Title: Gender Equity Matters!
Author: Thorius, K.K. -- The Equity Alliance at ASU
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Abstract

Despite remarkable progress along many indicators of equitable access, participation, and outcomes of schooling, there are still persistent, pervasive issues that must be addresses, including continued disparities in access to athletics and academic programs, sexual harassment, hate crimes, and discriminatory treatment of girls and women. This What Matters brief includes strategies for: achieving gender equity in access and opportunities to learn; achieving a gender-balanced curriculum; achieving gender-equity in interpersonal relations with/between students; achieving gender-equity in discipline patterns.

Gender Equity Matters!

by Kathleen King Thorius
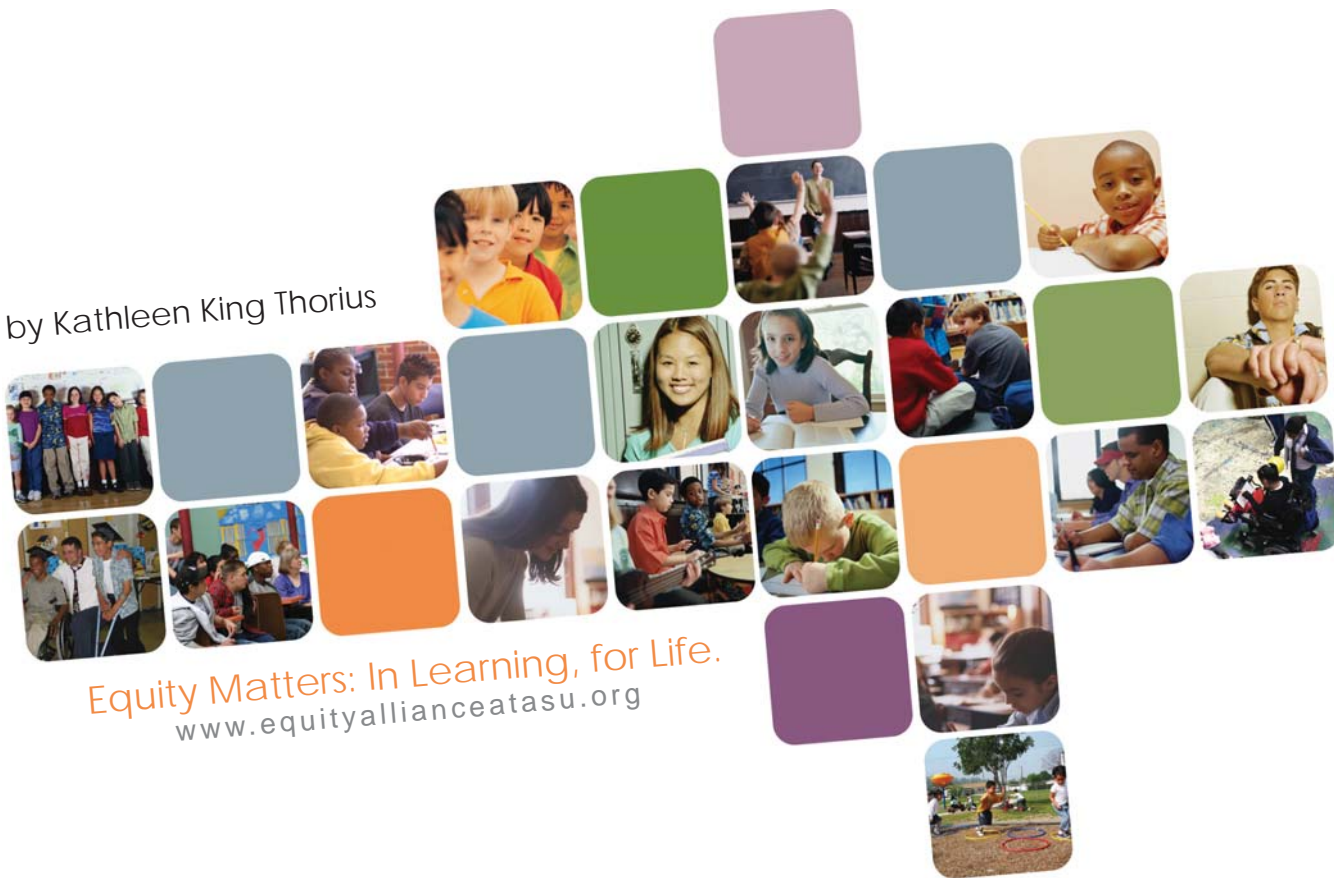
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There's a lot to be encouraged about when we look at the current state of gender equity in education between girls and boys, young women, and men. To start, the average educational performance of both girls' and boys' has improved over the past couple decades, and more women and men are likely to complete high school and postsecondary education than any time in United States history (AAUW, 2009). Yet, we must not become complacent in our knowledge of these improvements; both girls and boys continue to experience disparities in multiple educational and social outcomes, and while numbers are important indicators of success and improvement, they paint an incomplete picture at best, of the day-to-day experiences of discrimination by both girls and boys, on the basis of gender.

