

ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN GENDER BASED INEQUALITY

PAULINE MOREAU

I should very much like to thank the Council of Europe and the Finnish Government for hosting this important conference and for the invitation to me to speak at it. The Council of Europe has been to the forefront in promoting educational development in Europe for over fifty years while the Finnish education system is the envy of Europe and regularly tops the PISA scores.

Our conference today is based on the premise that the promotion of gender equality in education is a prerequisite to the achievement of *de facto* equality between women and men in all spheres of life and society.

We have been working for a very long period to foster *de facto* gender equality throughout the Council of Europe. We are familiar with the Council's Recommendations on education and on gender mainstreaming in education and the standards and mechanisms developed in 2007 by the Steering Committee on Equality between Women and Men, all of which highlight the linkages between education and gender equality.

We know from the Gender Equality Index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality or EIGE last year that no EU member state has achieved gender parity. Indeed, based on a matrix of the six domains of work, money, knowledge, time, power and health, the average gender equality index for the EU was just about 54 per cent along the way to gender equality. Now, of the 27 EU member states that were included, four were at or better than 70 per cent, but 13 were still below 40 per cent of parity.

The index looked at knowledge from three perspectives: educational attainment (at third level), educational segregation and lifelong learning. The results were as follows¹:

Educational attainment	69.0% EU 27; range 33.4% to 97.3%
Educational segregation	45.4% EU 27; range 23.6% to 68.2%
Lifelong learning	41.8% EU 27; range 22.7% to 84.7%
Overarching index/knowledge	48.9% EU 27; range 30.8% to 68.8%

This index relates only to the EU but it serves to show the challenges ahead and the disparities. With an educational attainment level of 69 per cent, one might mistakenly assume that we in the EU are well on the way to parity in education. However, when the issue of segregation by subject choice is examined, a very different outcome emerges. I will be exploring this further in this presentation.

These few figures show the complexity of the issue of gender equality in education. In speaking to you this morning, I am going to focus in the first instance on four key questions, looking at them from a gender equality perspective.

- Why do we educate?
- Who do we educate?
- What should we teach/learn?
- How do we educate?

¹ European Institute for Gender Equality : Gender Equality Index Report: June 2013: P. 116

I will then look at a framework for equality of outcomes from education and suggest some steps which might be taken to achieve that equality of outcomes.

Why do we educate?

A very short look at the history of the development of public education in my part of Europe shows that gendered trends have been enshrined in education since the early times.

In the late 19th century publicly provided education became available largely for working class young boys and girls who together learned the academic basics – reading, writing and arithmetic and religion. However, boys were also taught subjects like technical drawing and girls learned needlework and laundry-work to prepare working class women for a life in domestic service followed by marriage and motherhood, while boys went to work in factories. The girls' curriculum was extended to include cookery and hygiene to promote better health outcomes. As the school leaving age rose, boys began to learn the basic trades as a precursor to apprenticeships while girls learned typewriting to prepare for emerging office and other jobs, but only prior to marriage. Effectively the whole educational system reinforced the ordained roles in society – men as the providers and women as the caregivers.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century there were very mixed views about the educational syllabus for middle class girls and the sciences were shunned as unfeminine. The emergence of the advanced industrial age in the 1950s and for a better educated workforce prompted Governments to provide free or heavily subsidised secondary education and a broader educational curriculum to meet the new needs of the workforce.

At the same time, steps towards greater gender equality and the need for an expanded workforce led to the wider education of women. Free or subsidised third level education and the emergence of a stronger middle class led to an increase in tertiary education, again needed to foster research and development in the economy.

Accordingly the principal purpose of education has, for more than a century, been linked to the labour market. Indeed both the Council of Europe and the OECD reinforce this linkage in their respective definitions of the purpose of education.

The Council of Europe defines the four major purposes of education² as being:

- Preparation for employment
- Preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies
- Personal development and
- Developing a broad, advanced knowledge base.

The OECD³ takes a more "economic" approach and, on the topic of gender equality and education, sees investment in female education as essential to promote equality of employment opportunities and strengthen economic growth.

UNESCO⁴ adds to both by pointing out that the level of knowledge and skills that individuals need to function as workers, citizens and fulfilled individuals in the global society is increasing.

² Address by Secretary General Jagland

³ OECD: Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now

This brings me to my second question – **who do we educate?**

UNESCO tells us that the uptake of education has spiralled across the world since 1970. Its world atlas of gender in education tells us that, since 1970, the capacity of the world’s educational systems more than doubled with increases of:

- 68 per cent at primary level,
- 115 per cent at secondary level and
- 270 per cent at third level.

The gains were particularly striking among girls in terms of access, retention and progression from primary to secondary and beyond. Across the globe, female enrolment at the tertiary level has grown almost twice as fast as that of men over the last four decades for reasons that include social mobility, enhanced income potential and international pressure to narrow the gender gap.

Nevertheless, UNESCO notes that enhanced access to higher education by women has not always translated into enhanced career opportunities. Asking ourselves why, we need to turn to the question – “what do women learn?”

The UNESCO Atlas also offers some useful insights into the subject choices of young men and women at university. It will come as no surprise that women are under-represented in the sciences and over-represented in the social sciences and law – to take just two fields of study. The Atlas links “North America and Western Europe” and “Central and Eastern Europe” so we cannot get pure European figures but the data appear to reflect reality. Our first table looks at women graduates in the social sciences, business and law.

