

# Education

## Key issues in this chapter:

- ▶ Access to education globally is shaped by gender; internationally girls are less likely than boys to be in school.
- ▶ Internationally, girls' participation in secondary and tertiary education has been outstripping that of boys.
- ▶ The experience of education has been, and is, highly gendered across geography and history.
- ▶ Education has both a formal and a hidden curricula which reflects hegemonic gender norms.
- ▶ There is an international concern that boys are 'failing' in comparison to girls.

## At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- ▶ Discuss and explain differential rates of access to, and achievement in, education globally.
- ▶ Differentiate between formal and hidden curricula, outlining examples of both.
- ▶ Understand standard measures such as the Gender Parity Index and Percentage Performance measure.
- ▶ Describe and understand trends, patterns and debates regarding the gender gap in educational achievement.
- ▶ Relate your own educational biography to the material and issues in this chapter.

## Introduction



**Figure 13.1** Two school entrances

Source: Morton Primary, built 1909, picture 2005 © J. Marchbank.

### Stop and think 13.1

Look at the pictures in Figure 13.1. They are of a state school built in 1909 that is still in operation today, though the children no longer use these doors as entrances. What gender messages do these pictures convey to you? What statements regarding gender would have been conveyed to a child in 1909, even 1969?

## Gender and education

Why is gender of interest regarding education? Well, it is of interest for many reasons, not least because educational opportunities and experiences greatly influence a person's life chances beyond school, in relation to their position in the labour market, to the health of themselves and their family. Christine Skelton (1993) points out that there is a multiplicity of ways gender exists in all aspects of schooling, and she contends that these create inequalities between girls and boys. In this chapter we examine gendered patterns in school attendance worldwide, including the issues and reasons for non-attendance. Many gender patterns exist, and they are not the same at all levels of education. The next focus is on gender issues within educational systems. In this we will examine the curricula, resources, classroom interactions amongst other topics. Finally, we will analyse the key issue of the discourse of 'failing boys' which has relevance for many societies both industrial and developing.

So, we begin our exploration of gender and education by understanding who goes to school. It is the case that not all countries are able to provide comprehensive school cover and even in those countries where primary education is mostly free, such as India, not all children make it into school.

## School participation

In most developed countries all children are required to, and do, attend school. In developing countries this is not always the case; even when schooling is available it is often difficult to get to and expensive to participate. Sarmistha Pal (2003) conducted a review of educational research literature focused on developing countries which, she concludes, indicates that boys are more likely than girls to be in school. Even where schooling is free girls attend less due to other factors – even if schooling is free there may be a cost from the loss of the child's labour in the fields, home or workplace. Other factors mitigate against the inclusion of girls in education in developing countries, especially

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for families with limited or no resources. School fees exist in many countries, over 100 according to UNESCO, and these deter parents from sending children, especially daughters, to school. In some cases, where a family can afford to send some children to school pure son preference within the culture means that boys have a greater chance of education than their sisters. Pal (2003) acknowledges that this was the case for some families in the study in which she participated in the Punjab, yet there are other reasons why girls are educated less than boys – some of these are outlined in Table 13.1.

**Table 13.1** Reasons for boy preference in education in developing countries

1. Gender bias when money limited, expresses itself as son preference
2. Girls are needed at home to free mother to engage in paid work, this is gender specific as boys would not be expected to take on domestic roles to free the mother to work in many societies.
3. Lesser returns for the family on investment of girls' education as: girls leave home on marriage and educated girls earn less than educated boys [**Hotlink** → **Work & Leisure (Chapter 14)**].
4. Safety and cultural concerns regarding female children travelling to school, both in terms of their safety and propriety within certain cultures.

Source: Derived from: Baden and Milward (1997).

Variations exist regarding participation of girls within states and even regions. In an attempt to understand the reasons for these Pal (2003) analysed a number of factors involved in decisions around the attendance of children in primary schools in rural West Bengal, India. Her conclusions indicate that there are also several factors which can increase the likelihood of a girl receiving education; summarised these are:

1. Girls are more likely to be in school in areas and villages where there exists a tradition of educating women and girls.
2. In areas where men's wages are high there is an incentive for boys not to study but to work, therefore gender participation rates are more equal.

3. The influence of the mother – that is, there is a distinct correlation between the education of the mother and the education of her daughter/s; educated women send their daughters to school.

According to a report commissioned by UNESCO, as part of the campaign Education for All, the number of girls in primary schools worldwide has been increasing, and at a greater rate than the rate for boys. However, gender equality in participation is still a far off target in many states and of the estimated 104 million children of primary school age who are *not* in education over 57 per cent are girls (*EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2003*, cited in *id21 Research Highlight, 2004*) and in one region, sub-Saharan Africa, the enrolment of girls in primary schools is three-quarters that of boys. One measure of participation by gender is the Gender Parity Index; this shows the ratio of girls in school compared with boys in the same country – a figure of 1 means equal participation, less than 1 indicates girls' lesser participation and more than 1 girls' greater participation. So, for example the GPI in India for primary education at 0.83, clearly indicates that fewer girls are in school than boys. This index also allows us to see patterns within overall trends, one of which is the fact that many boys across the world do not go on to complete secondary level education, meaning that of the children who do make it to secondary level girls outnumber boys in a range of countries. This is the situation in countries along the development continuum (see Table 13.2).

So, the picture is not simply one of boys' greater access worldwide to education – there are many nuances within this picture. It is informative to look at examples from across the world, some snapshots, which go some way to illustrate the complexities

**Table 13.2** Secondary education GPI by gender, selected countries

Developing	Bangladesh	1.05
Middle Income	Colombia	1.10
Developed	United Kingdom	1.17

Source: Derived from: *EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2003*.

within the overarching statement regarding boys' greater participation in education than girls'.

