, while developing effective and trusted lines of communication between students and staff which are desirable (Besag 2003:118; Rigby 2007:25). CEEVEC seeks to make a valid assessment of the incident by looking for 'more than a snapshot of the act of aggression. You must also know about the situation and the circumstances in which an incident has occurred' (Rigby 2007:25). This is achieved in a more structured way than an informal act of collecting information and asking non-accusatory questions of students, perhaps in an indirect manner or by listening to pupils chatter amongst themselves as suggested by Besag (2003:117). The *in situ* evolution of CEEVEC in the course of this project means it can be fully integrated into the case school practice as desired by Galloway (2004b:46). Applications to other investigative acts by staff are also possible.

The way power is used in this approach is also important. It is clear the staff member leading the discussion is in a position of authority which is being asserted through their leading an investigation of the incident. The key to this approach is the desirable use of non coercive power and respect (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:211) to gather information, better understand the circumstances of an incident and intervene in the poor treatment of a student by his/her peers. At the same time, the conversational nature of CEEVEC positions it within a wider discourse of peer relations and use of power at the school. This conversational tone used in this approach contributes to a positive environment for students at school and possibly a positive social experience while intervening in the potentially socially destructive behaviour of bullying or poor peer relations.

The CEEVEC approach has become the first step intervention to investigate and interrupt the negative pattern of behaviour amongst peers in the case school. Its format has been influenced by the No Blame approach as well as the Shared Concern Method (Pikas 2002) because it is non-accusatory and solution focussed rather than focussed on punitive sanctions or retribution. CEEVEC is less time consuming and more flexible than either No Blame or the Shared Concern Method.

The non-threatening environment in which the conversation takes place, the relationship between the member of staff and the student as well as the attitude communicated by the member of staff are important components of this approach. The environment should be unthreatening (although it may be formal), with the member of staff maintaining an unthreatening tone in both verbal and non verbal cues to the student. A good rapport between the teacher and the student population will assist this approach, but it is important the tone of the conversation maintains some level of formality to avoid sending mixed messages about the importance of the conversation.

CEEVEC enables the use of further interventions if they are deemed necessary in the particular situation. Additional interventions at the individual level used at the case school include counsellor support for bullies or victims, or any student with significant peer relations issues, as well as mediation, aspects of restorative justice, the Method of Shared Concern of punitive sanctions such as school based punishments, parent meetings and school probation. CEEVEC can be used as a fore-runner to these different approaches by providing a strong starting point for a teacher to intervene and investigate at the level of the individual a reported incident of bullying or poor peer relations, establish a clear understanding of the circumstances, encourage empathy for the victim, reinforce the

prevailing positive school social environment and bring about a change in the negative behaviour between students. Each reported case can be evaluated and produce varying responses depending on the circumstance. In my experience CEEVEC enables a teacher to gather good information, understand the circumstances and employ an eclectic approach drawing on their experience and skills to bring about a positive outcome *(Reflective Journal – December 2006)*. The effectiveness of this approach relies upon the communication skills of the teacher and their relationship with the students. A good rapport with the students is important. The conversation resulting from the CEEVEC approach is issue based rather than personal. Therefore, the teacher must be skilled in directing the conversation back to the issues rather than personalities of the people involved. The level effectiveness of this approach is likely to vary between different teachers using it.

This approach has become an important action operating at the level of the individual student by contributing to a positive social environment at the level of the school as a microsystem. CEEVEC is not intended to be an example of best practice for all schools but it is an example of informed practice, refined in the course of this case school based action research project.

Class level action

Action at the class level has the whole class as the target group creating an environment within the group in which the extent of bullying and poor peer relations are decreased (Olweus 1993:69). This level of action in this study equates to the level of the House in the Middle School because the House group is the key pastoral unit during the boys' three years in the Middle School.

The House group is key point of contact for the boys within the case school and is crucial in their school social environment in these Middle School years. Consequently, action taken by the Head of House is important in determining the social environment of the House. The interviews with Heads of House in March 2006 revealed there were subtle differences in their approaches to intervening and investigating incidents of poor peer relations and bullying but they were largely similar in their approach to understanding the complexities of the situation and employing a blend of punitive and humanistic approaches *(Staff interviews – March 2006)*. Greater uniformity in the approach taken across the Houses, within the Middle School is desirable because common practice will assist in creating and maintaining a similar social environment experience for the boys, regardless

of their House affiliation. The use of CEEVEC across the Houses was an important aspect of this experience for the students.

Working closely with each Head of House individually and as a group, was an important initiative taken to assist their action in their House. A discussion of the student and parents 2005 PRAQ data with the Heads of House assisted their understanding of the situation in their House specifically and across the cohort generally (*Reflective Journal – 13 February 2006*). This discussion was followed later in the year by a whole day internal conference on 11 August 2006 led by me as Head of Middle School. At this conference the Heads of House were formally introduced to the CEEVEC approach to initially intervening and investigating reports of bullying and incidents of poor peer relations. At that conference the CEEVEC approach was recognised by the Heads of House to be closely aligned with their typical practice but formalised a procedure in a way they had not previously done (*Reflective Journal – 11 August 2006*). The CEEVEC approach was explained by me to be an approach with applications beyond peer relations investigation. It could also be used as a model for social relations between staff and students to reinforce a positive social environment while intervening and investigating situations between students.

At the Head of House conference on 11 August, 2006 (Miller 2006b), each participant was provided with the first version of a folder of documents to assist in their dealing with bullying and incidents of poor peer relations. A revised form of the covering document of the folder is included in this portfolio as Appendix 12 *Head of House Guide to Peer Relations Intervention*. This folder was distributed again at the commencement of 2008 and discussed further, as a part of an ongoing commitment to maintain a profile of bullying amongst all Heads of House, and to assist the two Heads of House who have taken up their roles since the August 2006 conference. The significance of the House in the lives of the Middle School boys at the case school, places the Head of House in a key role for establishing, monitoring and maintaining an important social context for the boys. The actions at this level are an important link between the individual student and the nature of the environment in the whole school. Consistency in practice, effective intervention and sensitive investigation of the circumstances of bullying and poor peer relations should help to align these experiences and contribute to a positive social environment. Feedback from Heads of House since this approach has been widely adopted has been very positive *(Reflective Journal – 12 December 2006).*

School level actions

Actions at this level are undertaken to develop attitudes and create an environment that decreases the extent of bullying in the school as a whole (Olweus 1993:69).

There were six actions at the school level used in this action research project. Some were part of the existing approach to dealing with poor peer relations and considered in the reconnaissance of this project, but they were modified as a result of the project. Other actions were developed in the process of this research project. The six actions employed in an effort to create an environment that decreases the extent of bullying in the whole school were:

- the whole-school policy titled *Dealing with Bullying and Harassment* and a commitment to engaging in review and reflection on practice;
- the *No Put Downs* signage and follow up;
- staff awareness actions;
- parent forums;
- student awareness through Middle School assembly addresses; and,
- inclusion in the Middle School orientation process each year.

This section will briefly outline these actions and provide some evaluation of each action as enabled by student focus group conversations, PRAQ data and reflective journal entries.

The school policy *Dealing with Bullying and Harassment* is an important document under regular review. The policy is the foundation for establishing a positive social environment for the students of the case school as well as to investigating and intervening in incidents of bullying and poor peer relations. The parental awareness of this policy reported in the Year 8 2006 PRAQ data was that 73 per cent were familiar with the policy, 14 per cent were unsure and 13 per cent were unfamiliar with the policy. It is desirable over time to increase this level of awareness at the case school through the strategies outlined in this section. This reported level of awareness by parents of the school document resulted in a change in practice for 2006.

The need to effectively communicate the school's policy and practices to parents was apparent from the Year 7 2005 parent PRAQ data as well as from conversations with parents related to specific incidents involving their sons in the course of the year (*Reflective Journal – 4 November 2005, 7 December 2005*). There were two strategies developed in response to this finding. The first strategy was to hold parent forums in the course of the year to increase parent awareness of the approach to dealing with incidents of

poor peer relations and bullying. A second strategy was to give greater profile in the Middle School orientation procedure at the commencement of the school year to the approach taken to dealing with incidents of poor peer relations and bullying.

The parent forums were devised to increase parent awareness. Two separate parent forums were held in the course of the action research period (Miller 2006a, 2006c). One parent forum included external professionals with some non case school specific content, while the other forum was dependent on two school staff with a clear focus on the policies and practices of the case school.

The first parent forum was on the evening of 4 May 2006 (Miller 2006a) was attended by approximately 100 parents. On this occasion a panel of four people spoke for fifteen minutes presenting aspects of their work as it related to parenting adolescents. The panel comprised a medical professional responsible for the training of General Practitioners who spoke on the issue of adolescent health, a regional tertiary referral psychologist who spoke on adolescent health, the school's Senior Counsellor who addressed stress in the HSC years and me, as the Head of Middle School. I presented the issue of peer relations amongst Middle School students and the way the school approaches the problem. This forum was an important event for me as it demanded I clearly explain the approach to bullying and poor peer relations to the school community in an arena where questions could be asked. This presentation also served to assist in deepening my understanding of the position of my work in a wider context of adolescent issues. In the question and answer section of the forum questions related to peer issues and how problems can be dealt with both at school and at home (*Reflective Journal – 11 May 2006*) were posed. This forum provided an important experience for me as both a teacher and researcher as it demanded I describe and justify the emerging approach to intervening and investigating bullying amongst Middle School boys. The feedback from parents on the evening was very positive with expressions of appreciation for the opportunity to hear about the range of issues as well as the details of the approach taken to incidents of poor peer relations at the School (*Reflective Journal – 5 May 2006*). Much of the content of the forum and reflections arising from the experience assisted my preparation for the second parent forum in the following term of 2006.

The second parent forum took place on 16 August 2006 (Miller 2006c). This forum was attended by over 190 parents of Middle School and Year 6 boys attracted by the title "Middle School Peer Relations: Managing the realities". I hosted the presentation and

shared presentation time with the Senior Counsellor of the case school. My objective for the evening was to inform parents, in general terms, of the results of my research to that point as well as to outline the typical practice for investigating and intervening in incidents of poor peer relations and bullying. This presentation was intended to increase parental confidence in the school's policies and practices so they might encourage their sons or themselves to disclose problems of peer relations to school staff. The feedback following the presentation was positive from the parents with particular reference to two aspects. First, there was support for the CEEVEC approach to dealing with incidents of poor peer relations and bullying at the school that was outlined in the presentation. The second aspect was for the action of the holding of the parent forum on this issue. It was clear to me by the high level of attendance and the nature of the questions at this forum that the issue of peer relations and the way the school approaches intervening and investigating bullying is very important to the parents of boys at the case school (*Reflective Journal – 29 August 2006*).

The positive parent perceptions of the school's handling peer relations incidents were supported by the Year 8 2006 parent PRAQ data 9 (n=130) which showed a decline in the number of open comments made by parents concerned about the handling of issues from 10 per cent in Year 7 2005 to 1.5 per cent in Year 8 2006. Parent perceptions reported in the parent PRAQ of satisfactory handling of incidents of poor peer relations and bullying at school rose from 16 per cent in 2005 to 28 per cent in 2006. These data suggest the efforts to increase parent awareness through two parent forums had a positive impact on their perception of the way the school handled incidents of poor peer relations and bullying.

The approach to dealing with bullying and incidents of poor peer relations was raised by me at a meeting with parents of all Year 7 boys as a part of the Middle School orientation program in January 2006 (*Reflective Journal – 31 January 2006*). On this occasion the parents were reminded they had also received the school policy statement *Dealing with Bullying and Harassment*. The parents were given a broad outline of the approach and encouraged to contact the school if they have concerns about the welfare of their sons. Also, the importance of a positive school environment that seeks to provide positive experiences for its students was profiled at this time. This action needs to be seen as one of many strategies undertaken to increase parent awareness of bullying and their confidence in the school's capacity to deal with problems arising in the Middle School years. This action was in direct response to the 2005 PRAQ data and the desire to

establish with the parents of new boys an awareness of school policies and how they are implemented in practice in regard to bullying.

The *No Put Downs* posters and awareness approach has been ongoing. Discussion of this approach featured in the student focus group conversations. These conversations revealed support for the *No Put Downs* policy and signage in each classroom. Two student comments made in support of this strategy are:

> *I reckon the whole "No Put Downs" thing… that it gives people the opportunity to voice their opinion and have their opinion and to air their opinions and not to be afraid of being put down for it (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).*

> *It [No Put Downs signage] does prevent continuous bullying. Somebody might say something as a one-off and then it doesn't accumulate. They might say it once but they don't really keep on going at that person (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).*

Although this strategy is seven years old the Middle School boys are new to it on their arrival in Year 7. It is necessary to have a maintenance approach to this action, enlisting the support of other staff to ensure the signs are always present in each classroom. The omnipresent nature of the signs and the boys' awareness of them is a reminder of the expectations of the nature of the social environment at the case school.

Actions to maintain staff awareness of a positive social environment at school also featured strongly in the action research period. The actions taken included the following:

1. The school policy document was distributed to staff on 17 October 2005 and they were asked to familiarize themselves with its contents (*Reflective Journal – 18 October 2005*);

2. On two occasions email was used by me to notify the whole school staff of specific concerns about patterns in behaviour across many Middle School students. The emails mentioned tripping and hitting as instances observed between students. Staff were asked for their support in monitoring and intervening when they saw evidence around school of such inappropriate behaviour (*Reflective Journal – 14 March 2006, 5 August 2006*);

3. The Principal addressed the issue on the front page of the weekly newsletter distributed to parents and staff (*Reflective Journal – 17 March 2006*);

4. The distribution of the student PRAQ by staff in November 2005 and November 2006 served to maintain the profile of the issue of bullying and a discourse associated with it. On both occasions the distribution of the PRAQ was preceded

by an announcement at the weekly briefing the day before its distribution. This announcement served an obvious logistical purpose but also provided an opportunity to maintain the staff awareness and a discourse on the issue of bullying.

5. There were eight other occasions in the course of the thirteen month action research cycle when staff were reminded of the issue of peer relations in an effort to raise and maintain their awareness of this issue at the school (*Reflective Journal – 17/10/05, 22/11/05, 13/3/06, 14/3/06, 17/3/06, 5/8/06, 7/8/06, 23/11/06*). All of these announcements were initiated by me but they were sometimes executed by a senior colleague in an effort to demonstrate broad support for staff awareness and effective action to decrease the frequency of incidents. This support was easy to rally in the case school because of the genuine desire by senior staff to maintain an approach that develops attitudes and creates conditions that decrease the extent of bullying in the whole school (Olweus 1993:69). Three of these occasions were in the weekly staff briefing led by the Principal or the Deputy Principal and involved a senior member of staff addressing the issue of poor peer relations encouraging staff to intervene, interrupt the behaviour and then pass on information to the relevant Head of House (*Reflective Journal – 17 October 2005, 13 March 2006, 7 August 2006*). The practice of a senior member of staff addressing the whole staff on bullying was established as an outcome of the first PRAQ data in November 2005 when the senior staff first became aware of the student perception of a lack of staff interest in stopping bullying behaviour shown in Table 3.5 (p75) (*Reflective Journal – 18 January 2006*).

Maintaining student awareness of peer relations issues and general reminders of the nature of the school environment was supported by a variety of strategies in the course of the action research period. There were eight separate occasions when this took place. Seven of these occurrences were in the weekly Middle School Assembly where I spoke directly about peer relations, bullying and how to deal with it. The eighth occasion was an email to all Middle School students on 8 June 2006 (Appendix 13). The use of the weekly assembly to maintain awareness of bullying issues was affirmed by focus group comments suggesting the boys listen to the comments made by the Head of Middle School and value the reinforcement of strategies such as those about "No Put Downs" (*Focus Group 3.3 – 19 May 2006 and Focus Group 4.3 – 26 May 2006*) referred to earlier in this section (p84). Comments of this type in the focus groups provided important ongoing feedback on the

effectiveness of actions taken to create a school environment where the conditions decrease the extent of bullying.

All of the actions in the course of the action research cycle were undertaken with the imperative of improving the experience of students in the Middle School, with regard to bullying and peer relations. The actions directly assisted the development of CEEVEC which is an approach enabling both an investigation and intervention of bullying and incidents of poor peer relations.

The action stage of this action research project has deviated from the typical action research format (Wadsworth 1998; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Stringer 2003) in the sense that they were ongoing rather than immediately undertaken after the identification of the action research question. As has been shown, data were gathered in the course of the action research cycle through student focus groups, parent forums and regular interactions with colleagues in a context where the imperative to improve practice was shared.

However, some of the actions have been evaluated in isolation in this section. The following section evaluates the overall impact of these actions on the boys as they moved through Year 8, and in their response to the PRAQ in November 2006.

Evaluating the actions

The reconnaissance data will be presented again in this section in conjunction with extra data collected in the action research period to evaluate the impact of the actions during the action research cycle. All these data contribute to creating a picture of the social environment experienced by the boys at school and their school experience.

The general situation

The general picture, the nature of the social environment and the resulting social experiences of boys in this cohort can be created by looking at data measuring student happiness, the frequency of student observations and experiences of bullying and parent perceptions of their children. Each of these indicators is presented in this section.

Table 3.8 *General happiness of students at school 2005/06* (p91) shows an improvement in the general level of happiness of the same cohort of students at the end of Year 8 2006 (n=185) compared to twelve months earlier. Collapsing response categories 1, 2 and 3 provides an indication of how the cohort experienced improved levels of general happiness

at the end of Year 8 2006 with 90.3 per cent of boys reporting general happiness in this range compared with 83.3 in Year 7, twelve months earlier. This is a much higher level of reported happiness than the national norms at 71.1 per cent for the same grouped responses. Consequently, the number of participants reporting levels of happiness poorer than 'neutral' decreased to 3.2 per cent at the end of Year 8.

Table 3.8   General happiness of students at school 2005/06 (%)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Group	Very Happy			Neutral			Very Unhappy
Y7 2005	8.1	44.3	30.9	11.4	4.3	1	0
Y8 2006	9.2	41.6	39.5	6.5	1.0	1.0	1.2
Norms (%)	6.8	24.1	40.2	20.9	3.9	1.3	2.8

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Q3

Table 3.9 *Observed bullying at school 2005/06* presents the results of observed bullying at school. Data in this table are limited to the cohort, but potentially includes incidents the boys observed across Year groups or between boys in other Year groups. These data show a decline in the frequency of observed incidents from Year 7 to Year 8 in the category of "Often" but increases in "Sometimes" while "Never" declines slightly, but is close to the norm. It can be deduced from these data that the frequency of bullying has decreased between Year 7 to Year 8 for the boys in the study cohort.

Table 3.9   Observed bullying at school 2005/06(%)

Frequency	**Norms**	**Y7 2005**	**Y8 2006**
Never	8	9	7.5
Sometimes	58	66	71
Often	34	25	21.5

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Q4

Data in Table 3.9 is consistent with data in Table 3.10 (p92) related to the frequency of bullying showing a decline in the frequency of experiences of bullying. The improvement in both the observed frequency and the frequency of bullying experienced by the boys over the course of the action research cycle are consistent with data showing an improvement in the nature of the social environment for the boys between Year 7 and Year 8 shown in Table 3.8 (above).

Table 3.10   Bullying experienced at school 2005/06 (%)

Aspect investigated	Norms	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Frequency of bullying			
• At least weekly	23	23	16.8
• Less than weekly	27.3	39	36.3
• Never	49.8	38	46.9

Source: 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Q7

The parent perceptions of their son's relations with peers as well as their perceptions of the general tone of relationships between boys at the school are shown in Table 3.11 and Table 3.12.

Table 3.11   Parent views of relations between peers 2005/06 (%)

Parent Views	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Generally friendly	78	88
Sometimes friendly, sometimes not	22	12
Generally unfriendly	0	0

Source: 2005 and 2006 Parent PRAQ Q2

Table 3.12   Parent description of their child's relations with school peers 2005/06 (%)

Parent Description	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Generally very happy	54	63
Usually happy	36	34
Happy about half the time	7	3
Usually unhappy	1	0
Generally unhappy	1	0

Source: 2005 and 2006 Parent PRAQ Q4

The trend of an improved peer relations environment from the end of Year 7 to Year 8 is indicated by a ten per cent increase to 88 per cent in parent perceptions (Table 3.11) of generally friendly relations between peers simultaneously with lower levels of perceived unhappiness in relations between peers in this cohort (Table 3.12).

It would be unrealistic to attribute all the improvement in the student social environment to the actions of this action research project. The influence of student maturity will play a role in combination with the actions taken. Due to its complex and dynamic nature it is impossible to attribute the improvement in the social environment to a single factor, although it is reasonable to believe that student happiness at school will be linked in some way to satisfaction due to the importance of peer relations for boys of this age. The quality of the social environment is an important component of the boys' school experience and marks a difference between the baseline and exit data in this study.

In summary, the general social environment experienced by the boys of this cohort is more positive at the end of Year 8 than twelve months earlier. The environment appears to have become one in which positive emotions are evident and experienced by the boys. These positive emotions can assist in the development of individual coping resources fostering greater resilience (Fredrickson 2001). This greater resilience could account for lower levels or reported bullying in the course of Year 8.

Location and nature of bullying

The student PRAQ data related to the location and nature of bullying provides a complex and sometimes contradictory picture of the situation when comparing the 2005 and 2006 data for this cohort. The picture of the social environment experienced by the boys becomes less clear when the details of bullying are investigated with the main forms of bullying experienced continuing to be teasing and name calling. The student data showing the location of bullying are presented in Table 3.13.

Table 3.13   Location and nature of bullying 2005/06 (%)

Aspect investigated	Norms	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Location of bullying			
• Classroom	65	67	76.4
• Playground	90	89	94.5
• To school	29	40	43.9
• From school	49	50	48.3
Teased unpleasantly			
• Never	54.1	47	52.2
• Sometimes	35.3	39	38.0
• Often	10.6	14	9.8
Called hurtful names			
• Never	55.0	43	54.6
• Sometimes	33.6	45	32.8
• Often	11.3	12	12.6
Exclusion			
• Never	74.6	64	66.8
• Sometimes	19.5	28	28.3
• Often	5.9	8	4.9
Threats of harm			
• Never	73.3	79	78.8
• Sometimes	20.3	16	17.4
• Often	6.4	5	3.8
Hit or kicked			
• Never	70.9	64	70.2
• Sometimes	22.2	30	21.1
• Often	6.9	6	8.7

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Qs 5 & 6

These data can be misleading because they are not an indication of the volume of bullying but the location of the behaviour when it has been experienced. Bullying continued to occur mainly while travelling to school (with most students travelling by train), in the playground and also in the classroom. The particular environment of a train is not conducive to good behaviour by all the students. The absence of supervision, large groups of people, small spaces in carriages and few exit options for a victim of poor treatment by peers contribute to the potential for problems, especially on the way to school in the morning. The challenge is to have the Year 8 boys transfer the features of the positive social environment they enjoy at school to contexts, beyond the school gate.

Bullying continued to be experienced at school in the playground and the classroom, although at lower levels by the end of Year 8. Focus group recounts of classroom bullying indicated that it took place when the teacher was out of the room for a period of time or in a low level manner, disguised as normal behaviour and deliberately difficult for a teacher to detect *(Focus Group 3.2 – 3 March 2006)*. Playground bullying varies enormously in its type and frequency.

The PRITS summary across the five school terms is presented in Figure 3.5.
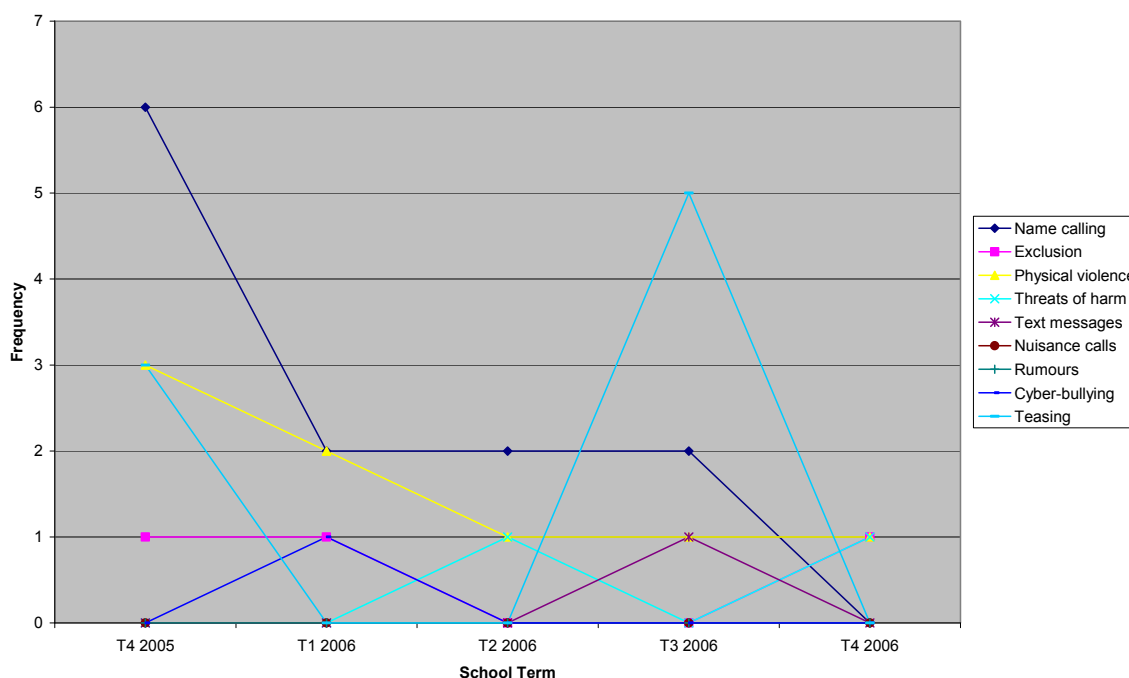

Figure 3.5   PRITS summary

Data presented in Figure 3.5 endorse the student PRAQ data in Table 3.13 (p93) with name calling, teasing and then to be hit or kicked as the most common forms of bullying in

this cohort although the situation improved in the course of the action research period. The general trend of an improved situation in peer relations is also displayed in Figure 3.5 (p94). This trend was suggested by the decline in the number of incidents reported and passed on to the Head of Middle School, although there was a spike in reported incidents of teasing in Term 3. The small number of reported incidents exaggerates the spike in reported cases of teasing in Figure 3.5 (p94). All other types of bullying behaviour decreased over the course of the study. It is possible that a lower level of reporting was because of improved resilience and the general ability of the boys to cope as they get older or that the boys chose not to disclose to anyone. It is also possible the boys become better at being able to 'discern intent' (Garbarino and deLara 2002:87) of their peers and so better able to understand the difference between a joke and mean-spirited conduct. However, the student PRAQ data suggested the situation was one where bullying decreases as boys become older. The positive influence of maturity resulting in decreased bullying is consistent with national data showing a decrease in frequency of bullying with age in secondary school (Rigby 2007) and the boys' perceptions of the reasons for changes in the behaviour through the year *(Focus Group 4.4 – 11 August 2006)*. There is a collective maturity of the peer group that influences the social environment within which the boys function. The change to this social environment due to maturity is clearly a contributing factor to the improvement in the quality of peer relations amongst most boys, but not all.

The perception of an increase in the frequency of physical acts by boys on entry to Year 8 was raised and discussed by one participant in *Focus Group 4.2*. The observation was that there were more scuffles in the playground between boys in this cohort. This perception is consistent with the student PRAQ data in Table 3.13 (p93) showing a 2.7 per cent increase from Year 7 to Year 8 in the proportion of students who often experienced hitting or kicking at school. This increase brought the results into alignment with the national norms for all three categories. This suggested the boys were more physical with each other in Year 8 and this had an impact upon their social environment. At the same time there was a decrease in the number of physical incidents reported to me in this cohort in the course of the year. Whether this is because the behaviour became normalized, the boys became more resilient or the boys were able to 'discern intent' cannot be determined from this data.

The threats of harm were lower amongst the cohort of this study than the norms for the student PRAQ data in both Year 7 and Year 8 in Table 3.13 (p93). The PRITS data in

Figure 3.5 (p94) showed a very low level of reporting of threats of harm by boys. It appeared that threats of harm were not a strong feature of the boys' social environment and they were not used widely to intimidate boys or as a means to higher order bullying, such as extortion.

Similarly, the reported use of electronic means to harass or bully a peer remained low. The frequency of cyber-bullying incidents was very low with only one situation recorded in PRITS in this period. This situation involved a text message on a mobile phone. There were no reported problems with internet use or chat rooms. The low frequency of cyber-bullying in the current research was supported by focus group conversations where the participants explained the tendency for peer relations problems to occur away from the use of new technology. One boy explained how he had responded when on the receiving end of an unpleasant experience using MSN.

> *The great thing about MSN is that if someone is bullying you or something, you can delete them and you can block them, which means they can't talk to you or get to you any other way. When I got bullied I just deleted them, nothing happened (Donald, Focus Group 3.2 – 3 March 2006).*

Although this was an encouraging comment suggesting that it is possible to withdraw from poor electronic conversations in cyber chat rooms it does not address conversations in those sites not involving the person whom the conversation is about. The implications of chat room conversations were not fully explored by the focus groups. The chat room forum was recognised by the boys to provide a way of spreading rumours or unfavourable stories across a group of people. However, chat rooms were not identified as a big problem (*Focus Group 3.2 – 3 March 2006*).

The issue of cyber-bullying needs to be closely monitored. It appears that this technology may be increasingly accessed by Middle School students, as the technology becomes more common place as a means of communication for adolescents. The impact of advanced mobile phone technology with the incorporation of cameras in telephones as well as the ability to transfer digitally gathered images to the internet was not evident at the time of this research but have become more evident in the time elapsing since the collection of these data.

Disclosure by students

Table 3.14 *Student Disclosure of Bullying 2005/06* compares data for the cohort related to their willingness to report to someone their experiences of bullying.

Table 3.14   Student disclosure of bullying 2005/06 (%)

Reported to:	Norms	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Mother	40.6	57	49.5
Father	31.5	29	43.3
Teacher or counsellor	30.6	19	19.5
Friend(s)	56.7	63	52.2

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Q 12

Students of this cohort were most likely to disclose they had been bullied to their friends but with less willingness in Year 8 than shown in Year 7. Mothers were the next likely group to be told, followed by fathers and then teachers or a school counsellor. At the end of Year 8 there was an increased likelihood of the boys disclosing to their fathers. Therefore, there were some changes in the patterns of disclosure with a greater potential role for fathers and less disclosure to friends. The level of disclosure to parents was higher in the case school than the national norms, suggesting stronger relationships with parents and a high level of parent interest in the boys' welfare at school.

The low level of disclosure to teachers or counsellors at school was explored in a focus group conversation. The fear of retribution or escalation appears to be the barrier to disclosure of incidents of bullying for victims or bystanders *(Focus Group 4.3 – 26 May 2006)*. In the same focus group discussion it was agreed amongst the participants that the person whom a victim would be most likely to tell would be their parents or their Head of House (*Focus Group 3.3 – 19 May 2006* and *Focus Group 4.3 – 26 May 2006*). The Head of House was identified by the boys as someone they knew and who knows them well. Therefore, the boys felt that the Head of House was in the best position to deal with the problem. Despite this, it is clear from the results here that the boys were most likely to tell their parents before a member of the school staff, even their Head of House. The reason for this response appears to be fear of escalation of the problem. The CEEVEC approach endeavours to overcome this problem but it requires ongoing actions at all three levels of school, house and individual to address this situation.

Table 3.15 *Consequences of having disclosed being bullied* provides further insight into the consequences and student perceptions of disclosure.

Table 3.15   Consequences of having disclosed being bullied

Outcome	Norms	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Things worsened	9.5	3.9	9.4
No change to situation	48.6	35.9	35.5
Things improved	41.9	34.9	31.7
Bullied but never disclosed	NA	25.3	23.4

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Q 13

Approximately one quarter of the cohort in both the Year 7 and Year 8 PRAQ acknowledged they had experienced bullying but they had never told anyone of their experience. The rate of improvement in the situation as a result of disclosure was approximately one in three while approximately one in three respondents experienced no change to the situation. One in ten respondents at the end of Year 8 experienced a worsening of the situation. Unfortunately, these figures cannot be linked to whom the victims have disclosed. This would assist in discerning the relative effectiveness of disclosing to different people. It is interesting to note that the high level of disclosure to friends in Year 7 2005 in Table 3.14 (p97) was followed in Year 8 2006 by a three-fold increase in the worsening of the situation as a result of disclosure shown in Table 3.15. This worsening of the situation may provide one explanation for the decrease in the level of disclosure shown in Figure 3.5 (p94) with a decision by students not to disclose to anyone. This suggests that disclosing to friends is the most likely course of action by a victim but it is one of the least effective in improving the situation. As a result, the students in this study may choose to remain silent rather than risk the escalation of the situation.

These findings highlight the importance of creating and maintaining a positive school environment where peer relations issues are handled well by staff through effective intervention to and investigation of reported bullying and incidents of poor peer relations. A lack of student and parent awareness of such an approach means the students are likely to continue to be reluctant to disclose to staff at school until the situation has significantly deteriorated beyond their capacity to cope. A positive school environment should be one in which the students can approach problems with confidence before the situation reaches such a point.

The role of teachers

Table 3.16 presents the data on student perceptions of teacher interest in stopping bullying.

Table 3.16   Student perception of teacher interest in stopping bullying 2005/06

Perceived Teacher Interest	Norm	Y7 2005	Y8 2006
Not really	15.1	16	24.6
Only Sometimes	23.5	19	23.5
Usually	33.8	37	39.3
Always	27.6	28	12.6

Sources: Rigby 1998 & 2005 and 2006 Student PRAQ Q 15

Student perception of this became less positive in the course of Year 8 for this cohort. This is shown by an increase in "Not really" interested from 16 per cent to nearly 25 per cent and a corresponding decrease in "Always" interested from 28 per cent in Year 7 2005 to less than 13 per cent in Year 8 2006. This suggests a perception of teacher indifference to stopping bullying.