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN GRADUATES IN THE FIELDS OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND LAW

Broad and Sub field	SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND LAW				
Region	All disciplines	Social and behaviour science	Journalism and information	Business and administration	Law
Arab States	53	69	58	42	55
Central and Eastern Europe	61	62	69	61	58
Central Asia	41	46	60	43	34
East Asia and the Pacific	53	56	64	52	51
Latin America and the Caribbean	57	70	61	56	52
North America and Western Europe	57	64	63	53	59

Source: UNESCO: World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education

⁴ UNESCO : World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education

Here we see a very strong presence of women across all disciplines, with women almost at or above 60 per cent in Law, social and behavioural science and journal and well above 50 per cent. We know intuitively that the presence of women is even more marked in the health sciences and in education.

The second table looks at women’s presence as graduates in the key disciplines of science. We know that the STEM sectors are the high net value sectors for world economic growth and therefore education in these sectors is more likely to lead to a top end career.

You will notice that women are under-represented overall in the science disciplines in both of the geographical areas which include Europe. Forty-seven per cent of science graduates in Central and Eastern Europe are women but the percentage falls to just 40 per cent in Western Europe and North America.

I also found it interesting to read that “Central and Eastern Europe” which now includes a mix of EU and non-EU member states has always been strong in attracting women into the sciences and mathematics and indeed was very strong in educating women in the sciences even thirty years ago.

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN GRADUATES IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCE

Broad and Sub field	SCIENCE				
	All disciplines	Life Sciences	Physical sciences	Mathematics and statistics	Computing
Arab States	51	73	61	59	33
Central and Eastern Europe	47	70	54	53	29
Central Asia	53	68	44	60	39
East Asia and the Pacific	48	60	58	62	29
Latin America and the Caribbean	41	67	51	53	31
North America and Western Europe	40	60	43	48	21

Source: UNESCO: World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education

It is noteworthy that women in Asia are much more prominent as students in these sectors than their European counterparts. I think this anomaly requires further examination by European educational authorities.

What are the **impacts of these divisions** in educational choices?

- Firstly, the choices made by women are likely to lead them into positions as employees rather than as entrepreneurs.
- Their choices are more likely to lead to careers in administration rather than in leadership at the level of the enterprise.
- UNESCO also tells us that very few women work as researchers.
- By making these choices, women are less likely to make the transition to the top leadership positions in their chosen field.

Indeed research done by the OECD shows that women are less likely than men to pursue a career in the same field as they studied. We know that, across Europe, women account for up to 80 per cent of the graduates in the education sector. OECD also tells us that many more women graduates opt to transition from their chosen field of study into careers as teachers or lecturers after university (but comparatively few become educational leaders at any level). Accordingly the education sector continues to be strongly feminised. This is of course linked to the fact that the public service and education sectors tend to offer better options for family friendly leaves and therefore these are often the first choice of employer for women.

This question of feminisation also impacts on the new question **"how do we educate?"**

The key topic of this conference is on stereotypes so I will not develop that point in detail. However the feminisation issue presents a number of challenges, one of which may influence the poor performance of boys who may not identify well with female teachers and miss having male teachers as role models at school. A further challenge is the issue of finding qualified teachers for the important STEM subjects, as the largely male graduates in these subjects can avail of excellent job opportunities in industry.

Finally I want to look at **what equality in education should mean.**

Looking at the outcomes of educational policies, UNESCO has developed a framework for gender equality in education which is applicable globally⁵. The framework contains four main dimensions:

- *equality of access,*
- *equality in the learning process,*
- *equality of educational outcomes, and*
- *equality of external results*

Equality of access means that girls and boys have equal opportunities to attend school/university. The statistics suggest that this has been largely achieved at primary and secondary levels across Europe, and statistics suggest that inequality in access to third level education is more likely to be based on economic disadvantage than on sex.

⁵ This material is drawn from UNESCO and also from USAID: Education from a Gender Equality Perspective 2008

Equality in the learning process means that girls and boys are taught the same curricula. Subject choices open to girls and boys at secondary school may vary considerably, impacting on the life chances of the child. All learners should be able to avail of a full curriculum with teaching materials that are free of stereotypes and bias.

Equality of educational outcomes means that girls and boys enjoy equal opportunities to achieve and outcomes are based on their individual talents and efforts. Educational exams and other evaluation systems must build the child's confidence and must also be free of any gender bias.

Equality of external results from a gender equal educational system will only exist at that point when men and women share economic and political power and other responsibilities on an equal basis.

Some steps to be taken

To meet that goal of equality of external results, we need to ensure that key policymakers with control of our educational systems, inter alia

- Ensure that girls are encouraged to foster all of their talents;
- Provide a comprehensive curriculum especially for girls at secondary school level prepares them to enter into the full range of tertiary studies;
- Encourage girls to work actively as representatives on student bodies;
- Provide an educational environment that promotes mutual respect among the student body;
- Maintain an awareness among all teachers and educators of the need to eliminate gender stereotypes and foster positive roles models.

Both the Beijing Platform for Action and the UN CEDAW Conventions promote a mixed approach of mainstreaming gender in tandem with a range of positive actions to achieve gender equality. A similar approach is fostered by the Council of Europe through its Recommendations and the Standards and Mechanisms, developed by the CDEG. These must remain as the approaches we take as policy makers in the future.

I believe that the wide range of topics we will discuss in the remainder of this conference will help us all to achieve the outcomes we want - both equality in education and equality in the outcomes of education.

Thank you.