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GENDER AND EQUALITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

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Abstract:

One of the most striking trends in education in the past two or three decades has been the rapid increase in female educational attainment. From the cohorts born in the 1950's onwards Women quickly caught up with men in educational investment. Furthermore, it is clear that the growth in the educational attainment of women has not stalled at gender parity. At the moment, female educational attainment clearly dominates male educational attainment in a majority of industrialized countries.

KEY WORDS:

Global Context , educational , tertiary graduates , industrialized countries.

1.INTRODUCTION:

This is true for several measures of attainment. Women are in clear majority among secondary school graduates, among students enrolled in tertiary education, and among tertiary graduates. Furthermore, judging from recent trends it seems likely that gender gap in educational attainment will keep on widening in favour of women in the future.

An Educational Approach:

Children arrive at school sharing the beliefs and values of their family. These beliefs and values will invariably be a reflection of the broad cross-section of community views of relationships and family life. The beliefs and values a student brings from home may be challenged at school, where teachers work to create respectful, equitable and inclusive environments. Teachers may need support and information to understand and feel confident in challenging the values students reflect from their homes, particularly in building and maintaining an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, both teachers and families may need support and strategies to address discrimination, harassment and bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Emphasis must be placed on the importance of addressing these issues in the school/college context. This context extends beyond the school gate to partners who provide learning opportunities or other support to students. Professional learning opportunities for staff, parents and school/college association members can be crucial in providing a platform for change in school/college culture and in developing positive approaches. Professional learning opportunities are available from registered external providers Promoting and making available a range of written and electronic resources

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will also assist in explaining the importance of challenging discrimination, harassment and bullying and supporting young people. Working It Out can provide such resources. Launching into Learning programs and Child and Family Centres also have an important role to play in modelling inclusion of families with same sex parents and providing information when appropriate about relationships and sexuality.

Pre-School Differences

Pre-school gender differences in social, cognitive and communication measures have been found, as well as gender differences in the activities that parents carry out with their children: Data from the Millennium Cohort Study suggest gender differences are apparent in early communicative gestures at 9 months old, with, for example, female infants more likely to wave goodbye. However, for the majority of developmental measures considered, small or negligible gender differences were found. At the pre-school stage, girls have better social and cognitive skills.

Parents are more likely to read and teach songs and nursery rhymes with their daughters than their sons. Pre-school provision helped boost boys' early number concepts but had no differential impact on early literacy skills.

Assessing the Gender Gap

The gender gap arises mainly because of differences between boys and girls in language and literacy skills, reflected in differences in performance in English and other subjects which are literacy based. The gender gap is small or negligible for Maths and Science. These trends are apparent both from historical data from English exam records going back 60 years and from international data. While gender does independently predict attainment, the social class gap has greater explanatory power and for some groups, ethnicity is also a more important factor than gender. A focus on boys' underachievement can shift attention away from the fact that large numbers of girls are also low attainers. Tackling the scale of these numbers is arguably of greater priority and importance to policy makers than the proportionate difference between boys' and girls' attainment. Additionally, the different subject choices made by boys and girls may be more marked and have greater longer-term outcomes in terms of subsequent career choices than attainment differences.

Girls and boys tend to use different styles of learning. Girls tend to show greater levels of motivation and respond differently to the materials and tasks given to them. Overall trends indicate that girls and boys seem to relate differently to schooling and learning and girls find it easier to succeed in school settings. Type of school does not appear to influence the gender gap: across schools in England, there are hardly any where boys make greater progress than girls. However, one study found that there are a large proportion of schools where boys and girls make similar progress but these tend to be schools where school performance is weak (i.e. for both boys and girls). The corollary of this is that the gender gap is wider in better performing schools. Boys are more likely to be influenced by their male peer group which might devalue schoolwork and so put them at odds with academic achievement.