One reading of this result is that the boys perceived many teachers as happy to allow the incidents to occur, without intervention. An alternative reading of these data is that teachers are inconsistent in their intervention into incidents and they send out mixed messages to the boys about their interest in stopping bullying. The actions to raise staff awareness of the need to intervene in incidents of poor peer relations that they witness at school as well as awareness of the policy document have not translated into student perceptions of staff willingness to intervene in bullying.

The Year 8 2006 student PRAQ data suggests this strategy had little impact because the boys' perception of teacher interest shown in Table 3.16 (above) deteriorated over the study period. The frequency of raising the awareness with staff appears to have no positive impact on student perception of staff interest at this stage.

An alternative view to this was expressed by one boy at a focus group. In recounting his own experience he claimed:

> *In my group of friends there were a couple of boys who were getting*
> *bullied a lot at the end of Year 7 and the beginning of Year 8 and now we*
> *are all friends again. They actually told the teacher who got their parents*
> *to come in and tell their Head of House. Then people who were bullying*

these guys were talked to and told to back off now and leave them alone.
We are all friends again now (Jack, Focus Group 3.3 – 19 May 2006).

This comment demonstrates student confidence in the capacity of individual teachers, specifically a Head of House, to provide effective intervention to achieve a positive outcome without an escalation or an increasingly complicated situation arising.

The focus group conversations also discussed the differences between normal teachers and Heads of House. The boys have high expectations of their Head of House whose principal role is one of pastoral care. These expectations do not apply to all class teachers *(Focus Group 4.3 – 26 May 2006)*. The inference is that the boys do not perceive this concern, perhaps because they are not looking for it.

The focus groups provided a valuable insight to the boys' views of the important features of an approach to investigating and intervening in bullying by teachers. The importance of the principle of listening to both sides when investigating incidents of poor peer relations and bullying was also stated by the boys in their discussions. One boy described an incident where he felt he had not experienced the benefit of a fair hearing:

> *The teachers really need to make sure they listen to both sides of the story.*
> *At one point I got in trouble and one of the staff had heard one side of the*
> *story. What the boy had said was true but he had missed out on some of*
> *the important details. When he came to my side of the story he [the staff*
> *member] didn't really listen that much and he went a bit harsh on me*
> *because he didn't listen to my full story. Teachers really need to listen*
> *(Chris, Focus Group 4.4 – 11 August 2006).*

A central issue for Chris is one of justice and the need for his position to be understood. It cannot be known whether the outcome would have changed had the member of staff listened more closely and allowed Chris to be heard but Chris would have perceived greater fairness in the process. The non-accusatory, one-to-one approach and non punitive approach of CEEVC was endorsed by the boys on a number of occasions in the focus group conversations *(Focus Groups 4.3 and 4.4)*.

The boys' perceptions of teacher interest and their expectations of teacher practice were important in shaping the actions taken in this study. These actions included the development and ongoing evaluation of CEEVEC as well as actions at a school level. The PRAQ data from the end of the action research cycle suggests these actions have had little impact on the general perception of boys of teachers' interest in addressing bullying.

However, the focus group conversations provided more encouragement to maintain the approaches with ongoing evaluation, especially involving the students.

Project Conclusions

This study has brought about significant developments in my understanding of peer relations in general and bullying in the case school specifically. This understanding has brought about changes in practice in the case school drawing extensively upon the literature aiming to create a quality learning environment at school. The reality of working with 600 Middle School boys on a day-to-day basis means it is important to have many options available when there are incidents of poor peer relations. The literature and models outlined have provided the foundation for these developments and assisted in the imperative to improve the practice at the case school in order to provide better experiences for the students. This is an important goal when applying the ecological perspective of this study because the nature of the experiences in the school will influence the development of the students. The school must strive to provide a positive social environment supported by the approach taken to investigating and intervening in bullying.

A reconnaissance incorporating consideration of both the literature on bullying and existing and past school practices in addressing bullying provided an important understanding of the context and assisted in the identification of the research question. The standard action research format was modified in this study in response to the research question because it was not clear from the outset what the approach would be. The plan was to devise an approach incorporating a range of actions over the course of the study with ongoing evaluation and modification to guide its evolution. CEEVEC is one of the outcomes of this process.

Implications for dealing with peer relations and bullying

The practices at the case school have developed at three levels: individual, House and school level. Each of these levels influences the experiences of the boys at school in regard to peer relations and bullying. Improvements in practice were the imperative in this action research project and this has been pursued through the collection of baseline data at the commencement of the action research cycle with subsequent developments in practice informed by personal reflection and evaluation involving a range of stakeholders.

CEEVEC is an important component of the actions taken at all three levels. CEEVEC has been developed as an approach to be used as an intervention and investigation into bullying and poor peer relations. The approach is one-to-one and non-accusatory in an

effort to find out about the situation from a number of sources. This standard but flexible approach has been an important development for me in my role as Head of Middle School. It has helped me greatly in planning how to deal with a situation reported to me, investigation, intervention, implementing the actions as well as confirming the approach taken if questioned about the process at a later date. The consistent use of this approach has given me greater confidence in both the interventions taken by Heads of House, and by me. Also, a standard approach of this type can be explained to parents or victims ahead of an intervention to gain their confidence in the process. That will hopefully result in changing the nature of the relations amongst the boys involved.

There is presently no such approach in the literature to guide teacher practice. If desired or deemed necessary, this approach can be followed by other more detailed humanistic interventions such as shared concern, mediation or restorative justice or a traditional punitive approach. Therefore, CEEVEC may be the only action in an intervention and investigation into bullying or it may be the first step in a longer process to bring about a positive solution overcoming the undesirable problem of bullying or poor peer relations. This approach aims to contribute to an environment by reinforcing the principles of students feeling supported, valued and listened to, even when they have engaged anti-social conduct.

At the House level there is a need to maintain the awareness of the Heads of House in creating positive relationships with the student members of their House. It is also important to have staff in the position of Head of House who will contribute to a positive environment and undertake investigations in a manner that is consistent with the school philosophy and vision. Positive relationships between staff and students are important in the event of problems between peers as the Head of House is likely to be involved in an approach intervening in a reported situation. Staff model appropriate social interaction and contribute to the social environment experienced by the boys in the microsystem of the school.

At the school level a number of practices have been developed and reinforced as a result of this research project. All these practices involve awareness amongst different groups of the approach at a House and individual level. The keys to this whole school approach are: parent awareness of the school policy; student awareness of the approach taken; and, staff awareness of the importance of effectively intervening in observed or reported incidents of poor student relations in their classes and in the playground. High expectations of students

are made explicit in the CEEVEC approach to intervening and investigating reported cases of bullying and poor peer relations. This whole school approach was significantly guided by four key aspects of the QTM's *Quality Learning Environment* encouraging social support at school (DETNSW 2003:16) presented in Chapter 1 of this portfolio (p17).

Future research

The effectiveness of CEEVEC requires ongoing evaluation, perhaps in the form of a new action research project. CEEVEC evolved in the course of this action research project in response to the central research question.

Teachers' professional development in the use of CEEVEC and the evaluation of this professional learning warrants investigation. Both professional development and its evaluation need to be undertaken at the case school and perhaps in other schools. Similarly, ongoing evaluation of the nature of the school environment in regard to bullying and peer relations as well as constant evaluation of practice related to intervening and investigating reported incidents are necessary.

The PRAQ results related to the location of bullying warrant further research. In particular, the higher incidence of bullying in the playground as well as when travelling to school is of concern. More research needs to be undertaken to better understand the nature of bullying in these locations and to devise ways of reducing their frequency.

The way students respond to their peers will be influenced by the interaction of the microsystem of the school with other microsystems incorporating the individual's personal traits (personality and biological), family experiences and wider cultural values. A school's learning environment can influence the nature of the experiences of a student at school through policies and practices related to peer relations, bullying and harassment combined with developing a school ethos that is conducive to positive social conduct and a strong academic culture. The resulting mesosystem will provide a unique environment explained by ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1995) to shape the development of the individual.

While ecological theory has assisted the understanding of why the school environment is important in the social development of students in this project, the QTM (DETNSW 2003) provided practical guidance as to how to encourage student engagement and build social support to facilitate a quality learning environment at school. Ecological theory and QTM

have combined with *in situ* data of this action research project to produce improvements in teacher investigations of and interventions in poor peer relations, as well as incidents of bullying, amongst Year 8 boys at the case school.

Finally, there is a place for large scale current national data to be collected to assist ongoing evaluation as well as understanding of the incidence of bullying in schools to enable an accurate appraisal of the current situation at a national scale. This information would be useful for comparison with previous research and to monitor long term trends in patterns of bullying behaviour in a wide social environment.

In closing

This research project provided an opportunity for reflection, evaluation, planning and implementation of an approach to teachers' investigations and interventions in bullying, and in incidents of poor peer relations amongst Year 8 boys. While the work undertaken was important in developing improvements in practice, further improvements in the learning environment at schools are always possible.

CEEVEC evolved in the course of this study in response to the key research question. This approach became the standard for initial intervention and investigations in the Middle School by the Heads of House and the Head of the Middle School. This approach strives to maintain positive attitudes and conditions at school that reduce the frequency and severity of bullying by sensitively intervening in incidents of poor peer relations in a non-accusatory but direct manner. Like all strategies to intervene in peer relations and bullying, CEEVEC's effectiveness will be limited by a number of factors such as the skills of the teacher employing it and their rapport with students, its suitability to the situation and the willingness of the students to engage the process toward improving the situation. The professional judgement of the teacher and their experience will be important in their decisions when intervening in incidents of poor peer relations or bullying involving students.

Peer relations and bullying are important issue in the lives of Middle School boys and influence their happiness at school. This project deepened my understanding of the situation at the case school and my confidence to address this important issue with boys, parents and staff. These outcomes were invaluable to me in my professional learning and efforts to improve the quality of the learning environment at the case school.

CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH PROJECT 2: YEAR 9 BOYS' VIEWS OF MASCULINITY

Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study of boys' perceptions of masculinity is a companion study to the first research project on peer relations because it investigates another aspect of the learning environment in the same Middle School. The project involved two groups of students over a period of 13 months from November 2005 to December 2006. This chapter includes a review of relevant literature on masculinity, a description of the research methods, the research findings and their discussion, ending with the conclusion derived from the project. The ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1995) outlined in Chapter 1 (pp14-16) is also relevant to the construction of masculinity. The interaction of 'masculinity' with the boys' families, schooling, peers, friends and elements in the wider culture is investigated in this study. The ecological perspective framing this project and the project's research questions direct the focus of the investigation to the interaction of different experiences in the boys' construction of masculinity, with particular interest on the influence of the school environment.

The three research questions for this project were:
1. What are the boys' views of masculinity?
2. What factors influence the boys' views of masculinity?
3. What is the influence of the school experience on the boys' views of masculinity?

Data was collected using a multi-method approach utilizing focus groups and questionnaires. A range of analytical tools including factor analysis, Rasch analysis and descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data with thematic summaries and reflections used to analyse qualitative data. A general rationale for this approach was provided earlier, in Chapter 2 of this portfolio.

Literature Context

Connell (2000; 2001; 2005) has been important in the development of my understanding of masculinity. Connell (2005:67) recognises that all societies have cultural accounts of gender but not all have the same concept of 'masculinity'. He explains that:

> This conception presupposes a belief in individual difference and personal agency. In that sense it is built on the conception of individuality that developed in early-modern Europe with the growth of colonial empires and capitalist economic relations (Connell 2005:68).

Masculinity is seen as 'relational' (Connell 2005) to femininity and it is socially constructed dependent on social interactions between people in a particular social, economic and political context. Four practices and relations that construct the main patterns of masculinity in the contemporary Western gender order are perceived by Connell (2005:77-81) to be hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization. Swain (2005; 2006a; 2006b) has developed Connell's work in the context of primary aged boys' schooling in the United Kingdom.

Swain (2006b) provides a useful summary of the key points in recent theories of masculinity. These are:

- Masculinity is a relational construct occupying a key place in gender relations;
- There are multiple masculinities;
- There is a hierarchy of masculinities;
- Masculinity is a precarious and ongoing performance; and
- Masculinity is generally a collective social enterprise (Swain 2006a:318)

These points emphasize the dynamic nature of masculinity that changes in social context and with place and time (West 1999). As a result, there are multiple masculinities.

This project has been influenced by Swain (2005; 2006a; 2006b). However, this project draws its data from one school rather than multiple sites, as in other research projects on adolescent views of masculinity (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). There are three key differences between my research and Swain's (2005; 2006a; 2006b). The first difference is in relation to the age of the participants. The current research has been undertaken with Year 9 boys while Swain's was with Year 6 boys therefore presenting some differences in the level of social and emotional development of the participants. The second difference is that the case school in my research is a boys' middle school while Swain's schools were co-educational primary schools of which two were state schools and one was an independent school. The third point of difference is that Swain's research was in the United Kingdom while mine is set

in an Australian context. These three differences are worthy of note but similarities in the investigations are apparent.

The current research and Swain's explore the construction of masculinity at school, amongst boys in or approaching early adolescence. Swain's work resonates with my work and both have their foundation in theory constructed by Connell (Connell, Ashenden et al. 1982; 2000; 2001; 2005; Connell, Hearn et al. 2005).

Defining 'Masculinity'

There are many alternative views encountered in the general discourse on masculinity. It is as though a continuum of understanding of masculinity has emerged with biological essentialists located at one end and social constructivists at the other. In between is a gap filled by researchers who have 'a greater appreciation of and interest in interactions between biology and social and environmental forces, along with the effect of these interactions on the body and behavior' (Gerschick 2006:370). In an effort to explain a balance between nature (essentialist) and nurture in the development of masculinity most writing on masculinity is positioned somewhere in the middle ground of the continuum.

There are four explanations for masculinity and its forms presented in the literature. These explanations are: an essentialist view, often connected with biologically determined attributes of masculinity; a social constructivist explanation; typologies of masculinity; and, a relational explanation of masculinity that considers patterns of interaction. Each of these is discussed in the following section.

Essentialist perspectives

Essentialists focus on the personal characteristics of men by selecting certain features to define the core of the masculine and base an account of men's lives on those features (Connell 2005:68). Given the possibility of selecting from a number of features there are many essentialist perspectives of masculinity. Connell (2005:68) summarizes the features identified by the essentialists at the essence of the masculine to include risk-taking, aggression, responsibility, irresponsibility and energy. Connell's criticism of an essentialist's view is that such a view is narrow. He asserts that: 'claims about a universal basis of masculinity tell us more about the ethos of the claimant than about anything else' (Connell 2001:31).

Despite the critics, the biological essentialist perspective is of increasing significance in education due to recent developments in brain research. This perspective is outlined

succinctly by Gerschick (2006:369) as a dependence on hormones and growth to influence behaviour. Gerschick (2006) acknowledges that supporters of this perspective recognise overlap between the sexes but they think of men and women as 'largely dichotomous, as demonstrated by the bodily, psychological, and behavioural differences that are thought to complement one another' (Gerschick 2006:369). The opposite sexes are considered to have evolved in a social environment so that adaptations to natural environments have became embedded in human genetic structures over long periods of time (Gerschick 2006:370). This perspective on gender focuses on the differences between the sexes and the similarities within them. In my view, this perspective blends gender and sexuality to the same thing and be seen as biologically determined. This is a convenient way to explain differences in the behaviour between boys and girls at school but does not account for many differences in the behaviour of boys with whom I work in the Middle School.

Newkirk (2002) is critical of essentialism because of the limitations it places on the potential experiences of an individual. As a result, he supports the plurality of masculinity:

> Terms like 'masculinity', when not pluralized, seem to imply a unified sense of 'maleness' when in fact there are many ways of being a male, and these are not fixed in biology but subject to change as societies change. The technical charge laid against this form of generalisation is *essentialism* - the claim that differences among groups of people are due to permanent 'essences'. Essentialism is at the root of virtually all forms of stereotyping, and this form of reductive thinking is reducible to this grammatical form: (Name of group) are naturally (name of trait). Essentialism obscures differences that exist within the named group; it elevates a perceived trait (filtered through the bias of the observer) into a fixed biological endowment; and because this often negative "trait" (e.g., 'women are naturally emotional') is seen as permanent, essentialism allows those in power ('men are rational') to rationalize their advantage (Newkirk 2002:22-23).

Newkirk is also suggesting that the claimants of the universal basis of masculinity achieve a particular position of power in order to make such claims. This suggestion concurs with Connell's comment regarding essentialists' claims of masculinity (Connell 2001:31).

It is my view that generalisations about similarities within the sexes can be a helpful point of departure in education in some situations. For example, a discourse commencing with generalisations about the ways boys learn encourages teachers to engage conversations about learning styles and pedagogy. It becomes problematic if differences within the sexes are disregarded, and if it is asserted that all boys and all girls learn in the same ways.

Educators have to be careful asserting that all boys are similar. The essentialist perspectives of boys have frequently been a guiding principle for the boys' education advocates (Hawkes 2001; Lillico 2004). The boys' education movement is driven by the desire to overcome the perceived problems for boys of under achievement and disengagement at school. The concern prompted an inquiry by the Australian Federal Government (Bartlett 2002) to address the needs of boys in schools. The stereotypes of disruptive, disengaged and underachieving boys in schools (especially late primary and secondary stages) are common in the popular press and supported by anecdotes of school experiences (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). The situation in contemporary education for boys has been commonly labelled 'a crisis' (Carr-Gregg 2004) resulting in responses from leaders in the boys' education movement (Hawkes 2001; Lillico 2004) to provide strategies intended to improve boys' academic achievement and school engagement.

It is easy to extrapolate the generalisations and stereotypes to all boys, regardless of the context. Popular books (Biddulph 1997; Pollack 1998; Kindlon and Thompson 2000; Lashlie 2006) suggest that the needs of all boys are the same, even though this might not be the principal thesis of their author. Nagel (2006) provides an explanation of how brains work, but runs the risk of confirming an essentialist perspective of masculinity. The issue is how differences between individual boys as well as between boys and girls arise, biologically or socially. This raises the question: "Is it a case of nature or nurture, or a mix of both?" Currently 'brain research' is gaining momentum and is influencing the development of pedagogy in schools, especially in explaining the specific needs of boys in response to poorer achievement by boys in school compared to girls. Brain research has an essentialist perspective generated from a positivist research paradigm and can be too easily generalised to stereotypes of what boys are like, how they learn and develop. Such generalisations become limiting if they are applied indiscriminately to educational policies on curriculum and pedagogy or school practices in general, even in an effort to overcome a perceived disadvantage by boys. Policies guided only by brain research, or a single essentialist perspective, can be far reaching by precipitating changes in educational practice, the allocation of resources and decisions that determine the nature of experiences at school by individual students. School policies have to be well informed and in the best interests of all boys, rather than just the boys who conform to the stereotype espoused by the essentialist perspective.

None of these popular books (Hawkes 2001; Lashlie 2006; Nagel 2006) is inherently or intentionally troublesome but their messages can be too easily over simplified to imply all boys are the same. Ironically, as an educator, it is important to recognise similarities between boys in the case school but their many differences must be considered in an effort to serve the child's individual needs. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:44) claim that 'biological essentialism is, by and large, anti-educational, and educators must challenge at every turn constraining deterministic views of science'. Accepting that masculinity depends upon a particular social context to shape a boy's view of masculinity does not mean, however, that I can disregard similarities in general characteristics displayed by boys whom I teach in the case study school.

At the same time, it is important not to discount a perspective just because of its limitations. An essentialist perspective can provide a valuable insight into an aspect for some boys at school. Recent brain research, in particular, will contribute to pedagogical development because it has progressed an understanding of how learning takes place. These developments will benefit all students in the long term if they are transferred carefully from the laboratory where they are discovered to the learning environment where they are applied.

Social constructivist perspectives

An alternative view of masculinity to essentialist perspectives suggests that masculinity is shaped by interactions between people in a social context. Connell (2000; 2001; 2005) is attributed with the view that masculinity does not exist as an ontological given but comes into existence as people act in a social context (Swain 2006b:319). Connell describes masculinity as inexact, created in context and interacting with the socially constructed environment within which it is evident (Connell 2001:30).

This view is aligned with the ecological perspective of the thesis in this portfolio because it allows the understanding of masculinity to be constructed in context as a product of the unique environmental circumstances. Connell defines masculinity in the following way:

> 'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture (Connell 2001:34-35).

This definition of masculinity attributes its construction to the social world rather than to biological factors or some other essential components of masculinity. Social constructionist proponents emphasize the importance of the social environment and nurture over nature in the construction of masculinity. They maintain that gender, both masculinity and femininity, is

contextually bound, assuming different meanings in different places (Gardiner 2005:35; Swain 2006b:318-319). That is to say, it is 'nurtured throughout the life course to the point that very different sexual beings are created' (Gerschick 2006:370). This perspective is completely opposed to the essentialist perspectives whose focus is on the individual attributes of a person.

The importance of social context is recognised by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998). They state that 'becoming a man is a matter of constructing oneself in and being constructed by the available ways of being male in a particular society' (1998:46). As a result, it is argued that boys construct themselves in, and are constructed by, the available ways and meanings of being a boy, in a particular social context of time and place as a result of the unique interaction of the microsystems of their world. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:51) maintain constructing masculinity is about negotiating a 'set of storylines' and Swain (2006a:318-319) describes this as 'repertoires of action'. Gilbert and Gilbert and Swain emphasize the importance of personal social experiences in shaping an individual's understanding and view of masculinity.

The social constructivist perspective introduces an opportunity for self determination by individuals and is closely aligned to an ecological perspective. A boy may be influenced by his environment through encountering experiences that will shape his masculine identity. These influences may be from beyond their immediate social world of family, school and peers, and even beyond their control, although they influence their lives. This consideration is absent from essentialist perspectives of masculinity (pp107-110). An ecological perspective helps to explain how these experiences are brought about. The nature of the social experiences of an individual will be shaped by the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystems of an individual's world. A social constructivist perspective places the social context as the primary influence.

In *Raising Cain: Protecting the emotional life of boys,* Kindlon and Thompson (2000) write:

> Boys come to conclusions about the way they should be, what constitutes masculinity, and whether or not they are good and worthwhile boys as a result of hundreds, or even hundreds of thousands, of moments of hearing, observing, and reacting to messages about what makes a boy and a man (Kindlon and Thompson 2000:258).

An acceptance of a social constructivist perspective of masculinity necessitates an acceptance of multiple masculinities. Logically, there will be varying forms of masculinity if boys are developing their own views on the basis of their personal social experiences, that may differ markedly.

Typologies of masculinity

Typologies have been frequently used by educational researchers to identify groups of boys and the way they construct masculinity within the same social context of a school (Willis 1977; Mac An Ghaill 1994; Martino 1999). These typologies tend to be presented as mutually exclusive groups of boys whose interactions are characterized by rivalry. This is certainly the case of the "lads" and the "ear 'oles" in Willis' British school boy ethnography (Willis 1977).

Swain (2006a:335) recognises these typologies as useful because they demonstrate how different forms of masculinity exist simultaneously in the same place. However, Swain (2006a) does not employ them in his explanation of his findings and he justifies his reluctance to use typologies:

> I found typologies to be too simplistic, limiting, and restrictive and unable adequately to illustrate the real-life complexities of pupil identities that were often multiple, fluid, and contradictory (Swain 2006a:335).

The restrictive nature of typologies, including at school, limits the opportunities to consider and explain the complexities of adolescent social interaction, especially in a school where the students are involved in a range of activities and social environments such as classes, sport teams, activities of special interest and travelling companions. It is through these activities that boys at school might attain membership to a particular typology. However, boys who may be categorized as belonging to different typologies interact with each other through membership of many different groups at school (as a result of a school's organization and educational requirements) rather than mutually exclusive social lives confined to boys in one group at school. Given these deficiencies, typologies have not been employed in this project.

Relations among masculinities

Connell (2005:76-81) outlines a relational approach to facilitate an understanding of the patterns of masculinity. This approach accepts the co-existence of multiple masculinities interacting in the form of four patterns of masculinity. These patterns are: hegemony; subordination; complicity; and, marginalization. Swain (2006a; 2006b) introduces an additional pattern of masculinity he calls 'personalised'. These five patterns of masculinity have been employed in this research to explain the complexity of masculinities demonstrated in the case school.

- Hegemony

The introduction of the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is attributed to Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985: cited in Connell, 2005 and Swain, 2006a) and further developed by Connell (2000; 2005). A hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity at the top the hierarchy of masculinities. Its prime position is the product of a particular pattern of gender relations in a social context. The form of masculinity that is praised most highly, encouraged and supported the greatest in a community is likely to be the dominant form. However, it does not have to be the most commonly engaged masculinity (Connell 2005; Swain 2006a).

Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant image of what it means to be a man in any particular social and cultural context. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:51) state the following:

> Some commentators have questioned whether there is a single dominant form of masculinity which warrants the label hegemonic, preferring to describe the stereotyped popular image as a culturally exalted rather than a dominant form. In our view, it is reasonable to speak of a pervasive and powerful form of masculinity which is exalted *and* practised across discourses and social contexts, which regulates thought and action, and which therefore can be called hegemonic.

The scale of the social context needs to be established for the notion of hegemonic masculinity to be more meaningful. Plummer (2005) employs stories of male sexuality from a variety of unidentified, but presumably Western, social contexts to illustrate the convergence of different stories into a particular version of what it is to be a sexual male. The scale of this social context is Western society, with a belief there is an essential male sexuality revealed by the combination of the different stories. Within this large scale: 'Hegemonic masculinity, the currently dominant and ascendant form of masculinity, is constructed as not-feminine, but also simultaneously as not-gay, not-black, not-working class, and not-immigrant' (Messner 2006:314). These understandings of hegemonic masculinity within a large social scale illustrate the complexity of masculinity with numerous components contributing to the nature of masculinity itself and the development of a dominant form.

A form of masculinity is not necessarily hegemonic in the long term nor is it consistent across social contexts. Connell (2005) explains the dynamic and socially defined nature of hegemonic masculinity:

> 'Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable (Connell 2005:76).

This suggests that the relative positioning in the hierarchy of masculinity may change over time and in place. Dominance at a particular time does not assure dominance forever, with many different social factors contributing to the establishment of a hierarchy of masculinities in any social scale. While it is important to recognise this large scale social context of hegemonic masculinity, it is one among a number of factors contributing to the experience of boys in the local social context of a school. In this research project it was necessary to consider the nature of hegemonic masculinity at a local scale, acknowledging the influence of the larger scale hegemonic masculinity in society, beyond the school.

Swain (2006a; 2006b) also refers to hegemony in the local social context of his research schools. The term hegemonic is applied to those who 'wield the single greatest power and authority, is able to regulate, influence and shape action, and in schools, personifies the characteristics of "real" boy' (Swain 2006b:319). In this way, the identification of a hegemonic masculinity helps to explain the complex interactions and relations between a number of co-existing masculinities as well as the boys' views of masculinity within a particular social context.

Hegemony masculinity operates by consent rather than domination requiring force to preserve its place at the top of the hierarchy. Swain (2006b:319) believes that the less resistance, the more effective the hegemony. A wide base of support in a community, not necessarily through individual engagement, can maintain the position of a particular form of masculinity as hegemonic in a particular social context (Swain 2005).

Swain (2006b:319) contends that 'the existence of multiple patterns of masculinity is not incompatible with, and need not invariably diminish, the authority of the hegemonic form'. This supports the belief that different forms of masculinity can simultaneously co-exist with a dominant form in a school (Connell 2000). Swain (2006a:337) recognises that 'the hegemonic form generally mobilizes around a number of socio-cultural constructs , such as physical/athletic skill, strength, fitness, control, competitiveness, culturally acclaimed knowledge, discipline, courage, self-reliance, and adventurousness'. There are many components enabling compliance by a boy to a hegemonic masculinity. Swain (2006a; 2006b) explores the link between the concept of hegemonic masculinity amongst Year 6 boys and their bodies. The current research explores the link between hegemonic masculinity and success at the case school which, to some extent at least, is connected to boys' bodies.

The identification of a hegemonic masculinity at the school may be intertwined with the boys' attitudes to, and perceptions of, factors influencing their views of masculinity. Some of the factors influencing the boys' views will be from a larger social scale, such as the macrosystem of Australian society, while others may be more immediate resulting from particular spatial practices at the microsystem level to produce a unique school culture and sense of place. Regardless of the scale of the social context it is the successful claim to authority, by any means, that is the mark of hegemony.

- Subordination

Subordinate forms of masculinity are located outside the hegemonic form of masculinity and in a position of lower standing in the hierarchies of masculinity. The subordinate forms are controlled, oppressed and subjugated by the hegemonic form (Swain 2006a:339). While such forms of masculinity do not conform to the hegemonic form they interact with it. The dynamic nature of hegemony (Connell 2005) will create opportunities for alternative forms of masculinity to take on the hegemonic position when circumstances change in a social context. Exactly how this occurs is not well understood but there is a simultaneous co-existence of alternative subordinate forms of masculinity. In the context of a school, subordinated boys will differ in their interests or actions from the boys who conform to the hegemonic masculine form. Understanding the hegemonic form is crucial before alternative forms of masculinity can be viewed as subordinate.

- Complicity

Relatively few males, perhaps even a minority, conform to the standards of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005:79). In fact, 'large numbers of men have some connection with the hegemonic project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 2005:79). This means the place of a hegemonic masculinity is not established and maintained through the direct participation by most men in the hegemonic masculinity. Swain (2006a:338) found this to be the experience of the boys in the local context of their UK school.

In the context of a school, the aspirations of some boys to achieve inclusion and achieve a hegemonic masculinity is recognised as a way of establishing and supporting a complicit masculinity. Connell (2005:79) uses the example of how many men benefit from 'the patriarchal dividend' without 'naked domination or an uncontested display of authority' considered as the means for male dominance in society as a whole. This translates to a school example, where boys participate in high status sports at all levels of ability and then attend key matches as spectators, thus maintaining the hegemonic masculine form. The boys themselves

may not meet the standards of the hegemonic masculinity but they are associated with it and thereby serve to support it.

- Marginalization

Marginalization takes account of other structures such as class and race and how they create further relationships between masculinities (Connell 2005:80). The example of how successful black athletes in the United States of America might be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity, but their success does not yield social authority to black men generally in that country. This example illustrates how race can confound the relationships between masculinities (Connell 2005:81). This is a significant additional layer across a large scale social context, such as a nation, but it can also be variable in the local social context of a school. The macrosystem level, of the country, will have an impact on a school through policies, role models and expectations. The influence on a school of the large scale social context will vary depending on the school's demographic mix and the presence of marginalized groups in the school. In the Australian context the structure of ethnicity could be a more important component of marginalization and subordination in some school environments but not in others.

- Personalised Masculinity

Swain (2006a:340-42; 2006b:326-28) introduces personalised masculinity as an additional pattern of masculinity . This pattern of masculinity is explained by Swain in the following way:

> Just because there is a culturally authoritative form of masculinity within each setting it does not automatically follow that all boys (or men) will attempt to engage with, aspire to, or challenge it: some, of course, are simply unable to do so. However, this also does not necessarily mean that these boys (or men) are inevitably subordinated, or that they have any desire to subordinate others (Swain 2006b:326).

Boys who conform to this pattern of masculinity are recognised as presenting no threat to the hegemonic form, and are generally accepted by their peers (Swain 2006a:341). These are boys who experience few problems moving between different activities and interest groups at school. It takes a certain level of tolerance in a school culture to allow this to happen and not to demand conformity to, or at least complicity to, the hegemonic form without subordination.

The current research aimed at a better understanding of how these different patterns of masculinity relate to each other in the school to shape the learning environment. The understanding that social context and personal biology interact to produce experiences shaping

an individual's development underpin the research questions of the current research. The
challenge for a school is to understand its role in shaping the nature of the experiences
encountered by its students in the prevailing social environment.

The following section provides a literature context for the issue of the role of schools in the
development of masculinities. This section provides a background to the third research
question in this project: What is the school's influence on the boys' views of masculinity?

The role of schools

Schools are an important component of the social world of young people. Schools provide a
focus for socialization amongst peers and exposure to new experiences. Gilbert and Gilbert
(1998:114) recognise schools to be gendered in their organization and practices.

> The school as an institution, with its historically reproduced rules,
> routines, expectations, relationships and rewards, and its deployment of
> artefacts, resources and space, actively shapes what happens within it, for
> all it inhabitants.

Gilbert and Gilbert recognise the importance of the school experience and how this in turn
influences students' perceptions of and attitudes towards masculinity. Every school provides
a unique combination of experiences for their students and a different environment for the
social construction of masculinities. As Connell (2000:161) succinctly explains:

> The academic and disciplinary hierarchy of schools … influence the making of
> masculinities, but by producing plural masculinities, in a structured gender order
> among boys, rather than a single pattern of masculinity.

The concept of a 'gender regime' (Connell 2000) is important in understanding the role of
schools in the construction of masculinities and the potential for the school to influence boys'
views of masculinity.

> Masculinities are configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure
> that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as face-to-
> face relationships and sexuality. Masculinity is institutionalized in this
> structure, as well as being an aspect of individual character and personality
> (Connell 2000:29).

A school is a complex institution, containing a particular gender regime produced by the
unique configuration of social practices. The gender regime appears in the way that patterns
of masculinity relate to each other in the particular institution. It is also reasonable to expect
that a gender regime of a school is dynamic as different influences interplay to shape the
school environment over time. Particularly for boys, the gender regime is enacted through
sport.

Sport

Sport is identified as very important influence in the way masculinities relate to each other in schools (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Connell 2005; Messner 2005; Swain 2005). Sport in any setting has been described as 'the embodiment of masculinity' (Connell 2005:54) and as the 'quintessential manifestation of masculinist ethos' (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:60). Boys' participation in sport, the profile different sports receive at a school as well as in the wider society are influential in the construction of boys' attitudes towards and perceptions of masculine behaviour. The influence of sport extends beyond the sport itself and will vary between social settings by providing a socialization process enabling the maintenance of power and control. Messner (2005:315), for example, reflects on the relevance of the game of cricket in domestic British schools as well as in the British colonies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Cricket was presented as a representation of British morality, ethics and values which would ensure control of colonies when taken from the cricket field into the wider society. This approach to social engineering is recognised by Messner as ineffective in some cases but the intention to provide social lessons by participating in cricket is evident. In this example, a form of sport has been intentionally used to establish a certain form of masculine behaviour and pattern of masculinity through establishing a particular social environment at the microsystem level but directly influenced by the macrosystem. The role of sport in schools will be explored more fully in the presentation of findings and discussion, later in this chapter.

