

Angela Thody

Lecture on gender disharmonies with particular reference to the Commonwealth.

See also accompanying power point slides.

The lecture divided into two halves so that the pedagogy as well as the content illuminated gender issues:

- the first, illustrating what are generally accepted as feminine, post-modernist approaches, is on power point and consists of slides shown to the audience without comment. The audience is then asked to share their feelings about the information presented.
- the second is delivered by reading the following paper in authoritarian mode to illustrate what are generally accepted as a masculine, modernist style with a competitive element introduced.

Angela was invited to give this lecture because of her book, *Educating Tomorrow: the management of girls' access to education in Africa* (Joint editor with S. Kaabwe), South Africa, Juta, 1999/2000. The lecture was first delivered for the Royal Commonwealth Society, 2001 – 'Gender and school achievements around the Commonwealth'. It was later adapted for her doctoral classes but by 2007, its latest delivery, the gender agenda had changed with boys educational achievements in developed countries falling further behind those of girls.

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### **Gender disharmonies: should we all be singing the same tune?**

**A M Thody**

This lecture will cover three aspects of gender disparity, with particular reference to the Commonwealth.

**a). data on gender disparities in education around the Commonwealth**

**b. outline of possible causes**

**c. should we, and can we do anything about this and if so, what ?**

**a) data on gender disparities**

The theme of this paper concerns 'singing the same song' in relation to gender disparities, a theme selected because there does seem to be one song emerging. Simplistically: in access to education, retention, school life expectancy and achievements, –

- in developed countries, girls outperform boys, but there is the beginnings of evidence of a slight change;

- in the richer, stable developing countries, there is rough parity in boys and girls' achievements and a varied pattern of each gender's areas of 'best fit';
- in the poorest developing countries, boys outperform girls;
- in all countries, men outperform women in status and wealth.

To illustrate these trends, please decide your individual answers to these questions. Do not confer.

In some countries, boys retention into secondary schools is less than that for girls. Which Commonwealth countries?

*Australia, Botswana, Jamaica, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom (Leo-Rhynie, 1999)*

In which Commonwealth countries do ethnic minority groups do considerably better or considerably worse than the majority peoples?

*All of them*

In which countries do female primary teachers outnumber male primary teachers?

*Australia, Barbados, Canada, New Zealand, Trinidad, United Kingdom, St Vincent, Botswana*

*South Africa, Lesotho.*

*Caribbean (and Latin America) – 90% are female*

*Arab countries – average 50%*

*Numbers and % of women teachers are increasing everywhere.*

**In which countries do male pupils develop fine motor, cognitive and linguistic skills earlier than do girls?**

*Probably none! In those countries of the world in which research on early years development has been done, the results are that girls much earlier develop those parts of the brain which control these skills*

**Did any men get all four right? Excellent. You deserve a prize.**

**Did any women get all four right? -Tell your partners and mum and dad how well you did today at school.**

It's important now to consider supporting evidence.

**Gender differences around the Commonwealth - some examples**

<i>Most Commonwealth countries</i>	<i>Australia, Barbados, Canada, New Zealand, Trinidad, United Kingdom, St Vincent</i>
<b>Virtually all access primary schooling; fewer girls than boys access post primary education</b>	<b>All access schooling; fewer boys than girls access post secondary education</b>
<b>Retention: fewer girls than boys complete a secondary education; fewer girls than boys continue to higher education</b>	<b>Retention: More boys than girls voluntarily truant and are formally excluded. Fewer boys than girls continue to higher education</b>
<b>Achievements: fewer girls than boys achieve good examination results</b>	<b>Fewer boys than girls achieve good examination results</b>

<b>Boys do better in the technical and scientific subjects than do girls; girls do better than boys in the humanities</b>	<b>Boys do better in the technical and scientific subjects than do girls but the difference is declining; girls do better than boys in the humanities</b>
<b>More men than women achieve senior posts in schools</b>	<b>More men than women achieve senior posts in schools</b>
<b>Where women are in the majority as teachers, teaching tends to be a low status occupation</b>	
More men than women achieve higher status positions in all careers and earn on average considerably more than women	More men than women achieve higher status positions in all careers and earn on average considerably more than women

## **b. outline of possible causes**

In seeking reasons for gender disparities, one finds what I have termed a 'hierarchy for responsibility'. At level one I place physical, elements that cannot be changed. At level 2 are the societal factors – those elements that are at least susceptible to influence at the macro level. Finally, at level 3 the organisational aspects which can be affected at the micro level.

