

Teacher Talk: A Post-formal Inquiry Into Educational Change

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Teaching for Gender Equality in Primary Schools in Botswana: Reality or Illusion?

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Abstract

After the ratification of the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action by the Botswana Government in 1995, the impetus for transforming the school curriculum to meet the world trends on issues of gender equality grew. The Botswana government embarked on massive changes on the school curriculum and teacher education programs to insure that they address issues of gender equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes (Policy on Women in Development, 1995). It is against this backdrop that this study interrogates the notion of gender equality as perceived and enacted within social studies classrooms in Botswana primary schools. I use the post colonial lens to query the teachers' perceptions and practices of gender equality in their classrooms. The study was qualitative in its approach and anchored within the naturalistic paradigm. Interviews, participant observations and focus groups were used to collect data. The findings from this study revealed enormous contradictions between what teachers say they do and what actually transpires in their classrooms, therefore leading to the conclusion that gender equality remains an illusion rather than a reality. The study has implications for teacher education, teachers and school heads to ensure that they create a gender-equitable environment for learners. The study further recommends that teacher education should make gender equity a central theme throughout teacher education. Furthermore, school-heads and teachers should develop school-based policies for gender equitable pedagogies, move beyond stereotypes and interrogate the school and teachers' own values, attitudes and culture for gender equality.

Keywords: Gender equality, social studies, post-colonial theory, naturalistic inquiry, teaching, pedagogy, transformative knowledge, citizenship, democracy, primary education.

1. Introduction

There is overwhelming evidence to support that eliminating gender disparity in schooling has dominated discussions on gender issues for some years. Eliminating gender disparity is generally interpreted as overcoming barriers to equal access and achievement in schooling for girls and boys (Aikman, Unterhalter, and Challender, 2010; Subrahmanian, 2005). However, recent discussions have broadened the scope from gender parity to gender equity and equality. Gender parity is viewed a prerequisite to achieving gender equality as it focuses on equal representation of both males and females in education. However, Subrahmanian (2005) in defining equality categorizes it as formal equality and substantive equality. The argument being that formal equality is based on access to and participation in education. Formal equality can also be interpreted as 'sameness' of men and women and is based on numerical gaps between the two. Substantive equality is cognizant of the fact that men

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