Equity Dispatch

Gender Equity

May 2012

GREAT LAKES EQUITY CENTER

IMPACT: *Educate, Engage, Empower--For Equity*

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time; but if you are here because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together." –Lilla Watson

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Educate

"Based on a visual inspection – either on ultrasound images prior to birth or a quick glance at a newborn's genitals at the moment of birth – a baby is proclaimed as male or female and from that moment embarks on a lifetime journey within the confines of male or female cultural expectations" (Newman, 2007, p. 54).

The social experience of children begins to be constructed based on biological sex almost from the moment they are born. Responding to the proclamations of doctors or ultrasound technicians, new parents begin to decorate their newborn's environment and body in pink or blue, give them different toys, and expect different behaviors from them (Thorne, 1993). By age three, most children identify themselves as either a boy or a girl and may even articulate ideas about how boys and girls are "supposed" to look, what they typically like, and what they should or should not do. These sex-based cultural and social expectations are commonly referred to as gender norms, and individuals are often judged on the extent to which they conform to these expectations or enact gender appropriately (West & Zimmerman, 1987). As educators, we can expect that children enter our schools with developing notions about gender norms and their own gender identity. And from the first day of school forward, we have the ability to help students

Equity Spotlight

Sharon Radd

Sharon I. Radd is a public school administrator of twenty years, and currently works with public school districts

critically examine these concepts and to create gender equitable learning environments.

Access to opportunities and representation of gender are two factors that have historically produced barriers along gender lines, and these barriers are reproduced in schools and contribute in large part to disproportionality in outcomes. The good news is that by critically examining how these issues work to produce disproportionality, we can begin to work toward thoughtfully reconstructing access to opportunities and representations of gender to produce equitable learning environments across the sexes.

When working to ensure gender equity, perhaps one of the most obvious areas to attend to is access to opportunities. Historically women and girls have had to fight significant battles for equal access to opportunities such as inclusion in extracurricular sports/clubs and enrollment in advanced math and science courses. Throughout the 20th century, colleges barred their doors to women, and primary and secondary schools limited opportunities for female students to develop the same skills or participate in the same activities as male students. Today, however, women make up a majority of college undergraduates and have gained ground in historically male fields like math, science, law and business (Corbett, Hill, & Rose, 2008). The passage of Title IX in the 1972 Education Amendments codified the protection of girls and women from discrimination in educational institutions receiving federal financial assistance. These protections are particularly related to admissions, recruitment, educational programs and activities, course offerings and access, counseling, and athletics (Valentin,1997). Yet, despite remarkable progress along many indicators of equitable access, participation, and outcomes of schooling, there are still persistent and pervasive access-related issues that must be addressed. Among these include continued disparities in access to athletics and academic programs, and the experiencing of sexual harassment, hate crimes, and discriminatory treatment of girls and women, including those who are pregnant, in some schools (The National Women's Law Center, 2007, as cited in King, 2011).

Gender equity is not just about addressing disparities in outcomes for girls. While, traditionally, focus has been on addressing the achievement of girls, today statistics regarding boys' academic performance indicate the need to also examine how boys are experiencing school. Since 1981, when the U.S. Department of Education began keeping more complete statistics, there has been a trend of boys lagging behind girls in reading and writing (Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Gender stereotypes about masculinity operate within social contexts in ways that contribute to the disproportionate punishment and expulsion of male students in schools. Research has demonstrated that cultural beliefs about masculinity exacerbate educators' disciplinary practices with male students while at the same time encouraging antisocial and aggressive behavior (Flood, 2000). These occurrences especially impact Latino and Black male students who are often the recipients of discriminatory treatment based on beliefs and assumptions about their masculinity. These assumptions lead to fear and resentment on the part of many educators.

Other statistics related to the performance of boys (including grades, special education identification, and high school completion rates) point to the need for educators to question the extent to which boys have access to educational opportunities that are responsive to their academic and social needs (Gurian, 2001). Gender equity requires educators to create the conditions for student learning where both girls and boys can excel.

Consider the following strategies for examining and promoting equitable participation:

- Set up a school committee to monitor student participation in courses, activities, and disciplinary actions by gender. Where there are discrepancies, investigate to uncover potential gender equity issues.

providing leadership, consultation, and professional development in the area of equity and integration. She is also an adjunct instructor in the Department of Leadership, Policy, and Analysis at the University of St. Thomas School of Education, Minneapolis, MN. The recipient of a 2006 Bush Leadership Fellowship award and the 2010 AERA Leadership for Social Justice Dissertation of the Year award, Dr. Radd's practice and research interests center on public education as a transformative institution for social justice and equity. Radd lives and works in the Minneapolis/St Paul metro area.

Upcoming Events:

Minnesota

June 19-22, 2012
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
National Charter Schools Conference 2012
Click here to read more

June 23-26, 2012
"Be Brilliant" American School Counselors Association Conference 2012
American School Counselors Association
Click here to read more

Illinois

July 9-13, 2012
Responsive Classroom
Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc.
Click here to read more

July 21-25, 2012
Midwest Differentiated Instruction Conference
Staff Development for Educators
Click here to read more

In the News

"Inside the Silicon Valley Gender Gap" a perspective from the trenches of women in STEM careers.