Historically, the physical elements were, until the mid twentieth century, considered the major cause of gender disparities; the weakness of women physically and mentally was deemed to limit their achievements. From the 1960s to the 1980s, societal effects were considered the major causes of gender disparities in England and USA and Australasia; society's limited expectations of women limited their achievements. From the 1980s onwards, schools became the culprits first for girls' failures and, once these were largely eradicated, then for boys' failures. In the early 2000s, Leithwood's research swung our understanding back to finding that society was to blame and about the same time, the wheel came full circle when human biologists discovered that men's and women's brains were of different sizes and operated differentially in different lobes. Hence we can now safely return to physical factors as explanatory. –

Each of these factors will now be examined in turn. Each of these is listed below and on the accompanying slide. Those of you who have studied motivational aspects of leadership will find interesting parallels to Maslow's hierarchy of needs but that is not for analysis here today.

### **1) PHYSICAL - *biology***

#### **2) SOCIETAL -**

**2a) *Psycho-social, role modelling, social culture;***

**2b) *Geography and Economics***

**2c) *Political will***

#### **3) SCHOOL EFFECTS -**

**a) *Culture***

**b) *Curriculum***

**c) *Teaching methods and materials***

**d) *Testing methods***

**e) *Variable school quality***

Before considering these in depth, a caveat on the simplicities of causalities and correlations. Oscar Wilde was asked the question, 'Why is America such a violent country? His apochryphal answer was 'Because their wallpaper is so hideous'. Hence one cannot assume that gender factors are an automatic cause of, outcome of or even cure for, disparities. For example, research in Trinidad, Barbados and St Vincent found that parents' occupations 'were significantly associated with school success, as well as whether the child lived with both parents and if father helped with homework' (Kutnick *et al*, 1997: 120). Those with professional or managerial parents did better than those without such parental occupations 'Occupation of parent provided a more significant explanation for school success than the sex of the child' (ibid). In the USA - children of fathers with

professional or managerial occupations had the lowest risk of dropping out of school (Nguyen, 2001: 16) but mothers' occupations seemed unimportant to school retention.

It is also important to accept that research on gender disparities must report in generalities yet for each of the factors seemingly causing or correlating with disparity, there will always be the exception that proves the rule. Hence,

*Causalities differ for each child*

*Each child of the same gender with the same variables as causalities is still likely to perform differently*

*Children of different genders with the same variables are still likely to perform differently*

*Each child of the same gender with different variables as causalities may still perform the same.*

*Research shows so far that it does not appear to be gender per se that is a determining factor in success - it depends on how this is combined with other variables*

*When you have corrected the imbalance for one sex, you appear to create it for another*

To return to elaboration on the possible causes of gender disparities

### **Physical factors: Biology -**

In developed countries, such as the UK, boys are deemed naturally aggressive and physically in need of activity and therefore unlikely to accept the norms of classroom passivity. Boys are naturally idle; they need sticks to make them work. Boys are designed to rebel against authority; it is the young stags challenging the older ones for dominance of the herd.

In response to this, schools find the need to exclude more boys than girls, particularly, Afro-Caribbean boys in the UK. Research in the Caribbean shows, however, that there is no necessary correlation between boys, African and bad behaviour since 'the Trinidad observations showed that it is naive to assume that it is just boys who present learning and behaviour problems in the classroom' (Kutnick *et al*, 1997: 120). Meanwhile, our assumptions about boys and girls physiological differences may well change dramatically as current brain research develops.

