



Welcome to the 15th edition of the GEA newsletter.

2011 is an important year for the GEA. We have our conference in **Exeter, UK** in April. The theme of this year's conference: *Gender & Education: Past, Present & Future* intends to engage participants in exciting debates about the past, present and future issues in the field of gender and education internationally.

It is with great sadness we report the death of one of the pivotal figures in feminism and education, Diana Leonard. Diana was an inspirational feminist, and a key part of the establishment of the GEA. We know that many members will be deeply saddened to hear this news.

2011 appears to be one of financial uncertainty in many parts of the globe. Deep cuts in public spending in many national contexts will directly affect education. Indeed the student unrest seen in many European countries highlight this time of both economic uncertainty and activism. In the UK, the Coalition government have made sweeping deep seated changes that will affect the quality and purpose of teacher education, schooling, access to further, higher and adult education, and a radical reshaping of higher education. The end of 2010 saw students and educators across the UK become active - occupying their campuses, taking to the streets on demonstrations and lobbying parliament. Some of this energy is captured in this newsletter in two engaging viewpoint pieces see pages 6-10.

As part of our ongoing series of autobiographical pieces by feminist educators, Jean Spence, reflects on her experience of feminist activism and the ongoing challenges to feminist youth work. Also in this issue, Miriam David interrogates the present media concerns around boys and schooling in a review of a recent UK TV show.

A huge thank you to all the contributors



to this edition We always welcome website and newsletter contributions. (www.genderandeducation.com) .

Please get in touch with your news, viewpoint pieces, book/TV/resource reviews, rants, cartoons and future events.

With warmest regards,

Fin Cullen— February 2011

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Diana Leonard remembered



Diana Mary Leonard, who has died aged 68 of endometrial cancer after a stubborn struggle, was a feisty and fiery feminist academic and activist. She was one of the originators of feminist sociology in the academy, organising the first British Sociological Association (BSA) conference on what was then known as sexual divisions in 1974. She never looked back from this early immersion in feminist politics and developed collaborative feminist practices in theorising, researching and political campaigning. A long and hard fight to get into and establish feminist scholarship, practices and pedagogies in the academy made her a strong and uncompromising leader of radical feminist activism and academic work in higher education. Diana was of a particular generation of activists who were first involved in the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. She was also a broad-ranging social scientist, having started in anthropology before moving on to sociology, as well as education from the late 1960s to the present, retiring from her post as Professor of Sociology of Education and Gender at the Institute of Education, University of London, three years ago. But she never actually retired and, with her emeritus status, and visiting professorship at the Centre for Higher Education Equity Research, University of Sussex, from 2008, she continued actively to engage with global feminist debates, theories and practices, having established a fearsome feminist agenda. This involvement ranged across con-

tinents from her early studies on French materialist feminism, to work in Canada and the USA, to Australia, Greece, Ireland, Israel and the Gender Equity Task Force in South Africa (1997), and at the Fatimah Jinnah Women University in Rawalpindi, Pakistan (2005-7).

'Changing Feminist Politics and Practice: gender, family and education' was the title of the day conference held to celebrate Diana's career on November 5th 2008. It was also the occasion for recording and reflecting on particular moments, organisations and actions in international feminism with which she had been involved, providing an interesting transect through a particular generation of feminists and the writing of her own involvement. The contributions were incredibly wide-ranging as befitted Diana's astonishing and exhausting if not exhaustive involvement – from feminist views on the family in the 1970s and 1980s, to influencing professional and state organisations, and setting up alternative feminist organisations, such as the Women's Research and Resources Centre, to working with school teachers and researching gender and schooling, establishing women's studies in higher education, researching higher education and doctorates and developing international feminism. As she wrote in the notes for the archival material, the conference 'also provided the seventy people who were present with interest and amusement and the opportunity to reunite with friends.'

Diana developed an eloquent materialist critique of the family, using French feminist theories, with her colleague and 'soul sister' Christine Delphy, whom she had met at a sociological conference, in 1974. They had 'a marriage of truly theoretical and political minds, made in feminism'.

Diana was born in Trinidad in 1941. Her mother was a teacher-trainer and her father

a scientist, working on sustainable plants, including the development of the optimal conditions for exporting bananas to Europe, and was thus not able to return to the UK until after the war. When the family eventually returned they settled in Brighton and Diana went to Brighton and Hove High school run by the Girls' Day School Trust. She then went to Girton College, Cambridge to read natural sciences, specialising in archaeology and anthropology in her final year. She started postgraduate life as a science teacher, and then did a PhD in social anthropology in South Wales on the subject of courtship and weddings. She had three children – Hannah, Polly and Tom Barker.