### School 'drop outs'

As shown in Table 13.2, the rates of completion of secondary education by gender do not always favour boys and, in addition boys and girls may drop out of education for different reasons. In a study of Ghana and Botswana (Dunne *et al.*, 2005) it was found that more girls than boys drop out of school before completing their education due in the main to pregnancy and early marriage. The factors driving boys out of school in these countries was found to be that boys feared corporal punishment, which is often much more severe for boys than girls, and were also eager to start earning money. In addition, boys displayed poorer punctuality and greater truancy rates than girls. A USA study (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. and The NETWORK, Inc., 1993) also found that early motherhood was a cause of girls dropping out of high school, with 44 per cent of girls in their study citing pregnancy or marriage as a major reason for their withdrawal from study (note, in certain US states the marriage age can be as low as 14 where a pregnancy is involved). Of the remaining 56 per cent of girls in the study who had dropped out other features were of note, these being that the girls were often from families which displayed very 'traditional' attitudes towards gender roles and as such did not greatly value the education of girls as they were expected to become housewives and mothers rather than breadwinners. In the USA girls drop out of education at lesser rates than boys, but when they do boys are more likely to return to education later, and this is also differentiated by ethnicity. The same USA report showed that of 'drop outs' 42 per cent of boys did later return compared with only 25 per cent of girls who had dropped out, whilst amongst 'drop outs' from African-American and Hispanic youth, boys return at a rate 10 per cent higher than girls from these groups (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. and The NETWORK, Inc., 1993).

Gendered experiences outside of school have also been found to cause girls to drop out, in particular gender based violence, both in the community and

within schools, along with the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases all mitigate against girls finishing their education. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003*, found that in two regions, the Caribbean and Southern Africa, girls between 15 and 19 are infected by HIV/AIDS at rates from four to seven times higher than boys.

### Tertiary education

For those who do manage to complete secondary education there is the possibility of tertiary, or higher, education. There have been a number of changes to gender participation rates across the globe in higher education, as shown by the extract below:

In the US there are two million more women than men in college and the National Centre for Educational Statistics estimates that within five years 61% of those entering college will be female. There have been reports that some ivy league universities are managing their admissions to avoid overloading their student bodies with women – much as the 11-plus had a higher pass mark for girls, or the grammar schools would have been swamped with them. At the University of Saskatchewan in Canada only 11 of the 71 students due to graduate in veterinary science in 2007 will be men. Sixty per cent of University of Ottawa students are women and they are the majority in nine out of 10 faculties. During the 1990s women accounted for 100% of enrolment growth at German universities and more than 60% in France and Australia. In Trinidad, unofficial figures suggest up to 75% of the student body is female.

(Berliner, 2004)

These examples are illustrative rather than representative; however, they do indicate a specific trend, also identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their survey of 27 member countries (OECD, 2004). Not only does the OECD note that 'Low educational attainment concerns more young males than females in 19 of the 27 countries . . . And particularly in Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain' (OECD, 2004) but, in addition:

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Younger women today are far more likely to have completed a tertiary qualification than women 30 years ago: in 19 of the 30 OECD countries, more than twice as many women aged 25 to 34 have completed tertiary education than women aged 55 to 64 do. In 21 of 27 OECD countries with comparable data, the number of women graduating from university-level programmes is equal to or exceeds that of men.

(OECD, 2004)

What is evident here is that young women are now catching up with the participation rates of young men in a number of countries, and in some cases, overtaking them. This is not due to the number of men

decreasing but, in most cases, due to the rate of uptake of higher educational opportunities by women growing. In the UK, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) monitors tertiary education trends, and their figures show that of the increase in uptake of higher education in the UK in the past decade over 70 per cent of it has been created by women (HESA, 2004). This trend does not only apply to developed countries but is also found in other areas, for example Jamaica (see World in Focus 13.1).

What we see from World in Focus 13.1 is that changes to the gender participation rates in higher education derive not simply from stagnation, or even a decrease, in male enrolments but from greater increases in female involvement. This supports the

### World in focus 13.1

#### University participation in the West Indies – where have all the young men gone?

In 1948 the student body of the University of the West Indies (UWI) was predominately male: with 70 per cent of students being men and only 30 per cent women. Now that figure has been reversed and men comprise the minority 30 per cent figure. Still, however, over 90 per cent of the professors are men and males retain a dominance in technical and vocational areas such as engineering. One explanation of the gender balance reversal is that girls have entered into those fields which were traditionally male bastions, such as medicine. The reverse cannot be said about boys entering female areas. Mark Figueroa (2000) has been trying to make sense of it all with his research based at UWI. His findings lead him to argue that the lower participation rates of men in higher education is not the result of any

forces of marginalisation but are actually due to historical patterns of privileging men. He argues that this historical privileging has resulted in forms of masculinity that create barriers for boys and reduce their educational aspirations. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Although a minority of boys can and do promote their masculine identity through academic success for the majority the early socialisation of boys, and society's expectations regarding appropriate male behaviour, hold them back in school. Figueroa notes that the hard male Caribbean image, strongest in Jamaica, causes boys to resist school as 'girlish'.
2. Part of this hard image is the connection it has to Creole languages in preference to English, as instruction in schools is in English boys are disadvantaged.
3. Whereas it is now acceptable for girls to have ambitions to enter

into male fields and professions, the same is not the case for boys wishing to enter female areas [**Hotlink** → **Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**]. As such, girls have made inroads into traditionally male areas whilst boys have not done the reverse.

From these findings Figueroa concludes that a policy shift is required if boys are to be able to keep up with girls. It is not that boys need to be protected from the competition girls are putting up, but rather that there is a need for social intervention (we will return to the idea of failing boys later in the chapter). His recommendations are the development of policies which challenge societal notions of male privilege; raise the status of education; encourage boys to enter into areas currently defined as female; provide support for language development in English and for this all to be implemented at a national level with consistent monitoring.

findings of the OECD study, amongst others. So why are women and girls responding in manner differently from men? One explanation for the British experience is given in Controversy 13.1.

## Controversy 13.1

### Do we need more graduates?

The UK government has a target of 50 per cent of 18–30-year-olds experiencing higher education and recent years have seen a great deal of growth towards this target, with Scotland having already attained it (MacLeod, 2002). Phillip Brown and Anthony Hesketh are sceptical about the needs of the economy for increasing numbers of graduates citing the fact that 40 per cent of graduates are actually in jobs which do not require graduate level skills (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). As the extract below shows this is having a differential effect on girls and boys from the working class.

Brown is co-author of a controversial book out next month which argues that the need for graduate workers is not as great as the government predicts and that too many employers are asking for graduate skills they don't need. He believes middle-class boys are as interested in going to university as they ever were, but that working-class boys continue to be as uninterested as ever. The shift is occurring as a result of working-class girls and women seeking higher qualifications, because more jobs need credentials, thereby increasing the gender gap.

