



The Commonwealth
Education Hub



Changing Patterns in Boys' Education

Discussion Summary

This e-Discussion was conducted in partnership between The Commonwealth Education Hub and UNGEI between 25 January 2016 and 19 February 2016.

Changing Patterns in Boys' Education

Introduction

The challenges that many boys face in realising their educational potential is increasingly being recognised as a major gender issue, not only in the education sphere, but also to social and economic development, and for achievement of the SDGs. In particular, there is concern regarding dropout rates among boys and low level of educational achievement. To discuss these issues, the Health and Education Unit (HEU) of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the [United Nations Girls' Education Initiative \(UNGEI\)](#) partnered to run an online discussion on *'Changing patterns in boys' educational: What can we do to make things better?'*

The objective of the four-week discussion was to bring together practitioners, academics and policymakers to debate how education can better address the interests of boys and male adolescents and allow them to reach their potential, as well as exercise their right to education. The e-discussion looked at related issues and risk factors, as well as strategies to address these and ways of scaling-up and adapting existing and promising practices.

The discussion reached out to over 700 participants, comprising representatives from Education Ministries, development organisations, the private sector and academia. A total of 25 responses were received from 11 countries across all Commonwealth regions and beyond, and were moderated by Ms. Nora Fyles, Mr. Mark Figueroa, and Mr. Wilfred T. Adderley.

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About The Education Hub

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Conceived as a 'network of networks,' The Commonwealth Education Hub is intended to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration among policy-makers and practitioners across the Commonwealth. Through its virtual 'one-stop-shop,' the Hub offers an array of online knowledge services designed to enable easier access to relevant information and resources, as well as to strengthen the collaborative context within which approaches, solutions, and best practices can be shared and adopted at scale across the Commonwealth, and perhaps even more widely.

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Discussion Summary

Key points

This discussion was broken into four themes:

1. Early influences and later outcomes: addressing risk factors and vulnerabilities from a life course perspective;
2. Gender stereotypes and gender socialisation and their impact on boys' education;
3. Fostering positive social growth and behaviour among boys; and,
4. Multisectoral policies, actions and strategies for boys' education.

Key conclusions and recommendations:

- Contributing factors influencing boys' education are variable (including socioeconomic factors, and gender stereotypes and norms), with complex dynamic interactions influencing changing patterns in dropout rates and achievement. Both the variable influences and dynamic interactions need to be recognised in addressing changing patterns in boys' education;
- Requires focus on gender equality for both boys and girls, analysing and addressing issues involved (including gender stereotypes, and disparities and inequalities stemming from social and economic influences) to tackle the issues faced by both males and females;
- Approaches to addressing issues related to changing patterns in boys' education are similarly applicable to improving girls' education, demonstrating the need to overcome stereotyping and gender norms;
- Strategies should seek to engage all stakeholders and are needed at different levels (i.e. individual, familial, community, school, policy);
- No one-size-fits all solution exists, requiring policies and strategies which meet the needs and challenges within a given context; and,
- Need for a multisectoral, integrated policy approach to improving boys' education, as well as that of girls.

Issues discussed

Complexities & dynamic influences

The discussion highlighted the complexities involved in both understanding and addressing the issues related to changing patterns in boys' education. Various potential explanations and contributing factors were discussed, including culture, socialisation, socioeconomic circumstances, violence, education systems, teaching approaches and gender norming.

Differing viewpoints demonstrated sometimes conflicting and contentious opinions, whilst also demonstrating the complexities involved in addressing the issue and the breadth of potential influences. Emerging from the discussion was the dynamic nature of the changing patterns, and that numerous factors are likely interacting and influencing these patterns. Gender was discussed as one

of various contributing influences, including socioeconomic disparities and inequalities within and across groups affecting boys' education outcomes. While it may be possible to find universal themes affecting boys' education, boys' should not be addressed as a homogenous group, nor should the dynamics at play. Each child's experience is individual, and different countries, regions and groups should not be compared as the same.

Some of the contributing factors that were discussed in greater detail are below:

General considerations

- *Disparities*: Achievement and drop-out rates are generally measured by the average, whereas achievement varies across the spectrum, influenced by factors such as socioeconomic class, ethnicity, and race; as is similarly the case amongst girls;
- *Individuality*: Multiple participants reflected on the individuality of each student, and that boys and students in general cannot be painted in one broad stroke;
- *Gender inequality dialogue*: Over the past fifteen years, equality in education has focused primarily on girls. Stemming from this, it was noted that there is widespread association of gender equality specifically with women/girls, at the expense of male gender issues. Many discussed the harsher treatment of boys, and gender-specific roles and activities (including chores and income generation) as factors influencing boys' education. There was a strong, agreed voice amongst participants that boys and girls need an equal opportunity and equal support, and that boys' underachievement and dropout is linked to broader gender disparities in society.
- *Parenting & environmental influences*: Parenting and the home/community environment were raised as potential contributing factors in shaping and perpetuating issues affecting boys' education. Socialisation and the formation of stereotypical expectations begin in the home and in the community before a boy enters the formal education system.
- *Privilege and patriarchy*: Mark Figueroa made the link between changing patterns in boys' education and privilege, with issues not necessarily stemming from underprivilege and disadvantage - "It is the historic privileging of males which leads to the tendency to socialise boys with greater freedom to do as they please while their sisters must sit still and serve others."
- *Socio-economic circumstances*: Can affect motivation to stay in school and influencing dropping out to join the economic sector, bring home wages, fulfil gender expectations, etc.
- *Perceived relevance*: Various contributors noted boys not seeing the economic value of education, and the weak link between what is taught and livelihood generation as influencing drop-out rates and low achievement.
- *Negative role models*: Influence of negative role models (e.g. those involved in illegal activities) on boys' behaviour and emotions, and the lack of positive role models in schools and communities to counter balance those associate with gangs, crime and violence.

Gender norms & stereotypes

Various gender norms and stereotypes were highlighted as negatively influencing boys' education, and contributing to changing patterns in boys' education. Different examples were raised as being perpetuated by peers, parents, the education system, and community under various circumstances. Discussed were different attitudes, behaviours, roles, responsibilities and activities that influence expectations of boys and shape notions of masculinity. Amongst others, these include:

- Gender norms and stereotypes as affecting behaviour, motivation, classroom learning, peer interactions and teacher interactions and expectations within the education setting, including lower expectations of boys and violence towards and amongst boys;
- Parenting practices which favour girls over boys, or have lower academic expectations of boys;

- Pressure to conform to gendered norms observed in society and by male role models; and,
- Gender-based association with violence and illegal activities.

Classroom-based experiences were used by multiple contributors to highlight the impact of these views and actions, such as students identifying education or particular subjects as being unmanly or for girls. As stated by Nora Fyles: “when we apply our gender lens, we see that schools are a mirror of society, and the gender norms prevalent in society are equally present in schools.” Understanding the parallel between student perceptions and society was discussed as critical in addressing changing patterns in boys’ education, along with other gender-based norms and stereotypes. It was also agreed that these issues need to be addressed in the home, community and education system.

There were conflicting views as to whether some of the behavioural stereotypes presented are based on intrinsic differences between boys and girls, or are learned. Several participants questioned the legitimacy of the intrinsic argument, raising that such beliefs reinforce negative gender stereotypes and obstruct the ability to address these issues.

Reflections for moving forward

As stated by Mark Figueroa, “from reading the comments, it appears that our experiences are different and that there is no one right response to improving the education and development of...boys. Clearly there is a need for various interventions at different levels. Countries have to make decisions on what works for them.”

Starting from the basis that inequalities and differences vary from country to country, region to region and person to person, the following section outlines some of the considerations that were put forward in relation to addressing changing patterns in boys’ education.

Strategies and interventions put forth by participants to address changing patterns in boys’ education include:

- Challenging existing norms and stereotypes to encourage changes in attitudes and behaviours with respect to constructs of masculinity and femininity;
- Addressing violence and discipline towards boys, gender stereotypes, and other detrimental notions and practices which shape masculinity, through initiatives such as anti-violence programmes;
- Offering initiatives which assist in development of parenting skills and foster parenting which prepares children for the education system, supports their progress, and challenges negative stereotypes and norms (e.g. parenting programmes and professional guidance);
- Promoting and supporting parents’ education as parents’ education has a role in shaping the education of their children;
- Strengthening links between education and livelihoods (for both boys and their families) by ensuring the learning environment contributes to the attainment of income generation. This can be supported by providing access to technical and vocation education and other education pathways where education is tailored to the demands of the workforce and priority sectors, and as such, students focus on obtaining relevant new skills;
- Supporting and developing interventions at a school-, community- and familial-level which engage boys to help them understand the value in their own education and empower them to pursue it (e.g. provision of mentoring programmes which develop a child’s interests and aspirations);
- Ensuring access to early childhood education which supports school readiness and socialisation - laying a foundation for success in education;

- Interaction with positive male role models - both in the home and at school - were discussed by many contributors as important for shaping individual ethics and values by offering male role models to look up to;
- Developing further research and gender disaggregated data for informed decision-making;
- Fostering engagement in extracurricular activities which offer an alternative to potentially anti-social behaviour, and promote positive relationships and the building of transferable skills;
- Changing teaching pedagogy to more effectively engage learners, such as using alternative teaching methods - learning is individual and happens in different ways; potential use of humour, games and competition for foster engagement and motivation; teacher training and peer-learning to support; and,
- Employing activities that support peer learning and leadership amongst students.

There was significant debate surrounding gender-segregation in education, with differing views as to whether single-gender classrooms and schools influence boys' education, as well as arguments and research cited for and against. However, as pointed out by Wilfred Adderley, regardless of whether classes are single sex or mixed, if the education system does not respond to the needs of students and provide high quality education delivered by skilled teachers, there will be significant challenges for the learning outcomes of students.

In addressing gender equality in education, it was raised that stereotypes and norms associated with girls (*e.g.* girls as submissive and compliant) and equity issues must also be tackled. The education system should play a role in reshaping gender concepts, and promoting an understanding of boys and girls as equal, with similar abilities and capabilities, working towards the same goals. As stated by Diana Pacheco and Devanshi Unadkat, "it is equally important to address the factors that are causing boys' underachievement [as] those that are limiting girls' potential and career opportunities." To this end, various contributors argued that strategies and interventions that are applicable to boys are similarly applicable to girls, thus improving education for all. As such, it was noted that this is not a war between the genders, and positive actions must be recognised to support both boys and girls. Learning can be taken from past achievements and new pathways to success can be formed.

All stakeholders, including schools, parents, communities and policymakers need to work together to drive change - opening a dialogue to create learning environments where "all children thrive regardless of their gender (Shirley Kelly)."

Learning can be taken from past achievements and new pathways to success can be formed.

A multisectoral approach to policymaking

The issues discussed and considerations put forth by participants supported a call, as voiced by Winsome Gordon, for "repositioning of education systems to respond to the individual learner's needs for meaningful education - that is education leading to productive livelihoods and respect for all. There is an urgent need for education, socio economic and cultural advancement to be more integrated and focused on human development."

Consequently, it is essential to develop education systems which are responsive to the needs of learners and equip learners with relevant skills and knowledge for their futures. This would ensure that meaningful education is being provided to help students to become responsible and productive citizens. Education policies should be holistic, and, as noted by various contributors, need to address

the issues related to boys' education using a multisectoral policy approach; integrating broader socioeconomic policies and development strategies to this end. The formulation of education policy should not be the sole responsibility of the ministry/relevant authority responsible for education. A collaborative, multisectoral approach is needed which includes all relevant ministries/authorities to promote coherence across policies, including economic, labour, gender rights and finance policies.

It has also been highlighted that education policies should incorporate a gender synchronised policy approach, which target both males and females. This approach is crucial to addressing the needs of both genders and supporting all students to access, complete and succeed in education.

To address the specific socio-economic, cultural, geographic and religious contexts, individual countries need to develop policies and intervention appropriate for their individual needs and priorities. Evidence-based policy, based on robust research and data, is essential for effective policy development. To ensure relevance of education, policies should be directed by real-time data to ensure that education is responding to global and local changes and needs. For example to this end, technical and vocational education can be tailored for the requirements of particular in-demand sectors, and for self-employment.

As is so often the case, the exchange of these experiences, including successes, challenges and promising approaches, can act as a central driver of progress towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Commonwealth & other Case Studies

Promundo, Global (from Ruti Levtoy, United States)

“Promundo works to promote gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls”

<http://promundoglobal.org/>

Social Renaissance Programme (from Kishore Singh, India)

Launched in 2011, the Social Renaissance Programme and Action Plan seek to create a multi-ministerial framework to address social issues of national concern.