Our understanding now is that boys develop the right brain earlier than do girls. Hence boys will achieve early on spatial tasks but not on linguistic tasks. Boys brain areas for physical activity develop more quickly than that of girls while their interpersonal skills areas develop more slowly. Male brains decay much faster than females brains (degeneration of male nerve cells precedes that of females by 20 years - though female overall rate of loss is greater) - hence the learning years (plasticity) of females is longer than that of males.

Females pick up nuances of voice and music better than males. Females have better hearing than men throughout life. Females have greater vocal clarity and variety than males. Females excel at verbal memory and process language more quickly than males. Men do better at target directed motor skills, spatial tests and mathematical reasoning than females. Males and females almost live in different worlds created by the processing of different sensory information through different areas of their brains. But we generally give both sexes the same type of education and assume that men and women will do the same jobs in more-or-less the same way.

These researches into neurological and currently unalterable factors, are borne out by what happens in schools. In research in England (Bleach, 1996) boys in a West Midlands school were found to prefer active learning, experiential work, group work. They preferred to do rather than to read, talk and write. They don't like homework. They will work hard in subjects in which they do well. They like getting marks and comments.

Research in Australia in 2001 (Bagnall) reported that boys were more speculative thinkers with experiential learning styles, were good at subjects involving hands on work (eg industrial arts) or physical space (eg physics). Girls were more orientated to languages, people and relationship subjects.

None of this is rocket science as you know but does it tell us that we need to play to the strengths of each, maybe have single sex education or different job descriptions for female and male professors?

## **2.a) Psycho-social and role modelling and social culture**

The basic supposition is that each gender is influenced in its attitudes to schooling by what society expects of the adult genders. Hence, for example, from the Caribbean, we learn that:

‘Despite being accustomed to employment and responsibilities, Jamaican women still tend to defer to male authority at senior institutional levels and in public life.’ (Brock and Cremmish, 1997:66)

Generally, socialisation in both developing and developed countries, has emphasised the value of docility and task concentration for girls. This is in their favour when facing school tasks, as is reflected in exam results in England for example, where examination success relies on coursework.

Family influence on drop-out rates was pinpointed by Lloyd's 2000 Kenya study. It was concluded that school quality variables make little difference to girls' drop out rates - 'family factors are of over-riding importance' in particular, mother's education, religion and parents' marital status (Lloyd, 2000, p. 143). This accords with Leithwood's research in Canada so family influence is not just a function of stages of economic development.

In Canada, however, the family is nuclear. In African countries, one must also consider first the extended family and then the tribe. Stephens 1998 study in Ghana

showed that the extended family is more important to the child's culture than they would be in European, American or Australasian Commonwealth countries. In Ghana, members of the extended family either formally or informally foster children from within the kinship group and different tribes had different child rearing practices.

All this would just be of anthropological interest if it were not for the fact that the coming of an encouragement of universal primary education has created a tension for many families (Stephen's, 1998: 44) –

Translate this to developed countries and you find the same tensions but the 'tribes' are the classes or income brackets; the middle classes attach more importance to education, and to the education of girls, than either the upper or lower classes. Move to India, substitute 'caste' for tribe or class, and the same issues emerge.

Similarly transcending national boundaries are attitudes to women's roles in the home. In Ghana for example (Stephens, 1997),

Time spent in fetching water and wood and housekeeping daily for the whole population (expressed as million hours per day)

Males:	7
Females	18.4
Boys aged 7-14:	3.1
Girls aged 7-14:	3.9

In developed countries, women still adopt the main responsibilities for home management and child care. In order to release equal amounts of male and female abilities into the economy, should societies legislate to force men to do housework, accept the situation, keep trudging away through moral conscience teaching or teach women that housework is not important?

Returning to more fundamental issues in developing countries

a major deterrent to female take up and follow through of educational opportunities (even when these are available) is a near universal fundamental cultural bias in favour of males (Brock and Cremmish, 1997:2) –

These biases include patriarchal systems, early marriage and pregnancy, rural women's domestic and subsistence responsibilities, the seclusion and segregation of females in some areas and a low regard for female value. Echoes of this are still heard in developed societies; women's status is still acquired partly from their domestic and child rearing achievements. Witness the 2007 photograph of the Nancy Pelosi, just elected as the first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives; she was surrounded by her scampering grandchildren. Did her very long serving predecessor, great granddad Tip O'Neil, ever appear with this grandchildren? No.

