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Education for All by 2015: will we make it?

Gender and Inequity in Education
Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION
In reviewing literature on gender biases and inequality in education, I was asked to focus on literature since 1999. In addition to western countries, mostly I was asked to find studies related to developing and non-western countries. The challenge has been great because one academic paper cannot encompass a thorough summary of many countries and societies. Therefore, I suggest looking at this paper as a preliminary study and introduction to potential future studies and aspects of more thorough and specific studies by narrowing countries and regions of interests and by narrowing the topics.

I was also requested to break the literature into four subjects: teacher training, curriculum and pedagogy; teaching methods and processes; management of peer relationships and school and classroom environment. In the search for literature, based on what I have found thus far, I modified the titles of some of the topics. I also found that at least two of them merge and in the literature. I mostly focused on teacher training, school and classroom climate (to which I added community, cultural, governmental influences etc.), and teacher-student interaction and peer interaction (which encompasses teaching methods and management of peer relationship).

The issue of gender inequality in education is very broad. Although there are many similarities among many societies, there are also some differences that change the perception on the problem for each society and individual. It would be fair to claim that different cultures, societies, households and eventually individuals, perceive the role of education in different ways. Likewise, in order to understand the obstacles to gain gender equality in education, it is essential to understand the broader picture of the studied society, e.g., the perception of boys and girls; masculinity and femininity; caring and leadership and their roles in society. These perceptions vary as well within each society and household. Likewise, the dichotomy between the private sphere and the public sphere; between objective and subjective factors are very subtle, many times intertwined and the separation is frequently unequivocal and blurry. Mostly it is essential to bear in mind that many stereotypical patterns are covert and less overtly evidential.

OVERALL REVIEW
Most of the studies I have reviewed focused on girls equality in education. However, several studies did mention that boys did not necessarily enjoy advantages either. Boys, often, have social constraints that hard to break (Pollack, 1999). For example, in many cases, boys need to dropout school in order to help their families in the field (see also GMR, 2006). Boys can also be viewed as problematic with discipline (e.g., Kutnick, 2000; Myhill & Jones, 2006). Likewise, other than traditional gender stereotypes, there are also objective reasons (by that I mean that the parents may be supportive but there are other obstacles) that can explain girls dropout from school and/or why they do not enroll to begin with. Some factors are related to physical
accommodations such as separate and/or clean latrines and also to the safety of the girls (e.g., concerns regarding sexual harassment and rapes).

**RESEARCH METHODS**

The studies I read vary in their methods and purposes. They can be meta-analytical, qualitative and/or quantitative. Some papers are defined as reports and therefore they are more general and less specific. They are also less analytic and less specific toward a certain region and they are geared mostly toward changing policies. Some studies use secondary source data. Such studies depend on existing data of other studies (e.g., Jones and Dindia, 2004). Quantitative studies can vary as well. Some are based on researchers’ data collection such as surveys and questionnaires and some are based on governmental data such as statistics, reports, demographic data and alike. Other studies can be either entirely qualitative or mixed with quantitative methods. In the last one, interviews and/or observations are included to get more personal and individual perspectives on the study, either through one-on-one interviews and/or through focus group discussions with different factors such as students, teachers, administrators and teacher educators.

**GENDER REFERENCE IN TEACHER TRAINING**

There are several components in teacher training that are related to gender equality. So far, I found 3: classroom management (e.g., whether the teacher treats boys and girls equally and fairly); sexual harassment (of female teachers and students) and teachers’ qualification. The first topic can be sporadically dichotomized to preservice and inservice teachers training (however, some studies are not equivocal with respect to their target audience).