He is not alone in this view. Diane Reay, professor of sociology of education at the Institute for Policy Studies in Education at London Metropolitan University, argues that the market for middle-class higher education students is now saturated. Even middle-class men and women who 10 years ago would not have considered themselves academic enough are going to university, which leaves any rise in university entry to come from the working classes. This is where the different approaches to education between the sexes, shown by her research, come into play. How girls and women work and respond to opportunities is the key to the rising gender gap in the higher education student body.

'Right from the start of school, girls assume different attitudes to learning,' says Reay. 'They have a willingness to play by the rules of the educational game and an engagement with learning. Even if they find things tedious, they get on with it, rather than get out.'

'As we move from an elite to a mass higher education system, working-class girls are buying into it, while working-class boys are opting out. Nothing is going to pull these young working-class men in. They are disenchanted with education before the sixth form.'

Source: Extracted from Berliner (2004).

Although women are now taking greater advantage of higher education it remains the case that the subjects dominated by women are most probably related to gender inequality in earnings and occupational segregation (Loury, 1997) [**Hotlink** → **Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**]. Table 13.3 illustrates this with figures from the USA.

**Table 13.3** Percentage of women in majors\* in one US college

Major subject	Women as a percentage of all students registered
English	70.6
History	39.5
Economics	29.8
Political Science	46.0
Psychology	77.7
Sociology	61.8
Biology	64.3
Chemistry	53.5
Physics	24.0
Geology	14.2
Mathematics	41.6
Business	44.6
Computers	14.4
Engineering	16.1
Education	76.8
Social Work	94.3

\* A Major is the main subject studied.

Source: Derived from: Bettinger and Long (2004), Table 1. Original source Ohio Board of Regents HEI System.

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Having now ascertained the main trends in educational participation it is time to focus on the ways that gender exists within education.

### Gender issues within educational systems

In this section we will cover a number of issues from gendered curricula to the organisation of schools and learning. In doing so the main focus will be on education in England and Wales, though not exclusively, as many of the issues found elsewhere also exist, or existed, within the English and Welsh education system.

### Compulsory schooling for boys and girls

In England and Wales prior to the first Education Act (known as the Forster Act) in 1870 education was voluntary though there had been a long tradition of educating boys from the middle and upper classes. Feminists in the nineteenth century campaigned for many causes, including the inclusion of girls in education. Most objections to educating girls were based on perceived 'natural' differences between the sexes, frequently citing the frailness of the female body as a reason for not educating girls (Spender, 1987). Likewise, arguments for educating girls reflected a gendered life role; just as it was hoped that compulsory education would socialise the working-class masses, so too it was hoped that the inclusion of girls would ensure better sanitation within working-class homes and improve infant mortality. From the outset the purpose of education for boys and girls was to be different: girls were to be educated to the domestic and motherhood role whilst boys to enter the labour market as useful employees.

There was also a social class element to education for what was deemed suitable for working-class girls was not the aim for middle-class girls. Working-class girls were to achieve practical skills in housekeeping and mothering, whilst a middle-class girl was charged with developing her abilities to organise her household (mostly through the employment of working-class women servants). However, as it was expected that the middle classes would make their own arrangement for

the education of their children the main focus of the 1870 Act was on an appropriate education for working-class girls and boys. So, lessons such as needlework and cookery became compulsory subjects (as they remained for many girls until the late 1970s and beyond). Skelton (1993) notes that as much as a fifth of the curriculum for girls in the 1870s was spent on needlework. She goes on to explain how girls' education became very subscribed and limited:

The 1876 Code stipulated that every girl entered for examination in the higher standards of elementary education had to take domestic economy as one of her subjects. As most schools only entered children for *one* subject, the vast majority of girls had no choice as to what they would be examined on.

(Skelton, 1993: 327, emphasis in the original)

Social and economic change in the first half of the twentieth century should have advanced women's education. However the pushing of women out of the workplace and back into the domestic sphere which occurred at the end of both world wars, diminished the attempts within the 1944 Education Act to address issues of equality of opportunity, the first Act in fact to do so. Although equality of opportunity was included in the Act it achieved little. The Act held that all were entitled to a free secondary education and that the education system would be based on meritocracy, not on sex, age, ethnicity or class background of students. Two matters restricted girls' education. The first was the requirement that children be offered education suitable to their age, abilities and aptitudes. The second was the structure of secondary education. With regards to the first point: it was assumed that girls would have a domestic role and boys one in the world of work, so suitable curricula developed, again preparing each for a different role in adult life. The notion of meritocracy was enacted through the development of grammar schools to be attended by the students who scored best in an examination at 11 (referred to as the 11 Plus). Yet this was a managed meritocracy. Although girls consistently achieved higher scores than boys in this examination, they did not receive the majority of the places. It was not viewed as desirable to have girls win more of the prestigious educational places so the examinations scores were weighted

differently based on gender. In other words, boys achieved a grammar school place for a lower score than did a girl (Deem, 1981).

Despite a number of educational reports little changed in the educational opportunities available to girls and boys. A major milestone came in 1975 with the Sex Discrimination Act. There was initial opposition to the inclusion of education in this Act and once it was eventually included it was in a very limited way (for further details see Arnot and Weiner, 1987; Skelton, 1993). Nonetheless, it opened the door for teachers, researchers and policy makers within education authorities to develop equality strategies within education, these dealt with both the official and the hidden curriculum (see A Closer Look 13.1).

## Gender and curricula

As noted immediately above, writings on education refer to two forms of curricula, and an explanation of these is given below.

### A closer look 13.1

#### Official and hidden curricula – definitions

Within an educational setting the Official Curriculum includes what is taught, basically the timetable of classes offered. For example, a requirement of girls to undertake domestic science and for boys to learn woodwork skills. It also is used to refer to activities organised by teachers be they part of the teaching programme or clubs and sports. The hidden curriculum is a term used as shorthand for things that are learned in schools through informal means, or simply unintentional messages absorbed from such things as the way learning and teaching are organised, for instance, the simple division of a class into groups based on gender which reinforces differences in children's minds about boys and girls. Other examples of the hidden curriculum that have been identified include teaching materials; school organisation (such as separate play areas for girls and boys) and administration, such as school registers divided into two lists, of girls and boys. In addition, teacher attitudes and approaches have been identified as adding to the hidden curriculum.