On her return to London in the early 1970s she plunged into the women's movement and, in 1976, she got a lectureship at the Institute of Education, where she remained for the rest of her academic life, with a spell on secondment to the Open University (1980-83) to work on its first women's studies course.

Diana established the Centre for Research on Education and Gender (CREG) in 1984, and from this grew postgraduate courses and doctorates on women's studies and education, including work on international postgraduate students. CREG was a vital and vibrant centre of research, critique, friendships and networks about women's and girls' lives, gender, sexuality, violence against women and all phases of schooling and higher education. Diana welcomed students from many African, Asian and European countries and some of her most recent research, with Maryam Rab, on the gendered family relationships of students from Pakistan who had studied in the UK formed the basis of her last publication, as a chapter in Elaine Unterhalter and Vincent Carpentier's edited book on global inequalities in higher education in June 2010.

Her many and varied publications include the two edited volumes from the BSA conference in 1976; *Familiar Exploitation* (with Christine Delphy) (1992); *A Women's Guide to Doctoral Studies* (2001); a prize-winning

essay with Louise Morley and Miriam David (2003) 'Quality and Equality in British PhD Assessment' in *Quality Assurance in Education*. She became an Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences in 2006, and she was made a fellow of the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE) in 2008.

As a woman of fierce intellect and amazing capacity to reach out to women across the globe with friendship and compassion, she was, of course, also terrifying on occasion and not always aware of the sharpness of her intelligence and, on occasion, her tongue. Alongside her ability to articulate sharp and often acerbic feminist critique, Di possessed an enormous sense of fun and a wry sense of humour. Diana was instrumental in the development and mentoring of many feminist educationists and sociologists around the world. She was also a very good friend and had a generous heart: she could laugh and groan with her friends at the ridiculousness of things in the academy and beyond. She welcomed many of her international friends to stay at her lovely home in Islington. She was a cherished colleague, collaborator, mentor and friend and an inspiration to her students, as being supervised by her was always a richly rewarding experience – thought-provoking, challenging, stimulating and fun. Latterly, as her illness took hold, she was greedy for news and amusement and we all laughed a good deal. She will always have a place in our hearts. She is survived by her daughters, Hannah and Polly, and her son Tom, and her six grandchildren.

Diana Mary Leonard,
born December 13th 1941,
died November 27th 2010.

Miriam E. David,
Institute of Education, UK.

A version of this text can be found in The Guardian (9/12/10)

Feminism & Youth Work: an autobiographical account.

As part of our series of autobiographical pieces, in this issue, Jean Spence, explores her feminist journey and the challenges posed for feminist youth work in the UK.

How I came to feminism and its impact on my youth work practice.

In youth work, feminist practice is particularly associated with the growth of the movement for work with girls and young women during the early 1980s. Following models derived from the principles of social education which were integral to youth work, influenced by the local educational practices of neighbourhood based community activism, and using the principles of single-sex organising and consciousness-raising popularised in the Women's Liberation Movement, feminist workers created girls groups and women workers' groups which were to some extent self-motivating and self supporting. Women youth workers organised single-sex activities, created their own resources, devised means of self-education, and campaigned around issues which were of particular concern both to themselves and to the girls and young women with whom they worked. In England and Wales particularly, they were supported significantly in their activities by the work of the Girls' Work Unit in the National Association of Youth Clubs which created a resource bank, provided training and support and crucially between 1978 and 1985, facilitated the organisation of an annual conference out of which was born the 'Working With Girls Newsletter' published bi-monthly between 1981 and 1986.

It is partly an accident of the history of my age that I had the privilege to participate in this movement. I took the feminism which I had adopted as a social science student into youth work where I was shocked at the marginalisation of girls in youth clubs. In 1976, as a part time worker supported by a full time female worker, I began to organise single sex work with girls and young women in Enfield, North London. I attended the London women youth workers' group meeting in the Earlham Street women's Centre once or twice, but was my women's group at the London University Institute of Education where I was a full time post-graduate student was more significant. Members of that group were concerned with ques-

tions of gender and education and we were all influenced by the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was producing innovative work around youth, gender and race.