Related Resources

From Nora Fyles

- UNESCO, 2015, **Global Monitoring Report: Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges**, UNESCO, <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2015/education-all-2000-2015-achievements-and-challenges#sthash.TYp1i3k8.dpbs>
- OECD, **The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence**, PISA, OECD Publishing, <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-gender-eng.pdf>

From Shirley Kelly, United Kingdom

- Dixon, E. J., 2014, “Helping boys’ learn”, Accessed 8 February 2016, <http://www.helpingboyslearn.com/>
- Gurian, M., and Stevens, K., 2005, *The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons from Falling Behind in School and Life*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Gurian, M., 2006, *The Wonder of Boys*, Tarcher-Putnam, New York.
- Gurian, M., and Stevens, K., 2010, “10 essential strategies for teaching boys effectively”, <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/604-gurian.aspx>

From Kishore Singh, India

- *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education*, Mr. Kishore Singh - Mission to Seychelles (A/HRC/26/27/Add. 1, 3 April 2014)

From Mark Figueroa, Moderator

- Video: **Changing Education Paradigms**, RSA Animate, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>
- Video: Ken Robinson, **Do schools kill creativity?**, TED Talks, http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity

From Diana Pacheco & Devanshi Unadkat, United States

- Jha, J., & Kelleher, F., 2006, **Boys' underachievement in education: An exploration in selected commonwealth countries**, The Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth of Learning <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLACREGTOPGENDER/Resources/CommonwealthBoysUnderachievement.pdf>
- Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, 2008, **Boys' underachievement: which boys are we talking about?** Government of Ontario, <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Martino.pdf>
- Murphy-Graham, E., 2012, **Opening minds, improving lives: Education and women's empowerment in Honduras**, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville.
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015, What lies behind gender inequality in education?, PISA in Focus, 49, 1-4.
- Watson, A., Kehler M., & Martino, W. (2010). The problem of boys' literacy underachievement: Raising some questions. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 53(5), 356-361.

From the Commonwealth Health & Education Unit and UNGEI

- UNGEI, 2006, **Why are Boys Under-performing in Education?**, UNGEI, http://www.ungei.org/index_3120.html
"This research finds that system-wide education structures such as the legislated years of compulsory education, whether education is provided for free and the process of academic streaming, can act as unintended push factors encouraging boys to leave school."
- Figueroa, Mark, 2007, 'Under-achieving Caribbean boys: marginalization or gender privileging', Commonwealth Education Partnerships 2007, <http://www.cedol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/23-25-2007.pdf>
"In as far as boys are now underachieving relative to girls, we must ask what has changed relative to when boys were overachieving?"
- Figueroa, Mark, 2010, 'Coming to terms with boys at risk in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean', Commonwealth Education Partnerships 2010, <http://www.cedol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/66-69-2010.pdf>
"In seeking immediate policy solutions, the underlying importance of gender construction is often overlooked, and issues relating to home and school are treated as if they operated outside the broader socio-economic and cultural framework."
- The World Bank, **Boys at Risk: A Gender Issue in the Caribbean Requiring a Multi-Faceted and Cross-Sectoral Approach**, <https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/10181>
"The core policies have an established track record in preventing disadvantaged children and young people from engaging in risky behavior. The best approaches focus on helping those affected by risky behavior to recover and return to a safe and productive path to adulthood. Although few of these interventions have been evaluated, there is sufficient evidence to make some recommendations. The general policies address critical risk factors at the community and macro levels, but have also been shown to be particularly effective at reducing risky behavior by young people."

- Barker, G., Verma, R., Crownover, J., Segundo, M., Fonseca, V., Contreras, J. M., Heilman, B., and Pawlak, P., 2012, 'Boys and education in the Global South: Emerging vulnerabilities and new opportunities for promoting changes in gender norms', *Journal of Boyhood Studies*, vol. 6, issue 1+2, <http://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Boys-and-Education-in-the-Global-South.pdf>
“Overall, as seen from the examples here, evidence is strong that the process of participatory group education and youth-led campaigns and activism works to change gender-related attitudes among boys and girls and that higher educational attainment for boys and girls is a contributor to various forms of gender equality.”

Discussion Question

From: Education Hub Facilitation Team

Sent: 25 January 2016 12:34

To: The Commonwealth Education Hub

Subject: [edu-hub] DISCUSSION: Changing patterns in boys' education achievement – Discussion ends 19 February 2016

Dear Education Hub Members,

Boys' drop-out and low educational achievement is considered a major gender issue, not only in the education sphere, but to social and economic development, and for achievement of the SDGs. To engage the education, gender and development communities across the Commonwealth and beyond, the Health and Education Unit (HEU) of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the [United Nations Girls' Education Initiative \(UNGEI\)](#) are partnering to launch an online discussion on '**Changing patterns in boys' educational achievement: What can we do to make things better?**'

This discussion will be moderated in a different format from previous discussions, with each week being guest moderated by different experts and accompanied by different guiding questions. The purpose of this format is to expand the breadth of knowledge being shared, engage with different issues involved, and to reach a more substantive outcome to be applied to policy and practice.

The following themes will guide the discussion over the next four weeks:

1. Early influences and later outcomes: addressing risk factors and vulnerabilities from a life course perspective
2. Gender stereotypes and gender socialisation and their impact on boys' achievement in education
3. Preventing the onset of anti-social and criminal behaviour
4. Multisectoral policies, actions and strategies for boys' educational achievement

The discussion will close on Friday, **19 February 2016**, after which we will consolidate a synthesis of the discussion which will be published on the Education Hub portal (<https://www.thecommonwealth-educationhub.net/>).

This discussion opens today, with the Prof. Mark Figueroa's opening moderator's statement being sent out later today.

To input to the discussion simply reply to this email or email eduhub@commonwealth.int.

We look forward to a productive discussion.

With best regards,

The Facilitation Team

The Commonwealth Education Hub

Email: edu-hub@groups.thecommonwealth.info

Full Responses

Moderator and Participant responses:

1. Mark Figueroa [Theme 1 Moderator], Jamaica
2. K. Ladhani, United Kingdom
3. Mark Figueroa [Theme 1 Moderator], Jamaica
4. Nora Fyles [Theme 2 Moderator], UNGEI
5. Winsome Gordon, Jamaica
6. Okwach Abagi, Kenya
7. Nora Fyles [Theme 2 Moderator], UNGEI
8. Avril Orr-Johnson, Trinidad & Tobago
9. Jim Wynn, United Kingdom
10. Obert Chigodora, Zimbabwe
11. Nora Fyles [Theme 2 Moderator], UNGEI
12. Wilfred T. Adderley [Theme 3 Moderator], The Bahamas
13. Pandora Johnson, The Bahamas
14. Wilfred T. Adderley [Theme 3 Moderator], The Bahamas
15. Okwach Abagi, Kenya (2nd response)
16. Gavin Dykes, United Kingdom
17. Ruti Levtov, United States
18. Wilfred T. Adderley [Theme 3 Moderator], The Bahamas
19. Winsome Gordon, Jamaica (2nd response)
20. Shirley Kelly, United Kingdom
21. Avijit Sarkar, India
22. Kishore Singh, India
23. Winsome Gordon, Jamaica (3rd response)
24. Michael Tapo, Papua New Guinea
25. Wilfred T. Adderley [Theme 3 Moderator], The Bahamas
26. Wilfred T. Adderley [Theme 3 Moderator], The Bahamas
27. Mark Figueroa [Theme 4 Moderator], Jamaica
28. Brenda Gourley, United Kingdom
29. Michael Tapo Papua New Guinea (2nd response)
30. Mark Figueroa [Theme 4 Moderator], Jamaica
31. Shirley Kelly, United Kingdom (2nd response)
32. Winsome Gordon, Jamaica (4th response)
33. Mark Figueroa [Theme 4 Moderator], Jamaica
34. Lebert Drysdale, Jamaica
35. Sue Dale Tunnicliffe, United Kingdom
36. Palesa Litseho, Lesotho
37. Diana Pacheco & Devanshi Unadkat, United States
38. Filomena Nhangumele, Mozambique
39. Mark Figueroa [Theme 4 Moderator], Jamaica

Mark Figueroa, Moderator

Moderator's opening statement on Topic 1: Early Influences and Later Outcomes: Addressing Risk factors and vulnerabilities from a life course perspective.

Moderator's opening statement on Topic 1: Early Influences and Later Outcomes: Addressing Risk factors and vulnerabilities from a life course perspective.

Fellow Participants,

As we embark on this four-week series of e-discussions, I welcome you in my capacity as moderator for the first theme, which has been framed within a life course perspective. In doing so, I note that participants are free to raise any issues relating to the over-arching theme: 'Changing Patterns in Boys' Educational Achievement: What Can We Do to Make Things Better?'

As moderator, my job is to promote a dialogue through which, we hope to identify positive steps that can build on past achievements and create new pathways that assist boys to be successful in their educational endeavours. The life cycle perspective draws our attention to the nodal points in each boy's life when he makes a transition from one phase to another. It reminds us that this is a very individual experience; although we may discern patterns with respect to different groups of children who face diverse circumstances within the Commonwealth and beyond.

Celebrating the successes of past initiatives and seeking solutions to current challenges, in a process of dialogue with colleagues, gives us a unique opportunity to take a comparative approach across countries and over time. In this context, we may discover that explanations and proposals, which at first sight seem unassailable, based on an assessment of the situation in one country or region, may not seem as viable when placed in a comparative and historical context.

Thus we must always ask: What are the dynamic processes that have brought us to this point? In the absence of intervention, where will they take us and what can be done to bring about a different future? How does the situation in each country or region compare with that which others are experiencing today, have experienced in the past and are likely to experience in the future?

These questions need to be posed both in relation to children as individuals and in relation to the ideas and practices which influence what they make of the opportunities that are available to them. As we observe patterns of changing outcomes, we must ask: What is driving these changes? And, however good or bad the situation may be: How can we make things better?

As we strive to improve the educational outcomes for boys we must also ask: What are the things that boys need to challenge to achieve a better future? What do we need to collectively challenge in order to create improved opportunities for boys? Are we preparing boys for the past roles that their forefathers played or are we preparing them to deal with changed circumstance?

Will the boys need to critically rethink past assumption as to what it is to be a man or do we need to re-inscribe old scripts regarding masculinity with a view to produce better outcomes for boys within the educational system? In making changes which uplift the performance of boys can we choose alternatives which also have a positive impact on the performance of girls as well?

These are complex issues that call for thoughtful responses which can benefit from insights drawn from the diverse situations facing boys across the Commonwealth and beyond. I therefore look forward to your full participation as we embark on this timely e-discussion.

Best wishes,

Mark Figueroa

K. Ladhani, United Kingdom

In my experience as a teacher in the UK I have found that boys' educational achievement varies, but that students in areas with a lower average income or a large proportion of disadvantaged students (those on free school meals), are likely to be in a worse situation. A strategy to overcome this in the UK has been to allocate more education funding to students categorised as disadvantaged, however, this additional funding is not increased in proportion to the needs of students, which makes it difficult for schools to cater appropriately for students' needs.

It is vital that education systems better address the interests of boys to help them reach their potential and maximise the opportunities offered from education. Some potential strategies could be:

- Providing incentives for achievement which appeal to students' non-academic interests, such as participating in sports or trips;
- Professional guidance to parents on "positive parenting" techniques to help address other issues that may be affecting boys' education;
- Having strong male role models for boys (particularly those from female-headed households) in schools to look up to; and,
- Mentoring from professionals in fields of interest to help develop boys' aspirations.

Mark Figueroa, Moderator

Thanks to our first contributor for a thoughtful comment distilled from class room practice.

The issue of varying achievement is raised and linked to disadvantaged situations (the particular type of disadvantages were not specified in detail, but the reference to school meals suggests income if not other disadvantages). We may ask: is this just due to a lack of resources available to these students? Or in the UK (and any other) case: does it have to do with the extent to which education is valued in these students' circles relative to students from more favourable circumstances? What direct and indirect messages are different boys getting which may affect their schooling? Are different boys getting different messages regarding school and what it means to be a boy?

The latter is connected to the proposal re positive parenting. Whether we are parents or not we can appreciate how unprepared many persons are for the challenges of parenting, which for many is the hardest task they will ever undertake; while others take it on with greater levity. In speaking to parenting, a question to ask is: are there parenting practices which relate to how boys are raised which are affecting their performance in school, and if there are, can they be challenged or should the school accept the way boys are raised and work to these patterns?

This takes us to the incentives that boys might be given. How can incentives help boys develop the attributes which will make them do better in school? Can they reinforce the very attributes which cause them to do poorly? How do we get to the point of intrinsic interest in learning, or is this a dream? How do we avoid the need to escalate incentives as children move to higher levels of schooling? Speaking as a University teacher, some of my colleagues claim that by the time the students get to us, if we can't offer a BMW we are unlikely to motivate.

How do we deal with the issue of role models for boys in school systems which are overwhelmingly staffed by women (especially in countries where a very large proportion of children grow up in female headed household)? Does being female rule one out as a role model? Can anyone point to experience or studies on these questions? What other strategies can other participants distil from their teaching or youth-work experience?

