GLOSSARY

New terminology plays an essential part in marking the changes which have occurred in current thinking about gender and education. To facilitate further reading and debate, it is important for new terminology to become more commonplace and accessible for classroom teachers.

collection of gender—the process by which individuals actively build, or ‘construct’ a sense of themselves as gendered. For education practitioners, it is important to understand the active part that young people play in this process, testing out behaviour and language which enables them to operate comfortably within a range of complex social relations. They interact with adults, with peers, and with media images within a variety of contexts, making sense of many competing agendas.

Although young people are actively engaged in this process, it is also important to understand that real choice is limited by the power relationships and structures within which we live: through these, young people can learn to ‘desire’ ways of being masculine or feminine which ultimately restrict them. The phrase ‘construction of gender’ reflects a development from the limitations of earlier theories of ‘sex role socialisation’ and ‘role modelling’.

The process has been described in this way:

In reality the choices are multiple and many dimensional, and come from home, from peers of both sexes with many different backgrounds, views and embodiments of gender, from a variety of views and modelled behaviours among the staff, and from the traditions and rules of the school itself. Students must undertake the difficult task of constructing themselves in ways which enable them to feel comfortable inside this confusion. This whole spiral of gender-shaping experience, personal reaction and self-modification is called the construction of gender’” ... (Dr Cherry Collins)

difference—the focus on difference in recent work on gender recognises that there is little value in comparing ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ as if these were simple, single-dimensional variables within homogenous groups. Consciously and unconsciously, young people make choices between many conflicting ways of being masculine and feminine, and are influenced by factors including place, socio-economic status, ethnicity and race. Disaggregated data which reflects these variables is needed for meaningful reporting on the education outcomes of girls and boys.

disadvantage—there are a number of factors which are associated with reduced access to and participation in schooling. These include physical and intellectual disabilities, geographic isolation, limited proficiency in the English language, poverty or low socio-economic status, homelessness, physical and sexual abuse, sexual and homophobic harassment and racial vilification. It is not uncommon for students to experience the combined effects of multiple factors associated with educational disadvantage. This does not mean that being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or coming from a non-English speaking background is in itself a disadvantage: in a study of Italo-Australian girls in South Australia, researcher Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli found that:
Far from seeing themselves as disadvantaged and inferior, the girls perceived their bridging position to be positive and fulfilling ... the girls were not torn between two worlds but were negotiating the two, embracing the values from either while rejecting others that were inappropriate to their personal identity.

discourse—a framework of values and ideas and ways of seeing the world which is embedded in the language we all use, and which marks the exchange of ideas within a community, e.g. ‘scientific discourse’, ‘economic discourse’, ‘feminist discourse’. Language—discourse—plays a powerful part in transmitting cultural values; it can also limit or open up the possibility of our recognising, resisting and redefining them.

equity—equity in schooling is defined in the National Strategy for Equity in Schooling as ‘the concept of equal access to school education and the fair and just distribution of benefits from the school education system’ for all students. This does not imply equality of treatment, as there are many factors which may disadvantage students in achieving equitable outcomes, and ‘priority assistance’ or identified affirmative action may need to be directed towards students in need.

essentialism—there is a perception in schools and the wider community that there is an ‘essential’ difference between men and women, that male and female behaviours are biologically determined and thus ‘fixed’. However, the powerful social influences of family, language and culture begin at birth, and it is impossible to know the extent to which human behaviour is either learned or ‘natural’. Theories of biological determinism also ignore the fact that men and women are diverse culturally, socially and economically, and that there is no single ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’.

femininities—speaking of ‘femininities’ in the plural is a way of drawing attention to the fact that there are many different ways of being feminine; that ‘femininity’ is not a single static entity within a homogenous culture. Girls are presented with many ‘femininities’ within popular culture, in formal school areas of learning and within their own environment, and experiment with a range of feminine ways of being.

gender differences—those differences in behaviours and attitudes which are constructed through social practice, which are dynamic and are capable of challenge and change.

gender-based harassment—harassment based on an individual’s gender, including harassment relating to the way in which an individual’s gendered behaviour, appearance, language and attitudes conform to dominant local norms. There is a growing understanding and acceptance that homophobic harassment is a form of gender-based harassment (see sex-based harassment).

harassment—behaviour (physical, verbal and social) which makes an individual feel embarrassed, frightened, hurt, angry or uncomfortable. Harassment frequently relates to an individual’s gender, race or ethnicity, and constitutes an abuse of power by one individual or group over another. Schools are coming to reject the use of terms such as teasing and bullying to label behaviours of this type, and to develop policies and
procedures which target harassment within school culture. Recent attention has been given to harassment of girls by other girls, as well as harassing behaviours by boys.

