FOREWORD

By: Susan M. Bailey

DESPITE TWO CENTURIES OF DEBATE and significant federal and state legislation, gender remains a controversial topic in U.S. education. The past decade has been marked by heated discussions in which sound bites often carry the day and K-12 education frequently appears as a zero sum game—if girls win, boys must lose, and vice versa. The Jossey-Bass Reader on Gender in Education provides a much-needed antidote to this oversimplification. The thirty-one articles and book chapters that follow represent a range of opinions, perspectives, and approaches to the topic of gender equity. Taken together they dispel any notion of quick fixes or exclusively one-sided disadvantage. Many reading the selections may be left with more questions than answers. But everyone will gain a clearer understanding of the complexities inherent in discussions of education and gender. The book is valuable for anyone interested in education and educational policy. Teachers, administrators, policy makers, parents, and academics will all find the selections provocative and informative.

The volume begins with an historic overview of the 1960s through the 1980s, a period during which women and girls made significant progress in education. With the passage of Title IX in 1972, legal barriers to equal access tumbled, even though enforcement of the law often lagged behind the letter of the legislation. But as the 1990s opened, the journey toward gender equitable education—first begun in the earliest years of the nation with the question of whether public funds should be used to educate girls—continued to be a series of tortuous hairpin turns rather than a long, but basically straight, path. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) published How Schools Shortchange Girls in early 1992. No sooner had the headline-grabbing title focused attention on girls than concern for boys arose. Soon, helping girls was equated with somehow hurting boys, as the media rushed to present the "two sides" of the issue. There was little focus on the stated thesis of the report that "by studying what happens to girls in school we gain valuable insights about what has to change in order for each student, every girl and every boy to do as well as she or he can." The challenge the report posed...
was to "help girls and boys acquire both the relational and the competitive skills needed for full participation in the workforce, the family and community."  

The Reader goes on to chronicle the debates of the 1990s. The selections reflect major differences about the nature and the origin of gender differences as well as about the most effective ways of addressing them. Each of the six major sections in the volume covers an aspect of the debate. Part One, Female and Male Identity, focuses on the nature versus nurture debate. Part Two, Negotiating the Classroom, presents a range of views on classroom interactions. Some chapters outline the way boys are at a disadvantage in today's classrooms; others detail the problems girls face. In sum, the authors present a strong case for gender equitable approaches that can help both sexes.  

Gender Equity in the Curriculum is the focus of Part Three. This section looks at the time-honored measures of equity, the differential achievement, and course-taking patterns of boys and girls. It also contains perspectives on sexuality and socioemotional development that point out how ignoring these issues undercuts academic achievement. What this section does not address, except in passing, is the content of academic materials and coursework. Little has been written on this topic in the past decade by gender equity advocates. This is perhaps in part because earlier work resulted in some significant changes in curricular materials. It may also reflect the move toward national standards and statewide testing that has left little room for curricular change, expansion, or enhancement.  

Part Four, Violence in Schools, addresses concerns that have claimed headlines during the 1990s—physical violence and sexual harassment and bullying. These issues are not as new as the expanded media coverage suggests, but the coverage itself is an example of how changing societal sensitivities reveal new aspects of old patterns. For example, within a few months in the early 1990s, sexual harassment went from rarely mentioned to front-page news. Anita Hill testified in the Clarence Thomas hearings in the fall of 1991. How Schools Shortchange Girls was released in February of 1992 with a short section on sexual harassment covering the limited research then available. Two weeks later, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that school districts were financially liable if they failed to provide an educational environment that was free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. Suddenly, sexual harassment in schools was "hot." Research and debate followed. The articles in this section reflect key findings and perspectives that emerged.  

The articles in Part Five, The Interaction of Gender, Race, and Class, challenge the idea that all students, or all girls, or all poor children, or all children from a particular racial or ethnic group are "the same." The authors use various methodologies but all focus on how to better understand the complexities and the realities of children's lives in school. These are areas that have gained visibility during the past decade, as researchers worked to challenge and refute a one-dimensional view of difference and disadvantage. A future edition of this Reader will hopefully include work focusing on another critical variable—disability, and the particular ways gender influences the education of students with special needs.  

The final section of the book looks at single sex versus coeducation, an apt finale as these chapters bring the discussion of gender and education to another hairpin turn and within viewing distance of the debate as stated in the late nineteenth century. Then, as now, the
questions centered on whether the education of girls and boys should be separate and different, separate but the same, together and the same, or together but different.\(^3\)

The Future

Preparing young people for citizenship in a democracy has always been a central mission of public education in the United States. The tragic and horrifying events of September 11, 2001, require renewed attention to this fundamental goal. Our future as a free society depends on active and informed citizens who value the principles of human rights and justice contained in our Constitution. By definition, education for citizenship must be gender equitable education; an education in which every voice is heard and each girl and boy has an equally wide range of educational opportunities and life choices. Furthermore, it is no longer possible to consider educating students for effective citizenship without helping them to acquire a global awareness and sensitivity. As they learn more about other nations and cultures, both girls and boys need to learn of the work women do around the globe to protect the environment and secure peace.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has said, "For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls."\(^4\) The primary victims of the world's armed conflicts today are women and children. But women are rarely at the negotiating table or in visible leadership positions. Whether in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, or Northern Ireland, women have worked successfully to promote peace, but most of this work has been behind the scenes and much of it is unknown to students and their teachers.

Twenty-first century girls and boys must grow up valuing and learning not only from men's accomplishments but also from women's. This is the challenge for educators in the century ahead. It is the next turn on the road to gender equitable education.

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