**Classroom Management**

**Inservice Teachers**

The following study was conducted in **Northern Ireland** (Gray and Leith, 2004). Researchers claim that although teachers have shared their concern regarding gender inequality in the classroom, they nevertheless argue that this issue is quite marginalized (but not ignored) in their teacher training. Researchers collected surveys from 344 primary school inservice teachers with 3 and 6 years experience. The questions focused on whether teachers felt there was adequate reference to gender issues in their trainings. Interviews with teachers (through focus groups) and with teacher educators (one-on-one interviews) were also included. Overall, despite inadequate gender reference in teacher trainings, teachers demonstrated awareness of gender stereotypes in the classroom. They expressed general concern regarding boys’ underachievement. However, teachers emphasized their preference to address their students as individuals and not as part of a group of statistics and quantitative data, not even in regard with the gender. Therefore, more than the concern regarding gender inequality, they have expressed frustrations with the government’s failure “to focus on the needs of individuals rather than groups” (p.13). In that sense teachers did not wish to generalize and divide their students into two groups: boys and girls.
In the **USA** there is by and large concern and reference to gender inequality in education. However, while there is great focus on girls there is less focus on boys. In recent years, there has been a great concern regarding the decline of boys in academic performances (e.g., Newsweek, January 30, 2006; Reay, 2001). The body of literature focuses greatly on advancing girls, in particular in mathematics and science. For example, the project Sisters in Science (SIS) (Hammrich, Richardson and Livingston, 2000) aims to familiarize teachers with reforms in science education and gender equality in the classroom. In a two-week program, teachers were trained how to help their female students to make a progress in science. The study included focus group reflection and dialogue with teachers. Likewise, surveys were collected from teachers after the course ended. The researchers also included observations to examine how the teachers who attended the program implemented what they had learned in their classrooms.

Findings suggest, “most teachers (75% or more) were able to treat boys and girls equally with respect to engagement, interactions, encouragement, listening, and acknowledging.” Researchers also noticed that there was collaboration between boys and girls in class assignments. Many of the teachers commented that the course helped them enjoy teaching science more than before. They also developed new ways of teaching science and mathematics throughout the year. Likewise, involving students in the learning process made the students more engaged and enthusiastic. However, teachers claimed that when they needed to teach something new, they tended to return to traditional approach of teaching (i.e., the teacher is the instructor and source of knowledge and the students are passive participants and learners). As a result the female students were less participatory in class activities. Teaching method thus made a difference in the level of comfort girls felt participating in the classroom.

In another study (also in the **USA**) the researchers (Metz and McNally, 2001) examined a different training program in which teachers use drama in order to understand their own biases in the manner they interacted with their students. Researchers worked with a female English Language four-grade teacher from Austin, Texas who had five female students and fourteen male students in her classroom. One of the researchers was also playing an active role as a teaching assistant. That helped both researchers to better understand the teacher’s role both, as an insider and an outsider, to guide her how to use drama and to learn about her own gender biases.

Although the study does not elaborate adequately on the role of drama in the training, researchers found that there were gender differences in how the teacher interacted with her male and female students. In one example, the students needed to perform different roles. They needed to identify leaders at home and then to play these leaders. Researchers noticed that the teacher was more flexible with the boys than with the girls. While the teacher was harsh on female students who refused to play a male role, she was more lenient and flexible with boys who refused to play a female’s role. In their conclusions, researchers wrote that teacher was not aware of her gender biases and the training helped her to identify and improve them. Findings suggest that even teachers, who believe to be egalitarian, treat boys and girls differently. This study suggests that there are more social constraints toward boys than toward girls. With respect to the abovementioned example, the teacher was more sympathetic toward boys’ discomfort to play a woman and less the opposite.
In an expanded study in **South Korea**, Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA) (2006) researchers observed teacher program training to enhance gender awareness among teachers, in the classroom. The program encouraged teachers to reflect upon their lives as men and as women in their daily lives; to implement gender equality in education; introduce feminist theories, and to raise awareness among female and male teachers of gender stereotypes. The program also discusses gender-equal family culture and school gender sensitive institutional culture. The main focus of the study was on classroom observations and conclusions. In the sections on teacher-student interaction, I will expand on biases in the classroom and in instruction methods.

