

ABSTRACT

Sex, Gender and Academic Achievement: Marginal Boys in a Secondary School in Barbados

Hazel Veronica Lindo-Carrington

This case study attempted to examine critically the view which is increasingly being held by the members of the public in various countries in the world, that boys constitute a marginal group within the educational system. More specifically, the study sought to examine differences in academic achievement and participation between boys and girls and to account for such differences in a secondary school in Barbados.

The cohort which entered the school in 1995 was the primary focus of the study and was traced from the point of entry to the year 2000. The effects of socioeconomic status (SES) and the score on the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) on academic achievement were also investigated.

Data collection methods included the examination of school documents, classroom observations, interviews and questionnaires. Chi-square analysis was used to determine if significant sex differences existed in each of the indicators investigated.

The boys in this study were found to be marginal, that is at the lower end of measures of the majority of indicators examined in this study. By the end of the fifth year more girls than boys had gained entry to Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) examinations in 22 of 24 subjects and 60.9% of the girls of the cohort had gained four or more subjects at CXC Proficiency Level Grades I-III compared with 36.0% of the boys. There were significant sex differences in favour of girls in the repetition rate, the assignment of students to subject tracks and those receiving awards. Boys received more detentions than girls and held fewer positions of responsibility. The score on the English component of the CEE was found to be a significant contributor to the variance in performance in CXC examinations. Factors related to the development of boys' gender identity were suggested and ranked higher than school-related-factors as likely contributors to male underachievement.

Future research should determine the extent to which the results of this study are representative of the academic achievement and participation of boys in secondary schools in Barbados. Individual schools may also determine if the findings have relevance for their school and classroom practices. In addition, there is a need to investigate further the relationship between the sex of the teacher, teacher experience, teacher training, the subject taught and the participation of boys.