The following section outlines some of the previous research of masculinity in schools. The nature of the unique environment experienced at school and the resulting gender regime are crucial components of the research findings.

Masculinity at boys' schools – earlier studies

The classic studies of the culture of boys' schools and masculinity in boys' schools (Willis 1977; Connell, Ashenden et al. 1982; Walker 1988; Benyon 1989; Eckert 1989; Mac An Ghaill 1994) employed an ethnographic methodology and interviews to reveal an aggressive form of masculinity in boys' schools by concentrating on working-class or deviant boys and their rejection of school culture (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:131). This form of masculinity is not universally recognised amongst boys even though it can dominate the culture of some schools. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:126) suggest this form of masculinity is intermittent and limited to particular school contexts, such as the playground and sport. Similar findings are

shown in more recent research (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003) of adolescents from different schools, with a resistance to authority, school rules and school values linked to adolescent views of masculinity. These studies represent most adolescent boys as oppositional. These studies are interesting and exciting and they portray oppositional boys well in the case schools they study. However, not all boys are oppositional and reject school culture even when a strong oppositional culture prevails amongst the boys, for example in the case of the aspirational boys described by Willis (1977) as 'ear 'oles' in a school where rejection of middle class values and an aggressive form of masculinity predominated. Not all boys or school cultures are the same and conform to generalisations about boys' views of masculinity at school or in their wider worlds. Boys' views vary in different social contexts and school environments.

Connell, Ashenden *et al*. (1982:73) recognise strong but alternative forms of masculinity in 'elite schools'. They describe this form of masculinity as 'motivated to compete, strong in the sense of one's own abilities, able to dominate others and to face down opponents in situations of conflict'. Informed by Connell, Ashenden *et al*, and as an elite school, it is reasonable to expect that the form of masculinity dominating in the case school environment will be less oppositional toward school values and more accepting of the school's policies. This compliance is accompanied by high levels of motivation to compete and develop personal skills to create an advantage in a world beyond school.

The contrasting oppositional and more compliant school environments shape different gender regime in the respective schools. The resulting views of masculinity are expressed differently but they have important similarities in relation to cultural reproduction in schools. In all cases the schools serve as an important microsystem of the boys' social context as a place for interaction with peers, parents, teachers, authority, values and knowledge. The nature of the school environment is influenced by the socio-economic character of the school population, aspirations of parents and students as well as the internal school factors of ethos and educational climate influenced by the students. This is clearly identified by the work of Willis (1977) where the boys of a urban working class background in an English comprehensive school rejected the middle class values of the education system, imposed by the school especially with regard to gender. In its place, and amongst themselves, the boys established a gender regime consistent with the factory floor and the working class values of their domestic microsystem. The school environment in the current research is far more compliant and accepting of the school's gender regime than the environment researched by Willis (1977).

An assumption in this project is that the school environment and the experiences provided at school have an important influence on the development of its students. For these reasons a social constructivist perspective of masculinity is more in tune with my research than an essentialist perspective. A social constructivist perspective of masculinity prevailing in this project is aligned with the ecological perspective of this portfolio as they both accept that students' experiences are influenced by the opportunities provided at school by their interactions with family, values, peers and others.

Research Methods

The general research methods for this project are outlined in Chapter 2 (pp21-23). Data collection in this project involved the combination of qualitative and quantitative tools to investigate the research questions. The multi-method approach used included focus groups and a questionnaire based on the information obtained through the focus groups and draw upon wider literature on masculinities and other factors influencing boys' views. Each method of data collection is outlined and justified in this section.

Qualitative Method
Focus Groups

Two groups of twelve boys from the cohort of Year 8, 2005 who moved into Year 9, 2006 participated in the focus groups in this project. Both focus groups met on five occasions, once in each term for five terms, commencing while the boys were in Year 8 during Term 4, 2005 until Term 4, 2006, when the boys were nearing the end of their time in Year 9. The focus group meetings were held on Friday afternoons immediately after school for between 30 and 45 minutes.

An information sheet (Appendix 8) and general guiding questions for these focus groups (Appendix 14) were prepared in advance of the research as a part of the ethics application submitted to the University of New England's Human Ethics Research Committee (HREC) in October 2005. The information sheet was read to participants at the start of each focus group meeting. The participants were assured of their privacy at this time. This has been honoured in this thesis by substitute names to all participant transcript quotations, other than my own. Contributions by me are marked "PDM". All participants were invited to the meetings in accordance with UNE's HREC requirements by stating that participation was not obligatory and that there was no punishment for non-participation. Informed consent was obtained from

parents and boys before the boys participated in the focus groups. A letter of invitation was mailed to the parents of each student participant at the start of the term in which the focus group was to be held. This letter provided details of the scheduled date and time for focus group meetings in the coming term as well as restating HREC requirements of this research.

One set of focus group participants was invited after random selection from a list of Year 8 students in September 2005. The other focus group comprised boys who had participated in a five day father and son camp in August 2005, titled *Pathways to Manhood*, run by an organisation external to the school. The reason for not randomly selecting all focus group participants was to enable deeper investigation of aspects of the *Pathways to Manhood* camp experience related to masculinity and the impact of this experience on the boys' perceptions of and attitudes towards masculinity. It is not an intention of this study to explore the details of the camp itself but to acknowledge the experience as unique to this group, within the school cohort. The same guiding questions were asked of the two groups in the sessions.

The process of selection of focus group participants was explained to the participants at their first focus group meeting in Term 4 2005. Additionally, in an effort to explain and clarify my study, I spoke to the whole of the Middle School about the focus groups, their purpose. The method of selection of participants and connections to my research during the Middle School assembly immediately before the first focus group meeting. I also discussed the research with parents and staff in formal forums (such as assemblies and parent gatherings) and in informal conversations individually or in small groups. This had the added benefit of encouraging discussion and awareness of the research topic within the school community.

The longitudinal nature of the contact with each focus group allowed me to follow changes in the boys' attitudes and perceptions of masculinities over time during their transition from Year 8 through Year 9. Five sessions over a thirteen month period allowed an opportunity for some of the issues first raised and discussed by the boys in the focus group sessions to be revisited later in the year with greater participant maturity. This also allowed for discussion to move with the seasons of interests (especially sport), activities (such as music and drama) and rituals in the school calendar. This structure also allowed for the developing awareness of concepts about masculinity to be brought to the group as the boys had an opportunity to discuss these matters with parents or peers at their leisure outside the focus group meetings.

The focus groups in this research led to the construction of the questionnaire (Appendix 15). It is clear and logical, following on from other approaches to measuring attitudes and perceptions in the social sciences (Ludlow and Mahalik 2002) who contended that focus groups are a valuable way to develop a detailed understanding of an area of research before attempting to devise a measure through a questionnaire.

The practical aspects of duration and scheduling meetings amongst other school commitments had an impact on the number of focus groups and the frequency of meetings. Stringer (2003:76) emphasizes the time and place of the meetings must be conducive to the process. Due to regular school co-curricular commitments of students on weekday afternoons, Friday afternoon was the best time to schedule meetings. In addition to this, variations in term length and wanting to maintain an equal opportunity for the boys to participate in the meetings, combined to result in two focus groups for this research project. As this research was undertaken concurrently with Research Project 1 on peer relations, involving two additional focus groups of different students, it would have been difficult to conduct more than four focus group sessions a term. Only the two focus groups involved in this project met in Term 4 2006 when the participants were in Year 9. Focus group attendance averaged seven participants with one session of two students to the largest of eleven participants.

The focus group sessions are identified by numbers explained in the following way. Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2 participated in this project, Research Project 2 – Boys' views of masculinities. Reference to focus groups is in this chapter by *Focus Group 2.5* as the fifth meeting of Focus Group 2.

The focus groups were used to directly address the research questions and to use the student responses to inform the construction of a questionnaire to be circulated to the whole Year 9 2006 cohort. The same questions were asked of the two focus groups meeting in the same term (one week apart). The questions asked in each session were the following:

Session 1 - Term 4 2005
- Are some subjects more suitable for boys at this school than others?
- Are some activities at this school better for boys to do than others?

Session 2 - Term 1 2006
- What influences your views of being a man?
- How influential on your views of masculinity was the Pathways to Manhood camp? (Group 1 only)

Session 3 - Term 2 2006
- What are the general influences on boys' views of masculinity?

Session 4 – Term 3 2006
- How does the school influence your views of masculinity?

Session 5 – Term 4 2006
- Is there a dominant view of masculinity amongst the boys in Year 9 at this school?

- What are the contributing factors to the development of the views held by boys?

The repetition of themes in these questions was a deliberate attempt to maintain and extend conversations amongst the boys, over time, and to capture aspects of the maturing process within the focus groups.

Quantitative Tool - Masculinity Questionnaire

A questionnaire distributed to the Year 9 cohort in 2006 was the only quantitative tool used in this project. The following section explains and justifies the use of this collection tool.

Construction and Content

The questionnaire used in this study was constructed in October 2006, between the fourth and fifth focus group sessions. It was devised on the basis of the information revealed in the eight focus group sessions before October 2006. The questionnaire's design closely follows the key research questions for this project. The questionnaire was used to identify patterns across the cohort further explaining the issues discussed in the focus groups over a thirteen month period.

The questionnaire (Appendix 15) contains 36 items surveying the boys' perceptions of the following: views of masculinity; role models influencing their views of masculinity; perceptions of the status of some activities; and, the influence of the school on the boys' views of masculinity. Of the 36 items, there are 32 Likert-type items to indicate a respondent's degree of agreement to statements about the following: views of masculinity; role models influencing views of masculinity; and, the influence of the school on the boys' views of masculinity.

Each Likert-type question has five response options (1 = Disagree Strongly, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The remaining section of four items explores the boys' perceptions of the status of a range of school activities. There are three items requiring respondents to rank the status of some school activities and one question where respondents

identify three items from a list of eight aspects of school they perceive to be of the greatest value.

Notification

The students were told of the questionnaire in the Friday Middle School Assembly the week before the questionnaires were distributed. In the notification students were explained the reason for the questionnaire, how the data were to be used and their place in my postgraduate degree research project at the school. The connection between the questionnaires, research, ethical responsibilities and doctoral studies at the University of New England were made explicit. In accordance with HREC requirements, the boys and their parents were told the boys were not obliged to participate, blank returns could be made to indicate an unwillingness to participate and that there was no penalty for non participation.

On 1 November 2006 the Year 9 boys' parents were notified in writing of the intention to distribute the questionnaire to their sons the following week (Appendix 16). This letter contained information regarding ethical requirements and clearance for this research, the reasons for the collection of the data, how the data was to be used as well as a statement that completion of the questionnaire was not compulsory.

Teachers at the school were notified by me of the questionnaire and their role in its administration in two ways. First, the week prior to its distribution the teachers responsible for overseeing the questionnaire administration were notified by email and on a second occasion through an announcement at the normal weekly Monday staff briefing on 6 November. The reasons for the questionnaire, procedural instructions and ethical issues were outlined to staff on both occasions.

Administration

The questionnaire was distributed to the Year 9 cohort in a twenty-five minute period on Tuesday 7 November 2006. Questionnaire completion was overseen by the teacher normally responsible for the boys in this scheduled period. On completion the questionnaires were returned to my internal staff mail box. There were no reported problems with these arrangements. A total of 187 respondents participated.

There were no blank returns from students but one response was disregarded because it was clearly a non-serious response evident by stray marks and the selection of the same level of agreement across the questionnaire.

Analytical Tools

The multi-method format required a number of approaches to be used in data analysis. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire (Appendix15) was analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics for one section of the questionnaire with Rasch analysis and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) used for analysis of the same items in the remaining three sections. The qualitative data collected in focus groups were analyzed using a thematic approach.

Questionnaire analysis

Descriptive statistics, Rasch analysis and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were used to analyze questionnaire data collected in this project. This section explains each of these analytical tools and how they were used in this project.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the section on the boys' perceptions of relative status of activities at school. There were four items in this section of the questionnaire. A combination of percentages and mean scores were employed to analyze the data collected from these items.

Descriptive statistics are recognised to be limited to the data at hand and do not involve any inferences or potential for generalisation (Walsh 1990:3). Their use in this research was appropriate because of the research design with data and research questions particular to this case study. Researcher generalisation of findings was not an objective of this research project so inferential statistics were not appropriate when investigating the boys' perceptions of relative status of activities at the case school. However, a means to economically present the data from the questionnaire was required.

Rasch analysis and EFA together

Rasch analysis and EFA were different tools used on the same questionnaire items to provide different insights into the data and to assist in its interpretation. The combination of Rasch analysis and EFA to improve understanding of the data is not common but it has been undertaken before (Grimbeek and Nisbet 2006). The factors revealed by EFA work with the Rasch model to deepen understanding of the case study. This approach is consistent with the Bond and Fox vision for the future of complementary use of statistics and measurement in social science research (Bond and Fox 2007:5). This approach was employed because it is

normal for me in a professional role to utilize two different tools to analyze the same data to assist in interpreting the data. This practice in my professional role typically helps me to better understand the complexities of the situation and to better inform a response.

Rasch analysis

Rasch analysis is presented as an effective analytical tool for measuring aspects of the human condition (Wright and Masters 1982; Bond and Fox 2001; 2007). Rasch analysis, devised by Georg Rasch (1960; 1980), constructs a scale of fundamental measure from raw data. It is the only method available for general use that constructs a measure in the human sciences. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to evaluate the merits and mathematical justification of the Rasch analysis. Bond and Fox (2007:263) cite the extensive body of work by Andrich (1988), Fisher (1994), Perline, Wright and Wainer (1979) and Wright (1985; 1999) to justify the applicability of Rasch analysis and how it produces the sort of measurements expected in the physical sciences when it is applied to measurement in the social sciences.

There are a number of scales within the Rasch family of models produced by Rasch analysis. These have been developed in response to different circumstances in data collection methods. Rating scale analysis were developed by Andrich (1978) and explained by Wright and Masters (1982). The work of Bond and Fox (2001; 2007) was used in this research because it is the scale most appropriate for use with a questionnaire using Likert scale responses.

Rasch analysis is a widely accepted tool for data analysis with potential to provide support for the measure of human perceptions and attitudes. Rasch analysis has been used elsewhere by social scientists to research aspects of masculinity, such as to measure the psychometric structure of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Ludlow and Mahalik 2002). In this case the measurement of aspects of masculinity provided a useful analytical tool to inform clinical interventions because relative differences in responses could be compared between respondents on all items. Rasch analysis assisted Ludlow and Mahalik (2002) in the development of the instrument as a single measure of masculinity. This analysis was useful in the current study to determine whether there was a single construct underpinning each research question.

The Rasch analysis used in this research project follows a rating scale design to analyze data for three of the four sections in the questionnaire (Appendix 15). Rasch analysis has been used to measure the following: the boy's views of masculinity (BVM) related to items 1 to 13 of the questionnaire; the factors influencing the boys views of masculinity (FIVM) related to

items 14 to 24; and, the school's influence on views of masculinity (SIVM) related to items 29 to 36.

At first glance, the development of a fundamental measurement scale by Rasch analysis resounds with work undertaken in a positivist paradigm. This research project is constructivist but the Rasch model produced and its construction of a measurement scale is appropriate because the responses were of the respondents' construction. The model provides a measure of the boys' endorsement of statements related to their perceptions and attitudes of masculinity, how they are shaped and the school's influence. The Rasch model developed from these data is not measuring masculinity *per se*, but it is a method of measuring the boys' perceptions. These perceptions are measured when the relative support by boys for the questionnaire items are positioned on a calibrated linear scale. Conclusions can be drawn from this measurement of the boys' perceptions of relative importance of each statement and a comparison between statements included in the questionnaire. The model produced from the data provides a valuable insight into the boys' perceptions of their views of masculinity, factors influencing their views and the school's role.

There were, additionally, four reasons why the Rasch model was used as a tool in the analysis of data in this research. First, Rasch analysis provides a deeper insight to the instrument and understanding of the data than would be enabled by standard statistical procedures. This is because Rasch analysis is able to: 'create abstractions that transcend the raw data … so that inferences can be made about constructs rather than mere descriptions about the raw data' (Bond and Fox 2001:3). This is achieved through the development of model with a measurement scale allowing comparison of items through their position on that scale. This unique feature is desirable in an effort to understand the data collected and its implications for the school.

Second, the Rasch model's rating scale analysis devised by Andrich (1978) is particularly well suited to be used in conjunction with data collected using Likert scale categories, as is the case in the questionnaire completed by the Year 9 boys. The subjective nature of data collected using Likert scales is recognised by Hales (1986 cited in; Bond and Fox 2007:101) as a limitation and a reason for the use of other scales in some areas of the human sciences, especially in psychology. This subjectivity is largely overcome by Rasch analysis. Bond and Fox (2007:101) are critical of standard methods for analyzing Likert scales because they 'disregard the subjective nature of the data by making unwarranted assumptions about their meaning'. Their discussion moves to consider the shortcomings of standard methods for

analyzing Likert scales before stating the merit of Rasch analysis. The fact that Rasch analysis considers the degree of difficulty of each question, based on the way a group of respondents actually responded to that question, takes into consideration aspects of this subjectivity. This is because Rasch analysis 'will also establish the pattern in the use of the Likert scale categories to yield a rating scale structure shared by all the items on the scale' (Bond and Fox 2001:68).

Third, the measured values of the key attributes shown by the Rasch model, including items and people can be represented visually in the item-person map and bubble charts. The map and chart provide a meaningful and easy to interpret representation of the data. The presentation of data is an important part of this, and any, research project.

Finally, this questionnaire and Rasch analysis have been used to research the situation in the case school in regard to boys' view of masculinity, factors influencing their views and the school's role in this. The questionnaire has been devised as a first step with potential in the development of a widely applicable measure of boys' views of masculinity. This research is an important step in refining the construction of such a measure, using Rasch analysis, if that potential is to be realized.

The most succinct summary of the general Rasch analysis is provided by Bond and Fox (2007:41). The value of Rasch analysis for test developers in the human sciences, especially psychology and education, is apparent as are its applications to measurement in social sciences for developing a measurement scale to investigate attitudes and perceptions. Rasch analysis is based on the examination of one human attribute (unidimensionality) at a time, placed on a hierarchical line of inquiry. This line is a theoretical ideal against which patterns of actual responses can be compared and investigated. Item and person deviations from the line are considered not to fit the model and warrant careful consideration. Therefore, put simply, Rasch analysis is an ideal that tests data to see if collected data fit a single model. Anomalies or mis-fitters of the model (from the data) warrant further investigation and consideration as to whether the problem was the nature of the item or the wording of the statement causing some ambiguity. A detailed explanation of item difficulty, person ability and the presentation of the data using *Bond&FoxSteps* (Bond and Fox 2007) is provided in Appendix 17.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

This study incorporated EFA to assist in the understanding of the questionnaire items and the participant responses and to explore an alternative interpretation of the boys' views of masculinities. EFA provides information on the relationship between variables and data reduction assisting in the identification of themes in the data. The work of Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) has been important in determining the level of variable loading used as the cut off for each factor as appropriate to the data of this study.

Qualitative data analysis

Focus group content has been analyzed using thematic analysis of transcripts without the assistance of an electronic tool. This approach involved drawing upon my: presence at the focus groups as facilitator; writing of a brief summary soon after the completion of each focus group in the reflective journal; transcribing each session and adding a more comprehensive summary; and, reviewing and analyzing transcripts identifying themes across all focus groups. These occasions of contact with the content of the conversations combined to produce a high level of familiarity with the conversations and their content.

The initial analysis of the focus group conversations occurred soon after the completion of the session. This involved writing a short summary noting the main points raised and discussed in the focus groups. This was typically noted in my journal. The objectives of this were to write a record of content soon after the session, to position the points noted in the wider context of readings and school issues as well as to capture my thoughts soon after the conversations had taken place. This was also a safeguard against a loss of data through an error in recording or through some other technical problem. The journal was the most appropriate place to note this initial analysis of the focus group conversations.

A more analytical summary was written following the transcription of the recordings. These summaries identified themes in the issues raised by the boys. The themes were identified and coded using a simple coding system in the margin next to relevant points in the transcribed conversation text. Themes in the text were identified at this early stage. Transcribing the meetings provided the opportunity to become very familiar with the content of the conversations and emerging themes. A summary of the themes of the previous meeting was read to the boys at the start of the following session. This assisted in the setting the scene for continued conversation. Furthermore, given the long gap between the meetings of each group

(i.e. once a term) this strategy served to recap and gather the thoughts of the boys, and my own with the group, at the start of the session.

This multi-method research approach produced a great deal of rich data for analysis presented in the following section.

Research Findings and Discussion

This section provides the research findings following an analysis of the questionnaire and focus group data. The EFA data will be presented on its own first then followed by a discussion incorporating the Rasch and focus group data addressing each of the three research questions.

EFA data

Table 4.1 (p131) reports the results of the EFA undertaken for all questionnaire items combined. The 24 items were analysed using Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) plus Varimax rotation (Orthogonal rotation). Only item loadings of .20 or greater were shown in the factor matrices with a cut off at .30 for inclusion in a factor. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was an acceptable .650.

Five factors were revealed by the EFA and reported in Table 4.1 (p131). Two factors related to the boys' views of masculinity, two related to the factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity and one related to the influence of the school experience. Factor 1 was named *Physical prowess* because it included four items (to look fit, enjoy sport, physical strength and not show sadness) all related to physical aspects of the boys' views of masculinity. Factor 2 was named *Media*. This factor included three items (TV, movies and magazines) related to the medium of media in different forms influencing the boys' views of masculinity. Factor 3 was named *School Influences* and it comprised six items (be myself at school, can do any activity, teachers' influence, male peer influence, rules don't limit their capacity to be themselves and assemblies). These items suggested the boys perceived opportunities for individual expression of masculinity at school. Factor 4, *The Arts,* consisted two items (to play music and enjoy arts). This factor related a place for creativity in the boys' views of masculinity. Factor 5 was named *Male Family*. This factor also consisted two items (family and fathers) both related to family influences on the boys' views of masculinity.

Table 4.1   Rotated factor matrix (16 iterations)

Item (#)	Factor 1	2	3	4	5
Look fit (4)	.685				
Sport (10)	.619				
Strength (1)	.579				
Not show (6)	.575				
Plurality (9)	-.262				
TV (23)		.875			
Movies (19)	.276	.688			
Magazines (21)		.627			
Be myself (30)			.613		
Any activity (29)			.558		
Teachers (16)			.481		.276
Male peers (17)		.243	.380		
Rules limit (32)	.252		-.378		
Assembly (36)			.374		
Many different (33)			.283		
Hear a lot (34)			.214	.212	
Play music (12)	.206			.679	
Arts (13)				.658	
Success (2)	.248			.265	.237
Family (15)					.599
Father (14)			.314		.475
Do anything (3)					-.268
Achievement (31)					.267
Female peers (18)					.217

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation

Factor 1 *Physical Prowess* and Factor 4 *The Arts* combine to suggest that boys have a view of masculinity that embraces both stereotypical male attributes such as sport and physical strength with the performing arts. A plural view of masculinity emerges from these data. Factor 2 *Media* and Factor 5 *Male Family* suggest the boys are aware of the impact of their male family members in particular, and to a lesser extent the media as influences on their views of masculinity. Finally, Factor 3 *School Influences* suggests the boys are aware of a number of ways that the school shapes their views of masculinity, even though it appears to be to a lesser extent than male family members and the media.

Question 1 - What are the boys' views of masculinity?

Table 4.2 lists the boys' views of masculinity in the thirteen (BVM) items. The thirteen BVM items were investigated in the questionnaire (Appendix 15). The short titles in the right hand column are the titles used throughout this section.

Table 4.2   BVM Items

Item #	Statement	Short Title
1	Physical strength is important for "a man".	Strength
2	Success is important for "a man".	Success
3	To earn a living "a man" can do anything he likes	Do anything
4	"A man" has to look physically fit	Look fit
5	Some jobs are unsuitable for "a man".	Unsuitable jobs
6	"A man" doesn't show he is sad.	Not show
7	"A man" is respected by people	Respected
8	"A man" can cope with anything	Cope
9	There are lots of ways to be "a man".	Plurality
10	"A man" enjoys sport	Sport
11	"A man" enjoys listening to music	Listen music
12	"A man" enjoys playing music	Play music
13	"A man" enjoys the performing arts	Arts

Source: Masculinity Questionnaire

These items form the basis of the bubble chart in Figure 4.1 *Boys' Views of Masculinity: all items* (p133).
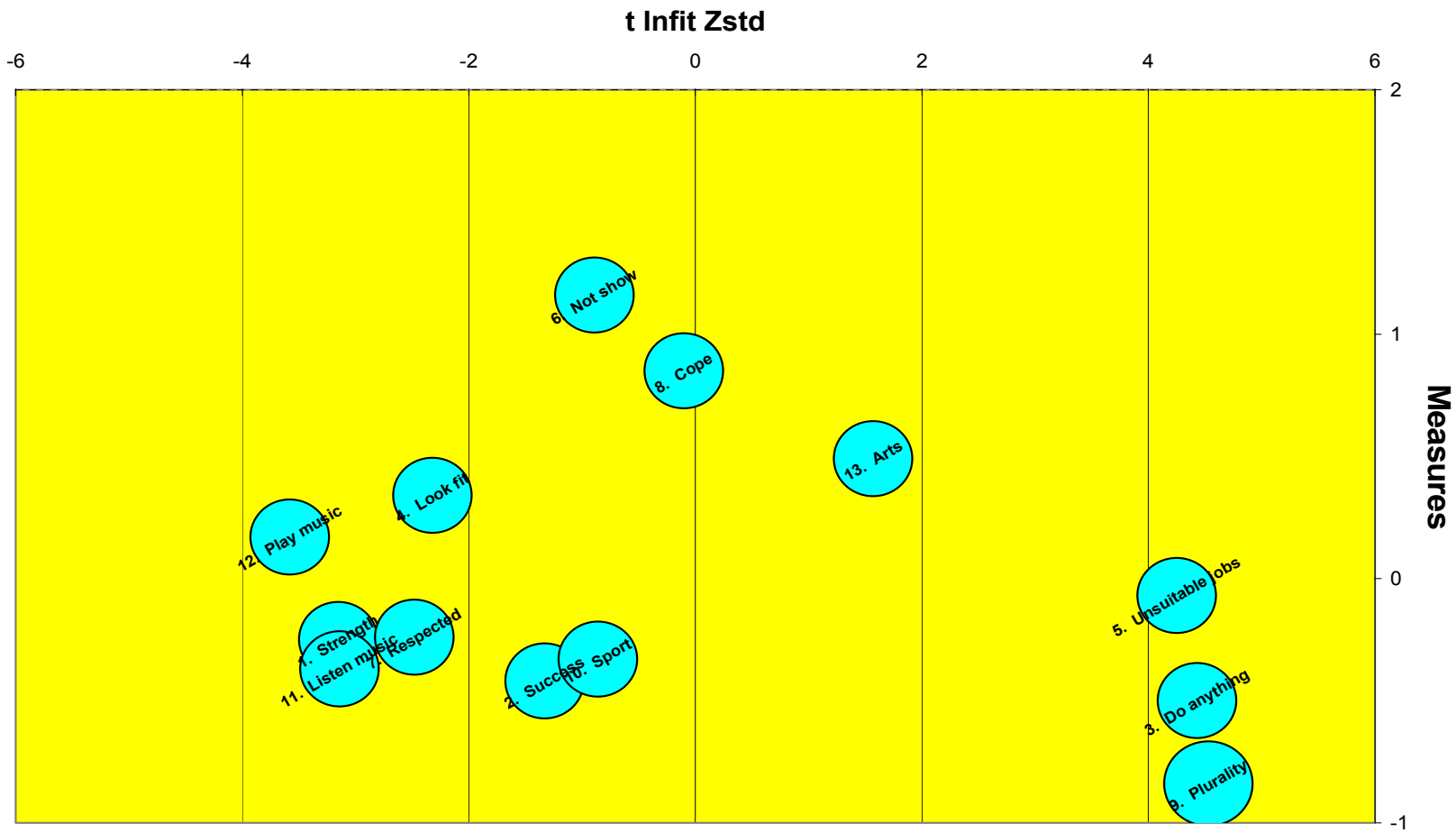
Figure 4.1   Boys' Views of Masculinity: all items

Figure 4.1 (p133) shows five of the thirteen BVM items fitting the Rasch model constructed by these data. There is a not a clear theme amongst these items and they do not combine to form a single construct underlying these data. This means that Rasch analysis suggests there is not a clear construct to masculinity perceived by the boys. The five items fitting the model are not clearly related to each other.

The three mis-fitting items in Figure 4.1 with a *t* value more than 2 are: Item 3 – *Do anything*; Item 5 – *Unsuitable jobs*; and Item 9 – *Plurality*. These items require further inspection using alternative analytical tools because the Rasch model's rating scale analysis has identified them as confusing in this quantitative summary. One possibility is that these three items are emerging as a separate concept warranting further investigation.
A separate bubble chart of these three items is included as Figure 4.2 *Men can do anything* (p135). This bubble chart shows the relationship between these three items as a concept of plurality. When taken as a separate concept, these three items fit the Rasch model with *t* infit scores well within the acceptable range of -2 and 2 as indicated by their position on the horizontal scale in the bubble chart.
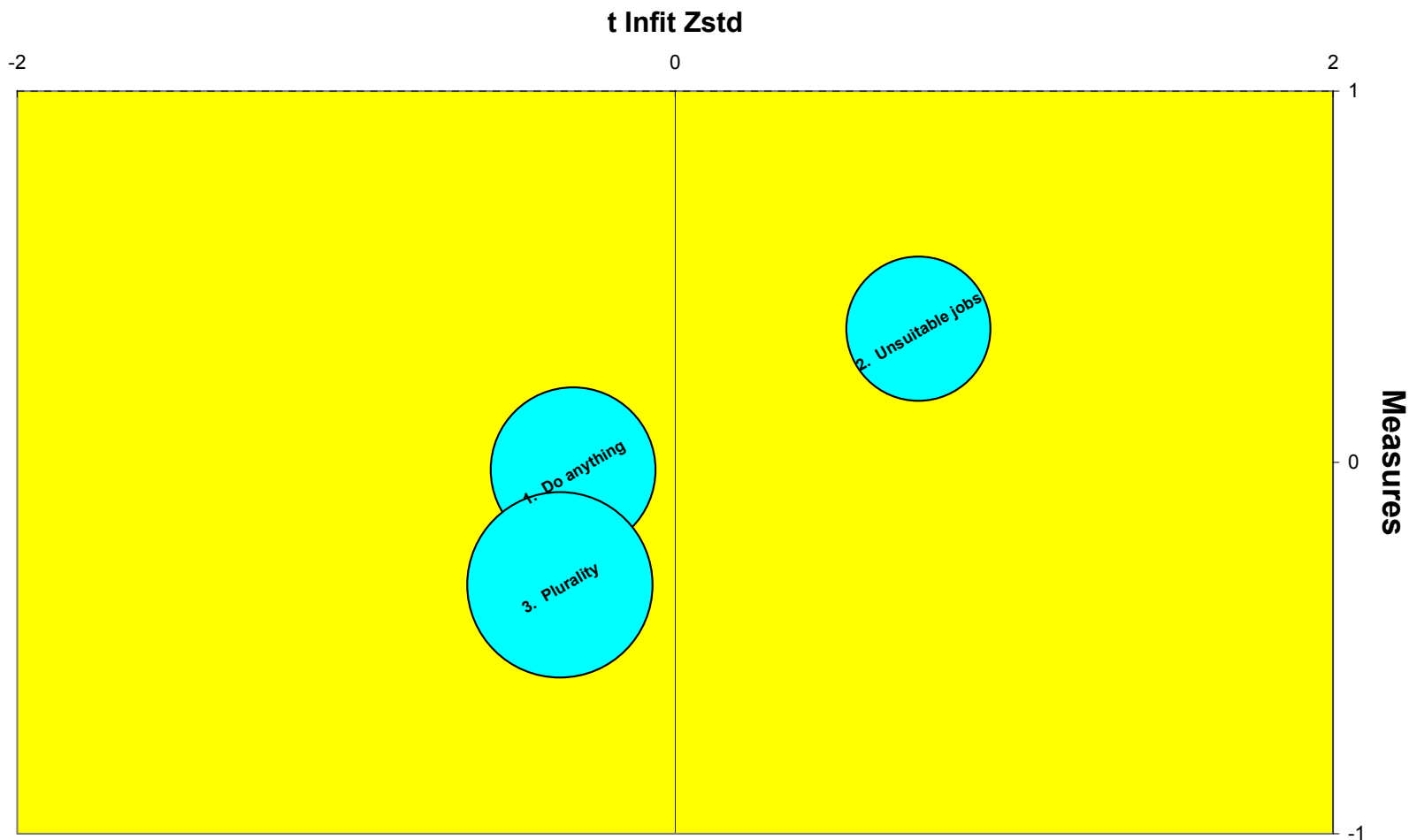
Figure 4.2   Men can do anything: items 3, 5 and 9

Table 4.3 (p137) is the item map for the thirteen BVM items. The very high level of endorsement by the boys of the statement "There are lots of ways to be a man" (Plurality, Table 4.2) is clearly shown in Table 4.3 (p137) and further supports the boys' perception of plurality of masculinity. A high level of endorsement of this statement indicates the agreement underpinning the boys' perceptions and attitudes as to what a man can be, other than just about anything he wants to be, resulting in a variety in the boys' views of masculinity. The largest cluster of items in Table 4.3 (p137), with similar and high level of endorsement includes seven items. In order of level of endorsement these are: Item 3 – *Do anything*; Item 11 – *Listen to music*; Item 10 – *Sport*; Item 2 – *Success*; Item 7 – *Respected*; Item 1 – *Strength*; and, Item 5 – *Unsuitable jobs*. Item 12 – *Play music*, Item 4 – *Look fit* and Item 13 – *Arts* received lower levels of endorsement with Item 8 – *Cope (with anything)* and Item 6 – *Not show (sadness)* receiving the lowest levels of endorsement. Generally, the BVM items are well endorsed. The lowest level of endorsement was for a negatively worded statement "A man doesn't show he is sad". The high level of endorsement of BVM items was not surprising given the process of construction of the questionnaire and their identification. The focus group conversations assisted the construction of the items. Therefore, the questionnaire is serving to confirm ideas raised in the focus groups and as items that the Year 9 boys can all relate to.