Nora Fyles, Moderator

Moderator's opening statement on Topic 2: Gender stereotypes and gender socialisation and their impact on boys' achievement in education

For the last 15 years, UNGEI has advocated for the rights of girls to attend and succeed in school. When UNGEI was launched in 2000 the most pressing 'gender issue' in education was about girls' disadvantage relative to boys - as girls made up the vast majority of the 84 million children and adolescents out of school. Still today, for the most disadvantaged, it is the girl who is least likely to enrol in school and most likely to drop out. According to the most recent data from the UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report, the poorest girls are still being left behind. While richest boys in Sub Saharan Africa will all complete primary school by 2021, and the poorest boys by 2069, the poorest girls will only achieve universal primary education in 2086 (UNESCO, 2015).

Over the last 15 years, the situation of girls' education has made huge progress. We now understand that globally, the 'gender issue' in schools is not only about girls' disadvantage. We know that boys are underachieving, dropping out, and not completing school, in rich countries as in poor. A 2015 study published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that across 65 high and middle income countries 14% of boys and 9% of girls did not attain the baseline level of proficiency in reading, mathematics and science. In fact, six out of ten students who did not attain the baseline level of proficiency in any of those subjects were boys (OECD, 2015).

So what is the gender issue? To what extent does it impact boys' (or girls') performance in school? How can we use what we know about gender relations to understand boys' educational experience especially as adolescents?

When we apply our gender lens, we see that schools are a mirror of society, and the gender norms prevalent in society are equally present in schools. While many factors influence girls' and boys' experience of education, gender norms are of critical importance. In a four-country study in Asia, it was commonly believed that 'school is for girls' (UNGEI 2012). Jamaican boys reported that school is 'girlish' (USAID 2011); and boys in Australia claimed that 'most guys who like English are faggots' (Watson 2010). Schools are gendered spaces where girls and boys learn what it means to be female and male, and where power dynamics between men and women as well as adults and children play out on a daily basis. Gender stereotypes can be reinforced by teacher attitudes or behaviors, and teaching styles can favor one sex over the other. Girls learn to underperform in math, and boys learn that it is normal to be violent, tough and act out. Unfortunately, not all schools are safe places for learning. Too often boys are exposed to rigid, violent, and hyper-masculine norms—and the ensuing bullying, homophobic or otherwise, that come from those—and girls to sexual harassment and other forms of violence and discrimination (Baker 2012).

So what about the gendered nature of the classroom and its impact on girls and boys? How do other inequalities intersect with gender in the classroom - ethnicity, socioeconomic status or disability? How can we interrupt this process of socialization to create safe, violence-free learning environments where boys and girls have equal opportunities and are supported to excel?

The Sustainable Development Goal, Education 2030, states that gender equality is inextricably linked to the right to education for all, and that we must act explicitly to eliminate gender bias. This is a tall order, and we have much to learn. We look forward to hearing your perspective on gender equality (and inequality) and boys' achievement.

Nora Fyles

Winsome Gordon, Jamaica

Dear Participants,

In Jamaica we are cognizant of the complexity of the issues surrounding the education of boys. While out of school girls in Africa want to be in school, many of the boys, in the Caribbean, are not attracted to school. Boys do not see economic value in education as it is structured. Maybe it is time to raise our heads out of the sand and accept that the structure of education in many developing countries does not prepare students for sustainable livelihoods. There is an urgent need to revisit the concept of schooling. In Jamaica, we are working in partnership The Commonwealth Secretariat to build teaching strategies that enable the engagement of boys in education. We have compiled a handbook on successful strategies and we will be willing to share it with anyone who request it. We would also like to hear from persons who have tried other strategies successfully.

Teachers have shared some of their experiences relating to boys as follows:

1. at both primary and secondary levels prefer to be in class together because the girls ridicule them when they make mistakes;
2. love hands on interactive classes , they like to argue and debate on topics;
3. love recognition and praise, and also competition;
4. are keen on the on-the-spot justice. If there is an issue between two boys, the teachers need to resolve it immediately;
5. highly value respectful relationships. Teachers try not to embarrass them in front of their peers;
6. benefit from the use of IT in their classes. They become more engaged with the learning experiences; and,
7. As they grow older, they consider schooling to be a non-productive activity. They can make more money out of school.

Recently teachers informed us that in Jamaica, parents provide girls with more resources for education than for the boys. Generally, the girls are more supported to stay in school. In some schools, parents purchase books for the girls first and the boys afterwards. A quick research also showed that teachers do not have a positive perception regarding the abilities of boys. School systems need to be more flexible and teachers more creative in order to meet the diverse learning needs of boys.

Okwach Abagi, Kenya

Dear Participants,

Thanks moderator for your opening statement on the issue at hand.

My comments are informed by socio-cultural and traditional attitudes and practices in African setting and the effects of globalization on socializing children including educating them, with some specific examples from country Kenya. Gender difference in school participation and learning outcomes between boys and girls has been a common problems across African countries. But the degree of differences vary from country to country, and in Kenyan situation from region to region. From independence (about 45 years in average), boys outperformed girls in education at all levels in many countries in Africa apart from countries like Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho in Southern Africa. This was because of socio-cultural norms and values, beliefs and socialization patterns that gave boys a head start compared to girls. In an African family boys were regarded as the cornerstone of the family and one who hold family heritage. Thus socialization at family level/home was that boys were given priority - good food, good place to sleep, good advise, space to innovate and interact at the expense of girls etc. With the introduction of schooling, the same myths, attitudes and practices were continued. For example, in Kenya on one hand the education policies and strategies were gender blind / neutral targeting 'children' without considering the socio-cultural values and practices. On the other hand, most parents, poor families in particular, made decision to only send and/support their 'special child' - boys to school. Girls were either not taken to school, if they were then could be withdrawn anytime before completing even primary education cycle. Traditional practices like FGM and early (child) marriages exacerbated the problem. Also, across the country there were more boys' boarding schools with enough trained teachers, good facilities, well equipped with for example laboratories compared to girls schools among other things. With this kind of situation, for years, boys outperformed girls in both end of primary and end of secondary national examinations and in university education. Men dominated politics and leadership in Kenya, thus the role models for boys to aspire for such positions were ready available.

But in the last one and half decades, two things happens in Kenya, like in many African countries that have impacted negatively on boys' participation in education. First is globalization and stress on market economy. In the last two decades, Kenya's economy has been doing badly, with increased unemployment for the youth including the educated. Role models were no longer the schooled. But rich business men. In naturally endowed regions in the country - coffee and tea growing and mining areas for example, boys were dropping out of school fast and getting into economic and other activities to make money. In such regions more girls were going to school, staying longer and outperforming the boys. The second issue is the introduction of UNGEI 15 years ago. As a result of this the international community and donors focused more on girls' education, as a stop-gap measure. In Kenyan situation, legal and policy frameworks on gender equality were developed and there has been increased in advocacy and investment that promote girls' education. For example, existing girl schools were renovated and good equipped with more facilities and good trained teachers. Boys' education got less focus in policy and by the media. Research has shown that in the last decade, there has been a shift of socialization pattern at home and nationally. Girls' and women have been empowered and they are competing favourably with boys and even beating them in education and leadership position. There are reports that boys have been 'neglected' and left to be socialized by digital/social media or by 'bad guys' - terrorists in some parts of Kenya. Boys have become 'sisy', some frustrated, some just taking it easy - thus no competitive spirit compared to girls. With the spread of small and medium enterprises like riding bicycles and motorcycles, and trading more and more boys are dropping out of school. Emergence of gangs for higher, like outlawed Mungiki group and youth radicalization in religious institutions to join Al Shabab etc. has also affected boys' participation and performance in school.

What do we need to do? First to except that there is a major problem - boys are not performing well in school thus becoming a danger for peace and security. Two, countries need to have reliable gender disaggregated data on girls' and boys' participation in education at all levels from ECDE to university for decision making and programming. Comprehensive research is needed. Three, we need to target boys for empowerment from gender perspective. Make them like education, see its value and increase their participation. Externally, countries must make available employment and business opportunities for both schooled boys and girls. So long us there are negative role models - corrupt men, unschooled rich men, and unschooled leaders at national level etc. boys will continue neglecting education.

Nora Fyles, Moderator

Thank you for the interesting and important comments on boys' education achievement. The reality of boys' lives in Trinidad and Tobago is indeed stark, and the message clear that growing up a boy in that environment leaves scars. That stereotypical expectations start so early in a boy's life raises serious issues for schools. To what extent can even the most authentic and engaging classroom rewrite the script provided to boys? The experience of Jamaica and the UK both noted how schools, curriculum and teachers reinforce approaches with do not contribute to boys' success. Although we know that with the right support schools can be provide spaces for girls and boys to reflect on and challenge gender norms but such programs are not universally available. Dr. Gordon calls on participants to share effective strategies for engaging boys - we look forward to hearing from you.

From today I take away some significant challenges and a few wonderful images of meaningful and supportive learning environments: curriculum based on building toilet blocks; on-the-spot justice, recognition and praise, and respectful relationships.

Thank you for sharing your experience.

Avril Orr-Johnson, Trinidad & Tobago

In some countries, there were stereotypes stating that mothers socialize the babies differently e.g.:

- Clothing - Male babies were mainly dressed in blue while girls dressed in pink. Play toys for male toddlers were vehicles, guns, animals while little girls were given dolls, books or cuddly stuffed toys.

- Chores - Boys were assigned outdoor duties such as emptying the garbage, weeding and weeding the yard, Girls on the other hand were assigned indoor chores e.g. washing dishes, tidying house.
- Boys would be expected to imitate the role of father and girl, that of mother or female. Many societies believe that the male child should be educated to continue the name of the family while the daughter be prepared for family life and marriage.
- Emotions - Boys were cultured to be tough and macho. They were nurtured to stifle their emotions while girls fully expressed their emotions and would be pampered. Many fathers from the Caribbean hardly interacted with their sons. There were too shy to sit and communicate with their sons and embracing them was not the norm. Father and son interfaced mainly when the situation warrants punishment or ridicule.

From these early influences and manner of socialization, we have indeed done our son an injustice. They have grown to be men with pent up anger. Many males mask their fears with drugs, alcohol rather than discussing or confiding in others. Too many are unable to sustain meaningful intimate relationships. They believe in having multiple relationships because of lack of trust. Many are short tempered and are unable to discuss issues with their fiancé or wife.

Females are moving into male dominated professions e.g. construction, pilots, politics, engineers, computers. More women engage in university level than men. Although, we have more men as chefs and educators, the fact shows that more women are breaking the glass ceiling.

Some of our men are having self-esteem issues and too many of our homes are run by single parents, mainly the mother. This situation results in a breakdown in family life and put our sons at risk. The homes are run by women and many of our schools are outnumbered by female teachers. The level of indiscipline is increasing as boys seem to have no mentors. Many times they complain that their fathers are not in their lives and their step fathers don't relate to them.

Jim Wynn, United Kingdom

If I could wave a magic wand I'd re-write the curriculum so that it was much more appealing to boys and girls and their interests at their particular stage of readiness. Some schools already do this within the constraints of their national curricula and it makes a massive difference. Have a look at Vigo school in the UK for example here. Subjects covered at one stage are flying, cars and boats with the usual subject based curriculum weaved in alongside the values the school is trying to promote too.

The real issue for teachers with this approach is a lack of experience and knowledge about how to make the learning authentic. The incentive for a boy to learn is in the interest that is generated. I recall a group of boys whooping and cheering when they managed to build a toilet block in a game called Theme Park. Building a toilet block enabled more people to use the theme park which unlocked the ability to design and build more rides. If building a toilet block can be made exciting than anything can.

So the answer for me is easy- authenticity- but the complication is the ability of education systems to allow this in the context of subject silos that are just too abstract.

Obert Chigodora, Zimbabwe

Dear participants,

In my experience working on Gender and Education I have observed the following as factors contributing to boys' poor educational achievements and subsequent drop-out:

1. Negative perceptions on the relevance of education- it is normally understood that with better educational attainment, one is positioned to lead a better and comfortable life. For boys it becomes motivational as it facilitates the meeting of "their" Gender role of being family providers. However, when prevailing socio-economic circumstances within a particular context (such as high unemployment rates, massive company closures) are contrary to this understanding, there will be no motivation to

remain in school. In the end boys may end up dropping out of school in pursuit of other non-formal economic activities (e.g. illegal mining activities) in order to meet the expected gender role of being family providers.

2. Role of gender practitioners- it seems some gender practitioners are guilty of the misconception of equating Gender with “Women/Girls only” programming. This is usually noted in some Gender messaging and programming that fails to meaningfully bring on board the involvement of men and boys. For example some Gender programming interventions in education tend to focus heavily on girls’ only needs with limited, if any, incorporation of boys’ issues. As a result, boys are left more exposed and vulnerable to risk factors that may lead them to dropping out of school or performing poorly as they will be no one really focusing on responding to their needs.
3. Negative notions of masculinities also contribute to boys’ poor educational achievements. Various media communication channels project an idea of “a real man” as someone associated with substance abuse. Some young boys end up emulating that and begin to identify themselves with such characters as their role models resulting in them dropping out of school. Although this is a challenge which affect boys from across different settings, it is mainly prevalent in urban settings where boys have unlimited access to various media communication channels.

