

Advanced 1
Reading Unit 2
Presented by Mohammad Rajabpur

The Education Gender Gap

A

Research into gender differences in education has tended to focus on the poor performance of girls in science and math, virtually ignoring the low achievement of boys in reading and writing. According to Cecilia Reynolds, from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, it has long been recognized that girls did well in literacy and that boys did not, but there was no great concern about this because in the real world, boys were still going on to get better jobs and salaries. However, a 2004 study by the Council of Ministers of Education found that Canadian girls are outperforming boys in literacy skills by a wider margin than previously thought. Among thirteen-year-olds, about ten percent more girls than boys meet expected targets for literacy, and among sixteen-year-olds, about seventeen percent more girls write at an age-appropriate level.

gender = sexual identity

B

As if that wasn't bad enough, recent testing has shown for the first time that the performance gap that once existed between boys and girls in science and math has now almost disappeared too. Some experts even predict that at some time in the future, girls may actually move ahead of boys in science. According to Paul Cappon, Director General of the Council of Ministers of Education, one of the consequences of this will be to put girls in the lead in relation both to university entrance and to achievement in the labor market. Already, only forty-two percent of university graduates in Canada are male, and that number is dropping each year.

gap = a difference between two things

C

While experts agree that now is the time to focus on the long-standing gender divide in literacy, their explanations for it, and their solutions vary widely. In a culture that favors equal opportunity and advocates political correctness, some have found it difficult to discuss this troubling gender gap without entering into the touchy domain of sexism.

advocate = to publicly support or suggest an idea, development, or way of doing something
sexism = bias and injustice towards females

D

Some educators have put the blame directly on policy and its implementation by women teachers, saying that since educational practice has aimed at improving the performance of girls, boys have been forgotten. Cecilia Reynolds has warned that it is important to address any differences between boys and girls without assigning blame. Nevertheless, although she doesn't

believe boys were forgotten, she does admit that insufficient attention may have been paid to their different learning needs.

address = deal with

insufficient = not enough

E

Others have pointed to a more subtle cause, to what Paul Cappon has called the "feminization" of education. Increasingly, teaching is becoming dominated by females as more young women enter the profession and more older men retire, he says. That leaves boys with few male role models in the classroom. "It's women doing the teaching. Boys in the socialization process will tend to discount the importance of that particular subject area when it's only women teaching it." he suggests.

subtle = not easily noticeable

F

Cappon also thinks the kinds of reading materials available in schools may be better suited to girls than boys. As he points out, the current wisdom is that boys' reading preferences include factual and instructional materials that will help them understand particular areas of interest, whereas girls are attracted to stories that explore interpersonal relationships.

suited = right for someone or something:

With her qualifications and experience, she would seem to be ideally suited to/for the job.

G

Since there is now concrete evidence of a significant gender divide, there is a growing body of opinion which argues that the only way to ensure equitable treatment of boys and girls is to segregate them. Some schools have used this tactic to improve girls' performance in science and math, but with the latest emphasis on literacy and boys, some now say full separation is the only solution.

concrete = clear and certain, or real and existing in a form that can be seen or felt

equitable = treating everyone equally; fair:

She charged that women are being denied equitable pay.

segregate = to keep one group of people apart from another and treat them differently, especially because of race, sex, or religion

H

Leonard Sax, the founder of an organization promoting single-sex education, points to the success of an inner-city school in Montreal which introduced single-sex classrooms five years ago. Since then, absenteeism has dropped and the rate of students going on to college has nearly doubled. Sax, a family doctor and a psychologist, believes that many people in education are paralyzed by a feeling that it's politically incorrect to talk about innate differences in the ways boys and girls learn. He argues, however, that genetic differences between boys and girls mean that it's impossible for them both to learn successfully in the same classroom. According to

Sax, every substantial choice made in schools benefits one gender and disadvantages another. As an example, he claims that girls hear better than boys and that part of the reason for boys falling behind is simply that they can't hear the teacher. He also points to research which shows that there are key differences in the way boys and girls respond to confrontation. Girls shrink away from a confrontational teaching style under which many boys would thrive.

promote = to encourage people to like, buy, use, do, or support something

absenteeism = a situation in which people are not at school or work when they should be

I

What policy makers ultimately decide to do may depend on how far the results of the recent study are judged to be an accurate reflection of the general situation. Cecilia Reynolds emphasizes that gender differences are statistical, with significant numbers of individuals everywhere not following the general trend. Although she does not believe we should be seriously concerned, she does think that in future, parents and teachers will need to pay more attention to what is happening to boys both at home and in the classroom.

policy-maker = someone, especially in a government or political party, who decides on new policies

Full Text:

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The Text in Simple English:

The Education Gender Gap

A

Research on education and gender often looks at girls doing badly in science and math, but it mostly ignores boys doing poorly in reading and writing. Cecilia Reynolds from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education says people have known that girls read and write better than boys, but it wasn't a big concern because boys still got better jobs and pay. However, a 2004 study in Canada found that girls are doing much better than boys in reading. For example, at age 13, about 10% more girls meet reading goals than boys. At age 16, about 17% more girls write at the expected level.