**homophobia**—fear or dislike of an individual based on their perceived failure to conform to dominant local norms of masculinity and femininity. This term has come to refer particularly to hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality, and the harassing behaviour which it produces.

**homophobic harassment**—verbal and physical harassment, including social exclusion and violence, which arises from individual or group homophobia. Homophobia can create a limiting environment in a school or workplace for young people wishing to exercise choice in relation to subject choice, cultural and recreational activities, relationships, attitudes and behaviours. It represents the exertion of power by a dominant group over girls and women, boys and men who are perceived to be different (see **sex-based harassment**).

**masculinities**—speaking of ‘masculinities’ in the plural is a way of drawing attention to the fact that there are many different ways of being masculine; that ‘masculinity’ is not a single static entity within a homogenous culture. Boys are presented with many ‘masculinities’ within popular culture, in formal school areas of learning and within their own environment, and experiment with a range of masculine ways of being.

**risk**—a broad term which is used differently in different contexts: a student may be ‘at risk’ of failing to complete schooling; of becoming long-term unemployed; or of death or long-term disability through drug and alcohol abuse, diseases associated with poverty and homelessness, or the effects of physical and sexual abuse. ‘Risk-taking’ behaviour by boys can include the misuse of cars, drugs and alcohol, and antisocial behaviour in gangs which may lead to death, injury or criminal record. Girls’ risk-taking behaviour can include eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia, unprotected sexual intercourse, self-mutilation, smoking and drug abuse. Girls at risk often pass unnoticed in school settings.

**role modelling**—an aspect of socialisation, in which adults or peers provide a ‘model’ of the behaviours young people should learn.

**sex-based harassment**—the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993–97 used **sex-based harassment** as the broad term which includes *sexist harassment*, *sexual harassment*, *gender-based harassment* and *homophobic harassment*. The variety of such terms reflects the effort to find language to describe the many forms which harassment may take. *Sex-based harassment* is the imposition of behaviour based on sex stereotyping. It is often unrecognised, trivialised or accepted as *teasing*, but it is one of the factors most commonly identified by girls as limiting their participation in schooling. It can include verbal and physical abuse, social exclusion and other forms of emotional trauma.
sexist harassment—harassment based on assumptions about an individual’s ability to enter and succeed in various types of work or courses of study, based on their gender. Sexist harassment relegates girls and women, and activities related to the domestic sphere, to an inferior position in Australian society. Because of this, boys and men can themselves become targets of sexist harassment when they actively participate in activities which are perceived as ‘female’ (see sex-based harassment).

sexual harassment—this term is used in some states to include all sex-based harassment. It can refer particularly to harassment which relates to an individual’s sexuality, and which may include comments about an individual’s sex, their relationships, sexual preferences, sexual behaviour or appearance, and includes unwanted sexual attentions, sexual propositions and physical contact (see sex-based harassment).

sex differences—biological differences between males and females.

socialisation—the process of learning sets of values and beliefs, through role modelling, through the communication of role expectations by the media, the family and the community, through sanctions applied by adults and by peers, and through direct instruction in how to behave. Recent research and writing has drawn attention to the limitations of the socialisation model. It is important to understand that individuals can make choices between alternative courses of action, and that schools can play a part in helping young people to challenge and resist learned behaviours. It is also important to understand that real choice is limited by the power relationships and structures within which we live, including those operating within school culture.

violence—violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual and verbal assault, emotional, psychological, social, economic and spiritual abuse. The national Gender and Violence Project Position Paper comments that:

A definition relevant for schools needs to convey an understanding that violence is a means of asserting power and control over an individual or a group, and can be perpetrated by individuals or groups of either sex ... A school based definition of violence needs to include a recognition of the impact of violence not only on the safety of the victim, but also on their rights and freedoms and recognise both the overt and hidden forms of violence which routinely take place in the school grounds, on the sports field and in the classrooms and corridors.

work—all productive labour which contributes to the maintenance of a society, whether paid or unpaid; it includes the production of goods, intellectual endeavour, domestic work and care for others (children, the aged and the disabled).