With the help of UNICEF, workshops were conducted in **Kenya** to encourage schools to collaborate with parents in the community and to train teachers to promote gender equality through such collaboration and through learning, to be sensitive to cultural norms (Unterhalter et al, 2005). Researchers argue that for such projects to succeed, there is a need in collaboration between women’s movements and alike, and women of the communities. They indicated that this was a major factor in increasing the odds for the success of such projects because women’s movements, separated from governmental influence are more ardent and adamant to promote equality. They have a strong influential presence that can aspire and empower other women. Swainson (2000) also argues that women’s NGOs are significantly important because they can challenge patriarchal norms that women in governmental position have not been sufficiently successful at.

**Preservice Teacher**

Quinn and Obenchain (1999) have demonstrated, in a preservice teacher training program in the **USA**, how biased teachers can be, without being aware of it. They gave their students/teachers a test with a hypothetical incident. The name of the main character was Chris. Researchers noticed that students/teachers analyzed the question with the assumption that Chris was a male. Researchers argued that the sex of the person in the test had an impact on the way the respondents analyzed the content of the test. The researchers’ concern was that the teachers/students had had gender stereotypical expectations from the main character. In the same manner, researchers suspected that if it were a real incident then teachers might develop different expectations from their own students based on their gender. Their conclusion was that it was essential to raise awareness among teachers in their training regarding gender biases in their class management and interaction with students.

**Sexual Harassment**

Other than (and perhaps prior to) gender equality instructions training, female students and teachers face a great challenge-to cope with sexual harassment and the perception of women in their own communities and countries. The issue of sexual harassment is a repetitive concern in many studies. Although I have here one study under teacher training category, I have found additional several studies that express great concern in this respect, but they are discussed with respect to school/classroom climate. There is a need to continue and search for additional studies in this respect.

Mameli et at., 2000 claim that “[t]eachers demonstrate a lack of understanding of gender and sexual harassment issues and are ill-equipped to educate children about
these issues” (p. 268). They argue that there is no adequate teacher training on this matter and on how to cope with it. Teachers are not sufficiently familiar with gender issues in teaching. On the other hand, female teaches are also victims of sexual stereotypes and harassment. Therefore, the conclusion from this report is that in order to promote a more egalitarian classroom, female teachers also need to be respected and be treated as equal to their male counterpart. Such an agenda requires also a cultural transformation of rooted seeds ingrained in discriminatory pattern behavior of many societies. Therefore, the training for egalitarian classroom requires also a supportive and respectful climate on a cultural level of the school and the community. Researchers based their findings on existing data from other studies in which educational administrators from different national and provincial departments of education were interviewed on that matter. Further research needs to examine whether there are sufficient and concrete studies that investigate the perception of the teaching profession culturally and the self-image teachers have.

**Teachers Qualifications**

Another important angle is teachers’ qualifications. The UNESCO/APPEAL (2000) report discusses teachers’ qualification of both sexes, in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The requirements are nevertheless, different in each country and in some there is more strict attention to teachers’ qualifications than in others. Although the report does not discuss gender related issues in training, it does discuss the challenges teachers face in becoming teachers. It also describes the differences in each country and between each country to become teachers.

There is a constant increase in the number of female teachers in primary schools. In some parts of each country there are more female teachers than male teachers e.g., in some parts of India there are less female teachers, in particular in rural areas. Regardless, women need to meet states requirements for teaching qualifications. However, for primary schools, in India, qualifications are lower. In Bangladesh and Nepal, it takes many years to get the training, due to load of work. In Nepal, only around one-third of all women teachers have educational qualifications above the minimum requirement. Teachers in the other three countries have also minimum qualifications, in particular in rural areas. Teachers in such areas also face additional challenges that training does not equip them with such as large classes, multi-grades, teaching first generation of school-goers, working with parents, classroom management, interaction with parents, facilities and more. Likewise, there are limited promotional opportunities for primary school teachers.

**Summary**

Most reports indicate that the majority of primary school teachers are women. Since the body of literature for years and decades associate primary care and school with home, the perception of female teachers was also associated with raising children at home. In that sense, home was not considered a profession that requires training like a lawyer or a medical doctor. Perhaps further literature review needs to also address whether there is teacher training that links the private and the public sphere, and acknowledge both spheres an equally important for society’s welfare. At the same time, being occupied by many women, the UNIFEM/UNDP (2002) report claims Teachers’
training study has therefore some limitations. Women as prime teachers in primary and middle schools, face challenges to attend such trainings because they do not have enough time. While they have a day job they also still have another job, to take care of their homes after work is over.