The high level of endorsement of all three items (Item 3 – *Do anything*; Item 5 – *Unsuitable jobs*; and Item 9 – *Plurality*) in Table 4.3 (p137) and the similarities in the patterns of response to them by the boys shown in Figure 4.2 (p135) demonstrates a willingness of the boys to support them as features of masculinity although there was diversity in the boys' understanding of the role each item plays.

Table 4.3   Item map of BVM: items 1 to 13
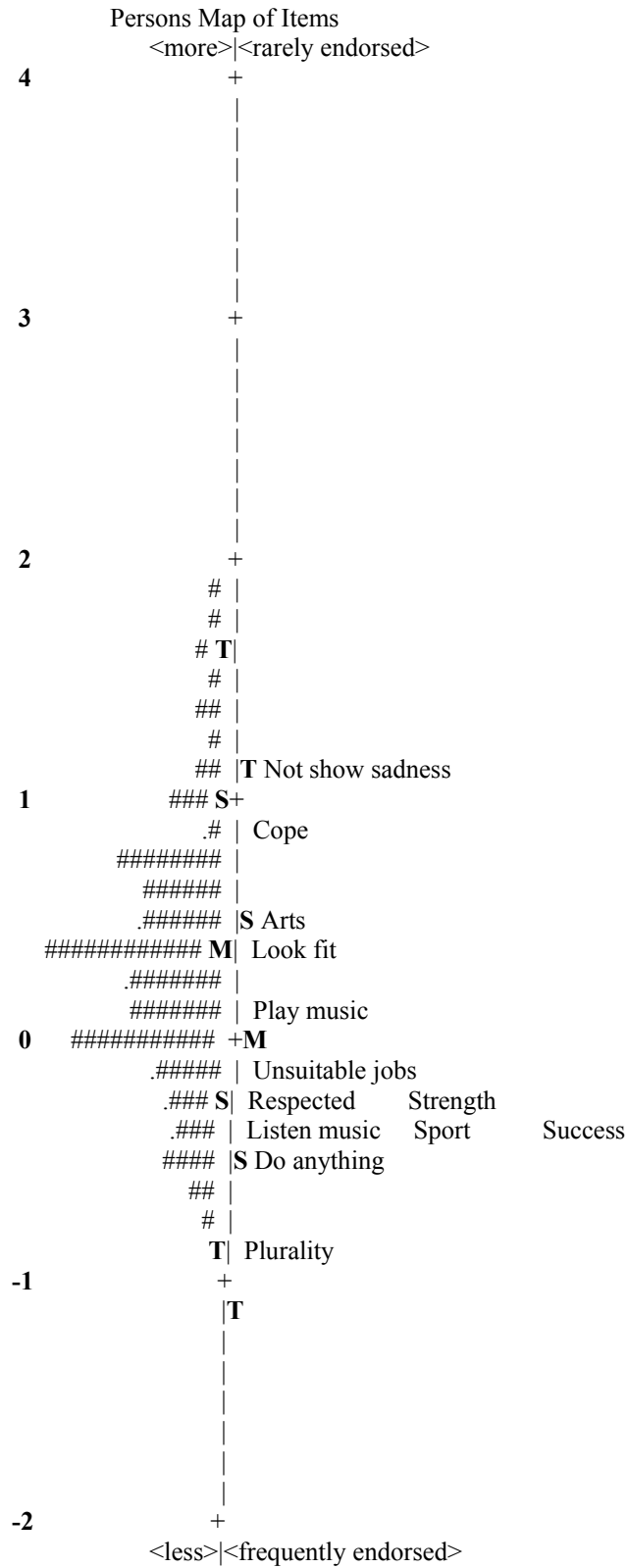
```
                  Persons Map of Items
                    <more>|<rarely endorsed>
        4                  +
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
        3                  +
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
                           |
        2                  +
                        # |
                        # |
                        # T|
                        # |
                       ## |
                        # |
                       ## |T Not show sadness
        1          ### S+
                      .# |  Cope
              ######## |
                ###### |
              .###### |S Arts
         ############ M|  Look fit
              .####### |
              ####### |  Play music
        0     ########### +M
                 .##### |  Unsuitable jobs
                .### S|  Respected       Strength
                 .### |  Listen music    Sport         Success
                #### |S Do anything
                  ## |
                   # |
                    T|  Plurality
       -1           +
                     |T
                     |
                     |
                     |
                     |
                     |
                     |
       -2           +
                  <less>|<frequently endorsed>

           Each '#' is two persons
```

This analysis suggests there is no uniform construct to the boys' views of masculinity, but there is variety in their views. These results support the variety revealed by EFA in Table 4.1 (p131) where two quite different factors were revealed in relation to the boys' views of masculinity. Factor 1 *Physical prowess* relates to physical attributes of strength, sportiness, physical appearance and not showing sadness while Factor 4 *The Arts* relates to creativity through the playing of music and enjoyment of the arts. These two very different factors suggest the boys have multiple views of masculinity and that there is not a common underlying dimension to the construction of the boys' views of masculinity, because they hold multiple views.

The following section will present further data supporting the presence of a variety of views, followed by detailed consideration of physical prowess as a feature of boys' attitudes and perceptions of masculinities.

Variety of views

The presence of a variety of views identified by the Rasch model and revealed by EFA are supported by focus group comments. There was an extended conversation lasting nearly ten minutes in *Focus Group 2.5* discussing the boys' perception that there are many different views of masculinity held by boys in the year group. In short, they accept a sense of plurality of boys' views of masculinity. One boy felt that: *'there are a lot of different opinions around which I think is one of the good things about this school. Everyone is sort of different, everyone has their own opinions and they are not afraid to voice them'* (*Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006*). This was immediately supported in the following statement:

> *I agree. I think it is a little bit more than from Year 7 and 8. You haven't
> really thought about different views of masculinity as everyone is new
> and you are all going to have the same view… now we are in Year 9 we
> know each other, what we are like and so I guess there is a more broad
> opinion. In a way, it's safer to have your own views (Focus Group 2.5 –
> 10 November 2006).*

This boy gives reasons for the diversity of views of masculinity as maturity and familiarity with peers in the cohort. This suggested that knowledge of your peers allows greater freedom of expression, encouraging the development of personalities and views of masculinity, resulting in peer acceptance. Another comment endorsing the presence of many views of masculinity was made by another participant: *'I think the vast majority would think that everyone has their own view and that there are lots of different views'*

(*Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006*). A final comment made by a fourth participant explores the role of the school in this by providing a range of activities in which to engage boys with differing interests:

> *I guess there are lots of different views especially in Year 9 at this school because there is such a range of people who are heavily involved in music and then other groups involved in sport and then academic. Then, of course, there's the mixture of all three (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).*

These differences in views supported the boys' plural view of masculinity.

Exploring the extent of the boys' views of masculinity involved sensitively discussing aspects of different, socially unacceptable behaviour by males generally and boys specifically in the focus group. The boys in *Focus Group 2.2* were quite uncomfortable talking about different types of behaviour by men. This was especially the case when discussing topics related to homosexual, transgendered or transvestite persons. Put simply, the boys at that time did not want to talk about this so the topic was quickly dropped when it was raised by one of the group participants. This session was in March (Term 1 of Year 9) and a similar discussion was not attempted with the other focus group at the equivalent session. It was my feeling at the time that it was not something the boys wanted to or were able to talk about. I felt it would be better revisited later in the year when the boys were closer to entering Year 10.

As a result of this earlier decision the final guiding question for *Focus Group 1.5* explored consideration of wider influences on the boys' views of masculinity. Most of this discussion, lead by the boys, was on aspects of being gay and how it is perceived amongst the boys of Year 9. At this time the boys were in Term 4 of Year 9 and I found them more willing to talk about this topic in a way they had not been earlier in the year. The conversation was inconclusive with statements expressing self-determination for a boy who is gay such as: *'it's their choice. If they want to be [gay] then that's okay'* (*Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006*) to statements suggesting a boy who is gay can do nothing to change: *'there's not really anything they can do about it'* (*Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006*). When discussing mannerisms or distinctive features, such as speech, of boys who may be gay one focus group participant stated he felt that: *'if they really wanted to stop sounding and acting like they were gay then they could'* (*Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006*). One boy was more tolerant expressing the view: *'there's really nothing wrong with being different. They might find it hard to make friends and get other people around them if they act like that. It's awkward...'* (*Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006*).

The participants recognised that to be homosexual in this cohort would be seen as different and difficult for the gay boy. Despite a level of tolerance in the views expressed it is clear that to be gay in this group would be counter to prevailing hegemonic views of masculinity, despite their range and diversity amongst this cohort.

The conversation on the same topic was undertaken with *Focus Group 2.5* the following week of Term 4 Year 9. The following selection of transcript illustrates the range in the responses including rejection by peers, a willingness to be tolerant, even sensitivity to a boy who 'came out' as well as the potential for hostility.

PDM	*How would you expect boys to respond if a guy came out and said to others: "I'm gay"?*
Mike	*I think there would be a variety of responses. I think there would be people who would totally remove themselves from him and have absolutely nothing to do with him. At the same time there would be other people who would be like "Yeah, OK". I think that everyone would be a bit worried.*
Tim	*At least for a little while.*
Jim	*I personally wouldn't worry at all. Maybe I would make less jokes of that kind of thing around them, like Year 9 boys do.*
Tim	*You would be careful what you say.*
Jim	*I would be careful with what I said but… I guess I would think of them a bit less but not really that much. But, I do think that lots of people would tease them for being gay… I think that would stop next year when the girls come.*
Hugh	*The girls might like it. (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).*

This was clearly an aspect of the boys' views of masculinity that has not been tested within this cohort so it is not featuring in their normal thoughts and something about which they can easily talk. There was considerable uncertainty in this conversation with elements equating to tolerance, sensitivity, indifference and hostility. The fascinating aspect of this conversation was the way the conversation turned to give consideration of what the girls will think. "What the girls think" carries great currency with the boys and will be further considered in the section analyzing data related to the school's influence on the boys' views of masculinity.

The presence of a plural view of masculinity amongst the boys was well supported by the quantitative and qualitative data in this study. Within plurality the focus group data had two clear and recurring elements featuring in their understanding of masculinity. These were physical prowess and success. These themes are discussed in the following two sections.

Physical prowess

This section provides evidence to demonstrate how Rasch analysis, focus group comments and EFA of the questionnaire data combine to support the importance of physical prowess, typically through sport, as a feature of the boys' views of masculinity. The Rasch analysis shows statements referring to the importance of physical strength and enjoying sport for a man are strongly endorsed by the Year 9 cohort and shown in Table 4.3 (p137) while EFA suggests physical attributes related to strength as Factor 1 *Physical prowess* in Table 4.1 (p131).

In the questionnaire the boys were asked to rank the seven sports from highest status to lowest status (1 for highest, 7 for lowest). The average score for each sport has been calculated to give an indication of the level of support for a sport. This is shown in Table 4.4 *Sport ranking by boys*. An average score of 1 would mean a sport had unanimous acceptance of the highest status where an average score of 7 would indicate unanimous acceptance of the lowest status for that sport. Therefore, the lower the average score, the higher the student perception of status for the sport. The average of the Average Scores is 3.99 with a standard deviation of 1.22 for items in Table 4.4. In support of the focus group comments, rugby is placed at the top of the hierarchy with an average score of 2.3, followed by soccer (3.0), basketball (3.2), cricket (3.8) and tennis (4.2). Cross country running (5.7) and tae kwon do (5.7) had the lowest perceived status of the seven sports listed here.

Table 4.4   Sport ranking by boys

Sport	Average Score
Rugby	2.3
Soccer	3.0
Basketball	3.2
Cricket	3.8
Tennis	4.2
Cross Country	5.7
Tae kwon do	5.7

Source: Masculinity Questionnaire Q 25

Participation in sport and a high importance of sport featured strongly in the boys' focus group conversations in the present research. This finding was consistent with earlier research into the role of sport in boys' construction of masculinity (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Martino 1999; West 1999; Swain 2006b) where sport is seen by the boys as a

desirable masculinity enabling benefits for boys ranging from improved health, positive social interaction with peers and what is described by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:61) as an 'entry to a world of men. Coaches, older players, club supporters, school "old boys" and other men will look approvingly on their success, welcoming them into a world of recognition and status'. An interest in sport, participation in sport but above all success in sport is desirable for boys. As stated by one boy: *It's [sport] a much more physical thing which I think is perceived as a masculine thing'* (*Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006*). To engage in physical forms of behaviour through sport is seen by the boys as manly behaviour.

Physical prowess appears to be demonstrated through participation in sport, demonstrating physical strength as well as appearing physically fit and demonstrates a level of stoicism. These combine in the present research to be a key factor of a masculine identity. The focus group discussions explored the importance of sport, physical attributes and ability more fully.

It was clear from the boys' comments that not all sports carry the same masculine value and that participation in sport *per se* is not enough for a masculine identity. It was evident the boys perceive some sports carrying higher status than others with different sports suited to boys and girls. Boys are more likely to engage sports with a greater physical risk than girls: *'sports like rugby and soccer are the more contact sports, which boys like rather than girls who worry about getting injured. They [girls] enjoy netball which is not as much contact' (Focus Group 1.1 – 28 October 2005)*. Contact sports with a greater risk of injury were attributed greater status by the boys because contact sports are seen to be masculine and not attractive to girls. A comment considering the impact of participation by boys in netball was: *'I know a couple of guys who play mixed netball outside of school. Occasionally they get paid out because netball is more associated with females' (Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006)*. This statement demonstrated that boys who play netball are going against the convention and do so at risk of low level teasing (being 'paid out'). Aspects of physicality, power, risk of injury and strength appear to be the determining factors in the consideration of relative status of activities and sports and associated masculine identity for the boys.

When asked about their view of Australian Rules football (not offered as a sport at the school) the comment was made that: *'it's very manly… I reckon more people get injured playing AFL than any other sport' (Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006)*. This statement

confirms that sports can carry high masculine status because of the physical contact they involve. The importance of physical strength and physical contact for boys in sport is further endorsed in an earlier focus group session. Physical strength is described by one boy as a key masculine trait. He believed that:

> *I suppose one of the main symbols of masculinity is strength and most people feel they can show that through playing rugby, by saying 'I can tackle this big person' etc. (Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005).*

This statement was supported by the responses of the whole cohort in the questionnaire and the factor analysis (Table 4.1, p131) of the data. The questionnaire data on the ranking of sports is presented in Table 4.4 (p141).

On a number of occasions in focus groups the boys identified the importance of contact sports in the masculine identity rather than just strength alone. One boy felt that: *'people [boys] like contact… if it's not contact then you're not a man. That is what men do – hit each other, smash each other' (Focus Group 1.1 – 28 October 2005)*. This view conformed to a traditional stereotype of masculinity as aggressive, even though a hint of sarcasm was detectable in the boy's tone and delivery of this statement. As another boy put it: *'They think people who play soccer… they think you are more girly because of the lack of contact'* (*Focus Group 1.1 – 28 October 2005*). A further comment about the high status of rugby because of its high level of physical contact was: *'The premium answer to "What sport do you do?" would be to say "Rugby". People sort of look up to you as someone who can get their body battered around for 80 minutes' (Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006)*. This statement was not surprising given the high profile of rugby at the school. Physical strength and contact were identified as important features of a sport for boys at this school, setting rugby apart from other well accepted and supported sports such as soccer with lower levels of contact. The outcome of this is team sports involving greater levels of physical contact were attributed the highest status by the boys (Table 4.4, p141).

The place of rugby at the top of a hierarchy was established in the discussion in *Focus Group 2.1* and later supported in the questionnaire data (Table 4.4). This was a widely held and unchallenged view. Rugby was seen as appealing to this because of its physical contact component. Early in the discussion of this topic one participant expressed his view that: *'I think that often rugby is seen more manly than soccer. Playing soccer is seen as less manly and not as tough'* (*Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005*). This idea was explained further soon afterwards in the conversation by another participant. He stated:

'personally when I run in and make a tackle and kick him a couple of times, it makes me feel really good, it sort of like feeling power and adrenalin burst that makes you feel really good. I think that's why a lot of people like rugby more than soccer even though I like soccer myself' (*Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005*). This comment suggested that it is something about the way that rugby makes the boys feel, because of the physical contact, power and chemical changes associated with the physical context intrinsic to the nature of the game that creates an appeal to the boys. At the same time, this participant recognised his personal preference for soccer as a game, although he enjoys the physical aspects of rugby. This view demonstrated as balanced approach in support of the physical contact in rugby and the enjoyment of a game, such as soccer resulting in aspects of both games can be appreciated by boys.

When discussing a comparison of sport generally, but using rugby as an example, with other co-curricular activities one boy said: *'I personally think that being in the top rugby team has a higher status than being in the top [academic] band, in terms of masculinity because there are boys and girls in the top band where as in rugby there are just boys'* (*Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006)*. This suggested that activities involving boys only are of a higher status than activities where boys and girls are involved. In some way, girls' participation in an activity was considered by this boy to reduce its status as an activity to which high masculine status is attributed. It is also an activity without physical contact and risk of injury, although the subtleties of the physical demands of playing music appear to be absent from this boys' consideration of the activity. This is consistent with the earlier comment about netball.

Discussion in *Focus Group 2.4* considered the relative status of activities and the level of acceptance of boys choosing to participate in them. When asked if it is alright in this school environment for boys to do other sports like tennis or something of less physical contact the answer given was: *'It's okay, it's just not as highly thought of'* (*Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006)*. This comment supported an acceptance of participating in other sports but a difference in status attributed to that sport.

The status of a sport is not dependent upon its level of physical contact. Tae kwon do is a full contact martial art but it held the lowest status equal to cross country running (Table 4.4). The team sports of rugby, soccer, basketball and cricket all had scores better than the average of the Average Scores resulting in their position at the top of a hierarchy of these seven sports. This confirmed team membership is important to boys in their view of

masculinity and it is even more potent when added to physical contact in a sport. Group membership will be considered in more detail later in the next section as a factor influencing boys' views of masculinity. Rugby's primacy in the activity hierarchy at this school will also be explored in detail later when considering the role of the school as an influence of the boys' views of masculinity.

Success

Success in a number of areas was discussed in the focus groups and it emerged as a component of the boys' views of masculinity. The most important areas in which the boys in the present research acknowledge success were in sport and with peers. The boys also value academic success at the case school and creativity. Each of these areas provided opportunities for boys to engage in masculine behaviour at school. These findings were shown by data from the questionnaire and focus group conversations. The general statement in the questionnaire "Success is important for a man" was very strongly endorsed by the Year 9 cohort as shown in Table 4.3 (p137) and it fits the Rasch model for this data as shown in Figure 4.1 (p133).

Given the importance of sport to boys, success in sport is desirable, attracting favourable status for boys. Earlier research has found that boys who are successful at sport enjoy social benefits with their peers with sporty boys often described the desirable label of 'cool' (Martino 1999; West 1999; Swain 2006b). Success in sport was recognised by the boys in the current research as something to aspire to as a part of a masculine identity. One boy felt that: *'you don't really look up to someone who is not doing too well. You are more likely to aspire to someone who is doing well and then succeeds in his sport'* (*Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006).* Success in sport clearly brings status amongst peers.

Despite the obvious importance of sport to the boys the discussion also recognised boys can be socially successful even if they are not good at sport: *'Some people just aren't good at sport … They enjoy music a lot so they play music and if they are a really good music player then a lot of people will respect them anyway… they don't have to play sport to be cool' (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006).* This statement supported a wider view for boys' success in a range of activities including music at this school despite the great importance attributed to physical prowess. This view of boys was consistent with a the pattern of masculinity termed 'personalised masculinity' (Swain 2006a) where boys are able to be accepted on their own terms, without presenting a threat to the hegemonic masculinity or other patterns of masculinity operating in the school.

There was extensive discussion in *Focus Group 1.1 and Focus Group 2.4* of the relative importance of an individual's success in a given sport over and above whether it has physical contact. A contribution made by a boy in this session reinforces the importance of being good at a chosen sport rather than the sport *per se* in which a boy is participating: *'it doesn't matter what sport you do. If you are the best, people are going to look up to you. If you are the best tennis player then you are still going to look good' (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006)*. This statement and others like it illustrated the complexity of the boys' views with a willingness to accept that boys will participate in activities they enjoy and in which they succeed.

The questionnaire investigated the boys' understanding of success and what they value at school. The questionnaire asked respondents to identify three items from a list of eight that they valued at school. The results of this are shown in Figure 4.3 *Things valued at school by boys*. The percentage figures report the proportion of questionnaire participants who included the item amongst the three they selected. Therefore, the total exceeds one hundred.

Q27 - Which do you value highly at School

	Being respected by classmates	Being liked by classmates	Treating classmates well	Being liked by teachers	Academic success	Sporting success	Academic achievement and Sport are	Musical success
Series1	58%	48%	29%	17%	47%	41%	31%	19%
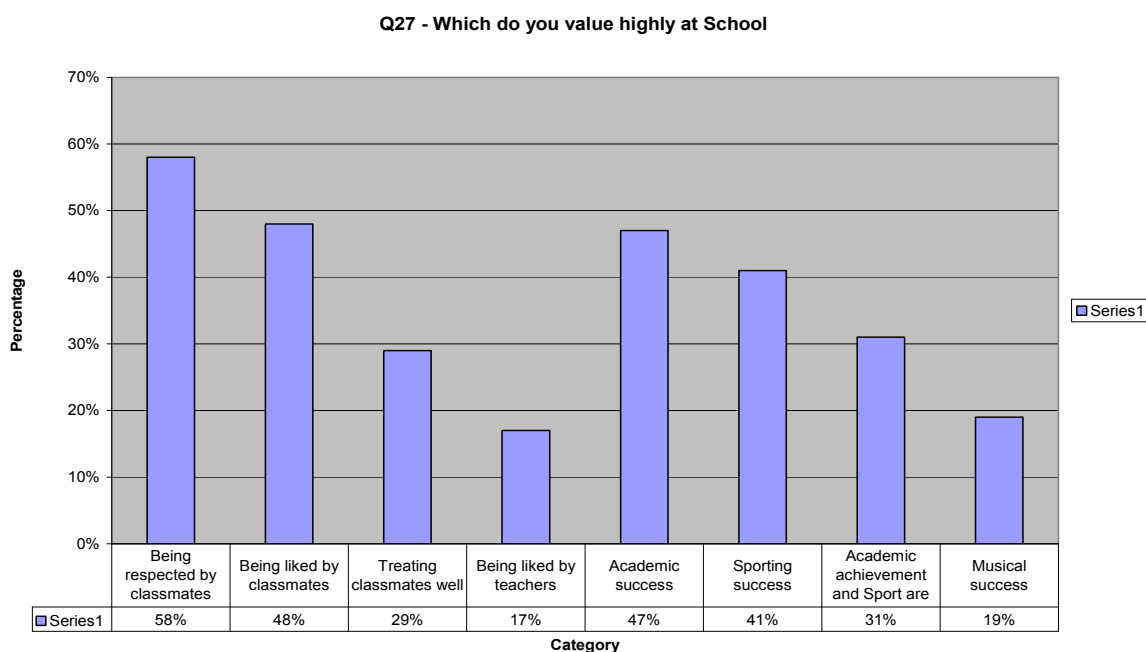
Source: Masculinity Questionnaire Q 27

Figure 4.3   Things valued at school by boys

The assumption for this item was that the boys will consider that achieving the things they value is a form of success. As individual issues social success, to be respected by classmates (58%) and to be liked by classmates (48%) were most strongly supported.

Academic success (47%) and sporting success (41%) followed. To be liked by teachers was least valued at 17% with success in music to be the next least valued at 19%.

Social success with peers features prominently in these findings. Considering the data for individual items the value attributed to both classmate respect and popularity was very high amongst the Year 9 boys. Both of these items were valued by the boys more than academic success and sporting success. There was an important link forged here between the two research projects of this portfolio. That is, the importance of social success with peers at school and how this relates to attitudes and perceptions of masculinity. At this stage of their schooling social success amongst male peers at school in a boys-only school environment is more important to the boys than anything else at school.

In addition to social success with male peers in one focus group discussion one boy stated the following: *'A lot of guys will think that someone is more masculine if they are good at talking to chicks' (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006)*. This comment was interesting as it connected the boy's perceptions of heterosexual social success and masculinity. The great importance of heterosexual success as a source of peer group prestige is recognised by Connell (2000:161). Therefore, the ability to talk to girls is seen as highly desirable and masculine behaviour by boys. Overall, these data confirm the high value of social relations at school and the great importance to the boys of social success with their male and female peers.

In a more general focus group discussion when asked if all activities at school are valued equally a response from one participant was:

> *probably sometimes sport over music. That would be because not so many people would be involved in music. Academic studies would perhaps be at the top as well because that is what the school's focussing on more, than sport… (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006).*

This response suggested awareness by the boys of relative status of activities at school ranging from academic endeavours to music and sport. This statement was consistent with the questionnaire responses with academic results valued more highly than sport, even though the boys talk about sport a great deal in the focus groups. Success in sport brings with it a double benefit for the recipients. There is access to high masculine status because of the success in sport itself as well as the secondary benefit of social success. If social success with peers is valued most highly by the boys and success in sport is a means to its attainment then there is little wonder as to why sport is so highly regarded by the boys, not

as an end in itself but to a greater social achievement with peers where popularity and accolades are obtained.

The questionnaire results add depth to understanding the degree of the boys' perception that academic success was most valued at the school, and so, was manly for boys. This is true when compared with sport and music, as stated in the quotation above and supported by the questionnaire data but social success, through classmate popularity, and respect is the most valued of all the listed issues. The relative status of academic success and social success was not explored in the focus groups as this emerged from the questionnaire data, after the conclusion of the focus group meetings. It was curiosity by me and a wish to explore connections between my two research projects that influenced the construction and ultimate decision to include this item in the questionnaire. Data from the question on what the boys' value at school provide a strong link between the two research projects of this portfolio on peer relations and masculinities. This will be explored in more detail in final chapter of this portfolio, Chapter 5 - Linking Conclusions.

Summary of findings

The understanding of the Year 9 boys' views of masculinity suggested by these data is that there is no dominant view of masculinity held by the boys. There is a variety of views but many contain, to varying degrees, dimensions of physical prowess and success as masculine identity. It is clear there is a wide acceptance for the high status of rugby at the case school. The next section provides a detailed investigation of the data to consider the factors influencing the boys' views of masculinities.

Question 2 - What factors influence the boys' views of masculinity?

The combination of focus group and questionnaire data investigating the factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity (FIVM) analyzed with both Rasch and EFA revealed the perception of the importance of role models for the Year 9 boys in this study. This together with the importance of boys' personal experiences in the construction of their views of masculinity and membership of groups are two themes emerging from analysis of the data collected.

There were eleven factors influencing boys' views of masculinity (FIVM) items, specifically addressing aspects of role models for boys in the questionnaire shown in Table 4.5 (p149). Table 4.5 simply restates the items and the short title given to each of them.

Rasch analysis of the FIVM items is presented as a bubble chart in Figure 4.4 *FIVM (All items)* (p150) in Figure 4.5 *FIVM (Less Item 8)* (p152) and as an item map in Table 4.6 (p154). The bubble charts and item map were devised using *Bond&FoxSteps* (Bond and Fox 2007). Discussion will commence with Figure 4.4 (p150)

Table 4.5   FIVM Items

Item #	Statement	Short Title
14	My father is a good role model for being "a man"	Father
15	My **family** provides role models for what it is to be "a man".	Family
16	The school's **teachers** provide role models for what it is to be "a man".	Teachers
17	My **male friends** help me understand the way "a man" behaves.	Male peers
18	My **female friends** help me to understand the way "a man" behaves.	Female peers
19	**Movies** provide role models for being "a man".	Movies
20	**Novels, poems and stories** provide role models of being "a man".	Literature
21	**Popular magazines** (like FHM) provide role models of being "a man".	Magazines
22	My mother helps me to understand the way "a man" behaves.	Mother
23	**TV shows** provide role models of being "a man".	TV
24	I have learned a lot about being "a man" from older male role models.	Older men

Source: Masculinity Questionnaire Qs 14 to 24

Figure 4.4 (p150) is a bubble chart of all the FIVM items. In general, the items conformed strongly to the Rasch model constructed from the questionnaire data suggesting there was a single underlying construct to the items and influences of the boys' views of masculinity. There were no items related to the FIVM model generated by the Rasch model that were considered to over-fit the model with a *t* value of less than -2.
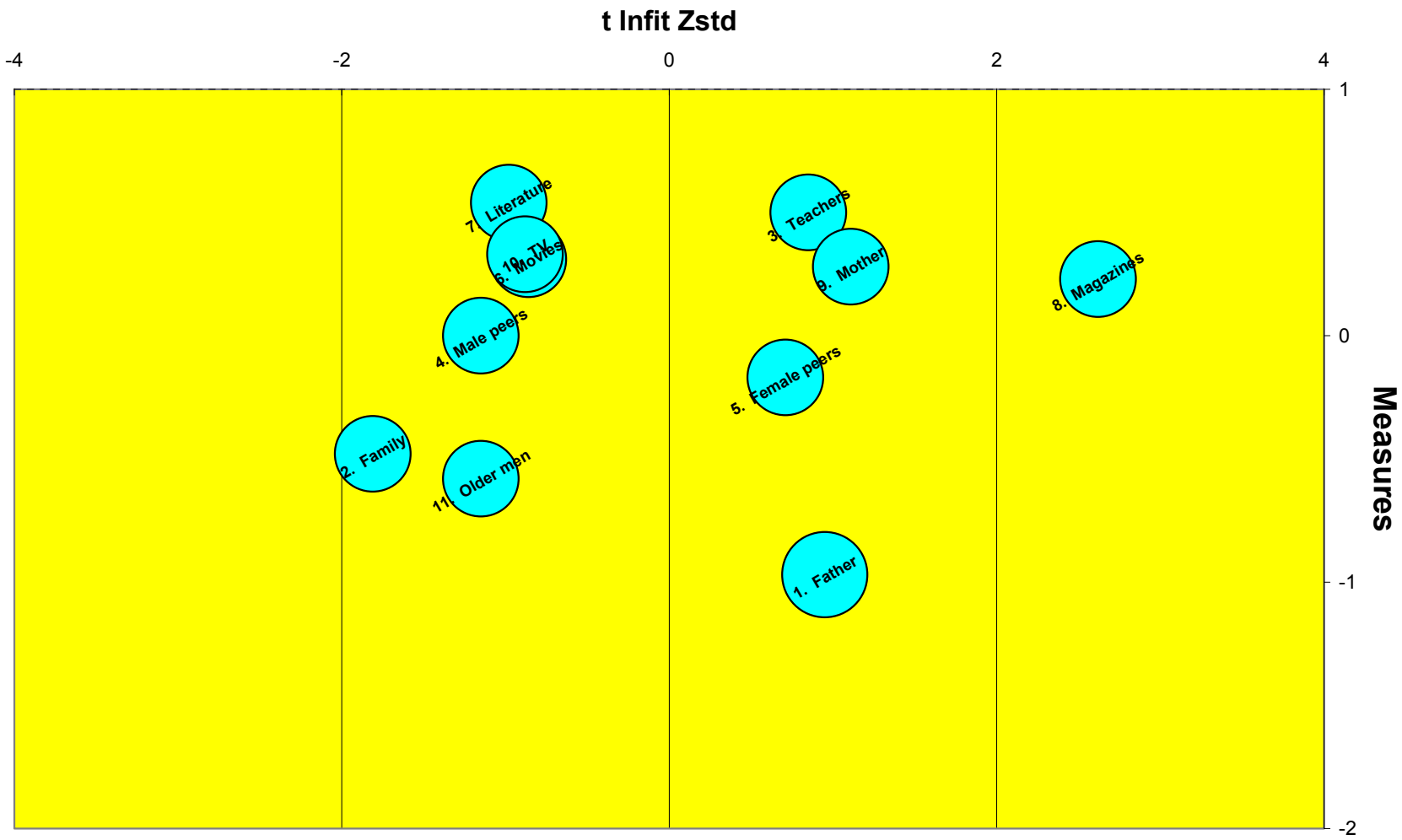
Figure 4.4   FIVM: all items

Just one FIVM item (Item 8 – Magazines) had a *t* value greater than 2, at 2.62 in Figure 4.4 (p150). This *t* value located this item beyond the conditions of satisfactory fit for the Rasch model (Bond and Fox 2007). Rasch analysis would have Item 8 disregarded in this research as a component of the measure of factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity for two reasons. First, participant responses to Item 8 were not consistent with the pattern of responses to other items in this section of the questionnaire. Second, this was a single outlying item. Unlike the number of outlying items in the BVM data already discussed in relation to the first research question and not disregarded in that section, Item 8 stands alone and was not a part of another construct. If this questionnaire was to be developed further and Rasch analysis used for the process of data analysis then careful reconsideration of this question in terms of its wording and respondent interpretation would be necessary before it could be included in a future questionnaire (Bond and Fox 2007).

