



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

#6 Martino, W. & Meyenn, B. (2002). 'War, Guns, and Cool, Tough, Things': interrogating single-sex classes as a strategy for engaging boys in English. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32(3), 303-324.

Abstract In this paper an investigation is undertaken into the impact and effects, on both boys and girls, of implementing single-sex classes - but particularly as a strategy for engaging boys in the English classroom at one particular Catholic coeducational school in Perth, Western Australia. Semi-structured interviews with seven English teachers at this school, where the strategy was implemented, were used both to analyse teachers' perceptions of single-sex classes in the coeducational context and to gain some insight into their pedagogical approaches. The study found that particular assumptions and knowledges about gender informed specific pedagogical approaches adopted by the teachers in single sex English classes. These assumptions and knowledges and the way they informed the pedagogical practices of the teachers, even in the same school, varied radically. It is concluded that single-sex classes as a strategy per se do not necessarily produce enhanced social and educational outcomes for students. Rather, as indicated in the research, there needs to be more attention directed to the particular effects of pedagogy and the normalising assumptions about gender that inform the implementation of curriculum in both the single-sex and the coeducational classes.

Relevance Summary

The present study underlines the importance of teachers' pedagogical practices in single-sex classrooms. Teachers modified their educational strategies and curriculum choices in ways that often reinforced gender stereotypes, particularly active masculinity and passive femininity. Some teachers implemented practices that encouraged boys to think critically about gender, particularly about the social construction of masculinities. Some teachers believed that boys may not have engaged in such discussions had girls been present. Single-sex classes seemed, to some teachers, to create a "safe space" for boys to think critically about gender. Teachers reported that single-sex classes improved the learning environment for boys and increased their self-esteem, but these results may have been more the result of pedagogical choices than a result of the sex-grouping alone. In fact, teachers' comments were largely based on the assumption that the presence of girls in the classroom was a cause of boys' problems. The teachers' assumptions presumed a stereotypical heterosexual masculinity, and overlooked the possibility that homophobia and sexism permeated boys' own social practices, as other research has shown.

Key Quotes

"... the research does support the view that as a strategy in and of itself, single-sex classes do not ensure that the 'boy problem' will be solved in literacy and, in fact, has shown that it has led to reinforcing particular versions of masculinity rather than ameliorating or interrogating their deleterious effects" (p. 308).

"It would appear that the productive pedagogy outlined here is not so much attributable to the single sex strategy per se, but to the complex dimensions of this teacher's pedagogical approach." (p. 321).