Hart (2005) can shade another light related to obstacles women face in gaining education. Although she teaches in a college level in the USA, most of her students are grown up women who are either mothers or they have other family chores as mothers and/or as prime caretaker in their families. As a result, they have to juggle between school and family affairs. Hart advocates more awareness to the women’s needs and consideration to their multi responsibilities.

**SCHOOL & CLASS CLIMATE:** cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, governments, etc.

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, climate is an essential component in learning. Factors such as gender socialization, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic background and alike, are significant in understanding gender inequality and disparity. Nkomo and Smith (2001) compared gender inequality in two places: Israel and South Africa. Based on the history of both countries and national quantitative data, they analyzed gender complexities in education. In their conclusions, researchers assert that in addition to gender, other factors must also be taken under considerations. For example, in Israel, there is a culture factor (Ashkenazi or Sephardim Jews); there is ethnicity a Jew or an Arab; there is the issue of socioeconomic background. In each category, there are gender differences. Researchers argue that girls are considered inferior and are discriminated in education. In South Africa, however, the researchers claim that the main problem is ethnicity and less gender. Unterhalter et al., (2005) also reported on high enrolment in South Africa of both genders. This is not to argue, however, that these two studies reflect the status of boys and girls in South Africa. These studies do suggest that the issue of gender inequality is were complicated and multi-layered.

**Parents’ Involvement**

Parents’ involvement is a dominant factor in children’s attendance in and concern with school. In Nepal, LeVine (2006) argues, girls’ access to school, and girls’ retention and dropout are strongly linked to girls background such as socioeconomic, culture, caste affiliation, area of residency (e.g., rural) and alike. Likewise, parents of a girl whose background is of a middle- or upper-caste are more open to send their daughters to school and to see the economic benefits in gaining education. The key to open a window of opportunities for children is, dominantly, according to the researchers at home. If the parents are supportive and are interested in sending their students to school, then the student, a boy or a girl, have a higher likelihood to retain his or her presence in school and to perform well. Therefore, in a preliminary literature search, it is possible to find reference to the role of parents in school and the assertions that collaborating with the parents is indispensable. School parents’ interaction is a significant component pertaining gender inequality and climate.

The UNESCO/APPEAL (2000) report addresses interaction between teachers and parents also in Nepal. The report focuses on parents’ gender preference of the teachers
and the significant role this factor plays for including them in their children education. The researchers found that many parents, reported that they felt more comfortable talking with a female teacher regarding their children’ education. Likewise, researchers indicated that female teachers were perceived as more effective in their relationship with their students, in particular in primary schools. They also added that a female teacher could be a role model to young girls who were not familiar with many educated women. Some teachers consider themselves leaders.

**Teacher-Student Interaction**

Valenzuela (1999) conducted her ethnographic study in Houston, Texas. Her participants were Mexican-American and Mexican born high school students. Her study’s main argument is that caring teachers are essential for the retention and positive academic performance of the students, especially for a vulnerable population such as of low economic background, and/or from unstable home, and/or immigrants.

Likewise, some studies suggest (e.g., Colelough et al, 1999; Rose and Al-Samarrai, 2001; UNIFEM/UNDP, 2002) that girls need female leader figure to be empowered and to cope with puberty, and boys need male leader figures who exemplify caring leadership. Stephens (2002) argues that female teachers can in particular inspire girls who hardly interact with workingwomen.

In an article in a weekly Tanzanian newspaper (The Arusha Times, October 11-17, 2003), the writer, Kimberly Walker, argues that the problem with gender inequality in education begins at home. “According to the UN, girls makeup 46% of primary school enrollment which then takes a huge drop to 16% in secondary school enrollment. Traditional practices including heavy household workloads, domestic priorities, and gender roles greatly hinder girls progressions in education”.