The opportunity for developing feminist practice was also circumstantial. In 1979 I was employed in Sunderland (North East England) as a neighbourhood youth worker with a specific brief to work with girls and young women. The project which employed me had emerged from the community activism flourishing at the time as a consequence of inner city policy and local working class women involved in project management had identified the need for provision for girls. Activist women were increasingly seeking opportunities for their own development and community and youth work courses became a favoured route to qualification. Consequently, in 1980, I was invited to design and teach a short course on work with girls and women at Sunderland Polytechnic. On becoming a full-time tutor at Sunderland and later (in 2000) at Durham University, my feminist understanding influenced teaching, course development and research in a context in which equality issues were exercising practitioners and policy makers alike with reference to the human services. Retaining an interest in the practice field mainly through management committee membership, fieldwork training and non-managerial supervision were crucial for the maintenance of my feminist knowledge and affirmative of my conviction that theory and practice are inseparable.

The climate of attrition which has faced feminist work since the 1990s, now threatens all youth work.



That I came to feminism at all is because it was emergent at a moment when women of my generation were benefiting from the post-war securities of full employment and the expansion of education and welfare. Few girls of my class made it into higher education, but for those of us who did, a new world of ideas and opportunity opened. My time as a social science student at Middlesex Polytechnic between 1971 and 1975, was a period of intense student radicalism. I learned a language with which to express socialism focused upon class and revolution. Yet the words and slogans were only that for me. There was a separation between my rational and emotional knowledge and I

found it difficult to commit to any particular political position. When a meeting of socialist women students argued about whether men should be allowed to join a proposed women's group, I could not articulate an opinion. Then in 1973 I read 'Sheila Rowbotham's 'Women's Consciousness, Man's World'. I still remember my excitement as I transcribed a sentence from it:

Every time a woman describes to a man any experience which is specific to her as a woman she confronts his recognition of his own experience as normal. More than this, his experience of how he sees the 'norm' is reinforced by the dominant ideology which tells both him and the woman that he is right. (p35)

This passage stimulated a moment of identification between myself as reader and the writer. Gender mattered! The insight was crucial to my future intellectual development and opened the possibility of personally engaged and committed learning. It also demonstrated the importance of writing which connected with the reader. Beyond this, the passage raised a broader questions about the impact of inequalities of power, suggesting the silence surrounding powerlessness. Discovering feminism marked a beginning for me of breaking silence, of connecting knowledge with experience, the rational with the emotional and theory with practice. I proceeded to read as many feminist texts as I could find at the time. My whole working life within the community and youth work arena has been informed by this reading and the engaged learning which it provoked.

The feminist slogan, 'the personal is political' is now a cliché but in the 1970s it inspired women in youth work to peel off the 'objective' pretensions of professional neutrality, enabling us to identify and name 'neutrality' as masculine domination. This meant that in relation to gender, the interests of young women and women workers were aligned and that feminist interventions might be based upon the commonalities of female experience and mutual recognition. Breaking silences involved communicating in single sex environments, naming the condition of being women and finding new voices through which developed, learned and campaigned for change. Improving access to youth work space and resources for young women meant improving the conditions within which women workers were required to operate. Campaigning around issues relevant to young women involved activism in relation to issues relevant to all women. Teaching young women new skills, involved women workers learning such skills themselves. The application of feminism to practice thus created a period of extraordinary dynamism within the context of youth work.

It was particularly helpful that the educational and developmental methods associated with feminism dovetailed well with the self-proclaimed aspirations of youth work to offer a universal social educational service to young people. However, and perhaps inevitably, feminism immediately encountered resistance at all levels – from boys and young men, from male colleagues and

from managers who felt their certainties challenged and their domination of space and time threatened. For me, particular resistance came from male youth workers who could not conceal their disgust when I attempted to introduce some educational sessions with young women derived from the feminist health book 'Our Bodies Ourselves' which involved information about how our bodies might be a source of pleasure for ourselves. Luckily, I was supported by a female youth officer. Others were not so lucky in their early efforts. Some women found themselves harassed, undermined, and even dismissed from their posts. The resistance stimulated and fed into female organisation. Women youth workers' groups began to emerge not only to help facilitate the organisation of work with girls and young women, but also to support and campaign with reference to the challenges faced by feminist workers.

