



Welcome to the ANCIE Bulletin, a quarterly electronic newsletter that explore different topics about newcomer children living in BC, including immigrants, refugees, international students and children of temporary foreign workers.

Gender Roles

Gender inequality is evident worldwide, however it exists in varying degrees across cultures. There are many good reasons to close the inequality gap and it is beneficial not only for women and girls, but also for men and boys who are set back by gender stereotypes and inequalities, which they learn from a young age and that are influenced by a variety of factors (Plan Canada, 2011).

Sex vs. Gender

Distinctions are made between the terms “sex” as physical attributes of males and females, and “gender” as the socially constructed roles and gender identity as the individual’s sense of their own gender identity such as dress or social obligations (expectations?). Gender may influence varying roles in the actions, decisions, or interactions of newcomer children and their families.

Gender Roles

Some cultures have specific expectations for girls and boys. Some gender roles are more distinct for example, some girls may be expected to help care for younger siblings and some boys may be expected to work after school to support the family.

Being aware of differences can aid when working with newcomer children and their families. It is important not to generalize as cultures are not homogenous; family expectations do differ within the same culture.

Gender Analysis – Identifying the Gap

Gender analysis uses gender, and its relationship with race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, disability, and/or other status, to understand the different patterns of involvement, behaviour and activities that women and men have in economic, social and legal structures.

In the case of primary education, gender analysis tells us that a gender gap exists in most countries; there is a gap in between girls and boys in both enrolment and retention in school.

In India, an average six-year-old girl can expect to spend six years in school, three years less than a boy of

the same age. Girls in rural areas are at even greater disadvantage: their risk of dropping out of school is three times that of a boy.



In Jamaica, however, it is boys who are less likely to receive an education. Boys are often pulled out of school and sent to work to boost family income, and thus, their drop-out rate is higher than that of girls.



In an effort to balance the educational needs of both girls and boys, governments are increasingly using gender analysis to investigate the source of the gap and determine measures that can be adopted to reduce inequalities in the education system.

We know that mothers are most often the key link between children and school – they are typically the ones contacting schools, preparing children for school and helping children with school-related activities and assignments. But in contrast to the existing research that has examined the dynamics of gender in schools, much less research exists on the way in which gender shapes the relation of families to schools.

Gender and Identity

Gender identity plays an important role during child development. Some children may form two identities (one for school and one for home) to address different gender expectations. For example girls may change into more trendy clothes at school then changing back to more traditional clothes before going back home.

Bicultural conflict, which involves parents holding firmly to traditional values while children seek to adopt the culture of the new community, is a common





experience for newcomer families. Newcomer children struggle with understanding where they belong. They are reminded of their responsibility to maintain cultural traditions by the family while they are also worrying about how they are being viewed by peers in their new community. They may want to develop friendships with peers of both genders, while their parents may frown upon interactions with members of the opposite sex.

In some cultures, genders do not mix, so some newcomer children may feel uncomfortable participating in some activities (e.g. group work, learning to dance in gym class). Many parents are eager to immigrate to Canada with their families, however once here some parents resist the influence of Canadian culture on their children, believing that Canadian norms are much more permissive than their traditional cultural/religious values regarding gender relations and sexuality. Service providers are often in the position of having to counsel newcomer parents around various perceptions of Canadian norms. For example, many newcomer parents mistakenly believe that Canadians believe it is appropriate for children as young as 12 or 13 years old to engage in sexual activity (Ethnocultural Minority Children and Youth).

Migration and Gender

Migration affects women and men differently depending on the reason for migration (social, political, cultural), the journey itself, and the settlement experience. Gender roles are also reaffirmed, negotiated, and reconfigured throughout the migration process. Gendered processes also lead to differences in people's interactions with settlement and other service delivery institutions.

A key development in international migration in recent years has been the feminization of migrant populations. The growing number of female migrants

and refugees now often out-number their male counterparts (Martin 2001). Research now focuses not only on the growing number of women migrants, but also on their changing gender roles as more female migrants participate as principal wage earners and heads of household rather than as dependants (Martin, 2001).

Examining gender roles across cultures and time demonstrates the role of social construction. To establish an adequate understanding of migrant lives, researchers must be aware of gender differences as they exist for both men and women.