Promising solutions:

1. Adopt gender synchronised policy approaches on education programmes where there is real meaningful involvement of both boys and girls and men and women. This will afford an opportunity for gender practitioners to effectively respond to the gender needs affecting both sexes in terms of their access to education, completion and succeed.
2. To improve on the relevance of education in a given context, there is need for educational practitioners to regularly conduct assessments on the status of education in order to respond to new demands that may require different set of skills. Education policy formulations should be guided by such real time data assessments.

Nora Fyles, Moderator

Dear Participants

Input from Zimbabwe today reminds us of the global nature of our question/issue and introduces new ideas not yet considered. The socio-economic circumstances such as high unemployment and massive company closures undermines the promise of school as a way of preparing for adulthood - for either boys or girls. In that situation, opportunities offered in illegal mining or drug related activities are attractive indeed. Schools may well be (perceived as) inadequate for preparing boys (and girls) to find sustainable livelihoods once they become adults; but what actually constitutes ‘sustainable livelihood’ (for women or men) at this juncture, 15 years into the 21st century? How can we ensure that schools keep up with the changing needs of young men and women? The suggestion offered by Obert Chigodora is an interesting one - for educational practitioners to regularly conduct assessments on the status of education in order to respond to new (labour market) demands that may require different set of skills. And for education policy formulations to be guided by such ‘real time’ data assessments. Further, how do we ensure that public education is financed to ensure it is ‘quality’ education, taught by well-trained, well-remunerated, well-supported, motivated educators? And that is accessible (with no financial barriers) and useful to all students, both male and female?

Today’s contribution also introduced a key point, that ‘gender’ is often misunderstood to mean ‘girls and women’. As this e-discussion reinforces, gender is not only about girls. Gender norms have a significant impact on both girls and boys - part and parcel of how boys and girls, women and men are perceived and treated in a given society. Efforts to support students to reflect and question gender norms, or change how they perceive themselves or each other must include both girls and boys, either in separate groups or together. Gender equality in school and in the broader society will only be achieved with the meaningful engagement of men and boys. The promising strategy suggested today is a good one: Adopt gender synchronised policy approaches on education programmes where there is real meaningful involvement of both boys and girls and men and women. This will afford an opportunity for gender practitioners to effectively respond to the gender needs affecting both sexes in terms of their access to education, completion and succeed.

Looking forward to reading more tomorrow.

Nora

Wilfred T. Adderley, Moderator

Moderator's opening statement on Topic 3: Fostering positive social growth and behaviour among boys

Dear Participants,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you as your Moderator for this week's discussion topic 'Fostering Positive Social Growth and Behaviour Among Boys'. The focus of this week's topic is to really gain more insight as to how we can find ways to improve the social development of boys that would help them to become positive contributors in society. Therefore, we hope that this topic will spark a diverse array of discussions on socio-economic situations to gender identity of which are factors that affect the social development of boys.

Growing up as a boy in many societies seem to have a similar set of specific guidelines that do not change. Boys are expected to display attributes and behaviours that are tied to a societies' image of what constitutes masculinity or being male. These attributes are expected to be expressed in the physical characteristics of self-awareness and presentation, mannerisms, communication and social interaction. Boys are expected to be tough, to engage in rigorous activities, to excel at certain activities and to shun or stigmatise certain behaviours. However, are these attributes hard wired within boys' DNA or are they tied to societal norms and mores?

With more studies being presented on gender and what constitutes gender, within this century, the attributes that boys express have opened discussions regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, for example in many societies boys are expected and encouraged to gravitate towards sports or technology but are not expected or encouraged to gravitate towards certain fine arts or beauty/lifestyle related activities. Therefore, this form of societal stereotyping causes boys to view the former as masculine and the latter as feminine which leads to behaviours that stigmatise and or to bully boys who may be interested or involved in those activities as 'weak'. Societies that places emphasis on these stigmatisations tend to see the development of 'hyper masculine' attitudes among boys which causes them to shun and not engage in activities that they consider effeminate. This translates into social constructs that leads to the 'hyper dominant' attitudes that are associated with male deviant activity. However, who and which of society's institutions should be held responsible for deciding what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and interests among boys? How does this decision shape their socialisation? And, what would be needed to encourage the development of positive self-awareness and self-esteem that would translate to a positive outlook on societal norms for boys?

Pandora Johnson, The Bahamas

What would be needed to encourage the development of positive self-awareness and self-esteem that would translate to a positive outlook on societal norms for boys?

It is believed that one of the factors contributing to the situation is the absence of male figures in the home and in the school. The absence of a father figure/male role model in the home means that there is no model of what it means to be a male. The male figures they see in the community and model their behaviour after tend to be the gang leader, the drug dealer, the macho man who is likely to encourage violence and aggressive behaviour. Violent, aggressive behaviour is deemed to be appropriate in the home and in the community. This is what research completed by persons at COB seem to suggest. The teacher population is predominantly female. This is particularly so in the primary schools. (UNESCO Stats cites Female teachers at 92% in Primary School and 76.42 in Secondary School in the year 2010 <http://knoema.com/UNESCOISD2014Aug/unesco-institute-for-statistics-data-august-2014?regionId=BS>). Children spend a great deal of their waking hours in school and much of their formation is fostered at this level. This absence of a male role model again manifests itself. Added to this is that much of our methodology in teaching favours females. That is, we expect children

to sit and listen for a great deal of time. Girls are more inclined to do this. Boys on the other hand are robust, they want to move and explore, find out how things work. This contributes to boys dropping out not necessarily physically but mentally. In an effort to arrest this trend, one of the primary schools engaged an experiment in providing all boys classes. The results from this experiment were encouraging. Efforts were underway to follow those boys and I believe that many of them are now at the end of the secondary school. All of this is to highlight the need for mentorship. There are programmes put on by churches and some community groups that focus on mentoring. In fact one group has an annual father son day where boys and men get together to engage in positive activities. The father son does not have to be a biological connection.

There is also the need to revitalize such movements as Boys Brigades, Scouts and other youth groups like Junior Achievement and GGYA. Parenting programmes are also a means of influencing the positive social growth and behaviours among boys. Which environment(s) would be more conducive to this development, i.e. would it be the home, the church, school, the community?

Indeed all of these agencies must be involved. If any of the programmes are to have the desired success there must be alignment among these groups. Any Social Scientist who has looked at society will suggest the challenges we are faced with today are as a result of there being a disconnect among these several institution.

Okwach Abagi, Kenya

Dear Participants,

The irrelevancy of education - primary to university level, is also a serious issue in Kenya that makes boys drop-out of school and lose interest in pursuing higher education. As I mentioned in my earlier contribution, the role models for boys in our society are not the 'educated' - professors. But the rich - no matter how they acquired it. A recent study (Jan 2016) indicates that the youth in Kenya (19 - 24) indicates that almost 50% of those surveyed indicated that they would do anything to become rich and are ready to elect corrupt leaders. Unemployment and helplessness of the youth - even graduates, makes them easy targets for terrorists etc. Education and training reform for relevance, quality and gender responsiveness is required.

Thanks

Gavin Dykes, United Kingdom

Changing patterns in boys' education achievement seems to be driven by the relative performance of girls and boys. If that is true, then there's something of a presumption that girls' education achievement is acceptable and we should turn our focus to boys. I suggest that we are unwise to make such presumptions. We should be looking to improve performance and opportunity for all. If we look across all students, I wonder how well we understand the motivation and aspirations of our students. I wonder also who understands the world they see, and the future they are likely to encounter best. If we are raise education achievement across the board, understanding the aspirations of students and aligning education accordingly seems sensible. There is some evidence that achievement can be enhance when this is done. I also believe that we might encourage students to become the arbiters of what makes for a good education for the worlds in which they are growing up.

Asking students about their aspirations is a way to encourage them to think about who they would like to be, and what they would like to achieve. If they would like to become a professional soccer player for example, then that's a great aspiration, and may be in maths or science or literature, there are ways to adjust the work they might do in these subject areas that help them step towards their aspiration. If their aspiration is in art - the same is true. One of the gifts of a great teacher is to understand such aspirations and how teaching in a subject area can help each student to step towards their aspirations. Perhaps greater attention to students' aspirations rather than the general improvement of grades could help make a difference.

Another variation on this theme is associated with the aspiration to make the world a better place. Perhaps linking learning to the Sustainable Development Goals and their achievement, not simply by academic study,

but also through enabling practical agency to students in stepping towards these goals is another way in which we could change patterns in boys' education achievement, and in girls'?

Ruti Levtov, United States

Thank you to the moderators and contributors for this engaging and thought-provoking discussion. The issue of boys' underachievement and drop out is a pressing one in many countries, as contributors have highlighted, and merits our attention. However, it's important that we consider the issue of boys' underachievement in the broader context of gender and other social inequalities in schools and in society. The different challenges facing boys and girls in schools often stem from the same root causes: rigid expectations of how boys and girls should behave, and the opportunities that are available to them that shape their lives.

In a 2008 book, anthropologist Janise Hurtig made the argument that given the way many of our schools are structured, it is no wonder that girls often do better, and boys drop out. What many schools are asking from their students, namely compliance and submissiveness, are traits that are emphasized as desirable for girls and women -- but not boys -- in day to day life. What is needed is a change in these gendered expectations, improvements in the quality of schools, and of course, attention to other structural issues like economic opportunities and racial/ethnic inequalities, as contributor Obert Chigodora mentioned. When we attempt to address these issues, we have to be very careful that our approach does not reinforce harmful norms, or, as Nora wrote: "re-inscribe old scripts regarding masculinity."

Dr. Gordon shared a list of strategies and observations about boys in the school setting, but I would argue that most if not all of these strategies are also applicable to girls: for example, the need to feel safe and supported and not humiliated by teachers or peers; a focus on active, relevant learning. In order to achieve this, we have to engage not just with students, but with the whole school system, with parents, and with communities.

The organization I work for, Promundo, has been working with men and boys, alongside women and girls, to challenge harmful gender norms and behaviors for more than 15 years with positive results. Our programs working with young men and young women and with teachers, and other programs like the Gender Equity Movement in Schools and the Institute for Human Rights Education in India show that change is possible. Making schools into places that are safe and welcoming for all children, that give children opportunities that are not constrained by their gender, race, or social class, and, importantly, that take into account the links between education and employment opportunities, may help us reduce inequalities in schooling.

Wilfred T. Adderley, Moderator

I wish to thank participants for their contributions to the discussion today.

After, reading your contributions, I wish to raise these key points:

1. As mentioned by participants Agbi (Kenya) and Johnson (The Bahamas), it would appear that one of the reasons for poor socialisation among boys is the lack of positive role models. Boys look for examples within familiar settings that they can imitate and emulate. This behaviour develops based off of a boy's interest and he chooses a role model that displays the attributes of which he wishes to aspire. However, the deciding factor between positive and negative would be exposure and environment. If he is in an environment where he is exposed to negative behaviours, with no exposure to appropriate behaviours or guidance that helps him to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate, he will adopt it and see it as normal. Therefore, in the absence of male role models within the home, community programmes are great outlets for boys to gain guidance and lessons on society.
2. Gender equality is an important factor in social development among boys, as highlighted by participants Dykes and Levtov. Boys should be made aware that girls are not weak or should be seen as compliant and/or submissive beings. They should understand that although there are differences in

certain physical traits, each sex has the same abilities and capabilities to attain high achievements. However, it should not be a battle but camaraderie. In this regard, although, there is more to be done regarding education for girls, focusing on the boys will not in any way shift the focus away from the positive strides that has been made in the development of education for girls. The reason why there should be a focus on changing patterns in boys' education is that many of them grow up with the mind-set that abilities are more valuable than education or higher learning, for e.g. 'Why do I need to focus on school (academics) when I am the best soccer player in my community?' It is this mind-set that teachers should try to influence by providing lessons that not just focus on the theoretical but also the practical. Providing the link between ability and knowledge helps boys to fully understand how to apply themselves that will allow for them to be successful and better able to handle social responsibilities. When boys grow up not understanding this link and are not capable of handling social responsibilities it could lead to imbalances in societies, where women have to fill the gap without a responsible partner in institutions like the home, the school, and professional level careers. Therefore, assisting boys to fully understand how to link their abilities with knowledge and apply it to career planning will allow them to not just look for a job or to just make money but to strive for community and societal development.

3. Fostering positive social growth and behaviours in boys is not just tied to one institution. It should take the entire society to contribute to providing assistance to meet this goal. Boys should be able to receive guidance in a safe environment from persons who truly understand their worth and from those who can share their life experiences, highlighting mistakes but how they were able to overcome them, as examples for problem solving.