B

Even more surprising, new tests show that the gap in science and math between boys and girls is almost gone. Some experts think girls might even do better than boys in science in the future. Paul Cappon, from the Council of Ministers of Education, says this may help girls get ahead in university and jobs. Right now, only 42% of university graduates in Canada are men, and that number is going down.

C

Experts agree that we need to focus on the reading and writing gap between boys and girls. But they have different ideas about why it happens and how to fix it. In a society that values equality, it can be hard to talk about this gap without touching on sexism.

D

Some educators blame school policies and female teachers, saying schools focus on girls and forget boys. Cecilia Reynolds says it's important to look at differences without blaming anyone. She doesn't think boys were completely forgotten, but maybe their learning needs weren't fully considered.

E

Others point to the "feminization" of teaching. Paul Cappon says more women are becoming teachers while older men retire, so boys have fewer male role models in school. Boys may pay less attention to subjects taught mostly by women.

F

Capon also thinks school reading materials suit girls more than boys. Boys like reading facts and instructions to learn about things they are interested in, while girls like stories about relationships.

G

Since there is clear evidence of a gender gap, some people think boys and girls should be taught separately. Some schools did this to help girls in science and math. Now, with boys struggling in reading, some say separating them might be the best solution.

H

Leonard Sax, who supports single-sex education, gives an example of a school in Montreal. They started separate classrooms five years ago. Since then, fewer students skip school and more go to college. Sax says many people avoid discussing differences in how boys and girls learn because they think it's politically wrong. He believes genetic differences mean boys and girls learn differently, so one classroom doesn't work for both. He says school choices often help one gender but hurt the other. For example, girls hear better than boys, and boys may struggle to hear the teacher. Girls don't respond well to strict, confrontational teaching, but boys might do better under it.

I

Policy decisions will depend on whether studies truly reflect the situation. Cecilia Reynolds says gender differences are based on statistics, and many boys and girls don't fit the usual pattern. She doesn't think it's a big worry, but in the future, parents and teachers should pay more attention to boys both at home and at school.

Comprehension Check Questions

Section A

Q1: What has research into gender differences in education mainly focused on?

A1: It has mainly focused on the poor performance of girls in science and math.

Q2: What has been largely ignored according to the text?

A2: The low achievement of boys in reading and writing has been largely ignored.

Q3: According to Cecilia Reynolds, why was the lower performance of boys in literacy not a major concern?

A3: Because boys still went on to get better jobs and salaries in the real world.

Q4: What did the 2004 study by the Council of Ministers of Education find?

A4: It found that Canadian girls were outperforming boys in literacy skills by a wider margin than previously thought.

Q5: By what percentage do thirteen-year-old girls outperform boys in literacy targets?

A5: About 10% more girls than boys meet expected literacy targets.

Q6: By what percentage do sixteen-year-old girls outperform boys in writing at an age-appropriate level?

A6: About 17% more girls than boys write at an age-appropriate level.

Section B

Q7: What recent trend has been observed in science and math performance between boys and girls?

A7: The performance gap between boys and girls in science and math has almost disappeared.

Q8: What do some experts predict about girls in science in the future?

A8: Some experts predict that girls may actually move ahead of boys in science.

Q9: What is one consequence mentioned by Paul Cappon of girls performing better?

A9: Girls may take the lead in university entrance and achievement in the labor market.

Q10: What percentage of university graduates in Canada are male?

A10: Only 42% of university graduates are male, and the number is decreasing.

Section C

Q11: Why do experts find it difficult to discuss the literacy gap?

A11: Because discussing it may enter the touchy domain of sexism.

Q12: What is agreed upon by experts regarding the timing to focus on literacy?

A12: Experts agree that now is the time to focus on the long-standing gender divide in literacy.

Section D

Q13: Who do some educators blame for boys' lower performance?

A13: Some blame policy and its implementation by women teachers.

Q14: What does Cecilia Reynolds warn against?

A14: She warns against assigning blame when addressing differences between boys and girls.

Q15: Does Reynolds believe boys were completely forgotten in education?

A15: No, she doesn't believe boys were forgotten but admits their different learning needs may have received insufficient attention.

Section E

Q16: What does Paul Cappon describe as the "feminization" of education?

A16: That teaching is increasingly dominated by females as more women enter the profession and older men retire.