### Gender issues within educational systems

It is worthwhile to examine some of the gender issues in both the curricula, not just to illustrate the ways in which gender has been created and sustained within education but also because schooling is a very strong socialisation force. For many of you reading this much of this will not relate to your experience within schools as with greater awareness many practices and materials were replaced in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, some aspects may be familiar.

### Stop and think 13.2

Whilst reading this next section keep in mind your own educational experience to date. Note down where you have experienced the things described below; likewise, note down your experience of a non-gendered curricula where appropriate. You may find it useful to conduct a short interview with someone older regarding these issues in their educational experience.

### School organisation

Look at the photographs at the beginning of this chapter – they are a perfect example of administrative devices employed by schools. The existence of separate entrances for girls and boys predates the Victorian education acts and in some cases continued to be used gender-exclusively into the 1970s (see A Closer Look 13.2, A schooling autobiography). Although in Britain single-sex schooling in the state system diminished greatly in the latter twentieth century this did not mean that sex segregation was removed. Gender remained an integral part of school organisation with some examples being the organisation of school registers being divided by gender and the lining up of children to enter class also being in two sex-divided groupings. It was a routine aspect of education until the 1980s (and beyond) to categorise and organise children and their activities based on gender, to send boys to play football whilst girls played netball for example. Education researchers have shown how such practices reinforce gender messages, in particular differences between genders, for example Skelton (1993) remembers how in her school teachers allowed children to leave the school assembly on the basis of



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'quietness'. As she reports, the girls always won, sending a message that this was what was expected of girls whilst boys were expected to be noisy.

### Teaching and learning resources

It may be difficult to perceive today but there is a great deal of evidence that shows that many of the resources employed by teachers in the past in the UK (which may still be being used elsewhere today) were heavily gendered. One such focus has been on reading schemes which employed stories such as *Janet and John*, *Peter and Jane* to introduce children to literacy for the first time. In these reading schemes very traditional roles were represented, in addition, the characters all appeared white and middle class. In *Janet and John* books children began their reading careers learning that Janet helped Mummy to wash dishes whilst John watched as Daddy put oil in the car. There is little need today to point out the sex stereotypes evident here. In addition, such reading schemes presented men and women in a restricted set of roles: women were predominately in domestic roles, or sex stereotyped occupations in the workplace. Likewise, men were virtually absent from domestic activities. In the past 30 years such schemes have fallen away, yet they shaped the socialisation experiences of many children for a number of decades.

### Gender and social relations in the classroom

Dale Spender is an educationalist and author who has written extensively about various issues, especially regarding the education of girls and women. You would

expect then that she would feel comfortable in teaching classes of both women and men, for with her awareness she would be able to ameliorate any gender differences in the treatment of pupils and students. Yet, for many years she required the men in her mixed groups to be silent or only speak in equitably allotted time. This is because she was aware that in class men continued to dominate communication. Such self-awareness is not always present. Spender's experiences tell us a great deal about interaction in the classroom. It appears that even if one is aware gender differences are not necessarily avoided in the treatment of pupils and steps, such as those Spender took, are required. Of course, some men protested that they felt excluded, which was just the experience that women had all along (Spender, 2006).

Research shows that there is a difference between the interactions between teacher and boy and teacher and girl. It is expected that boys will demand more of the teacher's time, be it only to discipline them, and research has shown that boys do receive a greater number of reprimands in class than do girls (see World in Focus 13.2). As such, teachers may attempt to engage boys more in the lesson and select material that interests them (Skelton, 1989). The greater verbalisation of boys has been observed in a number of contexts, leading teachers to ask them more difficult questions and to assess their abilities as greater than those of comparable girls (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. and The NETWORK, Inc., 1993). Studies from the UK and the USA show that, in the 1980s at least, boys received more time from teachers, were assigned to higher groups of ability, received harsher punishments and were asked harder questions than girls (Goddard-Spear, 1989; Lee, 1990; Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. and The NETWORK, Inc., 1993).

## World in focus 13.2

### Gender and classroom behaviour

#### UK

Becky Francis (2000) has written about how the laddish behaviour of some boys affects their educational

performance and that of others. This laddish behaviour includes a focus on activities deemed by the boys to be masculine: an interest in football; the sexual objectification of females; an attitude that rejects authority and general 'mucking about'. As Francis points out this can only diminish

educational achievement as schooling requires both diligence and obedience. Of course, not all boys behave in this way but even some of those who do not still feel the peer pressure not to study and pretend to work less than they actually do.

**Australia**

A study undertaken for the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, involving over 400 schools from across Australia noted that gender played a role in the disruption of the learning process, as reported by school students:

through 'mucking around', through ridiculing answers given by others in class, through deriding those who want to work . . . [each were] . . . reported by most students as happening in their school. 'Mucking around' was reported as something boys did often by around 60 per cent of students . . . Boys were reported two to three

times as often as girls as the perpetrators of all three of these disruptive behaviours.  
(Collins *et al.*, 2002:4)

**Jamaica**

Refer back to World in Focus 13.1; Figueroa's points also include a rejection by boys of schools as 'girlish'.

**Stop and think 13.3**

Look at World in Focus 13.2. Why do you think this pattern of laddish behaviour is visible across the globe? Is it that boys are simply naughty? Is it that they bore more easily? Or is it, as some commentators argue, due to a particular form of masculinity being expressed? After reading the rest of the chapter come back to this question. Has your thinking changed?

Before looking at who studies what it is necessary to note that gender interplays with 'race', sexuality and social class in the decisions taken about education (see A Critical Look 13.1).

**A critical look 13.1****Gender not the only issue**

It is important to note that gender is not the only variable at play here: African-Caribbean girls in the UK display more gender freedom in subject choice than do white girls and working-class African-Caribbean girls also performed better academically in the 1990s than working-class African-Caribbean boys, though not better than boys from higher social class groups (Arnot *et al.*, 1999). It has been argued that this may be due to black girls adopting an instrumental approach which views learning as a means of avoiding experiencing a lack of control in their lives and to overcome sexism and racism. However, Heidi Mizra (1992) has pointed out that even when black girls did study non-stereotyped subjects they still ended up in stereotypical jobs and experienced discrimination in the job market.