Figure 4.5 *FIVM (Less Item 8)* (p152) is a bubble chart devised using *Bond&Fox Steps* (2007) with the omission of Item 8. Figure 4.5 (p152) will now be the basis of my discussion of the Rasch data because these items fit the Rasch model suggesting a single underpinning construct.
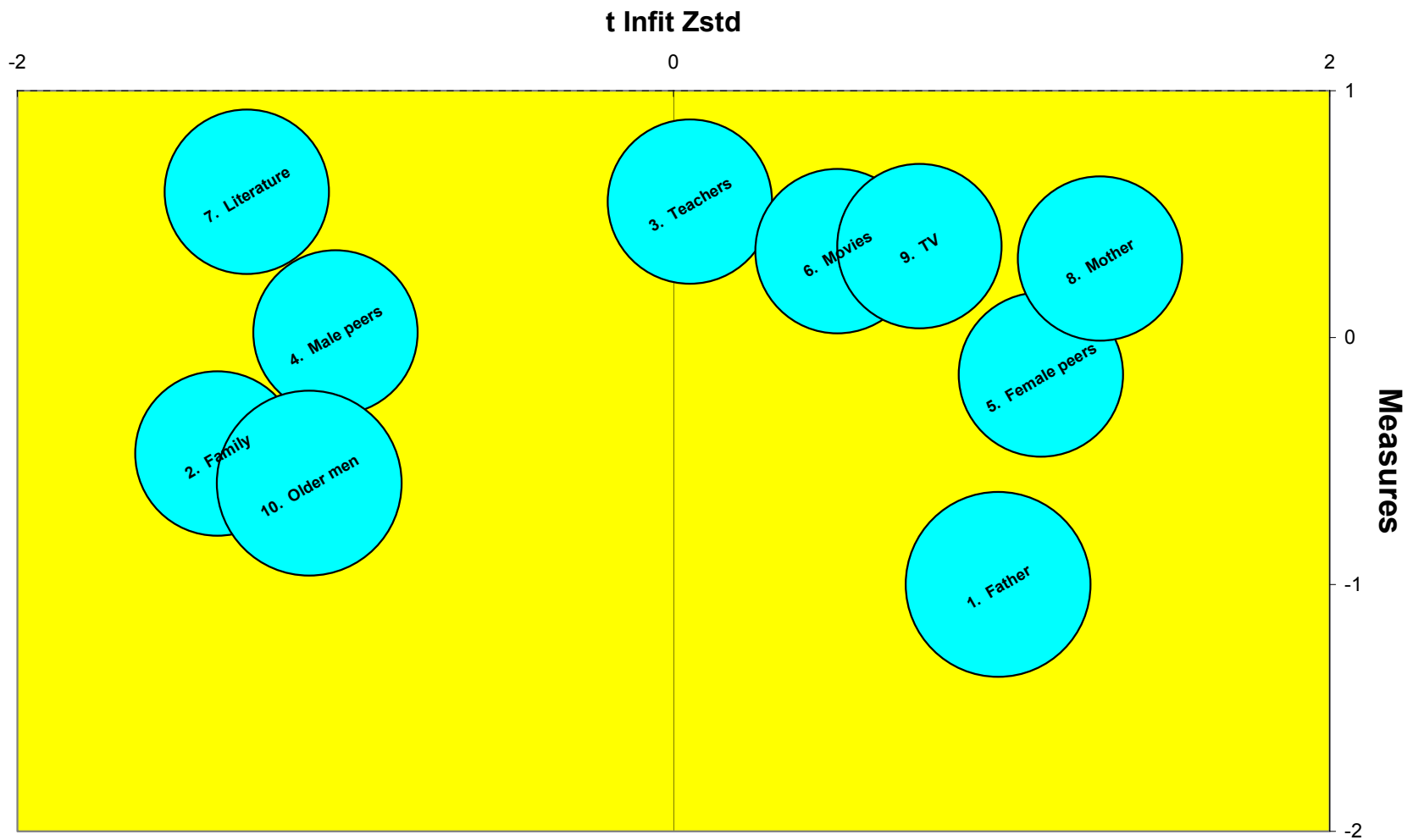
Figure 4.5   FIVM: less item 8 (magazines)

Table 4.6 (p154) is an Item Map for the reduced group of ten FIVM items. There are three item clusters and a single item set apart in the pattern. Item 1 – *Father* was the most easily endorsed item, followed by Item 2 – *Family* and Item 11 – *Older males* at an equal interval behind. Item 4 – *Male Peers* and Item 5 – *Female Peers* were the next easiest to endorse for the respondent. The final cluster and with the lowest level of endorsement included Item 9 – *Mother*, Item 10 – *TV* and Item 6 – *Movies* with Item 7 – *Literature* and Item 3 – *Teachers* the least endorsed at all.

The five most strongly endorsed items reported ion Table 4.6 (p154) of the questionnaire are connected to relationships with family and peers. The boys most strongly endorsed items that recognise older men and family, especially their fathers as influences on their views of masculinity.

The item referring to a father's influence is loaded with a judgement of 'good role model' which is not the case for the other items in this section where a positive influence is only implied. The boys' strong endorsement of a positive judgement of fathers adds potency to the importance boys place on the influence of their fathers as role models and is supported by EFA with a close relationship between father and families in Factor 5 in Table 4.1 (p131). The similar level of endorsement for the role of family and older male role models suggested further importance of close family related relationships for the boys. This was followed by male and female peers where, again, relationships with people are important influences on their views of masculinity. The greatest surprise is the lower level of endorsement for statements about mothers and teachers. These will be discussed later in this section with the support of focus group data to explain the boys' attitudes and perceptions of the influence of mothers and teachers on their views of masculinity.

Table 4.6   Item map of FIVM (excluding item 8)

Input: 187 Persons 10 Items Measured: 186 Persons 10 Items 5 CATS   1.0.0

```
                  Persons Map of Items
                   <more>|<rarely endorsed>
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                      T|
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                     #  |
                        |
         1           ## +T
                    #  S|
                  ####  |
                ###### | Literature
                   ##  |S Teachers
                 ##### | Mother      Movies       TV
               ###### M|
                .#### |
         0          ## +M Male peers
          ######### | Female peers
                .### |
                  .# |
               #### S|S Family
                     | Older men
                     |
                     |
        -1          # +T Father
                     |
                  T |
                  # |
                     |
                     |
                     |
                     |
        -2           +
                   <less>|<frequently endorsed>
                 Each '#' is 3 persons.
```
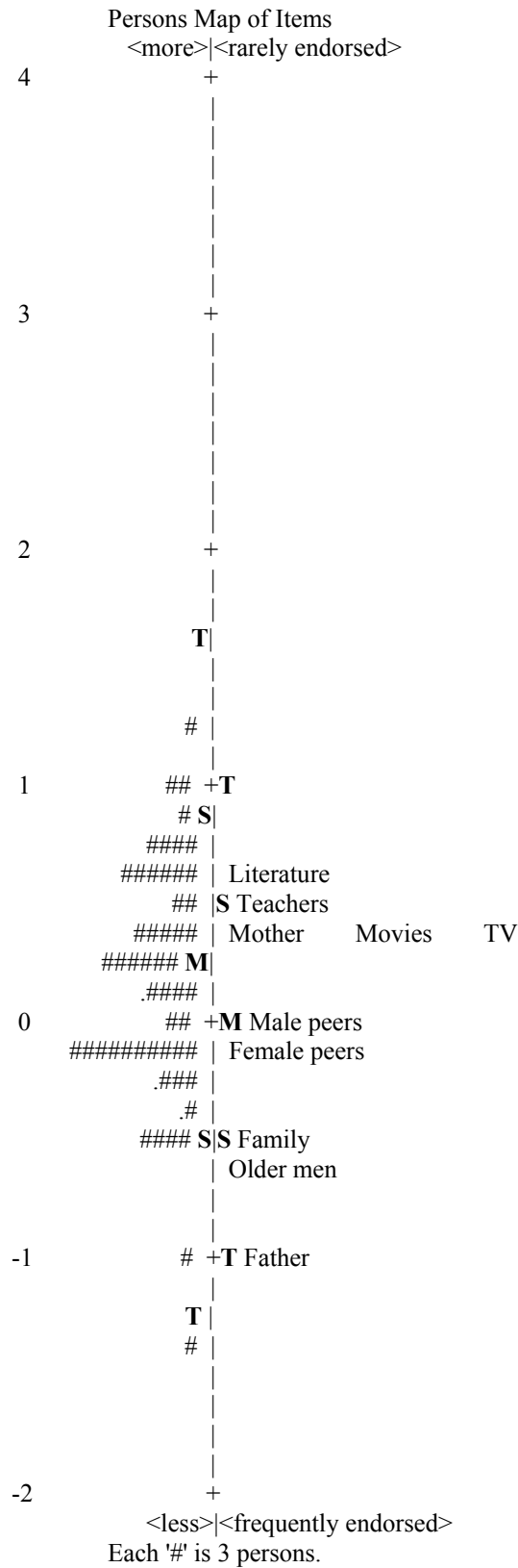
The cluster of items in Table 4.6 (p154) with the lowest level of endorsement included literature, movies and television. These items were similar and not so dependent on real life relationships but on portrayals of men and masculinities at a distance. These are influences on the boys' views of masculinity but the Rasch analysis suggests their influence was not perceived by the boys to be as strong as the first hand, real-life items of fathers, family, older males and peers. In short, the boys in this study perceived the face-to-face relationships with other people to be more important influences on their views of masculinity than images and portrayals of men through the media. EFA revealed a close relationship between TV, movies and magazines in Table 4.1 (p131) as Factor 2. This suggested these items have a similar level of influence but at a lower level than the other items investigated.

The Rasch analysis was very helpful in assisting in the identification of a single construct of influences of the boys' views (Figure 4.5, p152) as well as to illustrate relative importance of these items to the boys as shown in Table 4.6 (p154). Factor analysis confirmed the importance of family and fathers as a separate factor influencing the boys' views of masculinity (Table 4.1, p131). It was clear from these data and their analysis that boys perceived a range of influences on their views of masculinity through role models, though some were more important than others. Furthermore, focus group discussions were helpful in developing a deeper understanding of how the boys perceive different role models to influence their views of masculinity.

The items of movies, TV and magazines were shown by EFA to be closely related as Factor 2 (Table 4.1, p131) but they received very little attention from the boys in the discussions. A total of three short comments on all of these items were made by the boys across the ten focus group sessions. These items were included in the questionnaire because I felt there was a silence in the focus groups on these areas although they are recognised in the literature (Newkirk 2002). In fact, the items of TV, movies and magazines were perceived by the boys to be less influential of their views of masculinity in this study than fathers and family. This was shown by the relative levels of endorsement on Table 4.6 (p154). This was consistent with the absence of discussion in the focus groups on anything related to the media. However, when asked about this in the questionnaire the influence of movies, television and magazines were evident. This was consistent with the literature. Analysis of the questionnaire data by both Rasch and EFA suggests TV, movies and magazines influence boys' views of masculinity, even if the boys don't talk about it. The virtual absence of focus group discussion on the influence of TV,

movies or magazines means it does not feature in the next part of this discussion. This reflects the silence of the focus groups on this issue but it is not without recognition of its presence. As a consequence two themes related to *Role Models* are discussed in the following text. These themes are the importance of boys' personal experiences of role models and belonging to a group.

Personal Experiences of Role Models

The personal experiences of role models through family contact emerged as important factors of the boys' views of masculinity. The role of fathers and older male family members (or men associated through the family environment). Mothers emerged as a more subtle influence on the boys' views of masculinity.

Fathers and family

Fathers specifically, and older men known to the boys, were identified in this research as important role models for the boys.

The very high level of endorsement by the Year 9 boys to the item "My father is a good role model for being a man" (Table 4.6, p154) was consistent with the comments by boys in the focus group conversations, the inclusion of these items in the Rasch model (Figure 4.5, p152) and revealed by EFA (Table 4.1, p131). Fathers and family are clearly important to the boys in the current research. In the focus group discussions it became apparent personal experiences with people, especially through their family's social contact were important in the construction of their views of masculinity in the way recognised in earlier sociological theory of the construction of masculinity (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Connell 2005). The importance of personal experiences and the presence of a variety of views (already outlined in relation to the first research question) are intertwined. Each boy has unique experiences in their social world which is closely aligned to the microsystem of family. The boys recognise their views of masculinity are influenced by those experiences. Direct contact with adults was viewed favourably by the boys with one boy putting it plainly*: 'If you have a stronger relationship with adults then you probably get some tips' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006).* This boy felt time with adults was advantageous and assisted him towards an understanding of the way men behave. This view is typical of the general view of boys and their approach to social contact with adults.

The following observation by one of the participants sums up his understanding of how views of masculinity are constructed through the aggregate of personal experiences:

*The school shows us a few views of masculinity, you will probably learn
a few from your parents and parents' friends but you will never get a
complete and perfect view because everyone is going to be different and
everyone is going to have different experiences that are going to make
them a different man ... You have to construct your own view of
masculinity because if you go by someone else's you will probably not be
yourself and it's probably not going to fit you (Focus Group 1.5 – 3
November 2006).*

This quotation explained how this boy's mesosystem served to shape his views of
masculinity. With different influences and role models, it was recognised by another focus
group participant that individuals construct their own views of masculinity. He said:

*Some people might be like a pop-junkie and flunk out of school and not care…
other people might listen to their parents and stuff like that and take a lot from
it. Some people might take a lot out of the Pathways camp and make it one of
the things they see as important (Focus Group 1.3 – 9 June 2006).*

This comment outlines a constructivist view of masculinity held by this boy. He holds a
view that people construct their view of masculinity as a result of their experience of role
models through family, friends, popular culture and anything else they might have
experienced.

The boys were consciously looking to a range of older men, especially within the family
environment, as role models to influence their views of masculinity. In one focus group a
participant said: *'My dad gives me a strong role of what he believes a man should be like
and some of the things he [a man] should do' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006).* This
view was typical of the clear role of fathers and how the boys in this study are looking to
their fathers as role models.

A detailed insight to the boys' attitudes to and perceptions of older men as role models was
provided in *Focus Group 1.2.* All the participants in this discussion had all attended a five
day father and son Pathways to Manhood camp in August 2005. Aspects of this camp and
the overall experience have been important in the lives of the boys and influenced their
views of masculinity. Contact with a number of older men, including their fathers, was
valued by the boys. The following quotation summarizes the general feeling of the
conversation of *Focus Group 1.2.*

*After the camp it made me realize that my parents didn't turn out as an
adult, they went through it as well. They did exactly the same thing and
probably found it just as hard as me. That made me believe I could do it
as well (Focus Group 1.2 – 24 March 2006).*

The experience of listening to the stories of older men was the vehicle for the boys to find out more about what lies ahead for them in an adult life and how these older men have coped with the transition from boyhood to manhood. The older men were clearly role models for the boys. The sharing of personal experiences by the older men through the telling of stories was appreciated by the boys and recognised by them as influential and enjoyable.

Additionally, the discussion in *Focus Group 2.3* focussed for an extended period on families and the role of older men (fathers, uncles, grandparents and family friends). The flowing conversation revealed how the boys look to these men as influences on their views of masculinity. Personal stories, told by these older men, hold the interest of the boys during their time together in a social event such as family gathering, 50th birthday party or some other significant event bringing people together in their homes. One boy stated that: *'it is important to have those relationships with adults because you learn a lot from them, about masculinity and things like that… just from the way they are talking about people and the subjects they discuss' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006).* Another boy later contributes to this area of discussion by saying: *'the stories that Dad tells and some of his friends are pretty interesting, like one of them was in the navy… and some of their stories are pretty cool' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006).* The experience for boys of listening to the stories of older men was valued in this discussion. The participants in *Focus Group 2 .3* had not attended the Pathways to Manhood camp. The similarity in their comments about their fathers and older men to those of the other focus group, who had attended the camp, are clear.

The data supports the view that boys generally value opportunities to participate in adult male conversations and social events even if it involves a passive role, listening to their stories. These events provide experiences for the boys that influence their views of masculinity because of the stories they hear and the way they see people interacting.

Mothers

Rasch analysis showed the only family member not attributed a high importance in development of their views of masculinity is the boys' mothers. This is shown in Table 4.6 (p154) by less willingness of the boys to endorse the item "My mother helps me to understand the way a man behaves". It is possible that the boys' age is a factor in this perception and that the mothers' influence is more subtle than the boys detect. Although these data suggest mothers are not important role models for these boys it is my experience

with families of the case school that mothers play a key role in the organization of families at every level, particularly in the construction of the social environment of the family. Much of a mother's input may go unnoticed (and unappreciated) by their Year 9 son. One contribution to a focus group discussion went some way to acknowledge the subtle role of mother. One boy said:

> *Mum is [an influence] in a subtle way. If a man acts in a way that she thinks he shouldn't, she won't say: "Don't do this or it will make me mad." She will just sort of say she didn't like it and that most women won't like it' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006).*

Mothers are not generally perceived by the boys to be as obviously influential on their views of masculinity but at least one boy was able to recognise his mother contributes to his views.

Group membership

There are four principal groups discussed by the boys in the focus groups to which they may be a member. Rather than considering each of these groups as the site of the collection of individual role models, they are considered here as a site of social dynamics of a group. The groups are family, friends, sport and school. Group membership *per se* was not identified by the boys as a factor influencing the boys' views of masculinity in the course of the focus group discussions. The theme of group membership emerged from focus group conversations in the course of data analysis identifying ways each of these groups influence the conduct of boys and possibly their views of masculinity. It is clear that belonging to a group is important to the boys in this study. The boys' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, peer groups and sport will be outlined in the following section with the place of family largely covered earlier and school addressed later in this chapter.

Peer groups

The importance of peers as an influence of the boys' views of masculinity is clearly illustrated in the focus group discussions. The importance of peer group acceptance is also evident in the discussion of the things boys' value at school (Figure 4.3, p146). Peer groups were discussed at length in the focus groups when asked the guiding question for the discussion: "Do you think there is a dominant view of masculinity amongst Year 9 boys at this school?" Conversation about groups within the Year 9 cohort covered how the groups were formed, their collective identity, leadership of the groups, being "cool" and individual identity within the groups. Group leadership was considered early in the discussion by one boy stating: *'I think the different group leaders are people who are respected by the members of the groups and they [the groups] do what the group leaders*

do' (Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006). To be a leader of a group the boys recognise respect as important and this, in tern, results in a perception by peers of "being cool". As already discussed, peer acceptance is valued at school more highly than anything else at school (Figure 4.3, p146).

On another occasion there was a suggestion that boys with similar views tend to congregate in the same social group so there are differences within the cohort between social groups. *'I think that within individual groups each one [group] will have ideas. I know that everyone in my group plays soccer and we are all into music and stuff, and we all share the same ideas and agree on things' (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).* This suggested there are differences between groups of boys within the cohort and these kinds of differences may well be reflected in their plurality of views of masculinity between social groups.

One boy challenged the important influence of peer groups and the presence of group leaders as an influence on the boys' views of masculinity. He said:

> *On the idea that people tend to follow other people who have more respect, maybe like the group leaders… I think that is not always the case. For myself, I don't really follow anyone. I just do what ever I really want. No one [peers] really sets a role model for me (Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006).*

This statement supported a personally constructed understanding of masculinity and behaviour by a boy. Both statements supported the idea that there was not one view of masculinity dominating the year group but there is room for both collective views, held by groups who share similar interests as well as individual views held by boys. The discussion related to the importance of peers and membership of a group at school closed with this succinct statement from one participant:

> *Following someone can be okay because you are friends with them and that is what you would like to do, follow them and do what they do. But having your own choice is also good because it is your responsibility to make the choices you are about to make (Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006).*

Focus group discussions considering the influence of girls as peers arriving in Year 10 were very informative on the issue of the impact of female peers on the boys' views of masculinity. Female peers were recognised by Rasch analysis in Figure 4.5 (p152) as influential on the boys' view of masculinity. In *Focus Group 1.4* Tim poignantly stated: *'Being a man is not really what boys think, it is what girls think about you' (Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006).* Tim acknowledged the importance of girls' influence on the way

boys act and the following extract of transcribed conversation following Tim's comment further illustrates this point:

> Craig   I suppose it [girls coming next year] might cause boys to act
>   more maturely.
> Cain   It will eventually.
> PDM   Do you think it [the arrival of girls] widens their view of what
>   boys can do or does it narrow it?
> Tim   I think it widens it.
> PDM   Why Tim?
> Tim   Because, just in the example we talked about before, we could
>   play netball if girls were here.
> PDM   So you would be thinking that the girls coming in actually
>   widens the views of boys as to what they can do?
> Cain   Eventually it will. It can definitely narrow their views too [in
>   the short term] as they try to impress the girls.
> PDM   Narrow their views?
> Cain   At first, but when they realize not to act as an idiot and to be
>   sensible.
> Tim   In the long term….
> PDM   Craig, you were going to say something before...
> Craig   I think it will start off with everyone having the same idea about
>   the girls. They will all act the same way trying to impress them
>   all and stuff but as the girls become more integrated and they
>   [the boys] get more used to it. They [the boys] will act more
>   naturally.
> PDM   Not see them as a girl but as somebody else in their class?
> Craig   Yeah
>
> *(Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006)*

In general, the focus group participants felt that the movement to a co-educational environment in Year 10 would widen the boys' views of masculinity in the long term by changing the composition of their peer group. It might have an impact of changing the boys' behaviour in a manner that they try to impress the girls by behaving in certain, unspecified, ways. This conversation was inconclusive in anticipating the actual impact of girls on both the behaviour of the boys and their views of masculinity but these comments do provide an insight into the boys' awareness of the impact of girls on their conduct and views of masculinity as well as how the peer group influences their behaviour.

Sport

Sport was not presented as an FIVM item in the questionnaire because it is too ambiguous on its own. However, importance of sport as an avenue to group membership, especially with peers is apparent in the focus group discussions. It is difficult to treat sport and peer group membership as separate items for these boys as the two are closely intertwined. However, for the purpose of explanation this will occur here recognizing the connections between them as important in the lives of the boys.

In a discussion of the boys' perceptions of the existence of a shared view of masculinity in *Focus Group 2.4* the presence of collective (group) views of masculinity was discussed by the participants. One participant stated: *'every group has their own view' (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006).* It was interesting he considered the view to be constructed by the group with little diversity within the group. Presumably this is then a collective view, accepted or aspired to by members of a group in order to belong to the group.

This statement suggested groups within the cohort have differing views of masculinity and acceptable behaviour for boys (activities and social interactions). In a different focus group session a boy recounted his view of different groups and their views of masculinity:

> *Those who play rugby, their group is like the really tough ones. They are the ones who think that masculinity is about how strong you are or how rough you are and how much endurance you have. But other groups will vary. It depends on their habits and what they like doing (Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006).*

Although this statement did not outline the views of other groups, it identified how this boy perceived the importance of group membership (through sport) and its influence on the boys' views of masculinity. In this case, a plural view of masculinity arises from the number of groups in the cohort, each with their own view.

The importance of the experiences provided through sport and opportunities for bonding relationships between boys are well established (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Martino 1999; Swain 2006b). Sporting affiliation has a strong connection to the makeup of the peer group at school and the conversations the boys share at school. This was particularly evident in the conversations between boys about others who play different sports. These conversations extended to expressions of views of those boys, in terms of masculinity, as a result of the activities they play. The differences between groups can result in tension and an "us and them" mentality between them. The differences between rugby and soccer will be explored fully in relation to the third research question in this project.

The compulsory sporting requirement at the case school is intended to provide opportunities for social interaction by the boys encouraging the development of relationships with peers as well as benefits to health through greater physical activity. The sport selected by a boy can determine the friends he makes. One participant shared that: *'the team I was in, I formed friendships, because I only knew a couple of boys and they played rugby. I only played soccer. I formed friendships with the guys in my soccer team and just started to hang out with them at lunch and recess' (Focus Group 1.5 – 3*

November 2006). He was talking about his first six months at the school and how he had known boys at the start of the year from his primary school who played rugby while this boy chose to play soccer. The choice between rugby and soccer is made by the boys at the end of their first term in Year 7. It would have been at this time that this boy made new friends because of his choice of sport. His new friends in the playground were based on his sport. This is an important foundation for the development of larger groups within the school because the social group to which a boy belongs can influence his views of masculinity. Given the high value of social success at school that boys will conform to ideas and views generated by their social group. Selection of a sport is an important decision for the boys and can shape aspects of their views of masculinity.

Summary of findings

The key findings relevant to the investigation of factors influencing the boys' views of masculinities revealed by this research were:

- Personal experiences of older male role models are perceived by the boys as important in developing their views of masculinity;
- Each boy has different experiences shaping his views;
- The boys will talk freely about social interactions and its importance but less easily about the relevance of TV, movies and magazines as influences of their views; and,
- Groups influence the boys' views by providing an influential social environment within which the boys operate.

Question 3 - What is the influence of the school on the boys' views of masculinity?

As for the two previous research questions in this project, this section presents findings using Rasch analysis and factor exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in combination with focus group data related to boys' attitudes and perceptions of the influence of the school on boys' views of masculinity.

These items are listed in full and with their short titles in Table 4.7 (p164). Figure 4.6 (p165) shows a Rasch bubble chart for the eight items in School's Influence on Views of Masculinity **(**SIVM**)** contained by the questionnaire.

Table 4.7   SIVM Items

Item #	Statement	Short Title
29	I can do any activity at this school without being "paid-out" by boys of this school.	Any activity
30	I find it easy to be myself at this school.	Be Myself
31	Achieving at a high level in an activity is more important than the activity a boy does at this school.	Achievement
32	School rules limit my ability to be myself.	Rules limit
33	There are lots of different types of boys at this school.	Many diff
34	I hear a lot about what it is to be "a man" at this school.	Hear a lot
35	School positively influences my understanding of what it is to be "a man".	Generally positive
36	Middle School assemblies acknowledge achievements of all boys.	Assembly

Source: Masculinities Questionnaire Qs 29 to 36
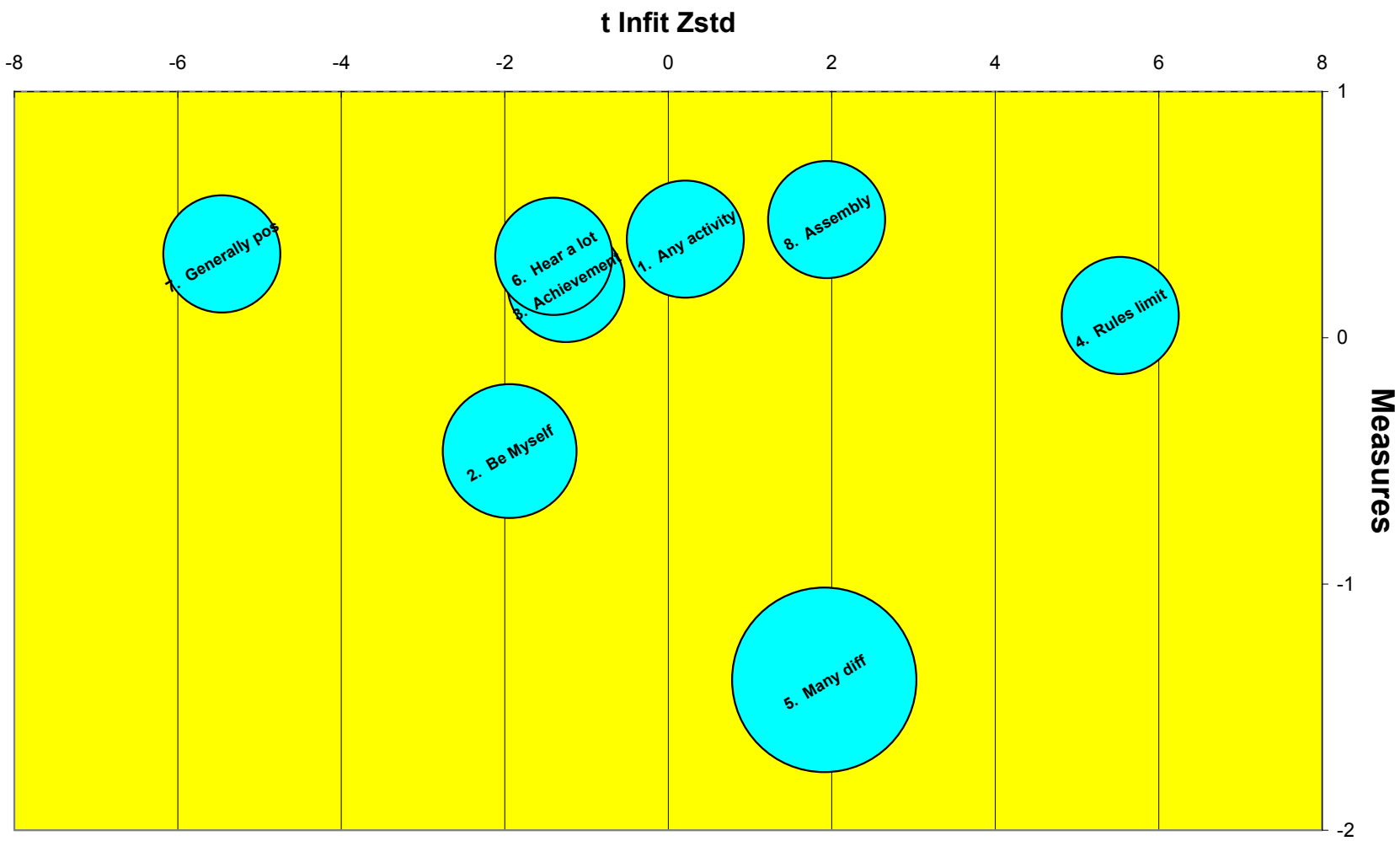
Figure 4.6   SIVM: all items

Six of the eight SIVM items on the questionnaire conform to the Rasch model generated by questionnaire data shown in Figure 4.6 (p165). These six items combine to form a single underlying construct for an investigation of the boys' perceptions of the school's influence on the views of masculinity.

Two items were clearly outside the acceptable pathway of the Rasch model (Figure 4.6, p165) with a *t* value of greater than 2 or less than -2. The item over-fitting the model (Item 7 – *Generally Positive*) has a *t* value of 5.5. Item 7 was the most predictable item on the questionnaire. This suggested the boys perceived the school as a positive influence of their views of masculinity but to a degree that it is not helpful as an item to be used as a means to differentiating boys' views.

Figure 4.6 shows that Item 4 – *Rules limit* has the highest *t* value in this section of the questionnaire at 5.5 suggesting that it warrants further investigation as an item. There is great inconsistency in the level of endorsement of this item. An explanation for this is in the nature of the statement and respondents' confusion resulting in what Rasch recognises as a random pattern in responses. The remaining six items fit the model. The Rasch analysis suggests the school experience does influence the boys' views of masculinity in a variety of ways. There are a range of experiences and opportunities at the school reflecting the school experience through assemblies and activities as well as the way boys interact at school.

Table 4.8 (p167) is an Item Map for the eight SIVM items. Once again, the distribution of person abilities [respondents] followed a similar pattern to the degree of endorsement of the items. This is shown by the way the left and right sides of the map are relatively closely aligned.

The item most easily endorsed amongst the SIVM items shown in this item map was Item 5 – *Many different boys*. There is some gap before the next item registers a level of endorsement. This was Item 2 – *Be myself* which is also set well apart from the remaining six items clustered together near the mean. The level of endorsement of these items suggests the school environment is one within which the boys can be themselves and they recognise a wide variety of boys in the school. This was consistent with the earlier discussion in this chapter on the variety of views of masculinity.

Table 4.8   Item map of SIVM: items 29 to 36
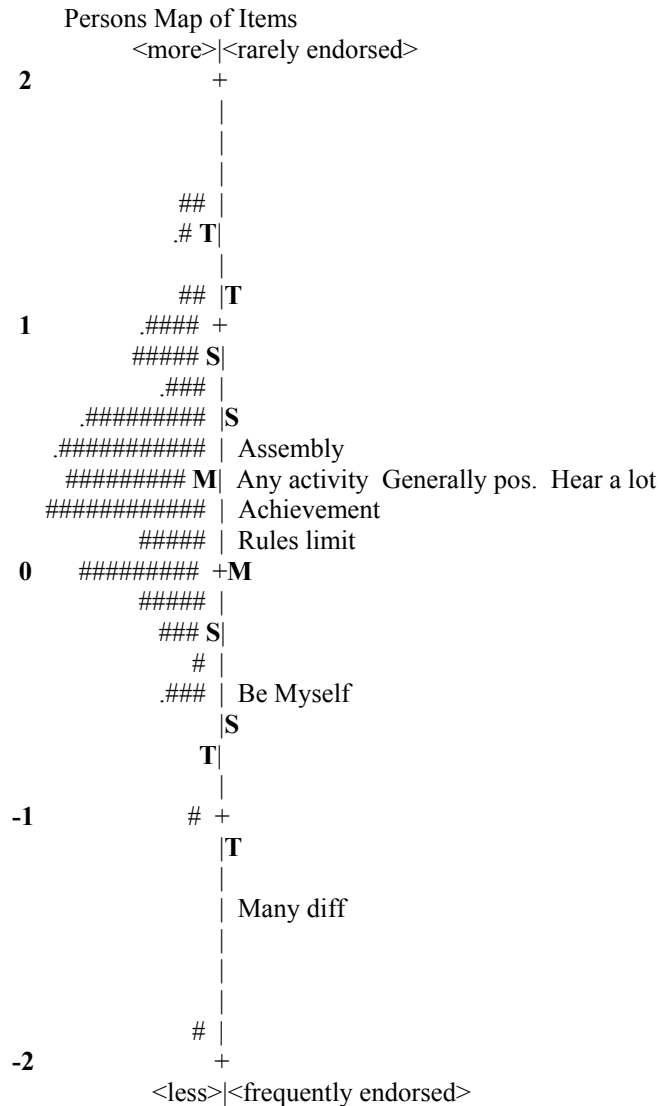
```
                    Persons Map of Items
                    <more>|<rarely endorsed>
      2                    +
                           |
                           |
                           |
                      ##   |
                      .#  T|
                           |
                      ##   |T
      1              .####  +
                    ##### S|
                      .###  |
                 .######### |S
              .########### |  Assembly
               ######### M|  Any activity  Generally pos.  Hear a lot
           ############  |  Achievement
                 #####  |  Rules limit
      0         #########  +M
                   #####   |
                   ### S|
                     #   |
                   .###  |  Be Myself
                        |S
                     T|
                        |
     -1              #  +
                        |T
                        |
                        |  Many diff
                        |
                        |
                        |
                     #  |
     -2                 +
                    <less>|<frequently endorsed>

            Each '#' is 2 persons
```

EFA served to deepen an understanding of the school's influence on views of masculinity by providing a different approach to the same issue. Factor analysis revealed the boys perceived school as a place where they can be themselves and it is permissible to try different activities. Factor 3 *School Influences* in Table 4.1 (p131) consisted of six items, four are from the SIVM section of the questionnaire and two are from the FIVM section, however, all items clearly relate to the school environment. Factor 3 suggests a close relationship between teachers, peers, the ability to be oneself, not limited by rules, participate in a variety of activities and hear achievements acknowledged in assemblies. The boys also perceive the school practices as influential of their views of masculinities.

The key issue for me in this study was to improve my understanding of how masculinity is constructed so that the school environment might become a more positive influence on the boys' views, encouraging boys to develop positive masculinities, be themselves and to do their best in all pursuits. The use of both exploratory factor analysis and Rasch analysis has assisted in this understanding.