At least such high achieving women provide role models for younger women to emulate. Hence the thinking behind Nelson Mandela's encouragement of Oprah Winfrey's foundation of a school for girls in South Africa in 2007. Earlier African and Asian research showed that girls access education where female family members

are literate (though boys enrolment in primary education is unaffected by this factor) (Kenya and Thailand, early 1990s; Buchmann and Brakeman, 2000). Generally, the mother's influence is considered the dominant factor influencing the success of girls at school.

The adult female as role model to encourage girls, grows in importance now that so many families world wide are headed by single women. Research so far indicates that this lessens girls' chances of success in standard education systems. This may be because women generally earn less than men, (70% of the world's poor are women and they own 10% of the wealth), work longer hours in paid and unpaid work and are often portrayed as inferior to men. Women who succeed in what might be seen as traditional male roles are criticised in terms that would not be applied to men who have achieved similar success. For example, Hilary Rodham Clinton, NY Senator and aspirant for the 2006 US Presidency, was reported thus in *The Times* of London:

The vaulting ambition of America's Lady Macbeth...Portrait of a terrifying ego...she has recast herself as a latter-day Boadicea...she has had shameless political reconstructive surgery (Baker, G. 2007, Comment, *The Times*, 26 Jan. p. 19).

Yet surely, to be a politician of any gender requires ambition?

Societal effects are often underpinned by those of Christianity is a doctrine generally supportive girls' education whilst Islam is less so but in all faiths the leaders are male so giving no role models for female advancement. Such attitudes are reinforced where denominational schools are dominant. In developing countries, such schools are often better organised and the boarding facilities are seen as better and safer than are those in government schools (Brock and Cremmish, 1997:3).

Health issues too affect access and retention in schooling and health issues themselves are affected by societal attitudes. In some societies, boys get preferential feeding and lighter house and farming work than do girls so boys are better able to take advantage of what education there is. Early pregnancy and rising levels of early sexual activity, both hinder girls' achievement and participation - these issues are largely covert but very significant (Brock and Cremmish, 1997:3). A lack of sanitary protection for girls can stop them attending school out of embarrassment for example.

In the gender disparity debate, it is easy to overlook cultural issues that disadvantage boys. These are becoming much more significant as girls lessen the gap in educational achievements. In Trinidad, Barbados and St Vincent for example, boys were found to have few examples of high attainment role models. The few high attaining boys hid their achievements by acting and misbehaving like their lower attaining male classmates (Kutnick *et al*, 1997, p.121). Such observations could be replicated in the UK. Unlike the women's movement, men have,

no formal men's liberation movement, no informal male equivalent of the sisterhood to help them cope with their increasing loss of identity, their disaffection and their sense of hopelessness (Bleach, 1996, p.6).

The male role is changing everywhere and there is - confusion about what it should be. In many places, there are no male role models in the home. In developed countries such as the UK, increasing numbers of families are led by single women. In countries such as Botswana, many fathers are likely to emigrate to economic activity in South Africa. Some societies, such as Jamaica, are strongly matriarchal (Brock and Cammish, 1997). Girls

everywhere appear to be more eager to please adults than do boys and since there are more females in the early lives of young children than there are males and more female than male teachers then girls will outperform boys.

Women are not as far behind men in pay differentials as is generally believed. In England, for example, men earn 16% more than women but for childless under 40s, the pay gap is only 11% . 'Marriage and children are the key reasons for the pay gap...discrimination had little to do with it' (Doughty, 2001:43). Men also do the more risky and less secure jobs than women and these are thus paid more.

## **2b) Geography and economy**

Location, location, location matters as much to gender disparity in education as does gender itself. In a study of seven states (Bangladesh, Cameroon, India, Jamaica, Sierra Leone and Vanuatu) it was found that urban girls were more likely to attend schools than rural girls. The reasons included distance from schools which for girls meant more danger when walking in remote rural areas. Urban areas had more single sex schools than rural areas and such schools helped overcome cultural barriers to schooling. Extreme conditions such as floods seemed to result in more girls missing school than boys (Brock and Cremmish, 1997).