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Inequities in access to public schooling altogether were commonplace in the 1700s, when the Boston Public School System began to admit girls in 1789. Over the next century, while overall numbers of students enrolled in public schools increased significantly, girls continued to struggle for access to schools, classes, and academic

Although we utilize dominant notions of gender as either female or male in this brief, we acknowledge that not all students identify in these ways. We encourage readers to access another brief in our What Matters series: Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Bisexual, Questioning Youth Matter! (King, 2009) when considering opportunities to learn for students who do not identify as male or female.

content that boys were much more readily able to obtain. In 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York, 300 women and men signed the Declaration of Sentiments, a plea for the end of discrimination against women in all spheres of society. Other formal public efforts to address gender inequities continued into the next century, including the 1963 Equal Pay Act which banned employers from discriminating between employees on the basis of sex by paying unequal wages, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin, and the passage of 1972 Title IX of Education Amendments: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under and education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Since the passage of Title IX, and through the work of countless individuals and groups within and outside the U.S.

educational system, there have been many improvements in the state of gender equity in public education.

What do we mean by gender?

Sex is defined based on biological differences with reference to the reproductive functions. In this piece we are referring to gender which is a social and cultural construction based on sexual identity, naming, clothing, etc.

Yet, despite remarkable progress along many indicators of equitable access, participation, and outcomes of schooling, there are still persistent, pervasive issues that must be addressed, including continued disparities in access to athletics and academic programs, 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). In our work as the Equity Assistance Center for Region IX, which serves Arizona, California, and Nevada, we partner with states and local school systems, to provide high-quality, effective opportunities to learn for all students, to be responsive to race, gender, and national origin, and to reduce disparities among and between groups in academic achievement. Embedded in this work is our consideration of students' opportunities to learn (i.e., access, participation, and outcomes) in connection with their gender identities. In the remainder of this *What Matters* brief, we provide basic information about current trends in these opportunities for girls and boys, and then provide some areas for educators to consider as they work toward making sure that students not only experience equitable academic achievement evidenced by improved test scores, attendance, and graduation rates, but also that their daily

school experiences are not discriminatory on the basis of gender.

As we outlined above, data show that females now perform comparable to or better than males on many indicators of academic achievement, particularly in reading and writing, and they are less likely than their male peers to be retained, dropout, or engage in risky behavior, like drug use and peer violence (Freeman, 2004). However, males continue to perform better in math and science. Although the gap is shrinking, female students are less likely to be enrolled in some Advanced Placement (AP) courses and tend to perform less well on AP exams (Freeman, 2004). The gap in athletics participation also persists (Braddock, Sokol-Katz, Greene, & Basinger-Fleischman, 2005). Boys are not safe from gender discrimination, either. Skiba and colleagues (2002) found that overwhelmingly, studies of school punishment by gender demonstrated that boys are referred to the school office and excluded from school as a disciplinary action at much higher rates than girls. In Arizona, the four year graduation rate for males during the 2007-08 school year was 69% versus 78% for females (Arizona Department of Education, 2009).