In addition to parental influence, Walker (2003) emphasizes more other objective factors. For example she considers the culture of the school, e.g., how the school is set up, the playground, mealtimes and so on as a substantial influence on how boys and girls learn. She also writes that many teachers believe that girls need less amount of schooling than men. Teachers also tend to cultivate boys and discourage girls from studying math and science. The problem is similar with regard to literacy. Boys have higher rate than girls. Therefore, curriculum content and teaching approach are also factors that determine learning. Moreover, Walker asserts that governmental influence in school curriculum reinforces gender biases and inequality. Quite often experts are hired by the state to write school curricula. That means that the curricula are controlled by government and thus are also tend to be gender biased. Such an agenda impacts school and classroom’s climate. (Education and Gender Equality Series, Programme Insights, 2005) (see also Swainson, 2000).

Favoring boys over girls have additional negative ramifications on girls in school. As I have already mentioned, sexual harassment is part of the climate girls grow at in and outside school. In Uganda, for example, boys are favored over girls and they are empowered to be masculine. As a result, sexual harassment becomes covertly legitimate (Mirembe and Davis, 2001). As I have already mentioned in teacher training section, sexual harassment is a very important factor in understanding gender inequality and disparity. Mamleli et al., (2000) write that this is “a key barrier to equality in schooling in South Africa” (p. 263). Researchers attribute this environment to male dominance in the
country. They, nonetheless, add that girls suffer from sex violence, boys suffer as well but girls are the prime victims, including female teachers. Therefore, one of the challenges in gender inequality is to secure schools so that girls will feel safe and their parents will feel safe to send them to school. The same argument can be found in the UNESCO/APPEAL (2000) report (also in GMR, 2006). However, the mains focus of such studies is gender socialization in which being a boy is perceived more powerful and appealing to girls who aspire therefore, to act like boys.

**Conditions and Welfare**

As part of the caring climate, researchers also address the need in appropriate facilities especially for girls. Colclough et al, (2000) addressed the need in facilities that will help to retain more girls in schools. They focused on *Ethiopia and Guinea*, claiming that good facilities are necessary for them, especially when they reach puberty. For example, there are schools in *Ethiopia* without latrines (the same argument was made by teachers in rural areas in places like India, *Bangladesh*, *Pakistan* and *Nepal*, UNESCO/APPEAL, 2000). That deters girls from coming to school often.

Reay (2001) focused on the *UK*. She argues that even if girls can excel in school, they think that being a boy is better than being a girl. Their views are still traditional. These are not necessarily explicit views, argues the researcher, but they are ingrained in people’s mind and influence their daily interaction with other people. Reay adds that girls can also act in a manner that resemble to that of boys, to the extent that girls disempower their own gender because they think that it is better to be a boy than a girl. UNICEF (2003) report gives an example how girls are also being associated with traditional stereotypes regarding their role is society. According to the report, girls are treated in schools in *Tanzania* with disrespect. For example, they are being asked to perform domestic duties for teachers and to be passive, while boys are being cultivated to be assertive. Researchers also added that both boys and girls said that in general “girls spent more time performing non-school activities during school hours, such as cleaning the classroom and offices, … [and] latrines” (p. 23).

**TEACHER-STUDENT AND PEER INTERACTION**

Interaction and class management are eventually linked to climate because as a human being, the teacher brings inside the school and the classroom his or her values system. No one can be value-free. However, some teachers make an attempt to be more objective and to embrace all students as much as equally possible while others remain traditional. Learning, I have mentioned several times, has also a tremendous influence on children’s social, emotional and intellectual growth. Therefore, the ethics of caring are crucial in schools’ climate is order to eventually promote learning (Rousseau, Dewey, Nodding). This title also includes teaching methods and peer relationships. While looking for literature on these topics, I divided the studies into two forms of interaction that were essential for promoting gender equality in the classroom: teacher-student and peer-peer interaction. The following literature since 1999 is the preliminary findings of the following categories: teacher-student interaction and peer interaction.
**Teacher-Student Interaction**

No matter how aware a teacher is of gender biases, eventually what matters is the actual interaction. Although, teachers may be aware of the need in gender equality, it is many times inevitable that he or she will treat boys and girls differently. Sometimes they favor girls and sometimes they favor boys. The studies are thus, unequivocal.