In contrast to this study, research in Kenya and Thailand discovered that the general assumption that the further from the capital cities you are the less likely you are to be in school, was not true. In Nairobi, for example, there was much lower secondary school enrolment than in rural areas. Overall, the researchers found that male and female secondary enrolments did not show expected correlations with the presence of a labour market that competed with going to school (i.e. which offered opportunities for unskilled work such as subsistence small holding agriculture). Instead, the nascent industrial and service sectors which needed better trained workers encouraged staying on at school (e.g. Kenya's expanding cash crop economy and Thailand's and Kenya's service sectors). The Thai manufacturing sector did not correlate negatively with female secondary enrolments but it did in Kenya. In both countries, however, this sector of the economy provided more high level jobs for men and so did not encourage female secondary education (Buckmann and Brakewood, 2000). The rural/urban dichotomy evidence was also supported by USA evidence. Research there found children in suburbs and rural areas marginally less likely to drop out than those in urban areas

In the UK, the numbers and percentages of women school principals declined the further north one progressed. It was highest in London, especially when the Inner London Education Authority existed with its strong equality agenda. As a personal footnote to this, I noticed that principals were taller as one moved north. Possible reinforcement for this, though in a different context, comes from the USA where 2003 research found that taller immigrants earned more than shorter ones with one extra

inch of height associated with a 1 per cent increase in income (Hersch, 2003). I await legislation on heightism with interest.

## **2c) Political will**

The status of gender disparity in the political stakes strongly influences the chances of altering situations. Since the 1990s, in the developed world, disparities of race, culture, religion and human rights have taken moved gender disparities off the political priorities agenda though there are the first stirrings of interest in correcting disparities that now disadvantage boys.

In the seven developing countries studied by Brock and Cremmish in 1997, the political will to make operative such things as equal opportunities legislation, universal education for girls and eradication of gender bias from texts, was not strong. Obviously, this can be explained by lack of money in these economies but there were few females in positions of political power. Departments of Women's Affairs set up by governments did not have high success rates, a conclusion also supported by Swainson et al 1995. Non-governmental organisations proved more effective than governments in progress to lessening gender disparities. Political will to change matters was lacking because:

the fact remains that a small group of government officials [male] will decide which policy issues will be prioritised. These male dominated groups have a disproportionately powerful role in interpreting what cultural realities are (Swainson *et al*, 1995:115/125: pagination differed in original and microfiche copy)

In seeking to challenge inequitable applications of the laws created largely by men, women find the legal profession in developing countries dominated by men. This compounds the existing difficulties of applying equal opportunities laws already at odds with traditional practices.

The influence of voters must also be taken into account.

It has been found that undue stress on the education of either gender can be counterproductive in annoying the other gender and its protagonists. In Malawi, for example, boys' parents were annoyed by a scholarship scheme for girls (Swainson et al 1995)

## **3) SCHOOL EFFECTS -**

### ***a) Culture***

### ***b) Curriculum***

### ***c) Teaching methods and materials***

### ***d) Testing methods***

### ***e) Variable school quality***

- a) **Culture** consists of the rational and the irrational, the formal and informal, the facts and the perceptions of facts. It's a complex inter-relationship of values from overt beliefs, ethical codes and moral insights (Hodgkinson, 1983) which can be rationally expressed. It also involves, however, personal preferences, feelings and emotions. These can be asocial and amoral. They are

attitudes embedded into teachers, pupils, parents, administrators and politicians. These are usually covert or sub-conscious. Culture is both a product and a process and is changing and can be changed, though the roots lie deep and conscious rationality is often outweighed by the personal values. Hence the importance of culture.

Schools' culture tends to reproduce what is already the culture of society. Schools can only change this at the margins but they can be catalysts for change. They cannot be apart from society and when this is gendered, as all societies tend to be, then this is reproduced in schools. Whether it should be or not is an entirely different question.