Such statistics are a reminder that gender equity in schools continues to be an issue, and that we must consider the ways in which both girls and boys encounter discriminatory experiences in school settings in connection with gender. There are four key areas that we will focus on in the remainder of this brief, along with suggestions for how schools and educators can assess and address issues of gender equity in their local settings: *Access and Opportunities to Learn, Gender-balanced Curriculum, Gender-equitable Interpersonal Relations, and Gender-responsive Discipline Practices.*

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Access and Opportunities to Learn:

Despite improvements in access to certain types of classes and subject areas for female students, there are still marked differences in access to and participation in elective classes, and the core subject areas of math, science, engineering, and other subject areas traditionally dominated by males. For example, even though girls represented 56 percent of all students who took AP exams in 2006, they made up less than 15 percent of students who took the AP exam in Computer Science (National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2007). While efforts to remedy these discrepancies should be focused across the educational system, there are specific strategies educators can engage in order to encourage both female and male students to develop interests and gain access to a range of subject area content.

Online resources for achieving equitable access and opportunities to learn:

- The *Intracultural Development Research Association's* podcast[1] is a discussion of where gender inequities tend to show up in classrooms and how educators can make changes to ensure equity for girls and boys.
- *Myra Sadker's 100+ Ideas to Promote Gender Equity in Schools*[2]
- The Schott Foundation produced this report[3] to guide systemic change in schools to achieve gender equity

Strategies for Achieving Gender Equity in Access and Opportunities to Learn

Take notice of the gender patterns in who teaches what electives and core subject areas, and be involved in efforts to increase the number of female educators teaching classes in the areas of science, technology, math, and engineering and other subject and grade levels traditionally taught by males.

Share with students your own interests, strengths, and talents in subjects and activities, making sure to include those which could be interpreted as breaking gender-stereotypes about what men and women like/are good at. Avoid references to stereotypes linking interests to gender.

Monitor that your own expectations and recommendations to students about what courses they may consider taking, occupations they might pursue, or academic or vocational interests they might have do not adhere to gender stereotypes.

Engage in dialogue with students' advisors, guidance counselors, and other teachers who interact with students regarding their schedules, about the importance of the preceding three suggestions.

Consider adding to the work you do on your grade or subject area teams or joining a team of educators who examine the course taking patterns, grades, and extra-curricular participation of boys and girls.

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Strategies for Achieving a Gender-balanced Curriculum

Select and use resources that reflect the current and evolving roles of women and men in society, and portray females and males in non-traditional roles.

Weave content about, for, and by women/girls, men/boys into every aspect of the curriculum. For example, seek a balance of female and male protagonists in literature.

Examine resources for gender equitable content and bring gender-biased materials to students' attention, while teaching them how to recognize gender inequities in curriculum and materials.

Model gender-neutral/gender-inclusive language, and interact equitably with female and male students.

Employ gender equitable instructional and assessment strategies which will enable students to learn and grow without facing artificial barriers or restrictions imposed by gender bias.

Gender-balanced Curriculum:

A recent research study (Chick, 2006) evaluated K-12 American history textbooks for gender balance by assessing the number of male and female historical figures in text and illustrations. The study found that at elementary, middle, and high school levels, significantly more (at the .001 level, i.e., very highly likely not due to chance) males than females were represented. One set of efforts of a multi-faceted approach to achieving gender equity in schools is in how curriculum is developed and supplemented to reflect a balanced depiction of males and females engaged in the wide variety of achievements of and roles available to all individuals in a diverse society. In order to do so, curricula and materials should emphasize gender-balanced content, activities, and instructional strategies that will aid in the creation of schools and classrooms that are free of gender stereotypes, and which support both male and female students to develop their range of interests, talents, and abilities.

Online resources for enacting a gender-balanced curriculum:

- OxFam's *Gender Equality in Schools*[4] discusses how the content of curriculum, interpersonal relationships, and the classroom environment can perpetuate gender inequality.

- Women in Literature and Arts Assembly (1995) presents these *Guidelines for a Gender-Balanced Curriculum in English Language Arts Pre-K to Grade 6* [5] and also includes a booklist. A booklist for grades 7-12 is available here[6] from the National Council of Teachers of English (1997).

- *Federal Resources for Educational Excellence*[7] has many resources for incorporating prominent women of history into lesson plans.

- The *National Women's History Project*[8] provides numerous educational materials to help classroom discussions about the numerous accomplishments of women throughout history.