In a large-scale study, in the **USA**, researchers found (Saft & Pianto, 2001) that teachers-students’ positive or negative relationship is by and large related to child’s age, gender, ethnicity and teacher’s ethnicity. They concluded that “school psychologists’ effort to understand why children succeed or fail academically can be advanced by focusing on social and emotional processes that contribute to child outcomes in part as a function of classroom interaction between children and teachers” (p. 138). Therefore, this review also focuses on literature that emphasizes the need in cultivating caring and nurturing climate is school and in particular in classes in order to improve learning (see also Kutnick, 2000).

Shumba (2002) also contends that students need a caring, nurturing and supportive environment in order to learn better. The researcher’s study focuses on primary schools in **Zimbabwe**. Finding reveal that teachers used a vulgar language with students. Questionnaires were collected from 300 teachers and 150 teacher trainees from primary schools. Results show that mostly female teachers shout, scold and use vulgar language with students. Teachers also label students negatively in public and abuse them emotionally. The researcher, however, does not provide us with additional information on the participants such as, the sex of the teachers who filled in the questionnaires, their socioeconomic background, ethnicity and alike. We also do not know if female students or male students are more affected by this attitude. However, the study does provide us with a gender angle regarding teachers approach to students because the focus is on female teachers who abuse their students. The findings are also consistent with other studies in this review that emphasize the need in a caring climate.

Kimberly Walker (*The Arusha Times*, October 11-17, 2003) based her argument on other studies and also writes that male and female teachers tend to cultivate the minds of male students more than those of girls (in **Tanzania**). Teachers, of both sexes, often discourage girls from studying math and science. They are gender-based stereotypical in classroom management. Colclough et al., (2000) also argue that in **Ethiopia** male teachers and in Guinea both male and female teachers had a positive view about boys and considered them more intelligent and engaged in learning than girls (Colclough et at, 2000). On the other hand, in a large-scale research project (Kutnick, 2000), in **East Caribbean**, researchers found that when girls performed academically better than boys, there was a strong link to their background at home. For example, the kind of schools they attended from a young age, with whom they lived, and their parents’ occupation. Kutnick also found sexual stereotypes in the classroom that favor girls. “Boys are less likely to be called upon in class; some may not be able to answer the question and they do not have the social support system that was found among the girls to encourage them to answer” (p. 83). At the same time, “low attaining girls did not put themselves forward to answer questions” (ibid., p. 83). Nonetheless, if a boy is low attaining he is stereotyped as a behavioral troublemaker.
In an expanded study from South Korea (I also addressed this study in teacher training), Gender in Education Network in Asia (GENIA) (2006), the researchers collected data from four classes (2-6 grade) from three elementary schools and from 1-3 grade (four 1-2 and two from 3rd grade) from two junior high schools. Researchers also interviewed 37 students (19 girls and 18 boys) and 16 teachers (11 female and 5 male). Observations were included as well. With respect to this section, findings indicate that there were gender biases in the manner in which teachers interacted with their female and male students. For example, teachers of both sexes gave priority to boys. They called on them and boys were also quicker to raise their hands. However, with respect to punishment, teachers tended to be more physical with boys, claiming that they do not cry and take it as hard as girls do. With girls, teachers use more verbal punishments. Researchers also found that teachers spoke more in general male language reference than a female’s.

Myhill and Jones (2006) found through individual interviews that teachers treat more negatively boys than girls. The ideal student in the eyes of teachers has characteristics that are associated with femininity. Such perception increases with age. Students also indicate that there are higher expectations from girls with respect to behavior and academic achievements. Teacher-student interaction works both ways. Students also bring biases into the classroom. Mayhill and Jones add that students thought that female teachers are less gender biased. Nonetheless, findings suggest that students listen more to a male than a female voice.