Winsome Gordon, Jamaica

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to draw attention to the reference that Ruti Levov made concerning the strategies for boys. I agree that they might be equally suitable for girls but they are absolutely necessary for boys. In some primary schools in Jamaica, the principal separates the boys from the girls for their core subjects. At this young age the girls ridicule the boys when they are unsuccessful at learning tasks. In the gender separated classes, boys achieve more than in the coed. classes. The boys expressed the need to feel safe and positive about themselves. Our girls grow up with an understanding that they are to be protected and they feel protected. On the other hand the boys are made to feel that they must be strong at all times and never display evidence of weakness.

Shirley Kelly, United Kingdom

I agree with Mr./Ms. Ruti Levov that we need to create learning environment where all children thrive regardless of their gender. The strategies that are currently employed to assist boys can be just as effective for girls as they are for boys. Boys are physiologically, emotionally, and behaviourally different to girls and are most likely to end up in Special Education class (75%) than girls (25%).

Michael Guran (2005) highlights a number of differences between boys and girls which imply that our current educational practices that expect boys to sit quietly and learn in the classroom undermines boys achievement while facilitating the achievement of girls. Hence, boys are at a disadvantages in our classrooms to the point that they are largely disengaged from the learning process.

Boys are being disciplined in record numbers. Some principals claim that 95% of disciplinary measures (including suspensions and expulsions) are targeted toward boys. Boys are less involved than girls in extracurricular activities such as participating on the debating club, student council, music, art, etc. They listen less in class and do less homework than girls. Their motivation to learn is low and their dropout rates are high.

Six physiological differences that contribute to the difference in educational outcomes between boys and girls are listed below:

1. "Boys show more areas in the brain dedicated to spatial-mechanical strengths, whereas girls generally demonstrate a focus on verbal-emotive processing.
2. Girls are generally hardwired to be less impulsive, enabling them to sit still, focus, read, and write at an earlier age than boys.
3. Boys are often misdiagnosed with learning disabilities and attention-deficit issues when educators are not aware of the delicate neurology of the male developing brain.
4. Boys' brains need more rest times during a day of learning. When bored, boys tend to "zone out" more than girls and require rest periods before reengaging in learning.
5. Boys are hardwired to be single-task focused, whereas girls' hardwiring demonstrates strength in multitasking. Transitions are more difficult for boys due to this lateralization of the brain versus typical female cross communication of brain hemispheres.
6. Less oxytocin in the brain of males leads to more aggression and playful rough-housing. Girls, on the other hands, are more predisposed to cooperative negotiation, have a much easier time with impulse control, and can sit "criss-cross-apple-sauce" in the reading circle with ease. Many boys have a difficult time sitting still to hear the teacher's story, as they are movement-driven (kinesthetic) in their learning process" (research and findings cited from Gurian, 2005 & 2006).

In the article "10 Essential Strategies for Teaching Boys Effectively", Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens outlines how we can level the playing field for boys in our classrooms. The proposed strategies will enhance the educational outcomes for both boys and girls.

The list of strategies is copied below for your convenience:

1. **Teachers increase the use of graphics, pictures, and storyboards in literacy-related classes and assignments.** When teachers use pictures and graphics more often (even well into high school), boys write with more detail, retain more information, and get better grades on written work across the curriculum.
2. **Classroom methodology includes project-based education in which the teacher facilitates hands-on, kinesthetic learning.** The more learning is project-driven and kinesthetic, the more boys' bodies will be engaged in learning—causing more information to be retained, remembered, and displayed on tests and assignments.
3. **Teachers provide competitive learning opportunities, even while holding to cooperative learning frameworks.** Competitive learning includes classroom debates, content-related games, and goal-oriented activities; these are often essential for boy-learning and highly useful for the life success of girls, too.
4. **Classroom curricula include skills training in time, homework, and classroom management.** In order to feel competent, engaged, and motivated, many boys need help learning how to do homework, follow directions, and succeed in school and life; classrooms are the primary place these boys come for that training.
5. **Approximately 50 percent of reading and writing choices in a classroom are left up to the students themselves.** Regularly including non-traditional materials, such as graphic novels, magazines, and comic books, increases boys' engagement in reading and improves both creative and expository writing.
6. **Teachers move around their classrooms as they teach.** Instructors' physical movement increases boys' engagement, and includes the teacher leading students in physical "brain breaks"—quick, one-minute brain-awakening activities—that keep boys' minds engaged.
7. **Students are allowed to move around as needed in classrooms, and they are taught how to practice self-discipline in their movement.** This strategy is especially useful when male students are reading or

writing—when certain boys twitch, tap their feet, stand up, or pace, they are often learning better than if they sit still, but teachers are often not trained in innovating toward more movement in classrooms.

8. **Male mentoring systems permeate the school culture, including use of parent-mentors, male teachers, vertical mentoring (e.g., high school students mentoring elementary students), and male peer mentoring.** By 16, vocationally oriented boys (and girls) need schools and communities to provide access to jobs and mentors through which students can master a trade.
9. **Teachers use boys-only (and girls-only) group work and discussion groups in core classes such as language arts, math, science, and technology.** Some boys and girls who do not flourish in the busyness or social distraction of coed classes get a chance to flourish in new ways in single-sex groupings.
10. **Teachers and counsellors provide skill building for sensitive boys (approximately 20 percent of males fall somewhere on the "sensitive boy" spectrum), and special education classes are taught by teachers trained in how to teach boys specifically.** This is crucial because approximately 70 percent of learning-disabled students nationwide are boys.

Canadian researcher Dr. Edmond Dixon (2014) proposes that meaningful active learning activities that are infused with humour, games, and opportunities for competition and mastery foster engagement, motivation, and higher level of achievement among boys. A more brain-based approach to learning versus a methodological approach to learning is more conducive to promoting higher levels of achievement among both boys and girls.

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Avijit Sarkar, India

Low achievement rate of boys' is a matter of concern throughout the world. The following measure can be taken:

1. Motivate the boys for achieving the goals.
2. Guide the boys for fixing the goal of life.
3. Counselling the parents.
4. Creating more job opportunity for the boys.
5. Encourage the boys to participate in sports.

Kishore Singh, India

Taken from the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Mr. Kishore Singh - Mission to Seychelles (A/HRC/26/27/Add. 1, 3 April 2014).

Establishing gender balance in education

Girls' performance in general education overshadows that of boys. According to available reports, girls outperform boys in part because of parental and teacher attitudes which push girls to stay in school, while neglecting to attend equally to the performance concerns of boys. The performance disparity has recently become more pronounced at the university level. It has been suggested that the disparity is also the result of a number of social problems, including greater drug dependence, school behavioural problems and learning difficulties among young men. Boys also leave school earlier, often to enter the workforce.

The ‘Social Renaissance Programme’

In an effort to address increasing social issues in the home, President Michel launched the Social Renaissance Programme in 2011. This programme is highly significant in embodying the concept of “humane development” which is enshrined in the Constitution of Seychelles.

The programme includes the National Social Renaissance Action Plan, developed through extensive consultation with citizens, and civil society. It places into national discussion some of the most serious social concerns. Pursuant to the Action Plan, the challenges faced by youth today must be voiced through public debate, in which all stakeholders in education have an important role to play. Social and disciplinary problems in schools in Seychelles continue to be major issues in the school environment. Moreover, domestic violence is a phenomenon which cannot be neglected, especially given its repercussions on the nation’s youth.

The Social Renaissance Programme and its Action Plan seek to create a multi-ministerial framework to address social issues of national concern, and this in collaboration with civil society and religious organizations. The Action Plan anticipates a number of individual projects, supervised by appropriate Government ministries, in an effort to raise awareness of the issues plaguing society, and attempting to engage with parents, civil society and Government agencies to identify solutions.

The Special Rapporteur shares the concerns of many teachers, administrators and government ministers regarding the increasing incidents of disruptive behaviour and social problems affecting schools of all levels. He is appreciative of the “whole-of-government” approach being championed by way of the Social Renaissance Programme through the inclusion of multiple government ministries to address these problems.

Wilfred T. Adderley, Moderator

I would like to start by saying thank you to all of our participants for today’s discussion. Each contributor provided useful points and information that can assist us with understanding how to go about fostering positive social growth and behaviour among boys.

After reviewing today’s input, I would like to highlight the following points:

1. Ms. Gordon (Jamaica) raised several points that I would like to comment on. She highlighted that boys are able to thrive better when they are in gender separated classes as opposed to gender integrated classes. In my experience, I do believe that both class structures have benefits for boys’ development. Based off of my observation, boys tend to relax, relate and also express themselves more in an environment in which they are comfortable. Therefore, it is up to the teacher to be instrumental at creating that environment for both boys and girls, assuring them that the class is a safe zone, enforcing this principle and ensuring that each student understands and acknowledges it fully. However, boys will be more expressive when they are around their peers, just like girls are. Each sex tend to develop their own cultures of communication within the class and will share and/or incorporate other students who understand their code. I think it is good to have gender separated environments for some subjects like language arts, reading, and math, and gender integrated for others like science, history, civics, and physical/sex education. However, and in my opinion, teachers should be careful not to make it appear that gender separated classes suggests inequalities within learning among students or that one gender is superior to the next. Students should be introduced to these models with the understanding that the class is a domain for creativity, movement, and interaction. Teachers should, also, be instrumental at engaging both genders in topics that would allow for them to understand how to relate to each other, citing appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.
2. Boys’ attention spans, as pointed out by Ms. Kelly, tends to be shorter than girls. As she mentioned, this is due to not being fully engaged during lessons. Boys love movement and will enjoy lessons that involve it. That is why they tend to gravitate towards subjects that are practical in nature. However, boys having a shorter attention span than girls does not mean that they do not have the ability to focus on tasks. For both genders, staying on task for extended periods of time comes as a result of effective

guidance and efficient classroom management by teachers, as well as physical and social development. For example, a teacher can have a well-planned lesson but if they are unable to keep their students engaged in the lesson then the teaching process is incomplete. Teachers have to understand that guidance is a big element of the teaching process, for example, during my early years as a teacher my 1st grade music lesson was interrupted by an ant. My inquisitive students were curious and enamoured by this ant that they immediately tuned me out, so I joined them in checking out the ant and I turned the ant into a music lesson of which the students got to move like the ant and even try to create an ant-like song. This experience, fast forward a few years, become discussions in my class among my high school students on life, love and relationships and how they relate to the subject in which I was teaching. In relation to boys, they will remain on task as long as they understand the goal that they are set to meet as well as the goal of the teacher. However, the teacher must be instrumental in sharing this expectation with them. These principles can also be used and applied to getting boys to participate in extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities should be positive, student-centred and structured to allow leadership development, peer-learning and teamwork.

3. The School Renaissance Programme, as mentioned by Kishore Singh, is a wonderful forum for youth and community development and I hope that it would also zone in on specific challenges that boys face. Also, as Avjit Sarkar suggested, engaging parents in boy's development is very important. It appears in some instances that most parents do not know how to relate to their sons when they reach adolescence. Some parents tend to not bother with them while others tend to crowd them. Getting parents to understand how to balance being a parent and being a friend and confidant in their son's lives is not an easy task. However, from my perspective, showing a positive interest in their interests is a start.

I would like to leave you with some questions for thought:

1. Today, gender identity is a conversation that has become a staple topic in discussions on youth development, diversity, and inclusion. Millennials are expressing their identity and orientation at a younger age.
 - a. How should this topic be approached in the socialisation of boys?
 - b. How should parents, teachers and the community relate to boys who are expressing their identity?
 - c. How do we provide guidance in helping them to build positive self-actualisation and esteem while getting others to understand the concept of inclusion?
2. Adolescent fathers face many challenges and with many of them ending up as school drop outs or on the low end of proficiency due to their responsibility.
 - a. Are there programmes geared towards assisting adolescent fathers with continuing their education? If not, should there be?
 - b. Other than existing information, what should be the primary focus in getting adolescent boys to understand sexuality and the responsibilities that come with it?
3. Although figures of abuse among boys may not seem high, it has been found that many boys do not report abuse and tend to keep it hidden.
 - a. How can one go about helping abused boys to get the care that they need in a safe environment?
 - b. What should be the focus to help abused boys to develop their self-actualisation and esteem?

Winsome Gordon, Jamaica

Dear Participants,

The dialogue on issues and responses to the need to assure the education of our boys is interesting. I was at the forefront of the advocacy and strategies to advance the education of girls. In one of our international meetings, I recall that a lady from Pakistan informed the meeting that we should strike a balance in our efforts to change or else in time we are going to have problems with the education of boys. She further noted that

uneducated boys will destroy societies through criminal activities and other unacceptable behaviours. Spoken in the 90s, she was not far wrong. Clearly the gender issues need to be contextual.

The negative perception of school referred to by our Zimbabwean colleague is probably the fundamental cause for the low participation of boys in education. We are left with a fundamental question. Is the present structure and management of school resulting in meaningful education for all?