Q17: How might the feminization of teaching affect boys, according to Cappon?

A17: Boys may have fewer male role models and may discount the importance of subjects taught only by women.

Section F

Q18: How might reading materials in schools favor girls over boys?

A18: Girls prefer stories exploring interpersonal relationships, while boys prefer factual and instructional materials.

Q19: According to Cappon, what are boys' reading preferences?

A19: Boys prefer factual and instructional materials that help them understand particular areas of interest.

Section G

Q20: What solution do some suggest to ensure equitable treatment of boys and girls?

A20: Some suggest segregating boys and girls in schools.

Q21: How have some schools used segregation in the past?

A21: Some schools used it to improve girls' performance in science and math.

Section H

Q22: Who is Leonard Sax?

A22: He is the founder of an organization promoting single-sex education, a family doctor, and a psychologist.

Q23: What were the results in a Montreal inner-city school after introducing single-sex classrooms?

A23: Absenteeism dropped, and the rate of students going on to college nearly doubled.

Q24: What does Sax say about genetic differences between boys and girls?

A24: He says these differences make it impossible for both to learn successfully in the same classroom.

Q25: Give examples of differences in boys' and girls' learning according to Sax.

A25: Girls hear better than boys; girls shrink from confrontation, whereas many boys thrive under confrontational teaching.

Section I

Q26: What does Cecilia Reynolds say about gender differences in general?

A26: She says gender differences are statistical, with many individuals not following the general trend.

Q27: What does Reynolds suggest parents and teachers need to do in the future?

A27: Pay more attention to what is happening to boys both at home and in the classroom.

New Words & Expressions

A

- **gender differences** – the ways in which males and females are different.
- **tended to focus on** – usually concentrated on; gave attention to.
- **poor performance** – not doing well; low results.
- **virtually ignoring** – almost completely not paying attention to.
- **low achievement** – not reaching expected success or results.
- **literacy** – the ability to read and write.
- **great concern** – serious worry.
- **in the real world** – in practical life, outside of school.
- **outperforming** – doing better than others.
- **by a wider margin** – by a larger difference.
- **expected targets for literacy** – the reading and writing skills students should reach.
- **age-appropriate level** – suitable for the age of the student.

B

- **performance gap** – the difference in achievement between two groups.
- **once existed** – used to be; existed in the past.
- **move ahead of** – surpass; do better than.
- **in the lead** – ahead; doing better than others.
- **university entrance** – being accepted to a university.

- **achievement in the labor market** – success in getting jobs and earning well.

C

- **long-standing gender divide** – a difference between boys and girls that has existed for a long time.
- **advocates political correctness** – supports avoiding language or actions that could offend people.
- **troubling gender gap** – worrying difference between boys' and girls' performance.
- **touchy domain of sexism** – sensitive area related to discrimination based on gender.

D

- **put the blame on** – say someone is responsible for a problem.
- **policy and its implementation** – rules or plans and how they are applied.
- **educational practice** – usual teaching methods.
- **assigning blame** – saying who is at fault.
- **insufficient attention** – not enough focus or care.
- **different learning needs** – boys and girls may learn in different ways.

E

- **subtle cause** – a cause that is not obvious.
- **feminization of education** – the process of education becoming dominated by women.
- **dominated by females** – mostly controlled or led by women.
- **male role models** – men whom boys can look up to or copy.
- **socialization process** – how people learn to behave in society.
- **discount the importance** – consider something less important.

F

- **reading materials** – books, texts, and other things for reading.
- **better suited** – more appropriate; fits better.
- **current wisdom** – what people generally believe now.
- **factual and instructional materials** – information-based texts meant to teach.
- **interpersonal relationships** – relationships between people.

G

- **concrete evidence** – real, clear proof.
- **significant gender divide** – a clear difference between boys and girls.
- **equitable treatment** – fair treatment.
- **segregate** – separate.
- **tactic** – method or strategy.
- **full separation** – complete division of boys and girls.

H

- **inner-city school** – a school in the central part of a city, often facing social challenges.
- **single-sex classrooms** – classrooms with only boys or only girls.

- **absenteeism** – students not attending school.
- **paralyzed by a feeling** – unable to act because of fear or concern.
- **politically incorrect** – not socially acceptable to say.
- **innate differences** – natural differences people are born with.
- **substantial choice** – important decision.
- **disadvantages another** – causes harm or difficulty to someone.
- **confrontation** – direct conflict or challenge.
- **shrink away** – move back or avoid.
- **thrive** – do very well.

I

- **policy makers** – people who create rules or laws.
- **judged to be an accurate reflection** – considered as a true representation.
- **statistical** – related to numbers and data.
- **general trend** – usual pattern or tendency.
- **pay more attention** – observe or consider more carefully.