The following section will consider the findings relevant to the boys' perceptions of the school's influence on their views of masculinities. The themes of perceptions of general school culture, opportunities at school and school practices will be the framework for the presentation of the research findings incorporating focus group data, Rasch analyis (Figure 4.6, p165 and Table 4.8, p167) and factor analysis (Table 4.1, p131).

Boys' perceptions of general school culture

Swain describes the school's role in the formation of masculinity as:

> as well as providing the setting and physical space in which the embodied actions and agencies of pupils and adults take place, its own structures and practices are also involved as an institutional agent that produces these "masculinising practices" (Swain 2006a:334).

The combination of the physical environment and the social interactions between people in that space are important in determining the culture of a school and the gender regime operating within it. This section investigates the impact of the school on the boys' views of masculinity.

The Rasch model (Figure 4.6, p165) and EFA (Table 4.1, p131) of questionnaire data combine with the comments made in focus group discussion to present the boys' perception of the school environment as positive, tolerant and dynamic. This finding is consistent with findings of the ACER School Life Questionnaire commissioned in 2006 at the case school (Kefford and Field 2007) outlined in Chapter 1. However, this general finding can be explored further.

In *Focus Group 2.2* the boys discussed the way school influences the construction of masculinity. They expressed the perception that the view of masculinity constructed at school was wider than one constructed in a general social context beyond school with typologies i.e. men of a type, conforming to expectations of particular contexts. This is was consistent with the high level of endorsement of "I find it easy to be myself at school" in Table 4.8 (p167). This perception is consistent with a 'personalised masculinity'

(Swain 2006a) where individuals develop their own understanding of masculinity according to the social experiences they encounter in a place such as school and in their social world beyond school.

A belief that their school is more tolerant of differences amongst boys was expressed by the focus group participants on more than one occasion and in different conversational contexts. The following extract of a conversation resulted when the group was asked as to whether they thought there was a difference in the way that boys who are obviously different from their peers are treated at this school compared to how they might be treated in another school:

> Matt *I think it is a lot more tolerant here.*
> Tim   *There is a bigger variety of things. My friend from my old school*
> *tells me that he sees people getting bashed every day at school.*
> *In the years I have been here I have never seen a single fight.*
> *(Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).*

This statement was typical of the views expressed by the boys in different sessions of both focus groups. Expressions by the boys in the focus groups of positive support for the school were supported by the high level of endorsement of the questionnaire items "There are lots of different types of boys at this school" and "I find it easy to be myself at this school" shown in Table 4.8 (p167).

The culture of the school and resulting opportunities are perceived as dynamic by the boys, especially in the longer term. A key area of cultural change perceived by the boys is in relation to participation in sports. The stories of fathers' experiences at this school are used by the boys to illustrate how they understand the school culture in regard to boys' participation in sport, to have changed over time. In a typical comment one boy said:

> *I have noticed that the general attitude on what should be done in*
> *schools has changed a lot. You talk about thirty years ago and there*
> *were only two sports to choose from and now there are, I don't know how*
> *many there are…and there are just so many more choices because people*
> *are more open minded, maybe, than they were then…. Boys have a wider*
> *sampling of sports and other activities. It gives them more freedom*
> *(Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006).*

When asked further by me as to whether this change was a good thing for boys a response was: *'It will [be good] because it will help them to identify more accurately what they want to do, what they like, what they are good at, what they are not good at' (Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006).* This statement supports the Rasch model's inclusion of the items "I can do anything at this school without being paid out" and "Achieving at a high level in

an activity is more important than the activity a boy does at this school" (Figure 4.6, p165). This statement also supports the solid endorsement of both items by the boys in the questionnaire (Table 4.8, p167). It is clear that the boys have an understanding that in their contemporary school environment they can more freely construct their identity through participation in activities they enjoy or succeed in. They recognise this to be different to the school experience of their fathers who were more limited in their choices and opportunities for success to a narrow range of activities at school, due to the school culture of the time. The detail of the process of change over time for this school culture is impossible to determine in this study. It is important to note the boys perceive that in a contemporary school they have a range of opportunities and they are reasonably free to explore them at this school in a way they believe their fathers were not able to do yet they are also bounded in their decisions by the options available to them, offered in the school environment.

Opportunities at School

This section will present findings of data related to academic, sport and other co-curricular school activities and how these school-based opportunities influence the boys' views of masculinity.

A key finding relevant to this section is that the item "I find it easy to be myself at this school" receives a high level of endorsement by the boys (refer Table 4.8, p167) and it is a component in the Rasch model (Figure 4.6, p165). The expression by many boys that they find it easy to be themselves at school contributes to a greater willingness of the boys to pursue opportunities they enjoy rather than opportunities they feel forced to select by other pressures, such as peer or parental pressure, alone.

In explaining how his views of masculinity are influenced by the school through the activities on offer to the boys and explicit efforts to develop boys' views one boy said:

> *There is not a great deal more that we could do. It's more a natural*
> *progression and realization of greater maturity… You can't enforce, you*
> *can try at least, greater maturity and sensibility on people. To actually*
> *change the entire views of what is manly, and what is not, is not really*
> *what you 'do', it's what you 'think' of things (Focus Group 1.4 – 25*
> *August 2006).*

This attitude towards choice, maturity and what the boys think about the things they do was evident in discussions about both the academic and co-curricular programs of the school. The decision by a boy to do something may say more about what he thinks about it rather than just doing it for the sake of it. The speaker here obviously thinks that

thinking about things rather than just doing them is a component of maturity that comes with time. In his view, maturity is a key determining factor in independent actions by boys rather than simply participating because an activity is perceived as manly. The following section will present findings related to academic and co-curricular opportunities the boys experience at school.

Academic Subjects

The meanings of school subject choices have been researched and are described as culturally gendered (Mealyea 1993; Martino 1994; Connell 2000). These writings support the stereotypical view that boys are more attracted to the physical sciences and subjects enabling access to a strong culture of workplace masculinity where women used to be excluded than they are to subjects like English, visual arts, drama and textiles and design. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998:22) account for boys' attraction to the subjects of mathematics and the physical sciences because of the role of these subjects in the powerful and prestigious male domain. Research on the boys' views of subjects in a secondary and single-sex school of the type of the current research is not available.

The academic program at school is a key part of the boys' experience. The first opportunity for boys to select elective subjects is in Year 9 when the boys select three from a list of sixteen elective courses. The subjects available as electives include: four foreign language courses (French, Latin, German and Japanese); two music courses (advanced and contemporary); sports science; global studies; geography; commerce; drama; computing studies; two design and technology courses (materials and multimedia); industrial technology (timber); and, visual arts. The boys' perceptions and attitudes towards subjects as well as the process of selecting elective courses were discussed in focus groups and supported the questionnaire data showing a school environment enabling boys to participate in anything on offer at the school.

The conversation in *Focus Group 2.1* about subjects supported a view that the subjects of the academic program are expressed to be of equal value and that it does not matter which subjects a boy chooses at the school. These comments challenge the findings of earlier research outlined above. One boy endorsed this view at the beginning of the discussion by stating: *'they [the subjects at school] are equal because people like different things like drama or music while others like hands-on subjects like agriculture. It really doesn't make a difference what you like. It doesn't make you any less of a man to do a particular subject' (Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005).* He perceived the elective subjects in Year 9 to be without a gender loading and that boys make a choice based on what they

want to do. Yet, this appears to be a naïve view of subject selection and he appears to be oblivious in making this statement to the subtleties of peer, teacher and parent pressure. This observation is supported in the following paragraph.

The discussion in *Focus Group 2.1* moved on to specifically discuss the boys' understanding of the factors influencing the selection of subjects for boys as they move into Year 9. The importance of individual choice was confirmed by comments like: *'it's [subject selection] based on what we think we are good at and what we like and enjoy. Some people just don't listen to other people's opinions and go their own way' (Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005).* Despite the perceived freedom to select subjects without the influence of other people, the boys' conversation revealed five factors potentially informing decisions about the selection of electives in Year 9. These included the following: relevance to things a boy will do later in life; the views and preferences of parents and older siblings; a subject may be perceived as easy; subjects enjoyed by a boy and his personal preference; and, older peer influence as important in sharing information in locker room conversations about subjects. Attention to each point was equally shared in the course of this conversation. The conversation itself overcame the naïve statement at the outset, quoted above. This revealed a willingness of the boys to develop their views in the course of the conversation without belittling other participants in the process. This provided an insight to the culture of the boys and the way they relate to each other as well as their views on the relative status of subjects studied at school.

Specific subjects also entered the focus group conversations. The longest conversation on the question of perceptions of subjects occurred during *Focus Group 1.1*. This conversation dealt mainly with the value of drama as an elective and its positive appeal to the boys. Drama and commerce have consistently been the two most popular electives in Year 9 for the last ten years with typically about half the cohort selecting either of them amongst their three electives. The content of commerce has a clear link to the conventional hierarchy of masculine knowledge and resulting power for the holders of this knowledge as well as the vocational applications of the knowledge (Connell 2000).

However, drama is not attributed a high masculine status in a stereotypical masculine hierarchy of subjects but it is consistently popular with the boys as a part of their Year 9 subject repertoire. Drama was described by one boy in the following way: *'Drama touches on our imaginative side and physical side with acting and you get to write extracts of plays, and make up you own play bits' (Focus Group 1.1 – 28 October 2005).* The

reasons identified as making drama appealing to boys included the performance aspect of the subject, its cognitive demands, physical demands, as well as the general standing the subject had amongst the boys at school. There seemed to be an element of romance in the boys' perceptions of drama with one explanation for boys selecting it as an elective being *'a lot of boys do drama because it's a different experience. It's mysterious. You don't have to be yourself, you get to be someone else, seen as a different experience' (Focus Group 1.1 – 28 October 2005).* The importance of the experience availed by selecting drama was apparent in these comments. In short, the boys held a very positive attitude towards drama and perceived it as a worthwhile experience which accounts for the large proportion of boys electing it in Year 9.

With the exception of commerce most elective subjects selected by the boys in this study contain significant practical components such as drama, visual arts and visual design courses. This suggested there is a hierarchy of subjects with some carrying more appeal than others challenging the hierarchy of subjects described by Connell (2000:157-8) where subjects like drama and visual arts are considered to be less desirable for boys. The reasons for this atypical finding of boys' support for these subjects may well be connected to the general positive school culture and the success in these subjects in the later secondary years at the case school.

Perhaps this is not surprising at the case school where the students recognised a very positive learning environment in the 2006 ACER questionnaire discussed earlier (p66). The boys participating in the current research held a positive attitude to learning and were supportive of other boys who select courses available to them at school. The boys said they support differences and accept boys choose from the range of opportunities available to them because it is normal within the school culture to do so. The boys' attitudes and perceptions of subjects were not consciously swayed by stereotypical views of masculinity. Normative practices in relation to subject selection and the masculine hierarchy of knowledge are redefined in the case school.

Nevertheless, there is a complex combination of factors determining subject choices by the boys at the end of Year 8 and it appears to be inconsistent with previous research in this area where subjects tend to be closely related to gender. The boys recognise the influence of older peers through shared experiences of subjects in locker room conversations. A typical comment in regard to this was: *'lots of people do drama because of the Year 9 influence on the Year 8 boys' decision when they talk about drama in the locker rooms'*

(Focus Group 1.1 - 28 October 2005). The experiences of older students were shared in the locker room. The boys recounted their elective subject experiences of teachers, content and level of success (as defined by them) in these conversations. These were all contributing factors to the decisions of the younger boys and their perceptions of subjects at the school.

Another factor determining the choice of the boys was the range of subjects available to them. The elective courses have been tailored by staff of the school over the years to attract Year 9 students (all boys) in an effort to sustain interest and attract new students. Without students electing to study a course it cannot be offered and the teachers have an interest in the number of students electing to take their subject. A dull elective course, not supported by strong numbers means a course will not be offered again and may result in the loss of justification for a teacher's position at the school. Therefore, teachers pursue student participation in their course because it is linked to their own interests. Over time, only courses that are of interest to boys will be available to them.

The most appealing courses are strongly supported while it is still acceptable to select less appealing courses. The fact that the boys perceive the popular electives of drama, commerce, visual arts and visual design to be acceptable says more about the alignment of the boys' views of masculinity and the views the school encourages through the academic opportunities provided for Middle School boys. It is by this subtle means that the school may have a significant influence on the boys' views of masculinity because it offers certain academic experiences for the boys, to the exclusion of others. Decisions by a school about the subject offerings may be based on economic principles (such as student demand and viability of class sizes), philosophical and school policy decisions (such as all boys should study a foreign language in Year 9). Regardless of the factors involved the boys in the case school appear to be supporting subjects not typically supported by boys of the same age in other schools. The next section presents findings related to sport at school and similar issues that arise.

Sport at school

Participation in a summer and winter sport is compulsory for all students. The requirement for boys to participate in sport says a great deal about the gender regime in place at the case school. Up to five sports are available in each sport season from which the boys select one for each of the two sporting seasons a year. The variety of sports

available to the boys in the current research is relatively large but this is considered typical of the choice available to boys in Australian independent schools (West 1999).

The various levels of physical contact in sports available to students suggests the school reproduces a particular type of sport experience for the boys, within which the boys have a choice of sports but a limited range of types, across the range of masculine status. In general, school sports are seen to reinforce dominant masculinities at a school, produce hierarchies of masculinities according to the types of sports receiving the greatest accolades at the school and develop opportunities for men to achieve power over other men through participation in the dominant activities (Messner 1992; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Connell 2000; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Messner 2005). The relations between the patterns of masculinity are very important, especially in regard to the hegemonic masculinity, sport and how hegemony is maintained. The hierarchy in place at school is controlled by the school to one extent because the school provides the sports from which the boys choose to participate.

The increased choice of sports with age suggests something about the way the school influences the boys' views of sports as well as empowering boys with greater freedom to choose. One boy stated: *'when you hit the middle school you have more choices. That shows that as you grow older you will have decisions to make and it helps you to make good decisions' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006).* It is implied here that adults need to be able to make good decisions. The choice of sport is perceived by the boys as a step towards less control by adults, enabling boys to develop an ability to collect information to make decisions for themselves. The experiences of the students at school are shaped by the opportunities available to, and engaged by them through social practices, curriculum and co-curricular opportunities.

The difference in status of sports is seen by the boys to be supported by the school and is consistent with earlier research explaining how hierarchies of masculinity form at school because of differing levels of admiration for performances in different sports (Connell 2000:159). The high status of rugby and soccer were well recognised by the boys. It was stated by one boy: *'There's definitely a rugby and soccer culture. They see themselves as the predominant sports which are seen as acceptable' (Focus Group 1.4 – 25 August 2006).* These two sports were further differentiated in status in the course of the focus group conversations. The high status of rugby and its position within the school was

supported by school policies such as requiring boys to play rugby in their first year of the Junior School as well as the general profile of the rugby program over soccer at the school. Soccer was definitely seen as lesser in its status in comparison to rugby with other sports of lower status again. Figure 4.3 *Things Valued at School* (p146) demonstrates the relative status of success in rugby. This high status of achievement has benefits for other participants in the same sport.

There was much conversation in *Focus Group 1.1* and *Focus Group 2.4* about the hierarchy of sports, especially the relative difference of rugby and soccer. Attitudes of participation in non contact sports at this school, such as tennis, and the perception these sports have lower status amongst the boys were revealed in the discussion at focus groups. Focus group data revealed that in the boys' views, soccer is attributed a lower status than rugby at the school for three reasons. The reasons were: soccer does not have the same level of physical contact as rugby; school policy requires boys to play rugby for at least one year in the Junior School; and, the quality of the playing venue for the First XV rugby matches. One comment summed up the importance of the main venue for the First XV (rugby) spectacle: *'rugby appears more glorious. They have the big oval and all the spectators' (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006).* The boys acknowledged how the high status of rugby is sanctioned by the school. Rugby is clearly the most admired sport at the case school placing it at the top of the sport hierarchy.

The relative ranking of sports has already been presented in Table 4.4 (p141) but the primacy of rugby is confirmed by responses to Question 26. This question asked: "Which achievement do you think has the highest status" (Appendix 15). The respondents were asked to select a single achievement from a list of seven. The results are shown in Figure 4.7 *Status of achievements* (p177).

Q 26 - Which achievement has the highest status?
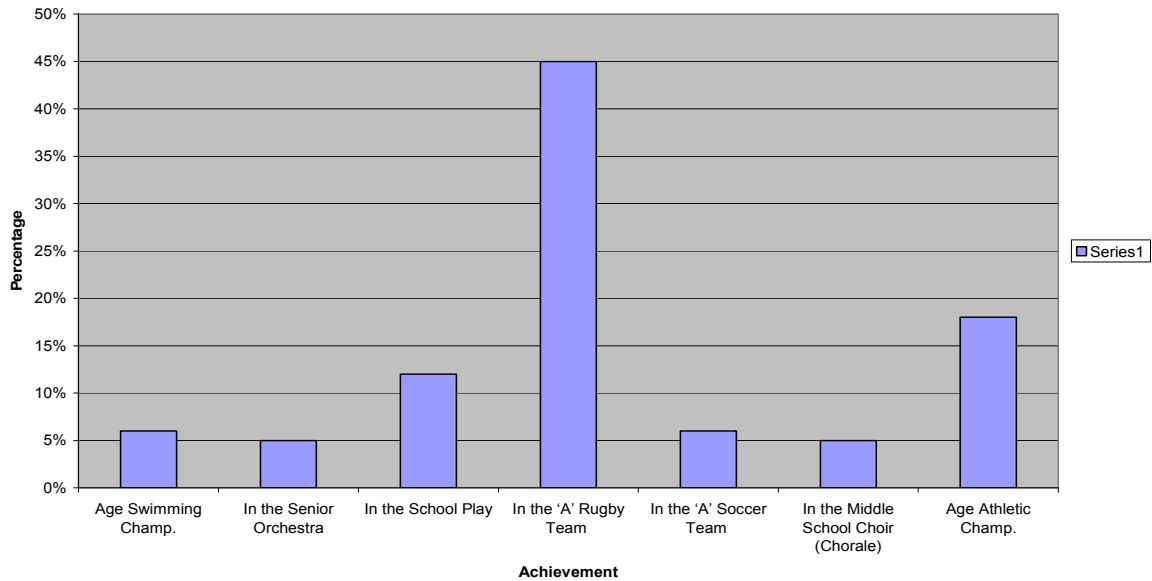
Source: Masculinity Questionnaire Q26

Figure 4.7   Status of achievements

Membership of the "A" team for rugby was perceived by 45% of the boys as having the highest status. The next closest achievement was Age Athletics Champion. It is interesting to find that 12% of the boys rated participation in the school play as having the highest status. This was the third highest status achievement in the school but is indicative of the level of support for drama in the school, as an activity and a subject, in the curriculum. The primacy of rugby is clear in Figure 4.7, consistent with the earlier discussion related to Table 4.4 (p141). This result required endorsement by non rugby players because only about 30% of the cohort plays rugby each season. Moreover, the number of participants in rugby and soccer is also approximately even in the cohort. The high level of acknowledgement for the Age Athletics Champion may be attributed in part to the timing of the questionnaire as the major school athletics championships had been held five weeks before the distribution of the questionnaire.

It is important to acknowledge the school limits the range of choice by deciding which sports will be offered as a part of the school experience. The boys recognised they can participate in any of the school sports with a good level of peer acceptance, without a great social cost. This is consistent with the high level of endorsement of the questionnaire items of "Boys can do anything" and "I find it easy to be myself at this school" in Table 4.8 (p167). Participation and success in an activity enables group membership and it is through that group membership the boys experience the most desirable outcome of all, social success.

Other activities at School

Findings related to activities of high status presented in the previous section were complemented in the questionnaire by pursuing the boys' identification of low status activities. In Question 28 participants were asked to identify three activities from a list of eighteen items they considered to be of the lowest status at the school. Figure 4.8 *Low status activities* presents the results for the ten activities most commonly perceived by the boys as being of low status.

Q28 - Lowest status activities - Ranked
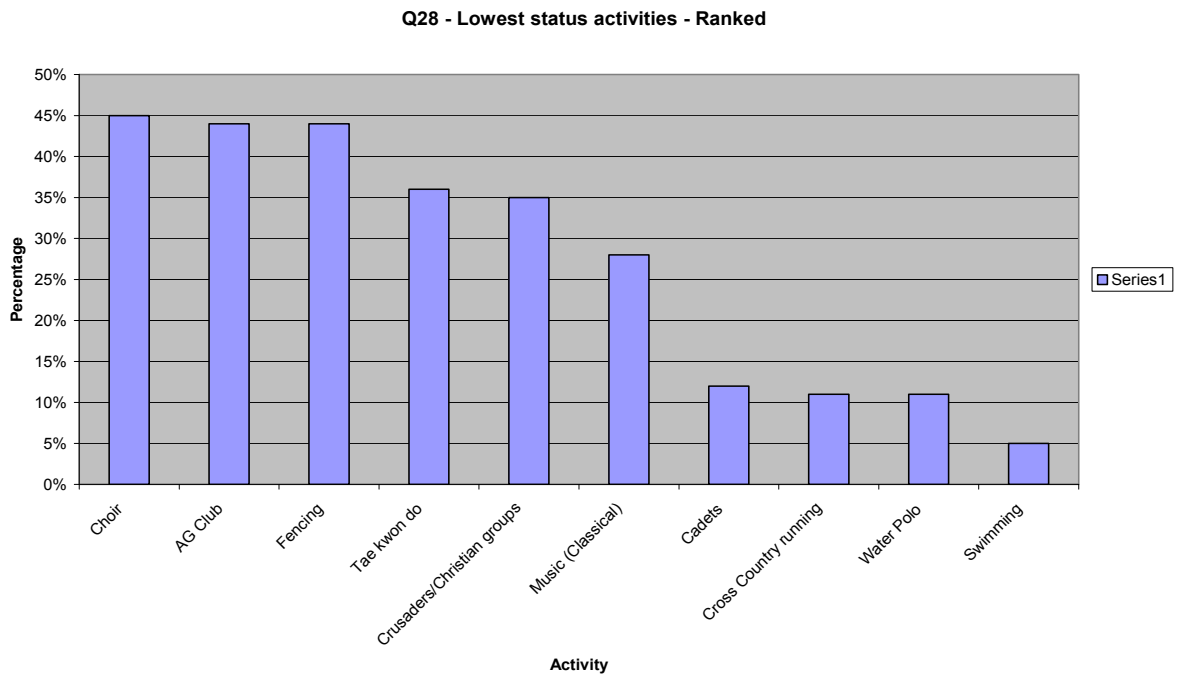
Source: Masculinity Questionnaire Q28

Figure 4.8   Low status activities

A cut off of 5% frequency was arbitrarily determined to simplify the presentation of these data. The percentage figure on the vertical axis indicates the percentage of respondents including an activity amongst the three they selected. Totalling the percentages of all activities eighteen would equal 300. Therefore, approximately 45% of respondents ranked choir as one of their three activities of lowest status. Rugby and soccer were least frequently included with less than 2% of respondents including either of them in their selection. Choir (45%), agriculture club (44%) and fencing (43.5%) were rated as of the lowest status, followed by tae kwon do (36%). The school's activity records show these all to be activities with between forty and fifty boys participating in them at any one time in a Middle School with a population of 600 boys. The numbers in the agriculture club are far fewer at about fifteen to twenty boys at a time. The fifth lowest ranking went to Crusaders (a lunchtime Christian group) which has a more transient membership but typically around eighty boys would regularly attend this activity. The recognition of low

status by the boys relates closely to the numbers participating in each activity except for music.

The negative consequences for participants in these low status activities seem to be few. One boy expressed his support for the view that boys at this school can engage a range of activities without unbearable consequences.

> *At some schools you will not do an activity because you will get paid out for the rest of your life. But here you might be a bit reluctant to do something but you will do it anyway. You know you will get a bit from your friends, it's not such a big thing (Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005).*

Presumably to *'get a bit from your friends'* for participating in an activity means that a boy will be the focus of negative comments by peers for participating in some activities. The example of choir was twice raised in *Focus Group 2.1.* Although it is recognised as a low status activity in Figure 4.8 (p178) choir is considered alright for boys in this year group to participate and not to experience a hard time for it. In fact, two participants gave examples of how they understood boys in other schools were treated poorly by their peers in those schools for participating in an activity such as choir. When asked to consider rating the level of teasing of boys participating in activities with "1" the lowest and "10" the highest level of teasing the initial response was: *'At this school I reckon choir and soccer are kind of level at about a "3" which isn't too bad. Outside of school probably "5" or "6" with ballet about a "9" or "10" ' (Focus Group 2.1 – 4 November 2005).* This statement provided an insight into the boys' attitude towards participation in lower status activities as well as a perception of the level of support these activities receive at their school compared to other schools known to them. This statement also supports a general feeling in the group that the level of teasing of participants in the lower status activities is lower than their perception of teasing that occurs in other schools for a similar kind of activity. This is an indication of the boys' perception of the general culture of peer group acceptance at their school and the potential for boys to participate in activities on the basis of personal preference, with less negative peer pressure than they might experience elsewhere. This is consistent with the boys' high level of endorsement of the questionnaire item "I find it easy to be myself at this school" in Table 4.8 (p167).

The activities and subjects available at school are an important aspect of the general experience of boys at school. These specific experiences combine with and may result from particular school practices.

School Practices

There are a number of school practices that influence the boys' views of masculinity and combine to show the potential for a school to be a 'masculine-making device' (Connell 2000:155) . The practices evident in the case school are: school rules; co-educational Senior School; and, Middle School assemblies.

School rules

School rules involving student (and staff) dress code and discipline have been recognised as important 'masculinizing practices' (Connell 2000:155) governed by the approach to gender by a particular school. Conflicting findings have emerged from the data depending on whether it is from the questionnaire analysis (Rasch analysis or factor analysis) or focus groups. Independent consideration of both questionnaire analysis and focus group data is important to explore the importance of school rules in the gender regime of the case school.

The questionnaire data for the item "School rules limit my ability to be myself" because it has a *t* value of 5.5 placing it well outside of the Rasch model in Figure 4.6 (p165) yet when EFA was employed this item loaded heavily and negatively in Factor 3 to suggest school rules do not limit the ability of boys to be themselves in Table 4.1 (p131). The Rasch analysis shows this item is not a part of a single construct in this research. Bond and Fox (2007) recommend that items of this nature need to be disregarded altogether from the model or included in later questionnaires when they have been reconsidered and reworded. The EFA loading suggests it should not be disregarded.

The focus group data complement the factor analysis and unravel some aspects of the Rasch analysis for this item. School rules were specifically discussed in *Focus Group 1.3, 1.5 and 2.5*. In general, the boys' comments suggested they perceive the value of school rules and clear student expectations as important, reflecting the outside world. The boys perceived the formal structure and expectations of the school to present a fairly narrow representation of masculinity, consistent with the school's gender regime. An opening comment in *Focus Group 1.5* was:

> *Masculinity could be lots of things like how strong you are, how you look and represent yourself. But school shows you what a man could be… it enforces… not enforces, but some of its rules are like hair styles, uniform, looking good, manners and stuff like that, trying to keep fit and stuff like this. It's not as individualistic but more conforming to the sort of routine we have to do here (Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006).*

The school uniform has been described as a means to 'patrol and control student subjectivities through regulatory practices of body fashioning' (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:232). In a focus group discussion one boy described the school uniform as a part of a wider phenomenon of the school's gender regime but he did not oppose the limitations imposed by such a regime.

> *Some of the responsibilities, like what we are allowed to do, is we are trying to become men… like the uniform, ties and all that (Focus Group 1.3 – 9 June 2006).*

The limitations of self expression imposed by the school rules and code of behaviour (Appendix 1) were discussed in *Focus Group 2.5*. The boys acknowledge these limitations accepting them as a part of attending the school and compliance to the school's gender regime. One boy said: *'you can't express yourself through long hair and stuff like that. There are a few areas that are constricting of personality but overall I think that it is pretty good' (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006)*. The school uniform and school rules are not seen by this boy to be the key school practices limiting his subjectivities and individuality. Expectations of conduct at school are part of a wider phenomenon but can be accepted by him while he pursues other avenues to reveal his individuality.

The opportunity for self expression through non-uniform days to raise money for charity was recognised by one participant as important. He stated: *'some people who don't have much respect with a lot of other people … wouldn't be able to express themselves as much' (Focus Group 1.5 – 3 November 2006)*. This statement suggests reputation and established peer acceptance will influence the degree of freedom of expression on non-uniform days. The school's support for the non-uniform days and the resulting opportunities for self-expression through the wearing of casual clothes did not enter the boys' discussions.

The lack of antagonism evident in the boys' comments to the requirement to wear a school uniform is consistent with other research but there is a higher level of acceptance at the case school than in some other research (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:233). This would suggest that in the school there is not a strongly evident 'protest masculinity' that is constructed through defiance of authority but there is a secure hegemony at the school (Connell 2000:159). In this case, the hegemony appears to be secure because of the boys' acceptance of the place of the school uniform within the school's gender regime.

The experience of attending the case school seems to be quite varied as an influence on the boys' views of masculinity. On one hand the school provides a range of acceptable experiences for boys to engage at school. On the other hand, the formal aspects of the school are perceived by the boys to support a narrow view of the way boys should conduct themselves defined by existing rules, expectations of students and the nature of opportunities on offer to boys.

The boys recognise that the school rules and student expectations limit their opportunities to express their individuality yet they do not resist it. They appear to accept the value of the school experience as a process of socialization for life after school. The authority of the school remains unchallenged in the focus group conversations and suggests a high level of acceptance of school rules, and the part they play in the construction of its gender regime.

Co-educational Senior School

The unusual whole-school structure of a boys' Middle School (Years 7 to 9) and a co-educational Senior School (Years 10 to 12) influences the boys' views of masculinity as a part of their Middle School environment. The impact of a co-educational Senior School was explored in the focus groups. The discussion focussed on the impact on social interactions between students and subject selection.

When anticipating the expansion of the year group from a single sex, boys-only environment to a co-educational Senior School and the consequent impact on social interactions, two boys in *Focus Group 2.5* expressed the following views:

> Matt   *I think next year pretty much everyone is going to change. It's a totally different environment and everyone will be acting a lot more mature and stuff. The opposite might be the case for some people. I reckon the way people behave is going to change dramatically.*
> Rick   *It's like going to a new school again (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006)*

The arrival of girls in Year 10 was recognised as having an impact on the Year 9 boys in their final stages in the Middle School. During Term 2 of Year 9, one boy said: *'I think that has boosted the talk about masculinity' (Focus Group 2.3 – 15 June 2006)*. The imminent arrival of girls and the potential for their inclusion in the boys' daily social group is predicted to have an impact on the present social balance. This boy believed the change to the make up of the year group had an impact on the social interaction of the boys up to six months before the change in their cohort composition in Year 10.

Despite the imminent arrival of girls, the boys recognise that social groups naturally change over time. One boy claims that *'friends are changing… in Year 9, like any grade, friends are changing, like who you hang out with, who you talk to, what they relate to and stuff… it comes up in conversations'* (Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006). The addition of girls to the year group is expected to have a large influence on the boys' social groups and possibly even the way the boys relate to each other. This can be put into the context of normal changes in social groups but the boys have shown a willingness to blame the girls for taking their friends. Boys who align themselves more strongly with girls may become the subject of some ridicule *(Focus Group 2.4 – 1 September 2006)*.

The focus group data particularly suggests the school's co-educational policy for the last three years of secondary school influences the Middle School boys. There are practical changes for the boys in the composition of their cohort when they move to Year 10 as well as a general impact on the social environment of the school. In this case, the school's influence on the boys' views of masculinity is through providing them with a change in the learning environment from single-sex to co-education.

Middle School Assembly
The role of the Middle School assembly is less clear. Although an aspect associated with assembly fitted the Rasch model for these data in Figure 4.6 (p165) suggesting it joins the other items as a component of a single construct and it was a component of a Factor 3 revealed by EFA in Table 4.1 (p131) the item "Middle School assemblies acknowledge achievements of all boys" also received the lowest level of endorsement of all items in this section of the questionnaire.

The attitude towards assemblies provided by earlier research tend to be quite negative with assemblies seen to be meaningful only to 'those boys who excelled in the dominant masculinities' (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:230). In summary, assemblies are described in earlier research as 'a public display of power that only encouraged resistance' (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:232).

The only positive comments made about assemblies in this earlier research resulted from assemblies as broad and inclusive (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). Such assemblies recognised participants of activities other than only the high profile sports, such as community service and music (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:230-1). As a result, assemblies provide an opportunity for the school to influence the relations between the patterns of masculinity by providing a forum for profile, recognition and legitimacy of a range of student achievements beyond a single form of masculinity. In the current research assemblies at the case school seem to be a far more positive experience than described in other research.

The findings of the current research are further explained by considering the focus group comments by some boys. In the course of the discussion by *Focus Group 2.2* the participants recognised the significance of time in assembly and the frequency of the inclusion of short student music performances as an indication to how some aspects of the school are supported. The boys' perceived sport to be more important than music at school because the teacher in charge of sport is allocated time in Friday's assembly to make announcements related to sport ahead of the normal Saturday sport commitments.

When asked about the influence of school assemblies and the profile given to activities through their inclusion in announcements and presentations, one boy expressed the following view:

> *It's good how you hear all about the sports achievements and stuff at the same time you hear about all our musicians and stuff going on. It is kind of putting them on par. I think it is saying to everyone that at this school we consider these people, our musicians, as worthy of recognition as our sportsmen, which I think is good (Focus Group 2.5 – 10 November 2006).*

The boys have acknowledged in earlier research (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003)and this current research how assemblies can be a positive experience for the students of a school. It is clear these events need to be carefully planned with latent messages about support and profile taken into account in the planning stage because assemblies are seen by the students as 'public sites of presence and absence, reward and repression' (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:229).

Summary of findings

The key findings relevant to the investigation of the boys' perception of the role of school as an influencing their views of masculinities revealed by this research are:

- Opportunities for boys at school have changed over time;
- The stereotypical hierarchy of school subjects can be challenged when students perceive a very positive learning environment;
- School structure influences the boys attitudes towards school, each other and girls; and,
- The school provides a broad experience for boys by intertwining the academic program, co-curricular activities and the hidden curriculum.