Take for example, a poor family sacrifices all and sends the boy to school. After 12 years of schooling, at age 17 years, the boy is fully back at home. He is literate and was exposed to a technical /vocational skill of some sort but unable to make a livelihood. The farmer is left in confusion, there are no jobs awaiting his boy, the boy is educated and does not wish to farm. If the farmer had kept his boy at home, he would be a farmer and would be able to feed himself and a family.

In Jamaica about 10% of the boys who go to school will qualify for entry into tertiary institutions. A Training institution called Human Employment and Resource Training (HEART) is able to absorb another 3 % annually. All other boys are heading for the world of work. In this context secondary education must reposition itself to become the beginning of wealth generation. It should be livelihood oriented. There should be an easy transition from school to adult responsibilities. The boys who leave school would be employed or involved in generating their own livelihoods.

The emphasis in Jamaica is on advancing technical and vocational education. Students are able to acquire levels of certification in their vocations before leaving school. In addition, they pursue enterprise education. Students do well when they are engaged in meaningful learning tasks. They will achieve in the areas of Mathematics, Science, Language, etc. when the content and application are related to their choice of vocation.

Another critical dimension for the education of boys is the early childhood education programme. This is where we lay the foundation for the identity of our children.

Michael Tapo, Papua New Guinea

Hi, the educated audience and authorities in research findings that culminated evidences that seemed to demarcate the indicators showing boys do not gravitate towards the type of activities and chores that is feminine.

It is my perspective that the cultural factors within any society shapes the ways boys behaviours to be or for the choice of the boys' type of activity. In the case of why boys generally choose not interested in feminine type of work and chores this I believe happens because:

1. always mothers and girls are around to accept the responsibility;
2. if its paid employment related based on attracting customers employers will device recruitment guidelines that attract girls and women, so the context defines culture and behaviour boys relate to as feminine type of work.

Now, in developing nations the choice of either, or, neither, is not by choice and selection of boys. Options do not exists.

This shapes the behaviour of boys because each individual growing up in very remote, rural and urban areas are subjected to engage on 'imprecise -intuitive decisions' making every member of the clan is expected to have some level of skill and demonstrated behaviour. Build their house, clear up vegetation to grow food, harvest, represent family on community issues and livelihood. These are examples of boys' behavior and motivation have to be influenced by cultural and contextual factors.

Hence, no boy gets let behind.

Today, countries must carry out research into the need for more opportunities for same sex schools such as boys only schools, institutions as well as girls only.

Maybe there are recent studies. The past evidences of leaders, scholars, inventors, etc., seemed to show that perhaps there are these ideas to suggest to answers to the questions surrounding boys' education, achievements, and shaping of behaviours.

The case of 'boys only', or 'girls only' each individual boy or girl that will strive for success and let alone be competitive and even attempt to be more motivated and interested.

I am from the old school with such experience, but best teachers, hospital doctors, accountants, lawyers, nurses (men and women), village and ward councillors, etc. were the outputs of boys only and girls only schools.

When you are left with limited option of survival, limited employment opportunities, limited room to choose and select these alone is the context that will shape boys education and behaviour and hence cultural values will form for boys envisioning their life long livelihood.

Wilfred T. Adderley, Moderator

I would like to start by saying thank you to our participant for his contribution to our discussion today on the topic 'Fostering Positive Social Growth and Behaviour Among Boys.'

As pointed out by Dr. Tapo, it would appear that primary factors of influence on boy's socialisation would be the home and the community. More specifically, the culture within a home or a community is what decides and dictates the roles, activities and identities that a boy should adopt. This point is a good one for further discussion on whether gender identity is a learned concept or is present at birth. However, to address the point, culture and society does play a role in self-awareness and how people are expected to live based off of the foundational norms and mores. But, to address 'gender-specified' activities, it is not society by itself that places stereotypes on these activities, but the views of individuals within that society that influences the social construct of it regardless of developed nations vs. developing nations. For example, in most homes as we know it, mothers do the cooking, however many of the world's greatest chefs are men. Education and exposure is what provides people with a framework to challenge these 'so called societal norms' that were established by individuals or groups of individuals who saw their view as a way of bringing order to a way persons within that societal domain lives.

The view points on same-gendered schools vs co-gendered schools, which one is better, has been discussed at length for more than a decade. However, researchers on this topic are divided as some see no difference in the success of students in one over the other. In my opinion, same-gendered schools and co-gendered schools will produce successful alumnus if the productivity within provides positive output. Thus taking into consideration effective and efficient teaching standards and resources that allows for positive teacher-student relationships, teacher-parent relationships and school-community relationships. If same-gendered schools are to be considered they should not promote gender superiority and they should also provide outlets for co-gender activities with neighbour schools.

Finally, I would like to leave participants with a few questions for consideration:

- Should same-gendered curricula be introduced in co-gendered schools?
- Should same-gendered schools be introduced as a National/Public school concept?

Wilfred T. Adderley, Moderator

I wish to thank all participants who contributed to this week's topic 'Fostering Positive Social Growth and Behaviour among Boys'. The topics focus, as a part of the broader theme 'Changing Patterns in Boys' Education', was to zone in the socialisation of boys which is an important element in their cognitive development and education attainment.

This week's discussion raised many important points which led to several discoveries about the situation of boys within the different societies and cultures. However, the main points that I would wish to conclude with for more discussion are:

1. **Role models** - Role models are very important in the development of youth. These are people that youth look to for examples on how to develop their own set of ethics and values. It was brought out in the discussions that boys in some societies grow up without fathers, so the 'father figure' is either the next male kin or a male figure in their community. This male figure is responsible for transferring knowledge, whether positive or negative, to those young males who look up to him which would continue the social construct within that specific community or society. Therefore, as the participants shared, exposing boys to positive role models and male figures in society can provide them with the outlet that they would need to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.
2. **Gender and Education** - Past studies, due to the idea and experiences of researchers, that advocate for same-gendered schools have shown that there is not much difference in the academic achievement over co-gendered schools. However, some contributors have shared that boys tend to do better academically in same-gendered classrooms. If this is indeed a case for study, then there it would be good to generate research on whether same-gendered curriculums should be explored and introduced into schools.
3. **Relationship Building** - Understanding a boy's interest is a good start at building a relationship with him. Boys will connect quicker with persons who share the same or similar interests and will form groups accordingly. Positive relationships would require boys to understand the importance of empathy and respect for views that could be different from their own and to not stigmatise the views of others even in disagreement. This happens when boys are shown empathy and respect for their views and interests. Taking an interest in their individuality should come from parents, teachers and teacher-administrators, and the community. These institutions are important for providing social outlets for boys to understand responsibility, leadership, teamwork, and the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. They should be instrumental at engaging the academic and creative intellect of boys through curricular and extra-curricular activities that would help them to gain world-view but more importantly to build self-actualisation.

Mark Figueroa, Moderator

Theme 4: Multisectoral policies, actions and strategies for Boys' Educational Achievement

Fellow Participants,

Welcome to the final phase of our e-discussion on 'Changing Patterns in Boys' Educational Achievement: What Can We Do to Make Things Better?' Below, I highlight some issues which have been raised in the earlier phases of the discussion - and draw attention to a few others.

Ideas and practices relating to what it is to be a man or a woman, may affect both boys and girls negatively (and positively). This is not to say that there is a uniform impact on different groups of males and females whether taken singly or in relation to each other. As such, coming to terms with the complexities involved is an urgent imperative; as is the need to increasingly move beyond the notion that gender only affects females. A question, in this regard is: are the challenges which many boys face in school ultimately another consequence of the same collection of the ideas and practices which have kept girls out of school and caused them to do relatively poorly, especially in certain subjects?

What does the long view of the transformation of educational systems and the wider society suggest to us are underlying causes for challenges faced by boys, and hence where might we find lasting solutions? Have we noted that well into the 20th century, leading Commonwealth universities still questioned women's capacity to undertake the same intellectual undertakings as men? Are we now hearing about the innate incapacities of boys which parallel what was said a century ago about the innate incapacities of girls?

Have we noted that boys, on average, used to, and in many systems still, out-perform girls and that, even where this has changed, boys on average, still often out-perform girl in many areas, not least of all in the so called hard sciences and mathematics? Have we also noted that (save for the most gendered of subjects) whatever is happening regarding the averages; the overlap in achievement of both sexes greatly exceeds the difference in averages? Neither boys nor girls are a uniform group whether taken as individuals or in terms of their diversity of class, ethnicity, race or other factors.

While the focus of this e-discussion is on boys, the education system is a larger issue. Certainly, there are Commonwealth countries where students perform relatively well (at least on international standardized tests). Yet there are others in which, despite considerable achievement with respect to universal access, graduates are not meeting internally established system goals with respect to criteria such as performance on standardized school leaving examinations.

Are many of the ideas regarding improving schools for boys: such as making lessons interesting and fostering active learning not simply good pedagogy? The question to be asked is: what is there that is particular to boys? and what has changed? Is it that shifts in the ideas and practices with respect to being a girl have led to a greater coincidence between how girls see themselves and what school requires of them? In a context where school still requires more of the “sit still” skills into which girls are socialized? Is it the socialization of boys which needs to be adjusted; is it the school that needs to change; or is it both?

If we bring school more in line with old/uncontested notions of masculinity in order to make education more boy-friendly are we preparing boys for their future? How are boys raised with restrictive notions of masculinity going to fit into economies in which services: educational, personal, caring and professional, play a growing role and manufacturing, mining and agriculture decline in importance? If boys are to be protected by segregating them in schools, how are they going to learn the interpersonal skills which are vital to success in the workplace?

Can we look at the school system by itself? What constitutes equity within educational systems where women earn less on average despite being better educated than men? This is a particular concern for systems in which females already overachieve with respect to males. Is the main issue, access, outputs or outcomes? How many years did it take females to achieve parity as university students? Did they receive special measures? Do we need an urgent fix or a long term solution for educational challenges being faced by male? How long do we expect to take? Should we be applying special measures?

Looking forward to your comments.

Brenda Gourley, United Kingdom

The statistics on violence towards women indicate horrendous levels: about one woman in three across the world will be the victim of either rape or serious assault in her lifetime. Such violence is usually perpetrated by a member of her family or her partner. The effect of this violence usually means that the affected women cannot and do not participate in school, university or the job market in the ways one would expect if they experienced no violence. Far from breaking the so-called glass ceiling, just getting to work - and staying in work - is all these women can do. Furthermore, the effects of such a large proportion of the population not achieving their potential is an important loss to the economies of the world.

While the statistics vary across countries of the Commonwealth, there is not a single one where this is not a significant problem. It seems to me that when the education of boys is under discussion there should be some reference as to what part education - and education authorities - can play in correcting this situation.

Michael Tapo, Papua New Guinea

Hi, again the educated minds.

Home - school environment and within school extra curricula and school curriculum needs close interrogation given that every child is different and that we know that every forms of 'learning is individual'.

In Papua New Guinea a developing society, pupils enter pre-school, elementary, primary, secondary, university education still with undiagnosed and unfixed disabilities or gaps.

Limited vocabularies, feeling of in security, shyness, inferiority complex, lack of and or ignorant human virtues such as purposeful, trustworthiness, non-violence and other value systems that are interwoven with home-school environment that greatly shape boy's or girl's learning.

This could or can shape boy's positive attitude and enhance boys' behaviours.

A culture created at school level to connect home and school to diagnose weak, poor, ignorance and other associated gaps prior to school education, during school interviews by teachers, through parent/teacher interviews, guidance officers, pastors, priest, etc., particularly values, and disability gaps such poor vocabulary, shyness are examples that would institute boys positiveness towards their education as well as truly inherit good behaviour.

Mark Figueroa, Moderator

Thanks to Brenda Gourley for drawing our attention to wider issues in education. One of the problems with many education systems is that there is often an over emphasis on the academic. The particular issue raised relates to the question of violence towards women. Participants are invited to suggest how schools might contribute to tackle this pervasive problem which also affects girls of all ages.

For my part, I believe that getting children to understand that men and women are more similar than different and deserve the same level of opportunities and respect in life cannot just be taught in words alone; it must be taught in deeds.

This is one reason why I do not support the separation of the sexes in school and the provision of different curricula for girls and boys. The vast literature on this issue has been unable to show that sex segregation produces a significant academic improvement for boys and indeed some of it shows that it is the girls who are more likely to benefit.

The issue raise regarding violence against women is significant in its own right, but it raises the general issue of violence in schools and societies at large, and points to the fact that school is not simply about the levels of academic achievement of their students.

In educating boys, broader issues of violence need to be considered especially in regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (where I live). Here we have countries where injuries (including intentional injuries) have at times been the leading cause of death among men, and more so among young men. There is no doubt that ideas and practices regarding what it is to be a man have contributed to this situation and participants are invited to comment on their experience with school-based anti-violence programmes in general or as they relate to specific forms of violence and related risk taking.

Going more broadly into the issue of the overemphasis on academics; a question to consider is whether this is one of the reasons why boys undervalue school. Should we be raising the status of technical and vocational education as a valued stream which provides a pathway to a successful career as well as the possibility of a return to study at the tertiary level, as exists in some European systems?