Provide needed support and encouragement for both female and male students who have enrolled in courses and activities that are non-traditional for their sex.

Equity minded educators who are interested in disrupting social forces that contribute to gender disparities can monitor representations of gender in their curricular materials, language, and actions to ensure that they help deconstruct limiting beliefs about what males and females look like or do. Students can take part in critical reflections and conversations about gender norms and gender conformity as they engage with literature, the media, history, or even patterns in their own classrooms. Consider the following strategies to create a more gender equitable environment in your school, and then brainstorm others with colleagues:

- Use instructional materials that feature men and women in various occupational, recreational, and familial roles. When images show a gender pattern (e.g., all U.S. presidents are male), initiate a conversation with your students about what they notice and why they believe this is the case.
- Encourage students to examine gender patterns within the classroom. Do male and female students work together often? Who answers questions more often? Use this data to launch a discussion about how to create a more gender equitable environment.
- Ensure that your expectations for classroom performance and behavior are equal across sexes.
- Support students in becoming critical consumers of information (e.g. media representation of gender and representations of gender in school curriculum).

Working toward gender equity means ensuring that all students feel represented in the classroom regardless of how they enact and identify their gender, and thus, are able to reach their full human potential. Schools can play a significant role in lifting the constraints of gender expectations by offering non-discriminatory opportunities to all students, monitoring and supporting participation in courses and activities, and ensuring that representations of gender in everyday practice challenge gender stereotypes. In order for these goals to be achieved, equity- minded educators must first become aware of gender expectations in order to be able to identify them as they play out in the social constructions that either help or hinder a student's ability to fully engage with opportunities offered in schools.

For a list of this section's references, click here.

Engage

We may only be a team of two science teachers coming from a small rural school district, but the [Museum's] community makes us a team of many more...this has broadened our district's perspective on the importance and urgency of implementing STEM in our schools. It has also given us the tools we need to start this process.
Kingsland Public Schools, MN (Science Museum of Minnesota, n.d.)

The Peer Alliance for Gender Equity (PAGE) Leadership Program

The Peer Alliance for Gender Equity (PAGE) Leadership program is a professional development program for education leaders funded by the National Science Foundation and hosted by the Science Museum of Minnesota. PAGE's mission is to address "gender, racial and class-based achievement gaps in STEM education", with support focused

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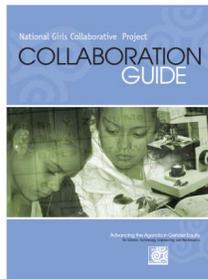
"New Study Finds Gender Bias in Children's Books"

Join the Conversation on Facebook :

In what ways do race and gender intersect in schools? And how can schools create a safe environment to talk openly and honestly about these issues with and among students and educators?

*Coming Soon:
The summer edition of Equity Dispatch!*

on professionals working in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

In bringing together school and district leaders who are responsible for STEM education, the PAGE program creates a community of equity minded educators and provides them with space and tools to develop strategies that support and contribute to the learning of all students and the economic strength of communities. The program's ultimate objective is to open doors to the benefits of STEM education that help children grow up prepared to participate in and contribute to a world that abounds with possibilities. STEM education not only creates opportunities for students to benefit from the economics of careers that are in demand, STEM education also creates opportunities for the world to benefit from brilliant minds.

The Peer Alliance for Gender Equity Leadership program is taking a systemic approach to educational equity by inviting representation from school and district leadership to work together and address equity at every level of STEM education. Recognizing the power of collaboration between schools and community organizations to promote equity, the PAGE project serves as an excellent example of what can happen when resources are brought together and equity is addressed head on.

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Empower

Something to Watch!

Professor Michele Elam of Stanford University presents a lecture in which she discusses the taboo nature of speaking about gender and race in the classroom. In her intriguing lecture, Dr. Elam details what some *a priori* conditions are for creating a classroom climate that facilitates conversation of gender and race in a way that cultivates awareness that can be used as intellectual tools "in the service of good critical thinking".

Something to Do!

National Girls Collaborative Project "Collaboration Guide"

Join the National Girls Collaborative Project

and build your girls-focused, gender equity education project's capacity through shared resources and networking. The National Girls Collaborative Project also offers lots of girls-in-STEM Informal Learning Resources that will help you design and facilitate gender equitable STEM education in your school/classroom.

Something to Read!

"'Good Morning Boys and Girls'"

Take time to read this short article that may have long lasting significance in your everyday practice. Get a new perspective on some of most basic gendered language in the classroom.

TEACHING TOLERANCE
A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

"Gender Expression"

Also from Teaching Tolerance, a series of classroom lessons for grades K-5 on "Gender Expression" teaches students ways to understand and disrupt gender construction and unfair biases.

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