



Question

Does single-sex schooling in K-12 increase achievement and educational experiences of both boys and girls?

Application

Report to policy makers on what the research says about single-sex schooling and how the issue is presented to the public by news media.

Literature Search

Popular Press

LexisNexis & Canadian Newsstand Databases (January 2003 - June 2004)

42 magazine and newspaper articles identified

Research Findings

Academic Search Premier, ERIC, CBCA Education & Reference, Sociological Abstracts Databases (January 1990 - June 2004)

160 articles identified; 48 met inclusion criteria

SPOTLIGHTS on most relevant articles = 6

SUMMARY OF SPOTLIGHTS

- Contrary to how the issue is sometimes framed in the news media, there are no meaningful differences between single-sex and mixed-sex schooling when social and academic pre-existing factors are considered
- When given the choice, girls generally prefer single-sex classes whereas boys typically prefer coeducational classes
- Rather than establishing single-sex schools, policies can be directed at ensuring equality of opportunity, eliminating sex discrimination in instruction, and managing student behaviour in the classroom

#5 Lee, V.E., Marks, H.M., & Byrd, T. (1994). Sexism in single-sex and coeducational independent secondary school classrooms. *Sociology of Education*, 67(2), 92-129.

Abstract

This study investigated how engenderment (socialization to gender) operates in three types of independent secondary schools: boys' schools, girls' schools, and coeducational schools. Observational data were collected in 86 classrooms in 21 schools in specific curricular areas. The study found that teachers initiated most of the incidents in six categories of sexism. Furthermore, although the frequency of incidents was similar in the three types of schools, the forms of sexism were different. Chemistry classes were the major locus of sexism in coeducational schools, and the severest form of sexism was found in boys' schools. Although girls' schools exhibited the most gender-equity events, they also perpetuated a pernicious form of sexism: academic dependence and nonrigorous instruction. Schools with policies that actively promoted gender equity in enrollment, in the hiring of faculty, and in personal relations were the least likely sites of sexism.

Relevance Summary

Unlike past research on sexism in the classroom, this study examined both Negative engenderment (incidents of sexism), and Positive engenderment (incidents of gender equity), and identified several contextual variables (gender of teacher, gender ratio, curriculum area, gender history of school). The study found that the most serious forms of sexism took place in single-sex schools: explicit sexuality in the case of boys' schools, and the encouragement of academic dependence in the case of girls' schools. These forms of sexism were rarer in the mixed-sex classrooms where the most common forms of sexism were either gender domination (boys dominating discussion and teachers giving more attention to boys) or active discrimination. The more serious incidents of sexism in coeducational schools occurred in classes in which girls were severely outnumbered. Most notably in Chemistry classes, incidences of sexism were considerably reduced in classes in which the percentages of boys and girls were more equivalent, and disappeared in the few classes in which females outnumbered males. Although results revealed that incidents of sexism increased in single-sex classrooms (i.e., same-sex teacher and students), the gender of the teacher did not affect sexism when the number of male and female students in the class room was more equivalent. In addition, employing female teachers to teach all-boys classes diminished the frequency of the flagrant forms of sexism present in male taught all-boys classes. These results illustrate that sexism in classrooms is not inevitable. The implementation of proactive policies towards gender equity can reduce or diminish the different forms of sexism in classrooms.

Key Quotes

"Although the presence of the two sexes does not eliminate sexism, and mixed-gender relations in schools may replicate entrenched societal patterns, the presence of both boys and girls seems to moderate the most flagrant forms of sexism." (p. 105)