The challenge is to decide how much school culture can affect pupils when we all live in gendered societies. Australian research in 2001 estimated that pupils achievement is 5.5% influenced by the school, 35% by the pupil and 59% by the teacher (Bagnall, 2001: 28) but Leithwood's contemporaneous Canadian and international research does not support such a strong teacher influence.

### **b) Curriculum**

In a study around the Commonwealth, it was found that the school curriculum reinforces distinctions in expected male and female roles; it prepares students for the public life in which men mainly engage while the family and local life is left to other agencies. This reinforces messages girls receive from schooling. (Leo-Rhynie, 1999 p. 26)

### **c) Teachers, methods and materials**

The general supposition is that the more female teachers there are, the more will girls achieve; the more male teachers there are, the more will boys achieve. Hence in the seven developing countries with girls underachieving, in Brock and Cremmish's 1997 study, (Bangladesh, Cameroon, India, Jamaica, Sierra Leone and Vanuatu), there were few female teachers and gender bias in textbooks.

It is not just gender distribution of teacher numbers that affect girls in school. Other factors have to be taken into account too. For example, in Kenya, the better qualified the teacher, the less likely are girls to drop out; the more severe are teacher reactions to teacher-pupil sex, the more likely are girls to drop out; where girls feel that there is no-one on the staff to whom they can talk, the more likely they are to drop out (Lloyd, 2000).

The evidence that different teaching methods affect genders differently is not clear. Developing countries such as the Caribbean, have more formal, didactic teaching compared with that in e.g. Canada or Australia, yet the gender disparities are the same. (Kutnick et al, 1997). In comparison, in science lessons in England:

Boys made more of an impact in class, so that even after several lessons, a number of teachers could not immediately recall the names of some of the girls. Boys muscled in on scarce equipment and were unlikely to be reprimanded by the teacher...By December of the first term at secondary school, boys dominated [science] lessons...Teachers seemed to be unaware of it (Henry, 2001:13).

This may account for the low numbers of girls following science courses in UK schools just as in Kenya, where girls feel that they are treated unequally with boys there is a 70 per cent increase in the likelihood of their dropping out of school altogether (Lloyd, 2000).

Females and males are subjected to different socialisation in mixed classrooms around the world and are rewarded for different things. Females learn to be feminine and docile. teachers are less likely to challenge girls and girls are less likely to challenge their teachers. teachers will direct their attention to the noisy rather than the quiet ones and the noisy ones are male (Leo-Rhynie, 1999, p. 26). Australian research concluded that boys appeared to need strong boundaries about what can and cannot be done in terms of behaviour, plenty of clear teacher direction, regular checking of work done in class, more rules, testing and checking, more sanctions, more high expectations and formal periods of silent work with do distractions (Bagnall, 2001). This would seem to fit with current UK emphases on the achievement of national standards through 'traditional' teaching but this also means a concentration on the more (i.e. girls), rather than the less able (i.e. boys). This has also happened in the Caribbean where Kutnick's research on gender differences found that teaching concentrated on the high achievers and this could disadvantage boys who were in the lower achieving group.

This lack of awareness by teachers of their 'double standards' towards pupils of different genders is supported by research in Trinidad where differential punishments were used for boys and girls in the same situation - boys who had forgotten their notebook were sent outside the class, three girls who had done likewise either received no reaction from the teacher or an amused one. An observer recorded the following teacher-pupil exchange to illustrate this.

*Teacher to girl pupil:-* Krystal, where is your notebook, darling? [Her response merely elicited an OK from the teacher]

*Teacher to boy pupil:* Jason, Kern where are your notebooks

*Jason Kern* Don't have it

*Teacher:* Outside

In the same class situation, girls were told they were expected to get scores in the 90s and boys in the 80s; the teacher remarked on the girls having given better answers; boys were publicly criticised; boys were often shamed in front of classes for poor work or for noisy misbehaviour or were ignored if they 'opted out' of lessons if they were quiet. 'There were no examples of girls being dealt with in this manner' (Kutnick *et al*, 1997:12).