Gender Inequalities in the Classroom

A teacher noticed when working with a family of sisters that the girls would sit in class and think about the inequality faced by their mother and grandmother by male members of the family. The girls tried to make sense of the role of equality between men and women and grew up determined to change gender inequality in their families by highlighting gender issues in their community. This demonstrates how the understanding of gender roles for migrant children can become very challenging when they are differently defined in their homes and their schools.

Gender is a powerful dynamic that shapes different experiences for girls and boys in school. From research on education, we know that gender has an impact on girls' and boys' experiences in schools and the outcomes of their education. Male-biased texts, curricula and teacher expectations, for example, have contributed to streaming of girls into subjects that limit their future choices. However, in British Columbia, standardized testing indicates that girls actually outperform boys at all levels of reading and writing (Critical Multicultural Pravillion, 2004).

Facts & Figures:

- Despite common belief, a gender gap in Canada persists.
- Age, occupation, and education all affect the size of the gender income gap.
- Canada sits behind Sri Lanka, Lesotho and Latvia, at No. 20, in a global measure of equality between men and women.
- The Conference Board of Canada demonstrates that despite common belief, a gender income gap still exists.

REPORT CARD			
Gender Income Gap			
	1980s	1990s	2000s
Australia	A	A	A
Austria	B	D	B
Belgium	n.a.	A	A
Canada	C	C	C
Denmark	n.a.	A	A
Finland	B	B	B
France	A	A	A
Germany	B	C	C
Ireland	n.a.	B	B
Italy	A	B	A
Japan	D	D	D
Netherlands	B	B	B
Norway	n.a.	n.a.	A
Sweden	A	B	A
Switzerland	n.a.	C	C
U.K.	C	C	C
U.S.	C	C	C

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.





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The following research highlights trends of gender inequalities in schools:

- Gender construction in schools can create very distinct notions of what it means to be a man and a woman, with polarized attributes for femininity and masculinity;
- Across most countries, boys continue to dominate classroom time and space, a practice that seems to create subdued girls and creates perceived differences between men and women;
- In many countries academic performance of boys and girls is converging, but when it comes to fields of study and work there is still clustering by gender;
- The curriculum, especially sex education, continues to center on biological features and refuses to acknowledge social dimensions of adolescent sexuality;
- The peer culture of a classroom contributes powerfully to classroom dynamics and the focus of either gender towards academics;
- Most public education policies fail to recognize the socialization role of schools. (Stromquist, 2007)

The Canadian education system, individual educators, and community groups have made substantial efforts to address gender inequality in schools by engaging in the classroom and adopting curricula materials with 'girl-friendly' or 'anti-sexist' strategies (SWIWMPC, 2002). However, more work needs to be done. Widespread gender inequalities still exist when it comes to education, and in Canada, the gender gap is still very prevalent despite popular belief.

There is More Work to be Done...

While cultural contexts vary it is surprising to see the similarity of gender-related experiences across countries. Current research questions the assumption that Canadian schools are gender-neutral or empowering institutions and states that changing the culture of schools is imperative to changing the gender inequalities of society. This highlights the importance of supporting teachers and educational administrators through comprehensive and continuous training about their understanding of and response to gender issues.

Additional Resources

AMSSA's Newcomer Childrens Information Exchange (ANCIE): www.amssa.org/ancie.

AMSSA's Newcomer Children Information Exchange (ANCIE) provides information and resources for BC service providers, educators, policy makers and the general public on newcomer children – kids aged 0-12 years from immigrant, refugee and/or temporary resident families.

Child Care Resource & Referral: www.ccrf.bc.ca

BC Child Care Resource & Referral Programs offer quality childcare referrals, resources and support to all child care providers and families in over 400 communities across the Province of British Columbia.

AMSSA's Newcomer Children's Champion Program

For more information about AMSSA's Newcomer Children's Champion Program or to subscribe to the ANCIE Bulletin, please visit www.amssa.org/ancie or contact Rishima Bahadoorsingh at newcomerchildren@amssa.org.

AMSSA is a province-wide association that strengthens its 75+ member agencies, who serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities, with the knowledge, resources and support they need to fulfill their mandates. For more information, please visit www.amssa.org.

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