A recent study found that the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies had an impact on the gender gap by improving the attainment of boys (more than girls) in English, and girls (more than boys) in Maths. However, the gap persists. The use of coursework in examinations may advantage girls but analysis does not find that this alone accounts for the gender gap. Other aspects of the curriculum, assessment structure and content have also been implicated. For example, reading assessments which focus on narrative may accentuate the gender gap compared to more factual-based assessment. A study has shown that boys performed significantly better on a reading comprehension task involving factual content compared to one based on narrative content. Girls' reading comprehension scores were less influenced by the content of the task.

Gender of the teachers, peer groups, and teaching practices:

The fact that females are hugely overrepresented in teacher profession in most industrialized Countries has led many commentators to speculate that one of the sexes (which one it is depends on the commentator) is discriminated against in assessment of students. The best available evidence on this issue is mixed. There are some studies that hint at potential bias against boys. In particular, Lavy (2008) finds that in Israeli high schools boys score higher grades in blind-tests where the gender of the student is not revealed than in non-blind tests where the grader observes the gender. This result would suggest that boys are discriminated against. However, it is not clear whether the blind and non-blind tests actually test the same thing. In a recent Swedish study where exactly the same tests are graded blindly and non blindly, Tyrefors et

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al. (2011) find no evidence of discrimination against either sex. There are also signs that single-sex education is attracting more support in some countries. For example, Buchmann et al (2008) report that in the United States there were 233 public schools offering gender-separate education in 2006 whereas in 1998 there were just 4. The effect of single-sex education on student achievement is a difficult topic because selection to these schools is far from random. However, the best available studies on the effect of the gender composition of the peer groups (Lavy and Schlosser (2011) and Hoxby (2000) suggest that single-sex schooling would exacerbate gender differences in attainment rather than reduce them. The achievement of both boys and girls is increasing in the fraction of females in their peer groups. Changes in teaching practices have also been suggested as a potential strategy of reducing gender gaps in achievement. It is often argued that boys are more sensitive to poor teaching. This concern led to a policy experiment in the UK, where primary schools were given highly structured instructions on teaching objectives and class management for daily "literacy and numeracy hours". Machin and McNally (2008) is an evaluation of this experiment and they show that this strategy was successful in improving the test scores of both boys and girls. However, the effects were always larger in magnitude for the sex that is generally weaker in the particular subject. Hence, these literacy and numeracy hours were successful in reducing gender gaps in achievement.

CONCLUSION

The rapid growth in female educational attainment is one of the most striking trends in education statistics in the post WWII world. In an increasing number of industrialized countries female educational attainment is now higher than male educational attainment. Women are in majority among secondary school graduates, among tertiary level students, and among tertiary level graduates. Judging from recent trends in international data, it seems likely that female dominance in educational attainment is becoming stronger in the coming decades. Evidence on the returns and costs of education suggests that the emerging female dominance in education is caused by a combination of increasing returns to both men and women and lower female effort costs of education which has meant that the net returns to education, particularly at the higher levels, have increased more for women than for men. Whereas the level of total benefits of education are probably still higher for men, they have increased more for women over the past three decades through removal of barriers to women's careers. The effort costs of education, on the other hand, have been lower for women for a long time due to gender differences in non-cognitive abilities. The fact that the widening gender gap in education partly reflects stalling or even falling male educational attainment is a cause for concern for policymakers since recent trends in the labor market make education ever more important for labor market outcomes. There is plenty of evidence showing that the medium-skill well-paid jobs are rapidly disappearing and that low educated men are increasingly employed in low-paid low-skill jobs. Furthermore, there are signs that male participation rates are declining across the whole OECD and that this decline is particularly strong for low-educated men.

Although there is scarce evidence on the effects of policies that would directly target gender inequalities in education, one can draw some conclusions on the effectiveness of different policies indirectly. First of all, it seems to be the case that single-sex education is more likely to widen gender gaps in education than to decrease them. However, there are indications that male students are more responsive to school resource investments such as reductions in class size. Early intervention policies, on the other hand, seem to be more effective in improving both female and male long-term outcomes without reducing gender gaps. There is also suggestive evidence that the structure of educational system, and the timing of tracking in secondary school in particular, affects male and female students differently.

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