Project Conclusions

As a leader in the school it is important to have an understanding of how the school environment constructs and maintains masculinity. This understanding should assist the development of new as well as maintaining existing practices to create a quality learning environment for the students. A framework for the social organization of masculinity in schools with particular attention on the relations among patterns of masculinity (Connell 2005; Swain 2006a) was introduced earlier in this chapter and will be utilized to outline the conclusions of this research about the influence of the school experience on the boys' view of masculinity.

Analysis of the focus group discussions and questionnaire data using the Rasch model, reflections on focus group participant comments and factor analysis of questionnaire data have resulted in the following conclusions.

What are the boys' views of masculinity?

There is a predominant plurality in the boys' views of masculinity. This is a significant finding because it supports the idea of a contextualized view of masculinity. Changes over time in opportunities and expectation of the boys demonstrate the influence of the social context on their decisions, and pressures to make the decisions related to the activities in which they engaged.

What are the important factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity?

The important factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity are:

- The boys' experiences at school and away from school influence their views of masculinity;

- Their experiences at school are determined by the school environment shaped by attitudes and policies;

- Policies are important because they determine the subject options and co-curricular activities available;

- Family and fathers are clearly perceived by the boys as the most important influences on their views of masculinity.

In ecological terms, the microsystem of the school interacts with the microsystem of the boys' experiences at home and with peers. For the boys at school the resulting mesosystem is the interaction of these microsystems shaping their views of masculinity. The importance of experiences encountered in each of these microsystems is apparent in boys' views of masculinity.

What is the influence of the school experience on the boys' views of masculinity?

The influence of the school is not recognised as the main influence on views of masculinity by the boys in this study and they do not seem to be conscious of practices that construct or reinforce masculinity *per se*. This does not mean they are not influential, just that the boys are not aware of their influence at this stage. As already stated, the boys perceive their fathers and older men to be most influential.

A boy's view of masculinity is diverse and dynamic (Swain 2006a:340) and may change in the course of a day dependent upon the context in which he finds himself. In the playground a boy may employ one view of masculinity, that is subordinated when he returns to the classroom after the break (Swain 2006a:340). The prevailing masculinity of the classroom may have no relevance to the social context of the skate park visited by the same boy on his way home from school where he employs a different form of masculinity again, before returning home to another social context and to engage an alternative form of masculinity. This capability to vary the operating view of masculinity will extend beyond school to different social contexts. The school is one amongst a number of social contexts where boys employ their story line to engage the social environment in which they are located at that point in time.

Relations among masculinities at school

Hegemony

There are many contradictions apparent in the findings of the present research. For example peers are valued most highly by the boys over everything else at school and academic success is valued more highly than sporting success despite the high profile and high status of a sport like rugby. Identifying a dominant masculinity, one that is hegemonic with a 'successful claim to authority' (Connell 2005:77) has been a difficult undertaking but the findings of the present research show that high achievement by boys in school activities is hegemonic. This applies to success in sport, academics and performing arts (drama and music) and even social success. Exactly how this success is measured varies between activities but social acknowledgement of achievement through events such as sporting matches, concerts for music or a play for drama are the common components of success.

Social success features prominently in these findings. There is an important link forged here between the two research projects within this portfolio as a component of the social environment of the boys. The link is the importance of social success at school and how this relates to attitudes and perceptions of masculinity. The findings of this research show that at this stage of their schooling social success amongst male peers is more important to the boys than anything else at school. Overall, these data confirm the high value of social relations at school and the great importance to the boys of social success with their male peers.

Given the lengthy focus group conversations about sport it is interesting to find the boys perceive academic success as valued more highly than sporting success and that social success is valued most highly of all. Academic success is perceived by the boys as having high value but second to social success for the Year 9 boys. It is less surprising to find the Year 9 boys did not value approval from teachers. This was one form of success they did not pursue.

Participation in a particular sport, or activity, does not necessarily guarantee conformity to a hegemonic masculine form although success in rugby is likely to assure it. Success in a lower status sport, such as soccer, basketball or athletics can still bring high status to the boy concerned.

Success in any school activity is the defining issue for boys in establishing authority and achieving the hegemonic masculinity in the context of the school.

This hegemonic form of masculinity at the school is closely aligned to the hegemonic form described by Connell (2005:77) as 'the accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'. Amongst all the activities the boys have available to them at school the activities they subordinated were popular with, or included, girls (such as netball).

Subordination

As stated earlier in this chapter, subordinate forms of masculinity are positioned outside the hegemonic form of masculinity and in a position of lower standing in the hierarchies of masculinity interacting with the hegemonic form without conforming to it (Swain 2006a:339).

Activities involving girls or activities of a lower status and outside of school, such as netball, were uniformly subordinated by the boys in focus group discussions. Such activities are pursued by the boys outside of the school because they are not made available to the boys at school.

The hierarchy of sports is clear but not fixed as sports appear to have the capacity to be subordinated by others in different situations. Although success in rugby is widely admired by the boys, rugby players are still vulnerable to teasing by the soccer players because they think rugby is not as skilful as soccer. This leads me to the conclusion that it is not the sport alone that entitles membership to the hegemonic masculinity but it is the level of performance.

Other subordinate forms of masculinity in this research are connected to participation without a desire to succeed. This means meeting minimum requirements in any activity available to the boys at school and conforming to school requirements of participation in activities. Boys who participate in a sport, such as rugby, are attributed some of the status of the successful participants in the top team but not all of it. Participation in rugby, even in a lower team, is attributed higher status than participation in Tae kwon do but success is Tae kwon do is still respected by the boys.

Failure to conform to the school's expectations of participation in activities will be low status. This is an important point as it is counter to the rebellious findings of earlier research into boys at school in different contexts.

Complicity

With relatively few males conforming to the standards of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005:79; Swain 2006a:338) it takes many others to support the position of the dominant masculine form. This is achieved in the school of this research through the direct assistance of the school and the support given by many boys for success.

At the school the aspirations of some boys to achieve the hegemonic masculinity is recognised as a way of establishing and supporting it. This is done by attending large events where accolades are given to the successful participants, such as assemblies, concerts, sports events and informal recognition of successful students. The boys themselves may not conform to the standards of the hegemonic form through their own success, but they can contribute to maintaining the place of such success by participating in the celebration of high achievement and attending high profile occasions. The presence of a large crowd of spectators at any event legitimizes the occasion and raises the profile of the performers. In this way, the audience are complicit in creating and maintaining the hegemonic masculinity of success.

Marginalization

There was no evidence in the current research of marginalized masculinities of the type described by Connell (2005:80-1) influenced by race or social class. The absence of data on issues of race and social class from focus group conversations are indicative of the relative homogeneity of the demographic composition of the school population. This homogeneity suggests the boys' attitudes to and perceptions of masculinity are not being tested across racial and class boundaries. As a result, the experience of the boys at school is unusual but a product of the context of their school.

Alternative interpretations of this silence are that the boys did not think racial and social difference was evident or they were too sensitive to the issues to raise them. It was not something that I pursued as a researcher in the focus groups which may say something about my position and bias. Issues involving racial and social class differences are not apparent in the relationships between boys in the case school.

Personalised Masculinity

This pattern of masculinity is apparent in the case school and is well supported by data from focus groups and the questionnaire. A 'personalised masculinity' enables boys to move easily between different interests and interest groups experiencing few problems at school. It takes a certain level of tolerance in a school culture to allow this to happen and not to demand conformity to or at least complicity to the hegemonic form, without subordination.

The idealised form of masculinity at the case school is success through high achievement and public recognition. A personalised pattern of masculinity enables the boys to engage different social contexts with different levels of commitment and success without risking subordination. There is a very close connection between a personalised masculinity and multiple view of masculinity. A personalised masculinity is constructed through personal experiences and it becomes a part of a personal story line. The school contributes to this story line, along with other contexts such as the home and the wider social world by providing unique experiences for boys. The experiences in the school environment microsystem influence the development of their views of masculinity that are carried to and then shaped by other social environments of their mesosystem.

Impact on practice

As a result of this research project a better understanding of the boys' views of masculinity, the factors influencing their views and the role of the school in shaping their views has translated into some changes in practice. In the role of Head of Middle School I am expected to provide leadership for the school community on a range of issues. Amongst them is support for parents in parenting their sons. This research project has provided an important experience informing the suggestions I make to parents about Middle School boys.

The importance of the family social unit is clear in this research. The boys are looking to adults as role models. Since the completion of this research I have been encouraging parents to keep their sons in their adult social world, engaged with older men and women who the parents know and trust as good role models for their children. The desire of the boys to hear stories and to be involved in this world is clear. Similarly, in the absence of adult role models, the participants in this research are likely to turn to their peers as role

models. This may or may not be a good thing, but parents need to know that the boys in this research are looking to adults they know to be role models.

The role of mothers is less clear. Their place in the development of adolescent sons has been explored by Lashlie (2006) in her popular book. This book has provided an important link for mothers as they seek guidance in raising their sons, on their own or in combination with another parent. My research has enabled me to encourage mothers to be instrumental in constructing the social world of their sons, linking it to the family and older role models. This suggestion has been well received by mothers at the case school as we work together to assist the development of boys through the Middle School years.

The current research has also brought to the surface the importance of providing a range of opportunities and acknowledging success at school. The case school is fortunate in the resources it has available to it, enabling a wide range of subject choices and co-curricular experiences at school. These experiences appear to serve the construction of a plural view of masculinity at the school and influence the boys in other aspects of their lives.

The school's directing role

The current research pursues a better understanding of how these different patterns of masculinity relate to each other in the school. The nature of the school environment and the experiences of students within it will be determined by the relations between these patterns of masculinity.

The case school provides a well resourced learning environment for its students. This means there are many and varied opportunities at the school for boys but the opportunities are limited to those the school can resource and is willing to offer the boys. Decisions are made to allocate resources. Furthermore, support from the boys through participation is essential for an activity to be made available to the boys. The well resourced learning environment of the school helps to assist in student engagement at school and build social support for students as attributed to a quality learning environment by the QTM (DETNSW 2003:16).

The boys of the current research demonstrated a personalised view of masculinity. Their capacity to adjust their view of masculinity to different contexts was most apparent in their focus group comments and supported by the predominant plural view of masculinity amongst the boys in the cohort. It is my view that this goes even further, that the view of

each boy is not concrete in time or place. Their view is highly contextualized resulting in different traits of masculine behaviour having prevalence for individuals in different contexts.

Implications for further research

As a case study the findings of the current research have deepened my understanding of the situation in the case school. There are two areas of further research arising from the current research.

First, the situations for boys in other schools in relation to the three research questions of the current research project warrant further investigation in other schools. This applies to schools in a variety of social, demographic and economic contexts as well as with differing organisation structures. This research would enable teachers within the schools to better understand the experiences the school provides its boys and to provide them with a range of activities, guided by school policies and practices with the available resources to create a quality learning environment.

The second area for further research to extend the research to girls of a similar age as they view femininity, in place of masculinity as is the case in the current project. The girls' views of femininity, factors influencing their views and the role of the school in shaping their views would make for a fascinating study of school culture in either a co-educational school or single sex girls' school. The purpose of this further research would be the same as for the boys in the current research and of great value to the case school, as they shape the experiences of their students and seek to provide a quality learning environment for the students.

CHAPTER 5 – LINKING CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter draws together the two projects and explains the importance of the research to the school, to me as a teacher, a researcher and a school leader, outlines the implications for this research for the school and makes recommendations for future research.

The overall argument of this portfolio has been that the social and learning environment of school shapes the development of students. The two research projects of this portfolio investigated two dimensions of the same school environment in the case school, informed by an ecological perspective adapted from ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The boys' views were positioned at the centre of the discussion of the investigation of how their views are constructed by their environment in relation to masculinity and peer relations.

In general, the findings of this research suggest a high level of compliance from the boys in the school and the support for the school from the boys, and their parents, is considerable. The school has a history of high academic achievement by its student body and an expectation to continue this high level of achievement. Also, it is clear that students enjoy the range of experiences they have at the school in the standard curriculum as well as in co-curricular activities. This means that the boys generally engage with schooling in a positive learning environment with the key aspects of social support to build engagement in schooling as identified by the QTM (DETNSW 2003:16).

The forms of masculinity in the case school were found to be different to the forms researched and described in the classic ethnographic research projects involving boys at working class schools. A tendency by boys to reject school culture is not evident in this case study. In fact, the opposite is true. The boys take on the school environment with a willingness to achieve in their endeavours and social success available to them from the experience. This is a form of cultural reproduction where the students seek the benefits of the success achieved at the school. For the boys and their parents the school provides an avenue to success beyond school. This success is seen as a means to security in life beyond school. In this way the social and cultural capital obtained at the school can be transformed into economic capital in the manner described by Bourdieu (1977) with benefits after leaving school.

The development of an effective pastoral care system, including an effective approach to poor peer relations, assists in the development of social and cultural capital. The CEEVEC approach to intervening and investigating incidents of bullying and poor peer relations was developed in the context of the case school. The effect of it can be seen from the point of view that CEEVEC seeks to re-establish harmony. The CEEVEC approach is a non-threatening, direct approach to intervening and investigating reported cases of poor peer relations. This approach has benefits for all three levels of action at school. Its use at the individual level as the standard method of initial intervention and investigation is further supported by its widespread use in actions at the levels of House and School. The result is that CEEVEC is a component of a whole-school approach to the issues of bullying and poor peer relations. It is used in combination with a number of other strategies seeking to establish and maintain a high quality learning environment of pro-social interaction amongst people.

The development of the CEEVEC approach throughout the project was informed by ongoing evaluation and input by boys, staff and parents. Important components of this approach were considerations of the way boys relate to each other in their Middle School years and the particular situation in the case school. The relations between boys are influenced by their views of masculinity and how masculinity is enacted in their relationships. The research into masculinities provided an insight to this.

The QTM (DETNSW 2003) was a useful model to assist positioning the development of CEEVEC with importance in the school's general learning environment as contributing to the dimension of *Quality Learning Environment*. The four key aspects of social support for student achievement recognised by the QTM (DETNSW 2003:16) outlined in Chapter 1 (p17) have been important considerations in the development of the CEEVEC approach and how it contributes to a high quality learning environment in the school.

Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 2005) has also informed my focus in this study. The boys' social interaction with their peers, interventions by teachers in incidents of poor peer relations and the opportunities they have to engage in a variety of learning experiences combined with the school ethos, school polices and educational climate to shape their school environment. The school environment in turn, is a key component of a mesosystem which influences the development of the boys.

The analysis shows that the school directly influences the experiences of the boys each day through its educational policies, the opportunities available to boys, the aesthetics of the school grounds and the inter-personal relationships between the boys at school. The school environment influences the boys' views of masculinity. The school's learning environment, in broad terms, is determined by: the school's physical and organizational structure; the academic and co-curricular opportunities available to the boys; rules and policies; formal occasions; and, school ethos, in response to the unique combination of the other determinants. Within a school students have unique experiences that interact with experiences in other social contexts of their individual worlds including peers and family. These interacting microsystems shape the boys' social development.

A more detailed explanation of the significance of the current research to the school and to me as a teacher and researcher as well as implications for the case school as recommendations for future research are covered in the following section.

Significance of the research

My position in this research was very important to this portfolio. It has been made clear from the outset (pp3-5) that I have been a teacher, researcher and school leader throughout the research. These roles complemented each other to assist in the undertaking and justification of the two research projects. There have been direct benefits of this research for the case school, for me as the researcher and for me in the day-to-day professional role of a teacher and a school leader.

The implications of the research findings are potentially far reaching. The projects and their findings facilitate ongoing improvement in the quality of the boys' education in the case Middle School through continued effective strategies (practice) of dealing with incidents of poor peer relations and a better understanding of the boys' views of masculinity, how they are constructed and the school's role in this. A deeper understanding of the school culture provided by the findings should lead to improvements in the school experience for boys, as suggested by West (1999).

To the school

This investigation had, as its underlying motivation, an imperative to improve the quality of boys' experiences at school. Through its two research projects this investigation has produced four main benefits for the case school. As case studies of the same school, the implications of these projects are most significant for the case school. It is the

responsibility of the reader to draw conclusions from these case studies applicable to other schools (Stake 2003).

The first benefit to the school is that Head of House interventions to incidents of poor peer relations and bullying have become more consistent as a result of the development of CEEVEC and its implementation. Effective use of this approach may serve in combination with other strategies to develop and maintain a high quality school environment conducive to positive peer relations.

In addition to improved practices *per se*, these projects have facilitated a review of some school policies and statements connected to the development of a positive school environment. Specifically, an outcome of these projects was a review of the wording of the School Code of Behaviour (Appendix 1) as well as the aspects of student behaviour addressed in the statement. The authoritarian voice found in Appendix 1 has been modified by a more supportive voice and expectations more clearly identifying respect for peers, linking this statement to the School Vision and Philosophy reproduced in Figure 1.2 (p9). This revised Code of Behaviour (Appendix 18) is to be adopted and included in the school's student diary from 2009. The improved understanding of the issues related to the practices intervening in peer relations and the construction of views of masculinity serve to encourage learning experiences and positive social development at the case school and have been supported by a greater awareness in school publications and statements such as the School Code of Behaviour.

A third significance of this research for the school is that the findings of the research have been fed back to the school by way of formal presentations to parents and staff, as well as regularly through actions by me as the Head of Middle School, involving staff, parents and boys. The high profile of the research within the school community means there is an awareness of the school's willingness to investigate current practices and to improve the experience of the students to maintain a quality learning environment and a positive place for students. Consequently, this research has contributed to the learning community existing within the school outlined in Chapter 1 of this portfolio.

Finally, these case studies have shown the school to be in a position of great responsibility. With such a high level of student compliance and acceptance of its position, the school has an opportunity to provide boys with experiences developing positive masculinities and peer relations. A school that encourages the development of

positive masculinities and social awareness is desirable in a context where bullying and the boys' views of masculinity extend beyond the school, as discussed in Chapter 3.

To the researcher

The research was significant for me as a researcher. The implementation and execution of a study while working full time in the research context, evaluating the results and, positioning the findings in a wider educational context has been beneficial for me professionally by developing:

- my ability to take on the perspective of a researcher in a school. This perspective is different to the perspective of a teacher, although the two are intertwined in professional practice. In particular, my ability to have a strategic approach to identifying a research interest, then developing core questions to be investigated and executing the project was developed through this doctoral work;

- a greater awareness of and ability to use a number of analytical tools, such as Rasch analysis and EFA, in conjunction with descriptive statistics to interpret data collected in a school;

- my professional effectiveness by deepening my understanding of the present practices related to peer relations and their links to the boys' views of masculinity in the Middle School with the view to effect change to bring about advantages for the students; and,

- the professionally relevant research and evaluative skills applicable to a range of educational issues so the process of improving practice can be sustained in the long term. This will be enabled by the application of the general principles and methods of investigation including data collection, analysis, evaluation, reporting and change management of future school-based research projects.

To the teacher and school leader

This research has deepened my understanding of boys' experiences in the Middle School of the case school and assisted ongoing development of strategies to improve the quality of a school experience for the students at least in the areas of peer relations and boys' experiences at school.

There have been three key benefits to me as a teacher and school leader. These are very practical benefits stemming from the work undertaken in the course of these two research projects over the last four years and they are linked to effective communication and leadership.

First, the professional learning achieved in the process of preparation of this portfolio has enabled me to converse more confidently with parents and colleagues on matters regarding both masculinity and peer relations as they relate to Middle School boys. This confidence is based on the knowledge gained through the two research issues of masculinity and peer relations as well as the associated educational, psychological and even geographical issues explored in my studies but not included in this final portfolio. The deeper understanding of how Middle School boys relate to each other and to adults has greatly assisted me in my senior pastoral role at the school.

The second significance of this doctoral research has been the extended process of writing-up, reflecting and re-writing text in preparation for this final version of this portfolio has greatly improved the clarity and quality of my writing skills. These skills are not specific to the academic format of this portfolio. The improved skills have assisted in improving the quality of everyday correspondence and school documents such as policies and departmental reports. Maintaining and improving the quality of written communication to a range of audiences at school is an important aspect of my professional role as a teacher and school leader.

The final significance of this research to me as a teacher is very important to my commitment to life-long learning. As a result of this doctoral work I have been able to actively model a love of learning to students, colleagues and parents who are all members of the learning community of the case school. This demonstration of a commitment to learning is an important feature of leadership in a learning community.

Each of the three benefits to me as a teacher and school leader identified here are significant pillars toward greater effectiveness in my multiple-roles in a school.

Implications for the school

In general, the research presented in this portfolio has had a significant impact on my practice and the formulation of policies at school beyond the specific areas of the two research projects. The focus of both policies and practice at the case school has shaped over the course of the projects from issues rather than simply the personalities of the people involved. The practices at the case school in general have come to follow these principles:

- Maintain a positive approach, looking to the future;

- Build relationships that value differences between people;
- Do not shame boys when they have done something wrong;
- Encourage effort all pursuits (academic, social and co-curricular); and,
- Focus on behaviour and the issues arising, not on the personal traits of the people involved.

School policies must be aligned with these practices in order to construct a quality learning environment through encouraging student engagement and social support. Broad policies such as the *School Code of Behaviour* (Appendix 1) and *Student Management Policy* have been reviewed and modified at the case school as a result of the current research to reflect the development of practices and these five principles.

The research has shown that a positive school environment can encourage higher levels of acceptance and pro-social conduct between students. Low levels of poor peer relations and plurality of masculinity produce a more positive learning environment for Middle School boys. Such an environment contributes to a school ethos where students are able to take advantage of many opportunities for new experiences and are not constrained by other factors such as prejudice and negative peer pressure. Engagement with new experiences in an environment where it is safe to do so will shape the development of students as they progress in the school.

A school needs to provide boys with a range of opportunities to extend traditional and narrow views of masculine activities. The policies, practices and decisions about the allocation of resources in a school are important in determining the nature of the experiences offered to boys. These policies, practices and decisions need to be based on a clear understanding of the wider learning environment and its significance in shaping the boys' attitudes and perceptions of masculinity and peer relations.

Schools also need to provide a high quality learning environment through facilitating experiences that foster positive emotions of happiness, contentment and compassion. Positive emotions have been associated with situations which present opportunities rather than threats with a strategy of approach rather than avoidance. It has also been suggested that the display of positive emotions in an individual is a signal to others that there is no threat in the environment (Huppert 2005:3). Teachers and school leaders need to display positive emotions at school through formal and informal practices to shape a school ethos that positively affects the students. A positive school environment will acknowledge the

achievements of a range of students, and their efforts. The general school experience needs to provide a variety of opportunities through which students can experience success as well as to participate in activities they might not otherwise encounter.

A school providing a wide range of activities for boys and encouraging many ways of enacting masculinity, and where incidents of poor peer relations are handled well, is an environment in which positive emotions are more likely to be displayed. In ecological terms, a microsystem of this sort will provide important experiences for boys in addition to the experiences they encounter in other microsystem contexts. The long term benefits for people who frequently experience positive affect are well recognised as this broadens their cognitive processes and builds enduring coping resources which lead to later resilience (Huppert 2005). It is suggested that an environment dominated by positive emotions results in an upward spiral because it will lead to positive cognitions, positive behaviours and increased cognitive capability, and that positive cognitions, behaviours and capabilities in turn fuel further positive emotions (Huppert 2005:7). School practices need to pursue the facilitation of such a microsystem for students by shaping a school ethos and educational climate, supported by school policies to encourage positive emotions.

Finally, there is also a benefit for the school through the support provided to me as a senior member of staff researching the issues of peer relation and masculinity at the school. This sends a clear message to the school community that the school is serious about understanding these issues and striving to address them. As described in Chapter 1 of this portfolio (p6) the school is a vibrant professional, educational environment. The support and encouragement I have received while undertaking this doctorate has enabled me to reach this point of view. Conversations with colleagues at other schools have lead me to the understanding that this level of support and encouragement is not ubiquitous.

Recommendations for further research

Specific recommendations for research have been made at the end of the two research projects. However, the areas of further work to be undertaken as a result of this portfolio are in two categories: within the case school as a part of ongoing improvement and maintenance; and, recommendations for work beyond the case school.

Within the case school there is a need to continue monitoring and developing an understanding of the environment in regard to both peer relations and the school's role in shaping masculinities. It is the responsibility of senior teachers in conjunction with all

members of the school community to maintain a commitment to improving practice. Open discourse on issues within the school and those affecting the school is important in assisting this process as well as enabling policies and practices evaluating the effectiveness of current policies and practices in meeting the students' needs. The issues related to peer relations and masculinities need to retain the high profile obtained in the course of this research. This can be achieved through the existing parent communication avenues of information evenings, newsletters and term letters from the school as well to students through school assemblies and conversations with boys. There is scope for this ongoing process to be the basis of research, through action research as well as involving focus groups participants in in-depth interviews at a later age to track their views and reflections through adolescent years.

Beyond the school, there are possibilities to research additional means of developing social support among students through the development of a *Quality Learning Environment*. Pedagogy is an explicit component of the process as recognised in the QTM (DETNSW 2003:14-15). This may include implementing and evaluating co-operative learning or other pro-social teaching approaches. Pedagogy is recognised as an important component of the learning environment (DETNSW 2003) and should be aligned with other activities, such as pastoral care, to facilitate a positive school environment.

While the current research has been undertaken in a boys' school context, the research questions for both projects are valid in any school. There is the possibility of reproducing this research in a different school context whether it is co-educational or another boys' school. The characteristics of the case school and its population will have influenced the nature of the environment and the experiences of the students within it. A different case school will inevitably lead to different findings for both research projects. The effectiveness of CEEVEC in other schools and its use by other teachers warrants further investigation because the engagement of me as a senior teacher and researcher of this project have played a large part in the overall project. Similarly, it would be anticipated that the boys' views of masculinity, the factors influencing their views and the role of the school in shaping their views will vary enormously in schools of different socioeconomic composition and experiences of how gender is constructed. The benefits to other schools from this research would be significant through better understanding the case school and informing improvements in practice to facilitate the quality of the learning environment at the school.

Finally, the current research could be easily modified to form the basis of an investigation toward a deeper understanding of girls' views of femininity or womanhood and the way they engage in peer relations in a girls' school or a co-educational environment. The social construction of gender suggests that an investigation of girls' views of womanhood, as well as the factors influencing their views and the school's influence on their views would make for a fascinating study. Such issues have become increasingly interesting to me, as both an educator and a researcher, and may be the basis for further research.

In closing

The research in this portfolio involved investigation of the role of the two social phenomena of peer relations and masculinities as components of a learning environment in the case school. Peer relations and multiple masculinities interact with each other as well as other aspects of a school environment to create the experiences of students at school. This research has sought to deepen understanding of this interaction in one school in an effort to improve and maintain a high quality learning environment for the pupils and facilitate the deeper engagement of boys with schooling.

Positive experiences at school are intended to facilitate engagement in schooling and improved achievement in a *Quality Learning Environment* as well as to promote healthy human development. The ecological perspective has been a thread to this portfolio because 'it depicts the dynamic developmental relations between an active individual and his or her complex, integrated and changing ecology' (Bronfenbrenner 1995:xviii). A school is a dynamic ecology within which young people encounter a range of experiences that shape their futures.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1   The School Code of Behaviour

I understand and accept that in becoming a member of this school that I must support the following regulations and practices:

1. **I will wear the School uniform** in it various forms neatly, completely and with pride. I will conform to all dress and hair regulations without exception.

2. **I will stand** as required for adult members of the School Community, greeting them courteously by name.

3. **I undertake** to keep all areas of the school neat and free from litter.

4. **I undertake** to be careful in my speech. I understand swearing, blasphemy and abusive speech are not acceptable.

5. **I promise** to behave at all times in ways that bring credit to the School. Specifically, I promise not to smoke, not to drink alcohol, nor to take drugs which are not medically prescribed, when in school uniform or when involved in a School-related activity of any kind.

6. **I will treat** my academic work seriously and be conscientious with my homework. I will actively seek advice and help of my teachers.

7. **I undertake** to accept the directions of those in authority over and care of me: Teachers, Residential Staff and Prefects or Seniors. I understand the importance of common courtesy and good manners, and of saying 'Please', 'Thank you', 'I'm sorry', 'Yes' and being honest.

8. **I understand** that I will regularly and punctually attend scheduled classes, Assemblies, Examinations and Chapel Services and participate in them. I understand that this is a Church School.

9. **I understand** that there are many opportunities to participate in the life of the School. When I have made a commitment to any activity, team, club, group or excursion, I will keep that commitment.

10. **I understand** that in being a member of this school I am undertaking a commitment to myself, to the staff and to the School.

Source – School diary

Appendix 2   Peer relations research: Data collection and action summary

Time Frame	Data Collection	Reflective themes	Action taken
Term 4 2005 (*Reconnaissance*)	• Focus Group 3.1 & 4.1 • Y7 PRAQ (students and parents) • PRITS • Journal	• Understanding present practice • Refining the approach • Ways to raise awareness across the school (2006 MS Orientation, staff info, parent awareness)	• 17 Oct – Distribute policy doc. to staff • 28 Oct – Assembly ("nick names") • 4 Nov – Managing the terminology ("peer relations") • 15 Nov – Managing the terminology ("peer relations") • 16 Nov – CEEVEC draft emerges • 18 Nov – MS Assembly comment re PRAQ distribution • 22 Nov – PRAQ distribution
Term 1 2006	• Focus Group 3.2 & 4.2 • PRITS • Staff interviews • Journal	• Parent notification of incidents • Student perception of teacher interest • Staff awareness • Approach consistency and effectiveness (CEEVEC evolves) • Head of House skill/approach	• 31 Jan – MS Orientation (parent meeting, "peer relations", policy awareness) • 1 Feb – New student assembly (peer relations) • 2 Feb – Y8 assembly (peer relations) • 13 Feb – PRAQ results discussed with Heads of House • 24 Feb – MS Assembly ("Sack-whacking" addressed) • 13 March – Staff briefing comment • 14 March – Email staff re tripping • 17 March – Principal comment (peer relations) in weekly newsletter • 21 March – Synod document on school practice • 7 April – MS Assembly ("What bullying is not") • 7 April – Y9 assembly (peer relations toward Y10)
Term 2 2006	• Focus Group 3.3 & 4.3 • PRITS • Journal	• CEEVEC development • Increasing student disclosure • Parent forum feedback • Approach effectiveness (data collection mid-point reflection)	• 4 May – Parent forum #1 • 18 May – Synod document on school practice regarding peer relations submitted

Term 3 2006	• Focus Group 3.4 & 4.4 • PRITS • Journal	• Parent forum #2 feedback • Head of House training feedback • CEEVEC refinement	• 5 Aug – Email MS students re peer relations • 5 Aug – Student email sent to staff • 7 Aug – Staff briefing comment • 11 Aug – Head of House training (CEEVEC) • 16 Aug – MS Parent forum #2 • 15 Sept – MS Assembly ("Words matter")
Term 4 2006	• Y8 PRAQ (students and parents) • PRITS • Journal	• CEEVEC approach feedback • 2007 Head of House peer relations information	• 19 Nov – MS Assembly comment re PRAQ distribution • 21 Nov – PRAQ distribution • 10 Dec – Head of House info package composed for start of 2007

Appendix 3   Student PRAQ form

Peer Relations Assessment Form A (Students)

This questionnaire is intended to obtain your views on how students treat each other at this school.

When you answer the questions, remember that this is an *anonymous* questionnaire. You are not being asked to put your name on it. You are free to answer as you wish. Nobody will know who has answered each questionnaire

But we would like you to answer all the questions and to do so carefully and honestly, as the information you give could be helpful to you, other students and the school.

For the most part, you will be asked simply to *circle* answers which you agree with.

Here is an example:

Do you enjoy coming to this school?   *(Circle one of the letters)*

I always do	A
I usually do	(B)
About half the time	C
I usually don't	D
I never do	E

In this example B has been circled by a student who usually (but not always) likes coming to this school. A person who never liked coming would circle E.

Now begin the questionnaire and do not leave any questions unanswered.

The questionnaire was prepared by Dr Ken
Rigby

Section A

1.   Are you male or female   *(Circle A or B)*

    Male   A   (1)

    Female   B   (2)

2.   What is your year level?

3.   Now look at these pictures and place a **circle** around the letter under the face which is most like you when you are at school?

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
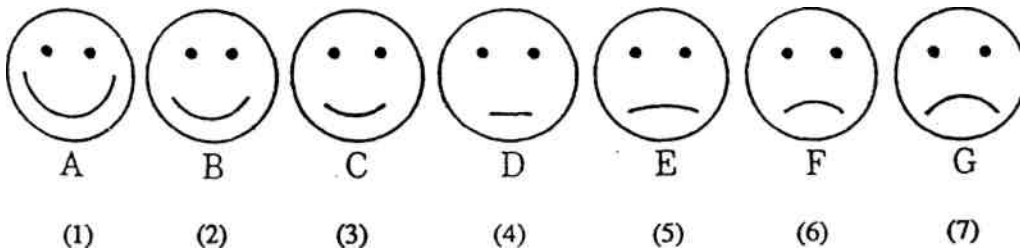
4.   Sometimes a stronger person or group of students will deliberately pick on someone weaker than themselves, and give that person a bad time. How often would you say this happens at this school?   *(Circle a letter)*

                     Never   A   (1)

                     Sometimes   B   (2)

                     Often   C   (3)

5.   **We call it *bullying* when someone is repeatedly hurting or frightening someone weaker than themselves for no good reason. This may be done in different** ways: by **hurtful teasing, threatening actions or gestures, name-calling or hitting or kicking.**

Have you noticed bullying going on in this school in any of these places?

(Circle the word giving your answer for each place)

Place:	*Your answer:*		
In the classroom	Never	Sometimes	Often
	(1)	(2)	(3)
At recess/lunch	Never	Sometimes	Often
	(1)	(2)	(3)
On the way to school	Never	Sometimes	Often
	(1)	(2)	(3)
On die way home from school	Never	Sometimes	Often
	(1)	(2)	(3)

Section B

6. Did any of these things happen to you while you were being bullied this year?
*(Circle your answer: if you were **never** bullied this year, circle 'never' in each case)*
Your answer:

Being teased in an unpleasant way Being	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)
called hurtful names	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)
Being left out of things on purpose	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)
Being threatened with harm	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)
Being hit or kicked	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)

Add any other things below to describe hat happened to you when you were bullied.