Saft and Pianta (2001) have sampled 197 preschools in various states in the USA regarding teachers’ perception of their relationship with their students. A few factors were included: (1) teacher ethnicity, (2) child age, ethnicity and gender, and (3) the matching of teachers’ ethnicity with that of the student. Researchers examined whether there is impact on student’s ethnicity and gender in the manner in which the teacher interacts with his or her students. Findings suggest that the most influential factor was ethnicity. When a teacher and a student share a similar ethnicity, the teacher tends to perceive the student in a more positive manner. Shel’s (2007) findings also suggest, that ethnicity can play a major role in the manner in which teachers socialize their students. For example, in her ethnographic study in Los Angeles, one of the participants was a female teacher. She was half Black and half Jewish but felt more Black. She, on the other hand, had complicated relationship with her only three Black male students (4th grade) in the classroom while she did not have any special conflicts with her other male students. She admitted that because she felt Black she had higher expectations from the three Black students and was less patient if they did not meet those expectations. However, she was more cordial to Black female students. Nevertheless, as any study, eventually it depends, by and large, on each teacher individually.

Jones and Dindia (2004) argue that the manner in which teachers-students communicate is substantial to school’s environment. Researchers also examined whether gender factor plays a significant role in the manner in which teachers interact with their female and male students. This study was conducted in the USA. Their conclusions were that although there might be differences, they should not be exaggerated. Other factors that were already abovementioned need also to be considered and addressed.
**Peer Interaction**

Last but not least is the interaction among students. Preliminary findings suggest that, in particular girls, need to feel at ease being in school. As they reach puberty, they might go through ordeal being in school, being the target of peer ridicule and harassment.

Girls in **Kenya**, according to Unterhalter et al., (2005) do not have a good experience with their peers when they reach puberty. They even shy away from school to avoid being ridiculed. In a small-scale qualitative study with 14 third grade girls in the U.K. researchers indicate that although on the surface it may look as if there is a trend toward equality in class interaction among boys and girls, subversively researchers argue, even girls gave priority to boys and considered them more powerful (Reay, 2001) (see also Stephens, 2000).

The Diphalana project in **Botswana** (Unterhalter et al., 2005) focused on peer interaction. The project geared to help pregnant students and those who gave birth to mingle in school and to learn how to take care of their babies. The uniqueness of the project is also by including the father of the baby. Boys too learned to be caretakers and they learned about HIV/AIDS and safe sex. Interestingly, researchers reported that this program did not increase teenage pregnancy. This also helped to retain girls in school and to relegate responsibilities to boys, and to have better relationship with their female partner.
CONCLUSIONS

Overall, most reports and studies indicate there is an increase in girls’ access to education. The road is indeed long but the trend seems to be optimistic. At the same time, one needs to be cautious that focusing primarily on girls will not entail negligence of boys. For example, there is a great concern nowadays, in the USA regarding a decline in boys’ academic competency. Therefore, if for years the focal of gender in education has revolved around inequality for girls, in recent years there is awakening regarding boys’ academic decline. Both genders lives are intertwined. The studies also reveal complexity and unequivocal findings related to teacher-student interaction with boys and girls. And yet, despite the differences in some studies, those that claim girls benefit from advantages, still it seems that advantages stem from traditional stereotypes on girls as docile and easy to manage.

The issue of gender and education deserves a great attention. However, as the literature indicates, social and emotional cognitions are fundamental to the study of gender and education. In order to have a better understanding of gender complexity and how it is being translated in practice, I suggest broadening the literature to philosophical, anthropological, and social foundations theories, as well as to gender theories and ethnographic studies.

In recent decades there is a trend, at least in the USA, to include literature on the ethics of caring (e.g., Noddings, 1992, 2002). Scholars link the ethics of caring at home to school and to the public sphere in general. Such studies have a long-term vision and they are less quantitative. The essence of education is world’s welfare and safety. To maximize safe and non-violent life, the literature also advocates cultivation of caring and nurturing leaders at home and in public and thus to teach through the ethics of caring. Eventually, school is not merely about science, math and grades, it is a reflection of our humanity. It is first and foremost a tool to improve our welfare as human beings, who deserve to live in peace and prosperity. Without addressing gender theories and literature on humanist education, the welfare of many children will not be improved and secured substantially.
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