Much more stringent disciplining is applied to girls in African countries such as Kenya (Lloyd *et al* 1996) and Swaziland (2001 Channel Four UK TV programme, *Going Native*). In Kenya, fieldworkers observed that 'particular schools were run by the cane' (Lloyd *op cit*, p. 123) and the Swaziland experience showed whole classes being frequently and regularly caned. The culture thus seems harsh and masculine and results in girls feeling negatively about schooling.

On the other hand, boys appear disadvantaged by the feminisation of the curriculum, as Bagnall's Australian research showed. Using non-fiction literature was one of the recommendations to correct this (as it is in the UK) yet Kutnick's 1997 Caribbean study suggested that children should not be allowed to select only information books but should be encouraged to read story books too. Whatever books are used, research shows that textbooks in many Commonwealth countries show women generally in the home and men in outside occupations; for books for the eurocentric market, white males are shown in a much greater range of occupations than women (Leo-Rhynie, 1999, p. 28). There appears to be, however, little differences in the contexts in which male and female children are portrayed in text books.

Further extraneous factors also influence gender disparities. The better the school facilities, the more likely are girls to be retained in education for longer. Hence repairing leaky roofs in Ghanaian schools affected girls' attendance (Lloyd, 2000). Boys are more likely to drop out where there are poor sports facilities (Jamaica, Brock and Cammish). Though this finding emerged from developing countries, could the sale of school playing fields in the UK be partly responsible for the current boys' underachievement?

### **3c) Testing Methods**

This is an area of current controversy in the UK. Until comprehensive schooling extended over most of England and Wales from the early 1970s, testing was by major, annual single examinations in which success was reliant on a retentive memory and ability to work under demanding conditions. This method appeared to favour boys. The coursework assessment that replaced much of this appears to favour girls, generally deemed to be more hardworking and methodical than boys as Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series demonstrates. Heaven forbid that we should favour such qualities so let us hope that Harry Potter's own achievements will inspire boys to do better.

Changing back to formal examinations may not however be the panacea for boys that it is claimed to be. Kutnick's Caribbean study found that, 'selection to secondary school [in Trinidad], based on CEE results, showed virtually no differences between the scores of males and females' (Kutnick *et al*, 1997:119). Gender disparities in testing outcomes could be as much related to available school opportunities as to anything more fundamental in sex differences. For example, in Jamaica, in 1999, it was reported that as there are more high school places for boys than girls, more boys move onto secondary education than do girls even though the girls' scores are higher (Leo-Rhynie 1999 p.19). This was the situation in England during the years that the 11+ examination was dominant (1944-64).

### **3d) Variable school quality**

There is very mixed evidence on how far variations in school quality affect gender disparities. For example, for both boys and girls who passed the selective tests to attend high prestige schools in Barbados and St Vincent, 'characteristic sex and social class differences in attainment were no longer found. Prestige schools encouraged a democratic performance' (Kutnick *et al* 1997: 120). This finding applied to the co-educational prestige schools but less so to all-girls' schools. It was suggested that this

might be because girls had lower self-esteem or because of teacher paternalism and lower parental expectations. Note the contrast with the UK where pupils in single sex schools regularly out perform those in co-educational schools.

In a study of three districts in Kenya in 1996 (Lloyd et al) which sought to ascertain the effects of school variables on dropout at upper primary on girls and boys, research showed that school variables generally did not correlate with girls' attendance (they were affected by family factors) though some variables did correlate with boys attendance. Boys were less likely to drop out where only English was used as the language of instruction for example but more likely to drop out where teachers have attended Inservice education in the last two years and where most classes started on time.

In the USA, 2001 research found that single sex education appeared to offer no better chances for either gender except for boys and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. For these, a statistically significant correlation be found with achievement and single sex education but that effect is slight. Elsewhere, it is strongest in nations in which single sex education is very rare (but there it may be affected by the selective entry factor as demonstrated in a 1995 study of New Zealand, Belgium, Japan and Thailand) (Datnow and Hubbard 2001).

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