Gender-equitable Interpersonal Relations:

Our actions speak volumes more than our words can and it is through our interactions that we can demonstrate gender equity. Yet countless studies have demonstrated the differences in types and frequency of teacher interactions with girls versus boys, for the most part, favoring boys (see for example, Sadker & Sadker, 1994). In interactions with students, be aware about the potential message that is being conveyed beyond the specific words or actions. Reflect on your own perceptions of gender roles and expectations and how they may play out in the classroom, and consider some of the following strategies to help promote gender equality in interactions.

Online resources achieving gender-equity in your interactions with students:

- The *Collaborative for Gender Equity in Emerging Technologies* project[9] is focused on confronting myths about female participation in science and technologies and encouraging females in high school to pursue careers in these areas.

- *Wikigender*[10] is an online platform to find and exchange information related to gender equality.

- *Association of Texas Professional Educators*' "Gender Equity"[11] gives a couple brief examples on gender equitable interactions with and between students

Strategies for Achieving Gender-equity in Interpersonal Relations With/Between Students

Model and insist upon the use of gender-neutral/gender-inclusive language in formal and informal classroom interactions, and interact equitably with female and male students.

Hold and demonstrate equally high expectations for female and male students and for cooperation between the genders.

Teach students how to recognize gender inequities in what they view and hear (e.g. recognizing and reframing "businessman", "mailman", "fireman", etc).

Observe students to ensure that neither gender interrupts nor takes ownership of an activity or project to the exclusion of the other gender.

Create opportunities for student participation that vary across levels of physical activity and verbal engagement.

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Gender-responsive Discipline Practices

Ferguson (2000), found that stereotypes of boys as dangerous and predatory impact the ways school discipline approaches are constructed and enforced. Morris (2005) found that female African American students were reprimanded in connection with stereotypes about how "ladies" should act. More generally, gender stereotypes impact both the expectations for the behavior of boys and girls, and the types of reprimands and punishments boys and girls encounter in schools. Of course, as we emphasize in all of our work, the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and disability (Crenshaw, 1991) make it impossible to conclude that any of these social categories alone is the reason that students encounter discrimination and differential treatment and opportunities in school and society at large. That's why ongoing analysis of which students are being reprimanded, both formally and informally in your classroom and your school as a whole, is an important step to becoming gender-fair in the ways you support students' social development.

Online resources for achieving gender-equity in discipline patterns

- *Stop the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track* provides key components of a model discipline policy here[12] with examples of school districts that follow "model" discipline practice.

- *Educational Equity Concept's* Gender, Diversities, & Technology Institute and 7 Generations Video produced and developed *Gender Healthy/Respectful Schools*[13] which captures the experiences and lessons learned in a three-year project in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts schools.

There are many resources out there for building schools that explicitly and directly address gender equity. We offer this short brief as a starting point, rather than an exhaustive list of approaches that you may take in your local settings. Please check out the resources we provide below in order to access additional information. As always, should you need any assistance with equity issues in education, contact us at the Equity Alliance at ASU (www.equityalliancetasu.org). Remember, gender-equitable schools are equity imperative!

Strategies for Achieving Gender-equity in Discipline Patterns

Be aware of how socialization patterns impact, but do not account for ways in which boys and girls interact across and within their gender groups, including how they address conflicts, and then, teach the behaviors you want to see, including strategies of negotiation and dialogue.

Insist upon and assist in developing comprehensive school policy prohibiting all forms of discrimination, including the identification of staff members who will confidentially hear concerns and create a process for swift and fair action.

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Websites for resources organized by numeral subscript

1. http://www.idra.org/Podcasts/Resources/Fostering_Gender_Equity_in_the_Classroom/

2. http://www.sadker.org/100ideas.html

3. http://ea.niusileadscape.org/lc/Record/1136?search_query=gender

4. http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/education/downloads/edPaper2.pdf

5. http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderbalancedprek6

6. http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_Search Value_0=ED461107&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED461107

7. http://www.free.ed.gov/subjects.cfm?subject_id=26&toplvl=174&res_feature_request=1

8. www.nwhp.org

9. http://genderequitycollaborative.org/

10. http://wikigender.org/w/index.php/Main_Page

11. http://www.atpe.org/resources/student&parentissues/gender.asp

12. http://www.stopschoolstojails.org/content/model-discipline-policies

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