_____

_____

_____

Now we would like you to make another estimate of how often you have been bullied by other students at school this year, this time on a daily or weekly basis.

Remember that it is not bullying when two young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.

Bullying is when a stronger person deliberately and repeatedly hurts someone who is weaker.

7. How often *this year* have you been bullied by another student or group of students ?
(Circle a letter)

At least once a week	Less than once a	Never
A (1)	B (2)	C (3)

8.   After being bullied, how have you generally felt about it?   *(Circle a letter)*

I have never been bullied at school	A	(1)
I have been bullied, but it hasn't really bothered me	B	(2)
I've felt mostly angry about it	C	(3)
I've felt mostly sad and miserable	D	(4)

9. How safe do you personally feel from being bullied by another student or a group of students at this school ? *Circle a letter)*

I always feel safe	A	(1)
I usually feel safe	B	(2)
I feel safe about half the time	C	(3)
I usually don't feel safe	D	(4)
I never feel safe	E	(5)

10. Have you ever stayed away from school because of bullying?   *(Circle a letter)*

No, I've never thought of doing so	A	(1)
No, but I've thought of doing so	B	(2)
Yes, I have once or twice	C	(3)
Yes, more than twice	D	(4)

11 If you have ever been hurt at this school by someone bullying or harassing you, **and this may include sexual harassment,** and felt upset or unwell because of it, please explain what happened and how you felt in the space provided below.

Section C

If you have NEVER been bullied at school skip questions 12 and 13 and go to question 14

Answer the next two questions ONLY if you have been bullied by another student or group of students

12. Have you **told** any of the following about your being bullied?
*(Circle for **each** person)*

Person		
Your mother	YES (1)	NO (2)
Your father	YES (1)	NO (2)
A teacher or counsellor	YES (1)	NO (2))
A friend or friends	YES (1)	NO (2)

13. Did things generally improve after you told someone?   *(Circle a letter)*
(Remember: answer this only if you have been bullied at school)

I was bullied but never told anyone	A	(1)
I told - and it got worse	B	(2)
I told - and the situation didn't change	C	(3)
I told - and things got better	D	(4)

Everybody should answer the next three questions.

14   Do you think that teachers at this school are interested in trying to stop bullying?
(Circle a letter)

Not really	A	(1)
Only sometimes	B	(2)
Usually they are	C	(3)
They always are	D	(4)

15. Do you think that students and teachers should work together to stop bullying? *(Circle a letter)*

Yes	A	(1)
Don't know	B	(2)
No	C	(3)

16. Would you be interested in talking about the problem of bullying at school with other students to see what can be done about stopping it? *(Circle a letter)*

Yes	A	(1)
Don't know	B	(2)
No	C	(3)

Now please add any other comments you would like to make about bullying at your school

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 4   Parent PRAQ form

Peer Relations Assessment Form B (Parents)

This is a brief questionnaire about children's relationships at school. The purpose is to enable us to understand the social needs of students better and to take steps to ensure that they have a happy, secure and peaceful environment.

We would very much like to have your contribution. **We stress that no names are requested and the questionnaire is to be answered anonymously.**

Either or both parents together can answer the questionnaire.

_____

1. How long have you had a child attending this school ? _____   years

2. From your experience would you say that relations <u>between students</u> at this school are:

     (Please circle the letter besides your answer)

     Generally friendly   A

     Sometimes friendly, sometimes not   B

     Generally unfriendly   C

_____

3. The following questions are about your own child or the one for which you have parental responsibilities. (If you have more than one child attending this school, choose the one whose birthday it is next)

     Now about this child:

     (i) Is the child a boy or girl ?_____

     (ii) What year of school is he/she now in ?   _____

     (iii) How old is the child now ? _____

4. How would you describe this child's relations with other students at school ?
     (Circle a letter)

     Generally very happy   A
     Usually happy   B
     Happy about half the time   C
     Usually unhappy   D
     Generally unhappy   E

Bullying at school

Here are some questions about bullying at school. This happens in **ALL** schools, but with your help we think that steps can be taken to stop it.

First we have to say what we mean by bullying. **Bullying occurs when a person or a group of persons deliberately and repeatedly hurt or frighten somebody less powerful than themselves for no reason. This may be done in various ways: by hurtful teasing; name-calling; physically hitting or threatening; or by continually and unfairly excluding someone. It is not considered to be bullying if people of equal strength or power have an odd quarrel or fight.**

----

5.   To the best of your knowledge, has your child been bullied by another student or group of students whilst attending this school ? (Circle a letter)

1. Yes, frequently	A
2. Sometimes, but not often	B
3. No, never	C

6. Do you think your child would talk to you about it if he or she was worried about being bullied at school ? (Circle a letter)

Definitely Would	Probably Would	Probably Would not	Definitely Would not	Really No idea
A	B	C	D	E

7. How would you say your child has been affected by bullying at school ? (Circle)

Not at all	Sometimes bothered by it	Has been upset by it
A	B	C

8. Has your child ever stayed at home because of bullying at school ? (Circle)

Yes	I'm unsure	No
A	B	C

9. Has your child ever engaged in bullying another child at school ? (Circle)

Yes, often	Yes, sometimes	No, never	I don't know
A	B	C	D

10. How do you think a school should respond if a child bullies another at   school?

Circle your answers (yes or no) to each of the following proposals

(a) Generally teachers should ignore it   Yes   No

(b) The person bullied should be told to stand up to the bully   Yes   No

(c) The bully should receive counselling at the school   Yes   No

(d) The bully should be punished   Yes   No

(e) Parents of the bully should be spoken to   Yes   No

11 Would you personally be in favour of a school having a definite and written policy about bullying at school ? (Circle your answer)

Yes   Unsure   No

12. Please add below any comments and suggestions you would like to make about bullying at school.

Please return this questionnaire in a sealed envelope either through your child or by mail to this address:

Appendix 5   Parent PRAQ Information letter

UNE LETTERHEAD

November 2005

Dear Year 7 Parents,

Re – Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaire Information

Further to my recent letter to you about my research into peer relations management in Year 8 2006, I have enclosed a copy of the parent Peer Relations Questionnaire for you to complete. The boys will have the opportunity to complete the student version of the PRAQ at some time during the school day in the next week.

The student and parent questionnaires contain questions about:
1. the general happiness of the students at school;
2. the frequency and nature of any harassment that may occur at the school;
3. feelings of safety from being harassed or bullied by others: and
4. how teachers, parents and students can work together to maintain a positive school environment and a good standard of interpersonal behaviour.

The anonymous information collected in these questionnaires will be analysed and used in two ways. First, it will assist in the evaluation of our existing approach to peer relations issues in Year 8 2006 as well as the planning for our improvement in this area. Second, this information will be used in my formal studies supervised by the University of New England towards the completion of a Doctor of Education degree.

It is important for you to know the following that all information collected in the questionnaires will be kept confidential and that no participants will be identified in any way in reports arising from this study.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE05/189 valid to 4/10/2007).

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351.
Telephone: (02) 6773 3449 Facsimile (02) 6773 3543

Email: Ethics@pobox.une.edu.au

Your return of the questionnaire in the enclosed envelope to Mrs Johnson's office will be an indication of your consent to participation. You are not obliged to complete this questionnaire. If you have further enquiries, please call me on 9847 8221.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Miller
Head of Middle School

Appendix 6   Peer Relations Incident Tally Sheet template

PEER RELATIONS INCIDENT TALLY SHEET

Date	Source of Info.	New case?	Incident nature	Yr group *Victim*	Yr group *Perpetrator(s)*	Location	Action taken

Appendix 7   Staff Interview Questions

1.   How long have you been a Head of House at this school?

2.   Which year group, in your experience, is the focus of peer relations issues?

3.   Have you used the statement of practice for managing peer relations and bullying incidents? *(Probe – Has it been useful? Do you consult it to assist with your management? How often do you use it?)*

4.   What model or strategy do you mainly follow when managing peer relations incidents? *(Prompt and probe – No Blame, Shared Concern, Mediation)*

5.   How do you record incidents of poor peer relations? *(Prompt and probe – Do you use Maze, put notes in hard files, record information next to all the boys involved?)*

6.   How do peer relations vary from year to year with the frequency, intensity and nature of incidents for Year 8?

7.   What do you think are the determining factors in establishing the differences from year to year?

8.   How are incidents of bullying and poor peer relations reported to you?

9.   Which avenue of reporting do you believe to be the most frequent means of reporting? *(Probe – What is not reported? Who does not report?)*

10.   Illustrate with an example of a peer relations incident you believe to have been well managed. *(Probe- What was good about the process? Were you pleased with the outcome for the boys involved?)*

11.   Illustrate with an example of a peer relations incident you believe was not well managed. *(Probe- What was not good about the process? Were you pleased with the outcome for the boys involved?)*

12.   What improvements do you think we can make to our practice in dealing with poor peer relations amongst our Year 8 boys? *(Probe – Do you think a standard approach would help us? Do you need more professional development in this area? Should we raise the profile of peer relations in the Middle School? Any suggestions?)*

Appendix 8   Focus Group Information Sheet

Focus Group/Interview Information Sheet

This is to be **read** to each group of participants at the commencement of each focus group session and to each participant in an interview before the commencement of each interview:

- Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not result in penalty;
- All information collected in the session will be kept confidential;
- You can withdraw from the study at any time;
- This session will be tape recorded (voices only);
- You can have your personal information returned to you or excluded from the study; and,
- No one will be identified in any way in reports arising from this study.
- Any questions?

Appendix 9   Peer Relations Group Questions

Year 8 Focus Group Questions

Peer Relations

1.   What expressions/words are commonly used to put down other boys in your year group? *(Probe – Why are they used? What do they mean?)*

2.   What other ways are commonly used to tease boys in your year group? *(Prompt - like knocking books from hands, wedgies, exclusion from games, hiding books and bags etc)*

3.   What are the main issues for peer relations in your year group?

4.   Where and how does most of the bullying in your year group take place? *(Probe - in the playground, in the locker room, travel to and from school, chat rooms, text messages)*

5.   What do you think is an appropriate way for victims to respond to bullying?

6.   How do you think onlookers (boys who see bullying) should respond/deal with it?

7.   In your experience, how well do you think incidents of bullying and poor peer relations have been dealt with at this school? *(Probe - Who do you know to have dealt with these incidents?)*

8.   Have there been differences in the outcomes of similar sorts of incidents at school? (Probe – Why? When? Who is involved?)

Appendix 10 The Kandersteg Declaration

Kandersteg Declaration Against Bullying in Children and Youth

We the participants at the Joint Efforts Against Victimization Conference in Kandersteg/Switzerland in June 8th to 10th, 2007 pledge our long term commitment and determination to promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying and victimization in children and youth.
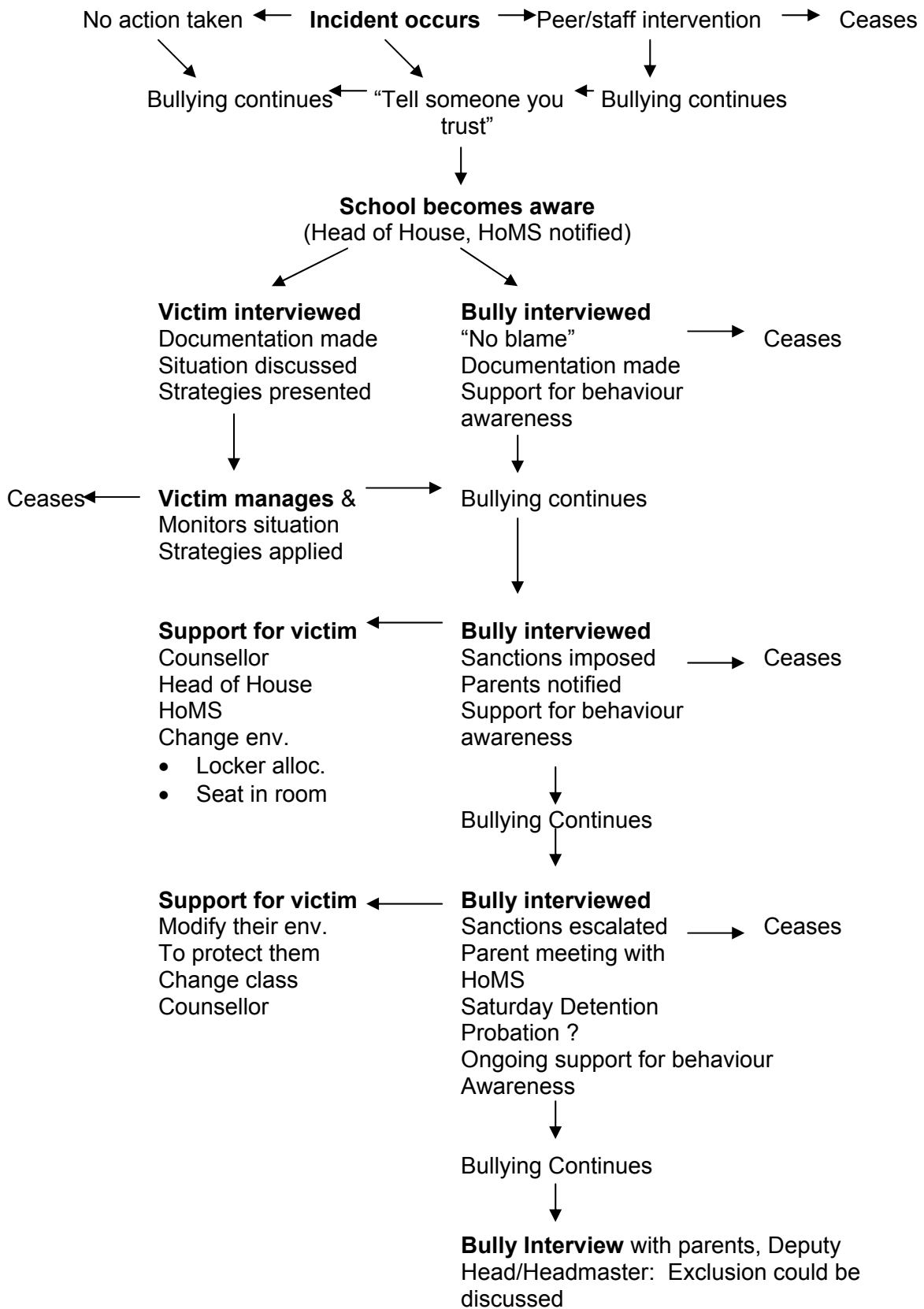
Considerations:

- Today, an estimated 200 million children and youth around the world are being abused by their peers.
- Every child and youth has the right to be respected and safe. Bullying is a violation of this basic human right.
- It is the moral responsibility of adults to ensure these rights are honored and that healthy development and citizenship are promoted. Many adults want more understanding and strategies to address bullying problems effectively.
- Bullying is a form of aggression, involving the abuse of power in relationships. It is recognised globally as a complex and serious problem. It has many faces, including the use of emerging technologies, and varies by age, gender, and culture.
- Children and youth involved in bullying suffer. Bullying and victimization problems begin early in life and for some last a lifetime.
- Many risk and protective factors associated with bullying are known and prevention.
- programs are being implemented in several countries with encouraging results.
- The mental and physical health, social, and academic consequences of bullying have an enormous impact on human and social capital. The costs of bullying burden our education, health care, social services, and criminal justice systems, as well as work force productivity and innovation.
- Bullying concerns and affects us all.

Actions to be taken:

- Stop bullying now in all the places where children and youth live, work, and play.
- Start prevention efforts early and continue these through childhood and adolescence, targeting known risk and protective factors and promoting healthy relationships.
- Educate and empower all adults involved with children and youth to promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying.
- Use policy and prevention programs, based on scientific research, that are appropriate for age, gender, and culture, and that involve families, peers, schools, and communities.
- Provide ongoing assessment and monitoring necessary to evaluate the success of policy and programs and to guarantee the rights of children and youth.

Kandersteg, Switzerland, 10 June, 2007

Appendix 11 Bullying Action Flow Chart

No action taken ← **Incident occurs** → Peer/staff intervention → Ceases

Bullying continues ← "Tell someone you trust" ← Bullying continues

School becomes aware
(Head of House, HoMS notified)

Victim interviewed
Documentation made
Situation discussed
Strategies presented

Bully interviewed
"No blame"
Documentation made
Support for behaviour
awareness

→ Ceases

Victim manages &
Monitors situation
Strategies applied

Ceases ←

→ Bullying continues

Support for victim
Counsellor
Head of House
HoMS
Change env.
• Locker alloc.
• Seat in room

Bully interviewed
Sanctions imposed
Parents notified
Support for behaviour
awareness

→ Ceases

Bullying Continues

Support for victim
Modify their env.
To protect them
Change class
Counsellor

← **Bully interviewed**
Sanctions escalated
Parent meeting with
HoMS
Saturday Detention
Probation ?
Ongoing support for behaviour
Awareness

→ Ceases

Bullying Continues

Bully Interview with parents, Deputy
Head/Headmaster: Exclusion could be
discussed

PDM
June 2004

Appendix 12   Head of House Guide to Peer Relations Intervention

Rationale

Bullying can have long term impacts upon everyone involved. We must constantly review our practice and strive to improve the way we support students of the Middle School in their development by reducing the frequency and severity of bullying incidents.

Data from across Australia has shown the frequency of poor peer relations and bullying incidents peak in Year 7 from the primary school years and decrease through the secondary years. School data is consistent with the National pattern.

School data has shown:

- The largest number of incidents occur in Year 7;
- Most incidents involve boys of the same Year group;
- The frequency of incidents decreases through the Middle School;
- The number of interventions (counselling, punishment, interviews and parent conversations) for each incident **increases** in Years 8 and 9; and,
- The way an incident is investigated/handled can influence the school ethos in regard to the way people treat each other at school.

Our practices aim to shape a **safe and high quality educational environment** that treats students fairly while encouraging pro-social behaviour. A fair process to facilitate a positive change to the way students treat each other, following incidents of negative behaviour, is important. This folder contains information to assist a Head of House in the inevitable task of investigating and resolving incidents of lousy peer relations and bullying amongst Middle School boys.

Bullying – a definition

> *Bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons* (Rigby 2007).

Bullying can be at different levels of severity and produce different responses from those exposed to it. Not everyone responds in the same way to the same level of severity. The term 'bullying' can be problematic because it is emotionally charged and tends to draw images of incidents of the more severe nature. Severe incidents are the least common we encounter. Most incidents we deal with are low level bullying involving name calling, put-downs, teasing and taunting.

The term 'peer relations' can be more helpful than 'bullying' when investigating and seeking to change the pattern of behaviour because it is less emotionally charged. On occasions, the term 'bullying' is going to be the most appropriate description of the behaviour and it should not be avoided.

Folder contents

- ***Suggestions for a Heads of House when a parent speaks to them about their child being bullied at school*** – this document will assist in many cases to set the scene and demonstrate a way the reported incident will be handled (Rigby 1996).

- ***CEEVEC Investigation Record*** – this document will assist in the investigation phase with students. It can be the extent of the intervention or the starting point followed by more detailed approaches below. Our recent practice has used a combination of punitive and non-punitive approaches for incidents of bullying. Research suggests that approaches limited to the enforcement of punitive sanctions (detentions) tend to be of limited effectiveness. Each incident needs to be understood as unique and may require a unique response, blending punitive and non-punitive approaches.

- ***No Blame and Shared Concern*** – The contents of Rigby (2007:218-227) are included. These are two approaches used widely throughout Australia. You will notice CEEVEC has evolved from these approaches. Other non-punitive approaches such as Restorative Practices can also be used. These require special skills and training involving group counselling and mediation.

This folder is a component of an ongoing commitment to assist the Heads of House in their important role shaping the quality of the school environment at our school.

P.D. Miller
Head of Middle School
January 2008 (Revised)

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Appendix 13 Email to students

5 August 2006

Middle School Boys,

One of the most important things about attending our school is the knowledge of each boy that he is safe and free to get on with his learning. No one deserves to be cruelly teased or put down for anything at our school..

The way you relate to your peers is important in this. I want you to think about always treating other people in the way that you want to be treated by them. You have heard me talk about this and it is an important question I ask myself when I am working with you.

If you are getting a hard time or you know of someone who is being treated unfairly by anyone at our school then you should tell someone you can trust. Try your Head of House first. If you don't want to do that then your parents, one of the School or I am always willing to listen.

SOMETHING CAN BE DONE BUT WE HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT IT!

Please help to make this the best place possible for all boys at our school. It is a great place to learn.

Mr Miller

Appendix 14 Masculinities Group Questions

Year 9 Focus Group Questions

Views of Masculinity

1. Are some subjects more 'suitable' for boys to do at our school than others? *(Probe – Which ones are suitable? Why? Which ones are less suitable? Why?)*

2. Are some activities (sports, clubs etc) better for boys (more 'manly') at our school? *(Probe - Why? Who says so? How do you know this?)*

3. What do you think are good/appropriate activities for a man to do? *(Probe - Why? Who says so? What happens if you do them?)*

4. What things do you think men cannot do? *(Probe - Why? Who says so?)*

5. What activities/hobbies/jobs do you think men should not do? *(Probe - Why? What happens if you do them?)*

6. What takes place here at school to influence your views of masculinity? *(Probe – Things said in assembly or chapel? School uniform? The things you learn in lessons like PDHPE, English, Geography etc)*

Appendix 15 Masculinities Questionnaire

<table>
<tr><td>

YEAR 9 QUESTIONNAIRE

VIEWS OF MASCULINITY

NOVEMBER 2006
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This questionnaire has been developed by the Head of Middle School to assist in the ongoing effort to understand what it is like to be student in our Middle School.

The information collected will be used to improve the experience of boys at this school in the immediate future.

The completion of this questionnaire is voluntary.

All responses are to be anonymous **(Don't write your name on the paper)**

Instructions

- **Read each question carefully**
- **There are no correct answers**
- **Mark your answer in the way the question requires**
- **This should be your own responses and not shared with others**
- **Answer each question honestly and based on your own views**
- **Return the questionnaire to your teacher before leaving the room.**

Practice question

Most questions are of this type.

Circle the number on the line that best states your view		Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral (Undecided)	Agree	Agree Strongly
1	Ice cream is my favourite desert	1	2	3	4	5

If you **Agree Strongly** with this statement then you would draw a circle around **5**

If you hate ice cream **(Disagree Strongly)** then you would circle **1**

You do not have to agree with the statements. You may disagree with as many as you like.

Thank you for the time and serious thought you give to the completion of this questionnaire

YEAR 9 MASCULINITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Have you attended the five day "Pathways to Manhood" camp with your father? *(Circle one)*

      Yes

      No

Circle the number on the line that best states your view		Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral (Undecided)	Agree	Agree Strongly
1	Physical strength is important for "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
2	Success is important for "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
3	To earn a living "a man" can do anything he likes	1	2	3	4	5
4	"A man" has to look physically fit.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Some jobs are unsuitable for "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
6	"A man" doesn't show he is sad.	1	2	3	4	5
7	"A man" is respected by people.	1	2	3	4	5
8	"A man" can cope with anything.	1	2	3	4	5
9	There are lots of ways to be "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
10	"A man" enjoys sport.	1	2	3	4	5

		Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral (Undecided)	Agree	Agree Strongly
11	"A man" enjoys listening to music.	1	2	3	4	5
12	"A man" enjoys playing music.	1	2	3	4	5
13	"A man" enjoys the performing arts.	1	2	3	4	5
14	My father is a good role model for being "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
15	My **family** provides role models for what it is to be "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
16	**Teachers** provide role models for what it is to be "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
17	My **male friends** help me understand the way "a man" behaves.	1	2	3	4	5
18	My **female friends** help me to understand the way "a man" behaves.	1	2	3	4	5
19	**Movies** provide role models for being "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
20	**Novels, poems and stories** provide role models of being "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
21	**Popular magazines** (like FHM) provide role models of being "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
22	My mother helps me to understand the way "a man" behaves.	1	2	3	4	5
23	**TV shows** provide role models of being "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
24	I have learned a lot about being "a man" from older male role models.	1	2	3	4	5

		Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral (Undecided)	Agree	Agree Strongly

25	Rank the following 7 activities from **highest status** to **lowest status** *(1 for highest, 7 for lowest)*	26	Which achievement do you think has the **highest** status? *(Tick one)*
	Basketball		Age Swimming Champ.
	Cricket		In the Senior Orchestra
	Cross Country		In the School Play
	Soccer		In the 'A' Rugby Team
	Tae kwon do		In the 'A' Soccer Team
	Tennis		In the Middle School Choir (Chorale)
	Rugby		Age Athletic Champ.

27	Which do you value highly at our school? *(Tick three)*		
	Being liked by teachers		Being liked by classmates
	Sporting success		Musical success
	Academic achievement and Sport are of equal value		Being respected by classmates
	Treating classmates well		Academic success

28	Which **three** activities do you think have the **lowest status** at our school? *(Tick the three lowest)*		
	AG Club		Fencing
	Athletics		Music (Classical)
	Basketball		Music (Rock group)
	Cadets		Rugby
	Choir		Soccer
	Cricket		Swimming
	Cross Country running		Tae kwon do
	Crusaders/Christian groups		Tennis
	Drama		Water Polo

Circle the number on the line that best states your view		Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral (Undecided)	Agree	Agree Strongly
29	I can do any activity at our school without being "paid-out" by boys at School.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I find it easy to be myself at School.	1	2	3	4	5
31	Achieving at a high level in an activity is more important than the activity a boy does at School.	1	2	3	4	5
32	School rules limit my ability to be myself.	1	2	3	4	5
33	There are lots of different types of boys at School.	1	2	3	4	5
34	I hear a lot about what it is to be "a man" at School.	1	2	3	4	5
35	School positively influences my understanding of what it is to be "a man".	1	2	3	4	5
36	Middle School assemblies acknowledge achievements of all boys.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your participation

Please give this back to your House Associate

Appendix 16 Parent Notification - Masculinities Questionnaire

UNE LETTERHEAD

1 November 2006

Dear Year 9 Parents,

Re – Views of masculinity questionnaire

You may be aware that for the last 12 months I have been undertaking research into the factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity. This project has focussed on Year 9 boys of our school. I have obtained information through student focus groups and detailed reflection on what we do at our school.

A questionnaire will be circulated to Year 9 in their PCP lesson on Tuesday 7th November. All of Year 9 will be invited to participate anonymously but they are not obliged to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contains questions about:

- the boys' views of what it is to be "a man";
- the factors influencing their views of masculinity; and
- how the boys view a range of activities at our school.

The information collected in these questionnaires will be analysed and used in two ways. First, the information will be used to improve the experience of the boys at our school in the immediate future. Second, this information will be used in my formal studies supervised by the University of New England towards the completion of a Doctor of Education degree.

All questionnaire responses will be confidential. Participants will not be identified in any way in reports arising from this study.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE05/189 valid to 4/10/2007).

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351.
Telephone: (02) 6773 3449
Facsimile: (02) 6773 3543
Email: Ethics@pobox.une.edu.au

I am grateful for the time and thought given to assisting my research to facilitate improvements at our school. If you have further enquiries, please call me on 9847 8221.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Miller
Head of Middle School

Appendix 17 Explaining Item Difficulty, Person Ability and Bond&FoxSteps

Item difficulty and Person ability in Rasch

The degree of difficulty of each item and the ability of each person is fundamental in Rasch analysis. This is because Rasch's work was originally conducted using test item analysis for their degree of difficulty. Bond and Fox (2007) explain item difficulty and person ability and their accuracy as follows:

> Each item difficulty and person ability is estimated on a logit scale, and each of these estimates has a degree of error associated with it. Estimation error decreases as information about difficulty and ability increases (i.e., when items and persons are appropriately targeted with the sample of items and persons at hand). These error estimates, coupled with item and person reliability estimates, indicate the stability and replicability of the item and person estimates. This information then guides the researcher in knowing how better to interpret and modify measures in the human science (Bond and Fox 2007:41).

Item difficulty in the current research refers to respondents' level of endorsement of the item/statement in the questionnaire. The better endorsed are 'easier' and less endorsed are 'difficult'. Item difficulty is expressed on a linear scale in logits with a logit value of 0 set arbitrarily as the average of the item difficulty estimate in Rasch analysis. Therefore, items close to 0 logits are near the average, items with a negative logit estimate are more easily endorsed by respondents than those with positive logit estimates.

Person ability is estimated in relation to the item difficulty estimates. That is to say, the more negative the value of person ability, the lower the person's level of endorsement of questionnaire items. In this research the 'more able' people endorsed the statements more regularly and 'less able' people were less inclined to endorse the statements. Therefore, "Success" for a person on the questionnaire meant a respondent strongly endorsed the items in the questionnaire. A [successful] person with high ability strongly endorsed the statement while a [less successful] person with lower ability did not endorse them as frequently.

It is crucial at this point to remember the Rasch model, using the rating scale analysis, is measuring the boys' perceptions of aspects of masculinity. This is not a test and there are no correct answers, just levels of endorsement of items in the questionnaire are measured.

Estimates of error are illustrated by the size of the circle on a data bubble chart generated by *Bond&FoxSteps* (Bond and Fox 2007). Larger circles represent a larger error estimate.

Error estimates shown by circle size are only relevant to the chart on which they are shown and cannot be compared to other bubble charts. An ideal Rasch model suggesting a single underlying construct to the data would have items with small circles and close to the centre line of the bubble chart to indicate stability in the data. It was not an objective at the outset of this research to develop a test for use in other contexts. This is a possibility for further development but it is beyond the scope of this study.

Bond & Fox Steps Output

Two types of figures are derived from *Bond&FoxSteps* output (Bond and Fox 2007) and presented in this Chapter 4 of this portfolio. The figures from *Bond&FoxSteps* are a bubble chart and an item map. Bubble charts and an item map are presented for data on each of the following: boys' views of masculinity; factors influencing the boys' views of masculinity; and, the school's influence in their views of masculinity. Tables and graphs also are used to present results for the fourth section of the questionnaire on perceptions of the relative status of activities at the school.

Bubble chart figures (Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6) illustrate the degree of fit of the data to the Rasch model. The *t* value for each item is located in relation to the horizontal axis of the map and the vertical location represents the item difficulty (level of endorsement by respondents) in logits. The Rasch model has a range of fit bounded by *t* values of -2 and +2. This range is described by Bond and Fox (2007) as a "pathway". Items not fitting the model (< -2 or > +2) because they are outside this range are said to be outside the pathway of expectation (outfit).

'Fit' to the Rasch model is a function of both item difficulty (level of endorsement) and person ability (willingness to endorse). Put simply, you would expect the most supportive respondents to endorse most items more than the average. Similarly, you would expect the least supportive respondents to endorse items less than average.

The bubble chart devised using data applied to the Rasch model using *Bond&FoxSteps* (Bond and Fox 2007) rating scale analysis identifies which items conform to this expectation. An item located to the left of the pathway, because of a *t* value less than -2, is termed over-fitting (Bond and Fox 2007). These items are considered to be too predictable and not useful for discriminating respondents. An item located to the right of the pathway because of a *t* value more than 2 is said to be a misfit (Bond and Fox 2007). Such an item is too random in the pattern of responses from questionnaire participants.

Item maps (Tables 4.3, 4.6 and 4.8) illustrate the relationship between item difficulty (level of endorsement) and person ability (willingness to endorse). On an item map, the vertical location represents the item difficulty (level of endorsement by respondents) in logits. Item maps illustrate the relative distribution of item difficulty and person ability estimates with items on the right hand side of the diagram and respondents on the left. Unlike bubble charts there is no account on these item maps for item or person fit representations for the same set of data or error estimation. Item maps are very useful for clearly illustrating the order of items and the relative difference in their level of endorsement. This is also shown on the bubble chart but it is less clear because the items are not clearly named and the scale is not as clearly calibrated (Bond and Fox 2007).

Appendix 18 The School Code of Behaviour (Revised 2008)

I understand and accept that in becoming a member of this school, I must support the following ways of behaving, as well as following these regulations and accepted practices:

1. **I understand** that ours is a Church School, and that I will be expected to respond to and behave towards other people in ways that are expected in a Christian school community**.**

2. **I understand** that in all my dealings with other people – teachers, other adults, and my fellow students - I must ensure that I show **proper respect**, care and consideration, and treat all others as I myself would wish to be treated. I understand that by developing and maintaining positive relationships with everyone I come into contact with at School will assist the School Community to be a harmonious and positive place where everyone can grow with confidence and dignity. I understand the importance of common courtesy and good manners, and of saying 'Please', 'Thank you', 'Excuse me' and 'I'm sorry'.

3. **I undertake to accept** the directions of those in authority over and in care of me: Teachers, Resident Staff, Prefects, Monitors, or Seniors.

4. **I undertake to be careful in my speech**. I understand that swearing, blasphemy and abusive speech are not acceptable.

5. **I will stand** as required for adult members of the School Community, greeting them courteously by their name if I know it, or as 'Sir' or 'Ms' if I do not know their name.

6. **I understand the absolute importance of always being honest.**

7. **I will wear the School uniform** in its various forms neatly, completely and with pride. I will conform to all dress and hair regulations without exception.

8. **I undertake to respect the buildings, facilities, gardens and grounds** at School, and to assist to keep all areas of the School neat and free from litter, especially areas I may be in.

9. **I promise to behave at all times in ways that bring credit to the School**. Specifically, I promise not to smoke, nor drink alcohol, steal, nor take drugs which are not medically prescribed, when in School uniform or when involved in a School-related activity of any kind.

10. **I will treat my academic work seriously and be conscientious with my homework**. I will actively seek the advice and help of my teachers especially when I am experiencing difficulties with my work.

11. **I understand that I will regularly and punctually attend** scheduled classes, Assemblies, Examinations and Chapel Services and participate in them.

12. **I understand that there are many opportunities to participate in the life of the School**. When I have made a commitment to any activity, team, club, group or excursion, I will keep that commitment.

13. **I understand that in being a member of this school, I am making a commitment to myself to be the best that I can be**. I am also making a commitment to my parents to make the most of the opportunities with which they are providing me; to the staff to work with them to take full advantage of all they are offering me in assisting in my education; and to the School, to make the best contribution I can to uphold its traditions and its good name.

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