Instrumentalism can also be seen in the education choices made by a group of non-heterosexual women studied by Gillian Dunne (1997). Dunne found that those women who knew early in their adulthood that marriage was not an option for them made decisions regarding education that permitted them to live independently. Whereas women who anticipated marriage, although later identifying as non-heterosexual, had been much more likely to abandon their studies, for example to support a partner in his studies.

**Gender and the official curriculum**

All of the issues discussed immediately above relate to aspects of the hidden curriculum. We have also seen how the development of education in England and Wales included a gendered official curriculum. In 1988 another Act came into effect, the Education Reform Act. A major aspect of this Act was the introduction of a National Curriculum. This National Curriculum requires that all pupils study a range of subjects and it has been responsible for a major change in the segregation of subjects studied at lower levels of high school resulting in a 'reduced sex segregation of subject choice up to the age of sixteen' (Arnot *et al.*, 1999: 20). This has also been influenced by a number of national projects encouraging girls into 'masculine' subjects, for example GIST – Girls into Science and Technology.

It has been claimed that prior to this girls' 'education lacked the breadth and depth normally associated with "good" schooling, and also precluded access to further and higher education' (Arnot *et al.*, 1999: 113). Yet, 'once subject choice was reintroduced [post 16] young men and women again chose sex-typed subjects and courses' (Arnot *et al.*, 1999: 21), (see Table 13.3).

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Despite a reduction on sex stereotyping of subjects studied in school, it appears that when students once more have the opportunity of choice gender differences emerge. Table 13.4 indicates these differences at A Level and Scottish Highers.

**Table 13.4** Gender differences in subject choice post 16, as percentage of entries for examination in GCE A Level and SCE Higher grade

	Girls	Boys
English literature*	70	30
Social Studies*	70	30
Biological sciences	63	38
History	52	48
Chemistry	51	49
Business Studies	46	54
Mathematics	40	60
Physics	24	76

\* England and Wales only.

Source: Derived from: Department for Education and Skills (2004), *Education and Training Statistics for the UK*, cited in EOC (2005: 4).

The continued gender differentiation indicates the influence of other social factors, though aspects of the hidden curriculum in the early teaching of subjects also add to the image of a subject as masculine or feminine; this could be as simple as the gender of the teachers leading the class in particular areas. The importance of role models has been raised frequently in the UK as an explanation as to why boys may 'switch off' from education in primary schools as they see few, if any, men in the classrooms and come to think that education is not, therefore, something that men do. It is interesting to note that the EFA Global Monitoring Team (EFA, 2003) has concluded that India's low primary level GPI of 0.83 is due to the absence of women teachers able to serve as role models for girls (many schools have only one teacher, around 20 per cent of Indian schools, and of these almost 90 per cent have a male teacher) [**Hotlink** → **Sex and Sexuality** → **Controversy 15.2 (Chapter 15)**].

## A closer look 13.2

### A schooling autobiography

I began school in 1969, and at that time I didn't perceive any major differences between boys and girls. However, by year 3 gender difference was really clear – when the bell went we all had to line up outside the doors. Except that there were two doors, one marked 'boys' and one marked 'girls' (these are the doors in Figure 13.1). Everyday we entered school in single-sex lines through the respective doors. Then my family moved and my brother and I went to a new school a few miles away. It was built in 1723 by a Glasgow Tobacco Lord's legacy. It was a beautiful building, still is, and it too had a 'boys' door and a 'girls' door. It also had playground areas associated with each entrance – it was taboo for the 'wrong' sex to be found playing in the 'wrong' playground. We did have a shared area too, but the interesting thing is that all of us, up to the age of 12, were fearful of ever entering, let alone being found, in the 'others' playground.

In all my Primary education I was never taught by a man, yet the Head of my first school was a classic patriarch – a kind, yet authoritarian man. Despite my next Head being female, so too were all the staff she managed, except for the janitor.

Actually, there was another signifier of gender evident from day one. Scottish state education usually requires school uniform. When I began school girls were only allowed to wear skirts and boys shorts or trousers. I stand today outside the same school with my child and watch the children enter, girls in trousers, older boys in long shorts. It is an interesting expression of uniform. In High School uniform was a little more relaxed, but not much: it was the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was a rural school with many of us getting there by bus. Remember too this was Scotland, in winter it was pretty cold. So, as girls we campaigned to be allowed to wear trousers, as it was far too cold to stand waiting for a bus in a skirt. We were allowed to wear trousers on the buses, but we had to change on entry – picture it, lots of teenage girls changing quickly into skirts in the toilets before class. Mind you, the jeans and cords worn by many of the boys (often due to their farming background) were banned from the bodies of us girls – in one explanation it was implied that such clothing might arouse the male teachers too much! We were not the only ones subject to a dress code – so too were the teachers. Teachers were held to account by the Head (called a Rector in Scotland) regarding their apparel.

## Key issue – failing boys' discourse

As is normal within schools, nothing was secret, not even the fight between women teachers and the Rector regarding women wearing trousers in their professional capacity.

On reflection I can see other issues regarding gender, not so much 'hidden curriculum' issues but of the actual curriculum and how teaching was administered. In Primary girls were taught in one year knitting and in the next crochet, whilst boys were released into the playground to supervise themselves playing football. To me this was a failure of both of us. Why should boys be assumed to need no guidance in their activity? Why should the class be divided by sex at such a young age?

Moving onto Secondary (High) school boys and girls were divided into Houses, not based on sex, we initially attended classes together based on Houses until we were 'streamed' based on ability. Yet we were also subdivided by other criteria – that being sex. This occurred in two ways: the first was in the teaching of the same subjects – we all did science but we did it in small groups (good teaching) divided by sex. The second was in the subjects offered – woodwork and metalwork were mandatory for boys in the first two years of Secondary education whilst two classes of Domestic Economy were compulsory in the same years for girls. Even when we got to choose our options an element of gender difference was built in; for those of us permitted to take an extra subject (that is in addition to the Scottish standard of 7) the choice was Biology versus Engineering Drawing. Whereas boys had had two years of Biology before this choice had to be made, the girls had had no Engineering or technical education. It is not surprising that most academically strong boys went into one class and academically strong girls into the other.