Thanks also to Michael Tapo who has emphasised the individual nature of each student and the extent to which we need to pay greater attention to our students' learning issues. As someone who is familiar with many persons with issues in the zone of what is labelled dyslexia (including myself), I know that where such issues go undetected students are often left behind. In the case of boys, this often results in disruptive behaviour and a downward spiral of educational underachievement.

The nature of the child's individuality so aptly described also points to the need to always see the individual and not his or her sex, and along with this, the need to create the learning environment in which each child can achieve to his or her potential.

Shirley Kelly, United Kingdom

It is very important that we achieve equity for both genders in our schools. As we all know, many boys are disadvantaged in the current educational system for a number of reasons.

First, many boys go through Primary school never having a male teacher as their classroom role model.

Second, many male students are disproportionately found in special education classes.

Third, most educational program are designed in a passive manner (sit quietly in your seat and learn) versus an active model that is more appealing to boys who feel a need to be active in their learning environment.

My premise is that many boys become confused and frustrated during their early school years when they are made to feel that they do not fit in the regular classroom and the best place for them is in a special education classroom. They are intelligent and know it. They also know that they do not belong in a special education classroom but they do not have the power to undo that decision. They are at the mercy of a female dominated system. Boys' unmet needs in our educational system leads to confusion, frustration, anger, anxiety, behavioural and emotional problems.

I have a number of rhetorical questions on the matter:

- Is it possible that such gender inequities during the early academic years may lead to males subconsciously turning the tables later on life?
- Can it cause them to lash out at females (passively or aggressively) at home or at work in attempt to resolve the left over frustration and anger they felt and endured under the watch of female teachers during their early school years?
- Are their subconscious minds driving them to settle the score now they have power to do something about it unlike when they were young children and were powerless to do anything about it?
- How much of female abuse by males later on in life is of our own making?

Just a critical psychological perspective on the matter.

Winsome Gordon, Jamaica

Dear All,

I find the comments and discussions very interesting. I have been trying to get boys to join in the dialogue. It would be interesting to hear from them on the issues raised. I will continue to try with the hope that they will join in before the dialogue closes.

It took my agency years and the sustained support of the Commonwealth Secretariat to get my country to address the education of boys as a national issue. From reading the comments, it appears that our experiences are different and that there is no one right response to improving the education and development of our boys. Clearly there is need for various interventions at different levels. Countries have to make decisions on what works for them.

Concerning single sex schools, there are extensive arguments for and against. There are developmental differences between boys and girls that would render the boys disruptive in school as it is structured and managed. Jamaica is emphasizing technical and vocational education but its success in raising the outcome levels for boys will depend on how well it is geared towards income generation or wealth creation.

A focus of early childhood education on respect and healthy relationships between boys and girls could well lay a strong foundation for later years. It would be interesting to study a few countries with low rates of violence against women and criminal activities to identify the contributing factors.

The wider socioeconomic policies and development strategies are also critical to the employment and occupation of youth. A boy who is unable to feed himself at age 18 years will become a problem to society. I support the arguments for a serious repositioning of education systems to respond to the individual learner's needs for meaningful education- that is education leading to productive livelihoods and respect for all. There is an urgent need for education, socio economic and cultural advancement to be more integrated and focused on human development.

The search for answers continues.

Mark Figueroa, Moderator

Thanks to my Jamaican colleague Winsome Gordon for another contribution which is rooted in her efforts to improve the education of boys in our country and beyond. She raises the issue of development differences between boys and girls and suggests that they would render the boys disruptive in school as it is structured and managed.

With respect to the first issue, we would need to ask whether these developmental differences have become more pronounced over time or whether they have remained approximately the same over the last hundred plus years that mass state supported education systems have become a staple in a wide range of countries.

If we conclude that the developmental differences have become more pronounced, we would need to ask why, and if they can change, why they exist at all. If we conclude that the differences have been stable, then we need to ask why these differences did not prevent boys from overachieving on average with respect to girls in the past. We would also need to ask whether in the past boys were more or less disruptive on average than they are today.

The fact is that many of the elements which persons suggest lead to the situation where some boys are doing badly in school were more intense in the past. For example, research for some school systems (including Jamaica) has shown that boys on average receive harsher treatment in school than girls. For example, they are more likely to receive corporal punishment in school systems which still employ these methods (including those where it is now illegal).

True as this is, we face a difficulty in drawing a simple conclusion to say that it is the harsh treatment that now causes boys to do badly on average relatively to girls. This is because the treatment that boys received on average was even harsher when they used to do better on average. There must be an additional argument to explain the changed outcome.

For my part, I accept that harsh treatment in school has a negative effect on many boys' educational achievement. What then has changed which allows us to accept the argument? Many boys are now less willing to accept that the treatment they receive is fair or just and react in a much more negative way than their forefathers generally did on receiving "six of the best". The fact is that children today are much more conscious as to issues of justice. For example, research in Jamaica has shown that many girls believe that boys are not treated fairly in school.

The important issue of how schools are currently structured and managed was also raised. This issue has often been connected to another argument as to why many boys do badly in school relative to girls. Arguments along these lines frequently suggest that boys need to be more active and or that they have shorter attention spans. Again we can note that in the past when school systems used to take a much more rigid approach to learning, especially in the early years, boys on average used to do better than girls. For example, I spent a year in primary school in the UK as did my children, and the transformation in one generation is patent. There has been less change in Jamaica.

Adjustments to the education system in the direction of more positive pedagogy are likely to produce overall improvements for both girls and boys and indeed may actually produce a greater improvement for girls on average. My conclusion here is based on the evidence that the problem does not lie entirely within the school system. For example, research shows that in many cases girls do better on average with respect to school readiness tests.

Some persons believe that this is intrinsic, but studies of male child socialization reveal that they are not taught many of the skills which are instilled in girls at an early age. As the ideas opposed to equal opportunities in education for girls and women have been eroded, we have found that females, whose socialization better prepare them for most school systems, tend to ramp up their achievement. Yet there are two barriers which females face. Males are socialized to be more self-confident and more competitive. This accounts for that group of males who tend to perform at the very top on standardized test even in systems where females are doing much better on average than males. In addition, there is also a notion that men should lead so that males are represented disproportionately at the very top of the education system.

In consequence, while I agree that the systems as currently structured and managed do not meet the needs of boys, I also believe that the way boys are socialized does not provide an ideal preparation for education, and if this is not challenged then other changes may produce disappointing results. Having got to the issue of restructuring the education system, I will leave you with two links to presentations by Ken Robinson who has his own view as to how radically the system may need to be changed. The question to consider is how much change is needed in the way we educate boys (and girls) if we are going to have them achieve their full potential.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity

Apologies to Shirley Kelly, as I received her comments only after writing the above; her first points are in part addressed above; but I would add that I agree that boys must face considerable dissonance when they enter the school room in many systems, having been socialized to run up and down and do as they please.

At the same time, I posit that the problems that boys face in school are not due to under privileging but from privileging. It is the historic privileging of males which leads to the tendency to socialise boys with greater freedom to do as they please while their sisters must sit still and serve others. Ironically, it is the same historic privileging which leaves women with the role as primary school teachers, a relatively low pay job within a caring - hence mainly female job, while men remain the vast majority of professors, a more prestigious and better paid position. That is, where the gender transformation in education is far advanced. Note that there are a good number of African countries and Asian countries where females have not yet achieved or significantly surpassed a 50% share of the primary school teachers. In contrast, this occurred in Jamaica in at the start of the 20th century and even earlier in more developed countries; a fact which underlies the point that not all systems are facing the same challenges.

Questions have also been sharply posed as to whether the harshness which boys receive because they are boys (often at the hands of females) results in them being abusive in later life.

While I do believe that the nature of the harsh and even violent treatment boys receive needs to be unpacked from a gender perspective, I am not as comfortable with the notion that appears to apportion blame in the manner in which the post was formulated.

Females are the vast majority in primary education in developed and middle income countries (with regional variations), in good measure because of biases in the system against women. I would not wish to blame them for finding themselves in this position. Nor do I blame them for being inadequate role models, unconvinced as I am that the role model issue is the fundamental one.

At the moment, I am not able to draw the attention of participants to any research on the questions posed at this time and I would invite comments especially from those who have access to such research.

Lebert Drysdale, Jamaica

The general approach to the education of boys must change if we are going to save some of the boys who are being: 'left behind in school', 'falling through the cracks' or, are 'at risk' of not completing formal education or training. The teacher training institutions should probably revise their curriculum to raise the level of consciousness regarding gender sensitivity in the teaching/ learning scenarios. The schools should make deliberate attempts to accommodate changes in the system to cater to both genders without compromising the standard of education that they would normally deliver. Parents should be sensitized through various mediums of this paradigm shift. There is no single answer to the creation of equity in the classroom, a multifaceted approach is needed.

Sue Dale Tunnicliffe, United Kingdom

It all goes back to home, community and early years before the formal education system.

Palesa Litseho, Lesotho

I think this low performing boys as compared to girls starts from home, where they are raised. At home parents have to look at boys and girls as the same kids, but at home we have a habit of treating boys more toughly than girls, and this develops into the boys mind such that they will start naming themselves strange, scary names - like lions, dogs, sharks and so on. These names only means tough people, and it continues to schools where they will be with girls, they start to behave tough to show girls that they are not like them.

For instance if we take boys from boys schools where there are no girls, they perform better because they do not have competitors.

My suggestions is that we have to look at foundations at home, where parents have to change their habits while raising their kids, treating children equally. This is going to improve our boys' education, changing their attitudes about life - we have to care to know where are boys are playing as we do with our girls, and they should help in domestic duties as we expect from our girls.

Diana Pacheco & Devanshi Unadkat, United States

First, it is important to recognize that the educational performance of boys or girls is not a war between genders. Traditional views of gender are affecting negatively the academic achievement of both boys and girls (Jha & Kellehar, 2006). It is equally important to address the factors that are causing boys' underachievement and also those that are limiting girls' potential and career opportunities.

Furthermore, it is imperative to note that gender is by no means the only factor affecting literacy achievement. The collective influence of gender and other social and cultural factors such as socioeconomic status must be further investigated (European Commission, 2009; United National Girls Education Initiative, 2006, & Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010). Therefore, gender equality in education should encompass the issue of disparities and inequalities existing between different social and economic groups as well as the diverse nature and extent of gender inequalities that exist within different groups (Jha & Kellehar, 2006).

In this vein, gender inequality in education is a complex issue that needs to be addressed from multiple and different perspectives. We argue that in order to address boys' underachievement and boost girls' self-confidence, parents, schools, policy makers, and researchers need to work together to foster positive changes in the attitudes and behaviours that students have towards constructs of masculinity and femininity while simultaneously addressing societal norms that create such stereotypical attitudes.

Interventions that target parents should focus on building awareness of how their support and encouragement can affect their kids' performance in school. Parents can be encouraged to offer equal support to the

aspirations of their daughters and sons and exerting the same discipline, behaviour, and expectations for their children regardless of their gender (European Commission, 2009).

At the level of schools, it is important to have teacher development programs that encourage teachers to acknowledge their own gender biases and counteract the detrimental effects of teacher expectations based on students' gender. Moreover schools must create a curriculum that help students challenge concepts of on gender, privilege, and power (Watson et al., 2010). The Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) is an exemplary program with a curriculum that addresses gender inequality (Murphy-Graham, 2012). The macro-systemic influences on schools should also be addressed. Therefore gender equality policies across all sector in society is required are essential to truly eliminating the challenges that both genders face in education.

Lastly, there is qualitative research lacking in understanding "which boys/which girls" are underachieving; more research addressing this issue should be adopted by educators in determining the most effective interventions for at-risk students (Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, 2008 & Watson et al., 2010).

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Filomena Nhangumele, Mozambique

Dear Team,

It is my pleasure to make part of the discussions in the hope that there are more Mozambicans in the discussion because this issues are cross cutting most development countries. Education without discrimination is what would lead to progressive development what we can do to mark that is a very good and challenging questions. On the theme bellow please let me share my thoughts of the little experience I do have in the field and community development interactions.

1. Early influences and later outcomes: addressing risk factors and vulnerabilities from a life course perspective indeed the early influence mark the path for the boys' educations. They mind encrypted with what they thought and have strong believe most time determines their future. Looking at our rural boys because it where I believe challenges are most noted. There are various and entangled factors that contribute for the boys limitations to the progress and achievement of further studies.
 - Social context- culture and believes of what makes a men after initiation (having a wife and children) - challenging the negative part of cultural believes would be one element. Children are raised by the parents, what programs are there for the rural parents to help them see the future further out of t their communities and historical practices that have proved to be functional in their understanding and context for and generations.
 - Children born in communities where the day is shorter due to poor conditions such as electricity, 6 PM is night and sleeping time, reading during the night is out of possibility. No exposure to the

world to trigger inspiration and see the world out of their community box. In countries where children have boarding school, they get in touch with different dynamic any change of mind set could be possible.

