

Boy-friendly teaching will not tackle gender divide

Tackling boys' underachievement by teaching them differently to girls is "absolutely wrong", according to the chairman of the review of the National Curriculum in England. Tim Oates CBE argued that attending to different styles of learning was misguided because the kind of "learning strategies" that girls had used to get ahead had been proven to work with boys as well.

In a keynote speech at a conference on gender differences staged by exams group Cambridge Assessment, Mr Oates said that only by studying what worked and making it available to both sexes could gender differences be reduced. Mr Oates pointed out that a number of people had said because there was such a large problem with under-attaining boys, to have boy-friendly pedagogy in schools would be needed. He said that because the strategies that girls used had also been shown to benefit boys, the focus should be on examining what would optimise attainment and making it available to all groups.

Mr Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge Assessment, concluded that efforts to tackle gender differences needed to take a multi-faceted approach, beginning from birth or even the womb and right through to adulthood. The conference also heard from Tom Bramley, Deputy Director of the Research Division at Cambridge Assessment, whose study, with colleagues Dr Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and Dr Sylvia Vitello, had found that the size of the boy-girl difference was roughly comparable to nine months' growth in height for boys in Year 11 in England.

In her presentation, secondary head, Rebecca Cramer, said the gender issue in education was "huge". She warned that boys were "massively underachieving" compared to girls. She pointed out that being a white male, having special educational needs and being eligible for free school meals, meant that the numbers actually achieving through the education system in England were "absolutely tiny". In another paper, researcher Dr Tom Benton probed a recent report on the gender divide by the OECD. He explained how in every country that had taken part in the PISA survey boys had been twice as likely to agree with the statement that "school had been a waste of time", whether they had done well or not.

The conference also heard that a worldwide gender gap existed in language learning. Dr Agnieszka Walczak and Dr Ardeshir Geranpayeh who had examined English language proficiency, had found that female learners performed slightly better than male learners in tests.

Dr Tony Sewell new member of Youth Justice Board

The Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, has appointed Dr Tony Sewell as a new member of the Youth Justice Board. His tenure will last for a year. Dr Sewell began his career as a London school teacher. He went on to spend many years as a teacher trainer, working at Kingston and Leeds universities.

He has authored a number of reports about the experience of boys in education, and has also been an international consultant in education for the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

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