Source: Jen Marchbank

Initially much that was written on gender and education focused on discrimination facing girls. More recently another key issue has come to the fore in many countries, and it is to this that we now turn.

## Key issue – failing boys' discourse

We have already seen that the numbers of young men entering higher (tertiary) education is falling as a ratio across the majority of OECD countries and, in World in Focus 13.1, had presented an explanation for declining achievement amongst many boys in Jamaica. One explanation for this change has been an argument that whilst schools have challenged girls to take up educational opportunities the same cannot be said for boys, and this is related to societal change generally that has provided new roles for women in the labour market [**Hotlink** → **Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**] and challenged notions of the male breadwinner [**Hotlink** → **Social Policy (Chapter 5)**] and traditional views of masculinity (Arnot *et al.*, 1999; Figueroa, 2000; EOC, 2001; Connolly, 2004). There has been considerable discussion of the impact of a 'crisis in masculinity' upon boys' views of future roles and the importance of education. Christine Skelton (1998) warns that a danger of such discourses is that it positions men and boys as victims of masculinity whilst at the same time ignoring women and girls, a situation that does nothing to resolve the perceived problem. So, what is the extent of the gender difference in achievement? A Closer Look 13.3 lists the facts for 2004.

Blame for the decline in boys' educational achievements has also been targeted at a perceived 'feminisation' of schools (see Connolly, 2004 for a discussion of this point). This discourse argues that curriculum content no longer favours boys; that the introduction of continual assessment and project work (as in GCSEs) favours the diligence of girls and suits their learning patterns better and that the absence of male teachers, especially in early years' education, all militate to feminise education and disadvantage boys compared to girls. The result of such approaches has been the proliferation of texts on how to 're-masculinise' the curriculum (e.g. Noble and

## Stop and think 13.4

After reading the autobiography in A Closer Look 13.2 analyse the text for examples of gender differentiation in terms of official and hidden curricula. Compare this with the autobiography and/or education history interview you were asked to do above. Are there any points of commonality or difference? How might these be explained?

## Education

## A closer look 13.3

## Key trends in gender performance, England, 2004

In England school children are tested at a number of points, these are referred to as Key Stages (at ages 7, 11, 14) and can be charted to show progress to GCSE at 16.

- ▶ In English girls on average progress more than boys on average at every stage.
- ▶ At Key Stage 1 there is a difference of 8 percentage points between boys and girls in English (that is 8 per cent more girls achieve the required level of ability).
- ▶ At Key Stage 2 the gap for English increases to 11 percentage points and by Key Stage 3 it is 13 percentage points.
- ▶ At GCSE girls continue to do better, with a gap of 14 percentage points.
- ▶ 59 per cent of girls and 48 per cent of boys gained five or more GCSEs grades A\*-C or equivalent.\*
- ▶ 43 per cent of girls and 34 per cent of boys gained two or more A levels or equivalent.\*

\* cited in EOC (2005:1)

Source: Department for Education and Skills (2005).

Bradford, 2000, in the UK; Fletcher, 1997, in Australia) by introducing tests, shorter classes, more fact based material, less reflection and more learning based on activities; as Paul Connelly has observed, the 'result is a plethora of advice and guidance that tends to unashamedly pander to boys' immediate needs and interests' (Connolly, 2004: 43). In the USA, Canada and Australia some school authorities are experimenting with single-sex schooling (Phillips, 2003) based on such arguments regarding differential learning styles.

## Gender and learning styles

[Hotlink → Pedagogy (Chapter 9)]

Although most educationalists agree that there are differences amongst children and their learning modes, not all support the argument that gender makes such a difference that schools have to provide differing

learning experiences for girls and boys. However, as Susan Phillips summarises some research makes the opposite case:

What are some of the possible reasons for these gender differences in achievement and attitudes? Researchers suggest they include possible physiological reasons such as differences in brain wiring; preferences in learning style active versus verbal; types of materials chosen; teacher style; and perhaps even the volume and the tone of a teacher's voice.

Males and females report being less self-conscious and more focused on learning in single-sex classrooms. Teachers can adapt the teaching style, classroom layout, how to elicit responses, teacher voice level, manner of communicating, and materials chosen to maximize learning. Male academic success seems to improve when: boys are seated at tables to allow freedom of movement; teachers are more aggressive at eliciting responses; there are more 'teacher-led' activities with clear guidelines and activities; communication is 'side-by-side' rather than 'face-to-face'; kinaesthetic activities occur: and the material studies contains elements oriented to male interests. Most boys appear to prefer more hands-on, competitive instruction with smaller groups when group work is required. Females seem to thrive when: the classroom contains individual desks; the classroom is quieter and more controlled; the material is suited to their interests; and socially oriented cooperative larger group activities are used.

(Phillips, 2003: 1-2)

Likewise, an extensive review of research evidence conducted by Arnot and colleagues (1998) concluded that there are differences between girls and boys, they found that overall there is evidence that:

- ▶ Girls are more attentive in class and more willing to learn.
- ▶ Girls do better than boys on sustained tasks that are open-ended, require thought and are related to real-world situations.
- ▶ Boys prefer more traditional learning modes such as memorising abstract and unambiguous rules and facts.

## Key issue – failing boys' discourse

- ▶ Boys are more likely to seek to achieve correct answers quickly than to gain a deeper understanding through sustained effort.

- 1987–90 a period of rapid change in gender and achievement;
- 1990–95 a period of stability once more, but with a disparity in gender and achievement.

## Stop and think 13.5

Do you agree with the notion that boys and girls have different learning styles? Can this explain why girls are now doing better in comparison with boys than before? Is your preferred learning style included above; does it fit with the 'right' gender demarcation?

## Analysing the gender gap

There is no doubt that across the globe there is a change in education; the change has less to do with the achievement levels of boys and more to do with boys' achievement in comparison with girls. There is also little doubt that this has become a key issue for educationalists and policy makers from Australia to Canada to the Caribbean to Greece to the UK and beyond. It is true that girls are now out-performing boys in many areas of education yet, as shown earlier this was always the case in the UK (and required the 'fixing' of 11 plus results to ensure girls were not over-represented in grammar schools). A number of explanations for this have been given, from differential learning styles to biology to female ambition to a crisis of masculinity.