- Distance walking to school, determines age to starts school. Enthusiasm to walk more than 10kms to school drop as the boy grows, we would rather work his fields get a women and stay a home and enjoys life in its context. Having a family is a paramount regardless the age and economic conditions to bear them.
- Economic factors such as keeping the boys in boarding schools limit the boys and the girls as well to continue to secondary school. Limited infrastructures for secondary schools also are a contributing factor.
- Limitation on survival skill, desire of a better life also contribute to development to criminal mentality.
- Integrated policies across different actors would help the development of the boys and the girls as well to desire bright futures. However, all programs should be locally contextualized. There is a lot being done for primary education but taking into account of limitation in secondary education youth programs of skill for self-employment should be targeted. Once they are self-employed and engaged with their sustainability the desire of improving and doing much more for themselves could be triggered.
- Self-skills training should sponsored by governments to promote massive participation, communities could contribute for a symbolic amount to accommodate all pockets.
- Youth are left astray and they develop their own survival which includes crime.
- Education of parents is also the foundation to boys and girls bright education in each and every context. Very little is mentioned in development programs about parents' educations. Most training for parents are relate to bearing infants and mostly directed to women. What about the fathers who are the decision makes in most of African families, they can determine the future of the family in particular boys. What should be done to educate the fathers to change the mind on children education and have them see the relevance of education for both girls and boys.
- Strong policies and implementation on education and children's protection would also raise parents' awareness on the importance of education to their children.

2. We can do better by reinforcing governments to develop policies that engage communities and raise their awareness to education. Let's discuss the root causes all of all what undermines the boys education because the symptoms will always flourish the roots are not addressed.

Mark Figueroa, Jamaica

CLOSING STATEMENT

Explanations for the Changing Patterns

A range of explanations for the changing patterns of boys' educational achievement were explicitly or implicitly put forward in the e-discussion. These included claims that boys are "hard wired" differently with respect to their brains and developmental trajectory; others questioned the hard wiring thesis and placed greater emphasis on socialization and gender norming. Whether due to hard wiring or socializing and gender norming, note was taken that on average boys are less prepared for the school systems which they face. Examples given relate to boys being on average more spatial-mechanical, impulsive, playful and kinaesthetic; more in need of brain rest time; and less able to multitask.

Related to the issue of socialization and gender norming, there was an emphasis on factors such as: the role of the home and community; chores boys are given; and patterns to which boys are expected to conform and which they observe in male role models - which are often re-enforced through gender stereotyping in schools. In some countries, parenting practices are more negative toward boys; seen in n lower expectations for boys and a greater willingness to spend scarce resources on girls' education.

Teachers also exhibit low expectations for boys or treat them harshly, verbally and physically, and are more likely to punish boys including using corporal forms even if these are illegal. Stereotypes of violent

hypermasculinity present challenges such as bullying, and girls were seen to ridicule boys in class; making school an unsafe or unwelcoming place for many boys. School and particular subjects are seen by many boys as unmanly; a factor sometimes made more problematic by the uninteresting nature of, and/or presentation of, the curriculum. Masculine socialization sometime also leaves many boys unable to express their emotions or seek help when faced with difficulties; this may lead, especially during adolescence, to negative coping strategies such as substance abuse and other high risk behaviours.

Boys often cannot see the value of school as contributing to their aspirational livelihoods which male role models engaged in illegal activities often exhibited more so than the educated ones. School's limited value is felt strongly by boys who expect to or feel social pressure to take on the role of provider for their families. Meanwhile, a boy may complete school without encountering positive male role models who may also be absent from the home. Boys are therefore educationally vulnerable, especially at nodal points in their developmental life cycle where special efforts may need to be focused.

Possible Solutions

In seeking solutions, there appears to be a consensus around the need to get beyond the notion that gender was an issue just for girls and women, and to focus on how ideas and practices with respect to what it means to be a man affect boys and men in general and more particularly the challenges which many boys face in school. Before looking at specific solutions, it is well to note that some participants highlighted broader challenges with respect to schooling and suggested that we should be improving opportunities and achievement for all. Specific challenges alluded to include: the adequacy of public support for education and the nature current content, methods, structure and management of education including the extent to which contemporary schools were preparing students for past jobs, rather than the unknown future which they will have to face with its rapidly changing technologies.

The need for coalitions between home, school and community organizations was recognized together with a broad national dialogue. General solutions included positive parenting, early childhood education, and the creation of a safe, welcoming and supportive class room atmosphere in which boys faced high expectations, interesting lessons and well trained, creative and gender sensitive teachers. The need for male mentors and role models and the value of incentives were also mentioned. The need for a stronger link between school and world of work was underlined. This may involve a reduction in the emphasis on academic subjects and a revalorization of technical and vocational education which both prepares students for the world of work and facilitates pathways to tertiary education.

A few participants provided very specific ideas on class room practice. These included maintaining a respectful atmosphere free from verbal abuse in which disputes between students are settled quickly and fairly; regular recognition and provision of incentives; use of IT and graphic presentations; fostering greater movement as against sit down and listen approaches; active, hands-on and competitive learning opportunities as well as interactive debate; greater academic and study skills training; more varied and student choices in reading material; infusion of humour and games; promotion of greater participation of boys in co-curricular activities including boys only groups such as scouts and the boys brigade; the use of boys only instructional groups for core subject or a move to single sex classes or schools; and the training of teachers in the teaching of boys and their special needs. In adopting special measures to promote boys' education, the point was made that there should be no compromise of standards.

In response to some of the points listed, other participants identified many of them as simply good pedagogy which was likely to benefit girls as well. Single sex approaches were questioned, based on the fact that research had not produced unequivocal results suggesting significant academic improvements for boys and some studies indicated that girls benefited more. In contrast, there are concerns that boys educated in single sex settings are less likely to develop the human relations skills and emotional intelligences which are increasingly seen as important as those of an academic nature.

Although it did not come into sharp relief, differences emerged. At one end of the spectrum are those who see differences between boys and girls as intrinsic and/or do not believe that the existing gender norms should be challenged by the school system. At the other end are those who see the ultimate solution to the challenge in

boys' education in the transformation of gender relations, which would change the ways in which boys are socialized. In light of this difference, I had posed the question: is it the socialization of boys which needs to be adjusted; is it the school that needs to change; or is it both?

I suspect that some participants would say that it is mainly the school system while others would say that it is both. Some participants explicitly called for the challenging of the existing gender norms and male child socialization. It was also suggested that fathers needed to relate to their sons in a different manner, with greater emotional involvement, and end the situation where many fathers only enter the picture when it is time to discipline a child. In contesting gender norms, a number of participants spoke to the importance of involving men, women, boys and girls, as well as the possibility for youth led activities which addressed the aspirations and agency of children, and promoted peer learning and leadership. The point was made that schools should address significant issues in society such as gender violence against women which remains pervasive across the Commonwealth. Another case cited was the manner in which male gender formation contributed to violence in society leading to situations where intentional violence is a main cause of death especially among young men, in some countries.

Accounting for the Stylized Facts

To successfully analyse the challenges of boys' education and point to a way forward, it is necessary to come to terms with the situation as it presents itself. In what follows, a set of stylized facts are presented with respect to boys' education in many Commonwealth countries. In these, note has been taken of a tendency for boys to drop out of school and repeat grades more frequently, and on average to do less well than girls. There are also other countries where, although boys on average still do better than girls, the same issues identified appear to be affecting a subgroup of boys who are underachieving.

In all that is said below it should be noted that the achievement of individual boys varies considerably and group achievement differs across class, ethnicity, race and other factors. In addition, while frequent reference is made to the differences in the average performance of boys and girls, averages tell us very little about what boys and girls actually achieve individually or in relation to other boys or girls. This is because in most cases the overlap in overall achievement of boys and girls is far greater than the related difference in their overall average achievement. It is also true that the spread of achievement within each sex group is generally far greater than the difference between the averages of the two groups.

In some countries, boys, on average, score lower in school readiness tests, at the end of both primary and secondary school and constitute the minority of students in higher education even at the graduate level. The education systems which produce these outcomes often have a large majority of female teachers at the primary and a smaller majority at the secondary level and even parity at the tertiary level; although males dominate among the senior academic ranks. Men are also over represented at leadership levels in schools, ministries of education and other policy making bodies. Yet, even where men, on average, have lower educational qualifications than women, they tend to earn more and to hold the majority of the leadership positions in business, governmental and social organizations.

For particular subjects that have been traditionally seen as male (such as mathematics), boys, on average, often still achieve at a higher level than girls and there is usually a group of boys who exhibit a very high level of academic performance. Thus we might find boys over represented at the very top and at the bottom of the class. In addition, some subjects are predominantly taken by girls while others are predominantly taken by boys. Example would be home economics as against mechanical engineering.

These contemporary manifestations within some school systems differ markedly from others where the main concern remains that of getting girls to attend and stay in schools. Within the Commonwealth, it is possible to see a spectrum of countries which manifest, to a greater or lesser degree, the tendencies identified. In a like manner it is possible to trace the history of each country and note how dramatically different academic achievement was in the past as it relates to boys and girls. Here too there is a spectrum in time relating to the dates at which we can mark various points as which girls and women achieve parity with boys and men or began to surpass them, on average, in educational achievement.

Evaluating the Explanations and Solutions

Our explanations for the changing patterns of boys' educational achievement need to be dynamic as what we see today is not what they were in the past. If we accept the hard wired explanation, which suggests that on average there are significant differences between boys and girls abilities, then we have to recognize that there were long-standing biases in favour of boys which allowed them to overachieve relative to girls. That is, in schools which were even more unsuitable in the past with respect to the kinds of environments that are now seen as suitable for boys' education.

If we adopt the hard wired paradigm, we would also have to note that this is about average tendencies. Thus, if (for whatever reason) we expect that boys are more active than girls on average, how do we treat the boys who prefer to quietly focus on pursuits which have become feminized? Ironically one of these is reading; a skill which, in many societies, until recently, the teaching of which was considered unimportant for women and over which there is violent struggle in some contemporary societies.

Additionally, given all the biases in societies against women, which see them earning less despite being more qualified and excluded from leadership positions which tend to be privileged as male: should we leave the school system as it is with its biases against boys, as part of an equalizing process? That is, if females are hard wired to do better in school should we let them do better since it would appear (within this paradigm) that males have other hard wired advantages that will allow them to catch up later in life. Or should we re-bias the schools in favour of males? Alternatively, is it possible to address all children based on their individual needs including any predispositions which are accounted for by hard wiring?

If we see socialization and gender norms playing a significant role, similar questions need to be asked, but with a big difference; we would assume that socialization and gender norms may change over time, while hard wiring does not. Explanations based on socialization and gender norms can account for the full range of stylized facts. The changing achievement of girls relative to boys is set in terms of the gender transformation over the last two hundred years. We can accept that traditional passive teaching methods would have always favoured girls save that it was made clear to them that their education should be limited, secondary to boys and geared to enhance their domesticity. Perspectives which were supported by pseudo-scientific explanations as to girls' capacities for the things men did.

Space does not admit for a full elaboration of the range of economic, ideological, personal, political and social factors which were at work in bringing about the gender transformation of school systems, but a few more points can be made. The growth in educational achievement by women has followed a clearly gendered pattern which remains today. Some subjects remain dominated by either by males or female; in others one or other sex performs on average better than the other although the gap in favour of males is being closed in many instances. Meanwhile the tendency of males to be more competitive and the privileging of leadership as male ensure that there is a top group of male students and that males are over represented as school principals and in other leadership positions.

In face of the differences in gender norms and socialization, some persons, consciously or unconsciously, are suggesting that the schools need to adjust to the manner in which boys are raised. Others believe that whereas this will bring short term results it is not a long term solution. The re-inscription of old scripts regarding masculinity may produce better outcomes for boys within the educational system but will it be just prepare them for the past roles that their forefathers played as against the new circumstances with they will face in life? This is a significant dilemma as the norms of gender socialization for boys will not shift overnight and teachers must face their contemporary charges in today's class rooms. On the other hand, to fail to help boys to develop many of the skills which have been in recent times coded as feminine is to handicap them in a world that has changed dramatically as it relates to the importance of human relations skills and emotional intelligence.

Ultimately, the school cannot solve the problems of boys' education on its own. As noted above a national effort is required. At the same time, there are many changes in the directions identified in the e-discussion which would make schools more effective for boys. Many would also make them more effective in general and help to produce the kinds of creative and critical citizens which the future will demand. We must face boys as

we meet them today and we must better connect with them to improve their performance in education. At the same time, we need to contend with them and find ways to inculcate in them, skills which may not come naturally to those socialized in to restrictive notions of masculinity. In doing so, we should always tailor our teaching to the individual child not his sex.

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To cite this report: The Commonwealth Education Hub Discussion Summary (January 2016), Changing Patterns in Boys' Education.



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