

KENTON CONFERENCE 2008

Kenton ko Thabeng tsa Mogale

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Abstract: Multiple paper session

Sub-theme: Local and global influences on education

Gender, education and global poverty reduction initiatives

Looking the other way: Gender and education in South Africa

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One of the more intractable stumbling blocks in transforming education in the post-1994 era has been gender equity. While the commitment to equality between girls and boys is inscribed in policy, reports such as that by Human Rights Watch (2002) tell of schools traumatised by gender-based violence where school-yard rape is silenced and systems to deal with the problem are non-functional. Unlike most developing countries, South Africa has more girls in school than boys but their success rates are lower. To argue that the failure of gender-equity in schools is a reflection of a broader patriarchal culture may have some resonance, but its pessimistic view of the possibilities of policies and schools to transform in favour of human rights is not helpful. This paper attempts to provide a more nuanced account for why the promise of gender equity has not been fulfilled.