There is a problem with this focus on gender, that is, although it is true that there is evidence that girls are performing better, on the whole, than boys this is not true for all boys and in fact, as the British statistics show both boys and girls have been improving their results at GCSE, whilst, as already noted, there has always been a gender gap between boys' and girls' performance: as shown by the need to adjust the results of the 11 plus and that even in the 1970s more girls than boys achieved five or more O Levels (precursor of the GCSE) (Arnot *et al.*, 1999). There is a distinct pattern visible in the gender gap in England and Wales. Arnot and colleagues (1999) detail it in three periods:

- 1975–87 a period of stability with virtual parity in gender achievement;

In other words, prior to 1987 the gender gap was small and unchanging but this went through rapid change; however, by 1990 that change had stopped though a gender gap pertained.

## Rhetoric and reality

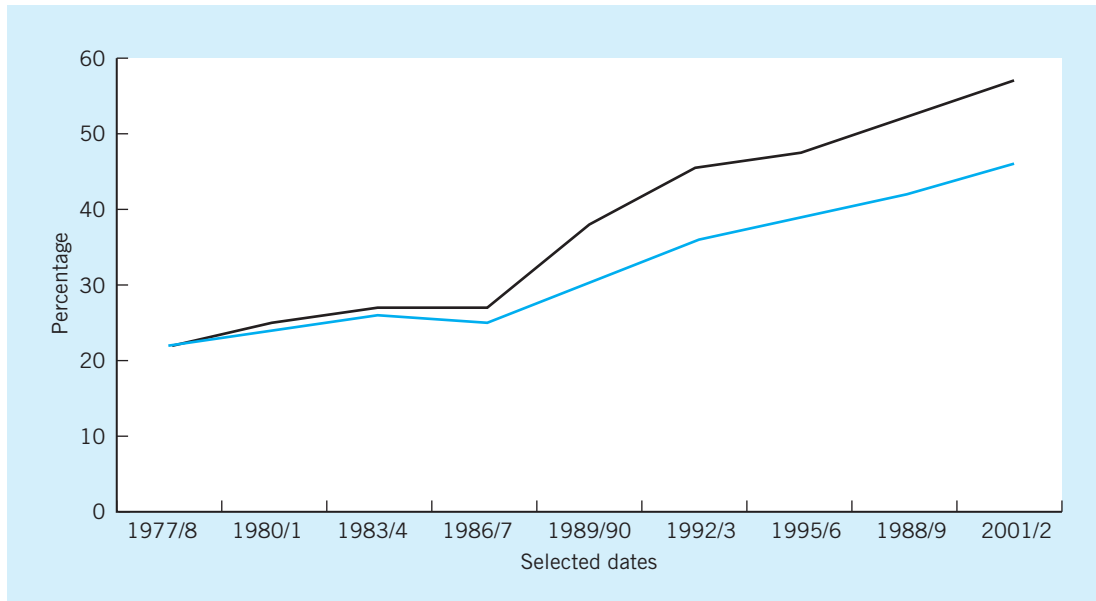
It is certainly true that since the mid-1970s an increasing gap has emerged between the performance of girls and boys, the most common measure used in England and Wales is performance at GCSE. This increasing gap is shown in Figure 13.2.

What is clear here is that there have been two trends: firstly, both boys and girls as groups have greatly increased their academic achievements; secondly, that there is an increasing difference between the genders in terms of achievement – this latter is the percentage point gap referred to earlier. This is a simple way to illustrate the percentage point gap, but what it does not show is the relative increase of boys' and girls' performance over the years. It also matters how many boys and girls achieved these grades, as Paul Connolly explains:

there is, quite simply a need to keep these differences in proportion. For example, if only 5 per cent of boys and 10 per cent of girls passed a particular GCSE examination the percentage point difference (i.e.  $10 - 5 = 5$  percentage points) would be the same as if 90 per cent of boys and 95 per cent of girls had passed that exam (i.e.  $95 - 90 = 5$  percentage points). However, we would generally be more concerned about the differences evident in the former case than in the latter. To understand why we need to look at it proportionately. Thus, in the first instance girls are twice as likely to pass the examination than boys (i.e.  $10/5 = 2$ ) whereas, in the second instance, girls are only marginally (1.06 times) more likely to pass the examination than boys (i.e.  $95/90 = 1.06$ ). In this way, 'keeping a sense of proportion' requires us to calculate the relative chances of boys and girls achieving the required examination passes.

(Connolly, 2004: 12–13)

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**Figure 13.2** Percentage of Girls and Boys Achieving 5 (or more) GCSEs (A–C), England and Wales

Source: Derived from Connolly, 2004

Connolly has analysed the statistics in just this way providing the following findings:

1991/2	0.799
2001/3	0.813

In other words, for every 100 girls passing five or more GCSEs at A\*–C, the number of boys also doing so in 1991/2 was 79.9 and 81.3 in 2001/3. What this analysis shows is that although a gender gap remains in this ten-year period boys had a greater *rate* of increase in achievement compared with girls. Connolly (2004) argues that this is a more valid way to examine trends over time and he concludes that:

Rather than boys continuing to lag further behind girls in relation to GCSE performance as the rhetoric so strongly suggests . . . the actual reality is that while there is a difference between the achievements of boys and girls it has actually been stable over the last decade and, if anything, boys are now showing some limited signs of beginning to catch up with girls.

(Connolly, 2004: 14)

Disaggregating the data – which boys and which girls?

As some boys do well and some girls do poorly educationally it is necessary to look at exactly what boys are failing and at patterns within the gender gap. As previously noted, gender is not the only factor at play in educational achievement or otherwise and we will discuss gender here in relation to these. Social class and ethnicity strongly influence the educational attainment of children (Epstein *et al.*, 1998), and comparing different groups of school students to the national average shows that there are some very high achieving boys in certain groups and some who do less well. Table 13.5 illustrates this.

It is clear from the table that not all girls are out-performing all boys, in fact, boys from the Higher Profession group out-perform all girls in all social classes except their own. Girls out-perform boys within each of the social classes and in all ethnic groups, yet black girls do less well than boys from Chinese, Indian and white families but better than boys with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and black ethnicities. Within social class groupings boys do best, relative to girls, in the Higher Professional class and worst in Routine class. Within ethnic groups Chinese boys do

**Table 13.5** Proportions of boys and girls in England and Wales achieving five or more GCSE grades A\* to C in 2000/1, by social class and ethnicity

	Total	Boys	Girls	No. of boys per 100 girls
<i>Social Class</i>				
Higher professional	77.1	72.1	82.6	87.3
Lower professional	64.5	58.9	70.1	84.0
Intermediate	51.8	46.7	56.6	82.5
Lower supervisory	34.9	29.5	40.8	72.3
Routine	31.8	26.1	37.4	69.8
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
Chinese	68.9	67.4	70.5	95.6
Indian	59.6	51.3	67.8	75.7
White	51.6	46.6	56.7	82.2
Bangladeshi	41.5	33.9	50.0	67.8
Pakistani	40.2	35.7	45.1	79.2
Black	36.3	32.0	40.2	79.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>46.1</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>82.0</b>

Source: Connolly (2004), Table 1.3, he derived the figures from the Youth Cohort Study, 2002.

best, relative to girls, whilst Bangladeshi boys do worst compared to girls from their background.

Connolly (2004) has analysed educational performance data based on the three variables of gender, ethnicity and social class to calculate the relative odds of a young person achieving the benchmark of five GCSEs A\*–C. As we already have seen the relative odds for boys achieving such a standard is around 0.813 (or 81 boys for every 100 girls). His analysis shows that, controlling for gender and either social class or ethnicity where relevant:

- ▶ Chinese young people are nearly seven times more likely to achieve the standard than black young people.
- ▶ Indian young people are over three times more likely to achieve the standard than black young people.
- ▶ Those from the Higher Professional class are nearly eight times more likely than those from the Routine class to achieve the standard.

- ▶ A young person's gender affects their chances of gaining the standard by a factor of 1.6 whilst their social class can affect their chances by a factor of 7.7 and their ethnic background by a factor of 6.8.

What this analysis shows is that it is not simply a case that boys are doing less well than girls, rather that young people's experiences of education and their personal achievements are influenced greatly by their social class and their ethnicity.

### Gender and social change

There are many explanations in existence as to why boys and girls respond differently to education; these range from biological differences to 'feminine' schools to a lack of role models. One explanation that is coming to the fore is related to social change. Schools, from the UK to the Caribbean, have and are challenging girls to change to fit modern society, to take up new jobs and professions and to look beyond a role of housewife and mother. It appears that no similar challenge has been made to boys to rethink and adapt



## Education

traditional notions of masculinity (Arnot *et al.*, 1999; Figueroa, 2000; Dunne *et al.*, 2005). Boys still display more traditional notions of household and family care than girls and even academically able boys seek masculine identity away from the classroom and books, finding it in sport or rebellious activities (Arnot *et al.*, 1999). However, not all boys have resisted changes in masculinity, as shown by the responses to attitudes to certain non-traditional occupations in a British survey of 11- to 16-year-olds (NOP Family, 2001). Nonetheless, the survey also showed that despite some intellectual changes boys still performed domestic tasks less frequently than girls, indicating that certain vestiges of gender stereotyping remain.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have covered a great deal of material regarding issues of gender and education. However, these are not the only ones. There is a great richness of work available on issues of gendered experiences of working in education, mostly women's gendered experience (see the Women's Higher Education Network series). Closely related to issues of gender are those of sexuality, both what is taught and what is experienced within educational systems by teachers and students alike (Lees, 1986, 1993; Epstein *et al.*, 2003). We hope that the insight you have gained from this chapter will aid your work on these other key issues.

### Further reading

Debbie Epstein, Sarah O'Flynn and David Telford (2003), *Silenced Sexualities in Schools and Universities*, Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books. The first book to address issues of

sexuality in all stages of formal education, from primary to tertiary. Easy to read, it combines literature reviews with research conducted by the authors to argue that educational institutions shape and manufacture sexualities.

Louise Morley and Val Walsh (eds) (1996), *Breaking Boundaries: Women in Higher Education*, London, Taylor & Francis. A wide ranging collection of chapters covering issues from the dilemmas of academic motherhood to sexuality to gender and age. Part of the WHEN series.

Diane Reay (2004), 'Cultural Capitalists and Academic Habitus: Classed and Gendered Labour in UK Higher Education', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(1): 31–9. In this article Reay clearly shows how advantages and disadvantages of class and gender interplay in the experiences of workers in higher education.

Pam Cotterill and Gayle Letherby (eds) (2005), 'Women in Higher Education: Issues and Challenges', Special issues of *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28 (2 & 3): 109–258. British and international articles that cover class, lesbian identity, inequality, leadership, resistance to feminism, 'mommy tracking' and the experiences of graduate study.

*Gender and Education* – an international, multidisciplinary journal publishing articles on educational research and ideas that focus on gender as a category of analysis. All levels of education are included, as are the experiences of girls, boys, women and men both as learners and teachers.

### Websites

Intute – a free online service providing access to the very best Web resources for education and research, evaluated and selected by a network of subject specialists. Enter the site and type in *education gender* into the internal search engine and follow your interests. Available at <http://www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/>

Oxfam – Oxfam are a leading British charity working across the globe. This site is their portal to their pages on education internationally. Available at [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/issues/education/index.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/education/index.htm)

## End of chapter activity

1. What explanations exist for son preference in sending children to school in developing countries?
2. What factors increase the likelihood of a girl receiving an education in a developing country?
3. List the different ways masculinity is said to hinder the educational attainment of boys.

## End of chapter activity continued

4. Social scientists need to be able to interpret data from graphs, tables and other sources, so using the data in Table 13.5 determine the following:

- (a) how many boys per 100 girls from the Lower Supervisory group achieved the benchmark of 5 or more GCSEs A\*–C?
- (b) although black boys were the least well performing group they did better than boys in some other ethnic groups in what way?
- (c) which category performed best overall?

Check your answers with the text.

### Answers

4 (a) 72.3

(b) In relation to girls from the same ethnic group, i.e. black boys per 100 black girls = 79.6, which is greater than Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys compared to girls from these ethnic groups.

(c) Higher professional girls with 82.6% achieving 5A\* to C passes.