I remain enthusiastic about the potential of single sex space for young women and female youth workers. The loss of such space, except with regard to specific gender-based 'problems' indicates a loss of feminist influence and energy. Perhaps a first step towards reviving feminist practice must be to question the terms in which single sex space is available. The energy which was released at the female-only youth work conferences organised by the National Associations of Youth Clubs, and later by the conference on girls work Youth and Policy in Leeds during 2010 suggests that despite any advances towards equality which we have gained, there is a continuing case for single sex organisation.

The climate of attrition which has faced feminist work since the 1990s, now threatens all youth work. There are differences of experience and emphasis since second wave feminism influenced my practice. Fault lines in that feminism were associated with a too literal adoption of slogans and to a self-indulgence around identity politics. A mature feminist practice for contemporary conditions will need to address new complexities in gender relations and other questions of power whilst recognising the overall threat to youth work as educational practice, but within this understanding the relationship between silence and powerlessness remains central.

Jean Spence,

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For more on feminist youth work in the UK see:

www.feministwebs.org;

www.infed.org

VIEWPOINT: Remembering Millbank, “raging rioters” and red flares

Late 2010 saw a wave of student protest in the UK following threats to funding within further and higher education. Here, two authors give viewpoint pieces on the demonstrations.

The 10th of November 2010:

I and 50,000 school, college and university students and staff gathered in central London to protest against the Tory-Lib Dem coalition government’s proposed cuts to education and rise in tuition fees up to £9000 per year. This placard – *Don’t Cut Women out of Education* – was left under the feet of the demonstrators, washed up by a tide of protest: one of a vast range of slogans on show, from the ironically knowing to the straightforwardly angry. But its message stands. Those who stand to lose out from the UK government’s plans are, overwhelmingly, those who already lose out.

The Fawcett Society is seeking a judicial review of the coalition budget, for not considering the gendered effects of their planned cuts to welfare and the public sector, which Fawcett argue will have a disproportionately negative impact on women. The education cuts are no exception to this rule. The subjects which have been deemed irrelevant and unnecessary, their teaching support withdrawn, are those which are disproportionately studied by women: arts, humanities and social sciences. The enduring gender pay gap puts women at a further disadvantage. Although graduates in lower-paying jobs will not be required to start paying back their loan until they earn £21,000, once past this threshold, those who earn less will take longer to pay off their loans, accru-

ing interest as they go (and the coalition has voiced intentions to raise the interest rate on student loans).

Raising tuition fees to such a level is not, despite government rhetoric, a necessary response to the economic crisis. Income from fees will in any case not begin to come in for several years, until the first cohort of students to pay the higher fees have graduated. It is an ideological sea change that marks the end of any pretence that higher education

should be considered a social good. Instead of seeing universities and colleges, and university graduates, as beneficial for the wider economy and society, the Browne report on the future of higher education, and the coalition government view degrees as individualistic, self-centric tick-

ets to employment.

These tickets won’t all be first class. The British higher education sector is already massively divided between those universities which benefit from high academic standing and research funding as well as reputation, and the often newer universities with lower re-

search reputations. No matter whether teaching is of equal standards (many newer universities are under-resourced; but students at many Russell Group universities might feel justified in complaining about their teaching by unqualified postgraduates, while academics hired for their research skills are exhorted to concentrate on REF submissions and grant proposals), degrees are not regarded as of equal worth. The class divide is already stark: middle-class students tend to go to universities with higher reputations, furthering their existing advantage in the employment market, while



Those who stand to lose out from the government’s plans are, overwhelmingly, those who already lose out.

working-class students tend to go to newer universities with lower reputations.

The coalition maintains that the creation of a market in higher education will raise standards through competition, result in a greater meritocracy in university provision, and improve student “choice”. But first of all, few universities will be willing to charge less than the maximum they are allowed, given the swingeing cuts to their state funding. Second, many universities will be unwilling to charge less than their rivals, thereby advertising to all that its degrees are worth less. Those which will end up having to charge lower fees will be those that are struggling academically and in terms of reputation. Students who choose these universities for their lower fees will disproportionately be those from less advantaged backgrounds who are worried about their ability to pay. The existing classed hierarchy of universities will only become starker.

The changes to education are not wholly devoid of positives. The recommendations that part-time students should no longer pay up-front fees and should be eligible for more support are welcome, and will particularly benefit mature students returning to education later in life, including parents taking higher education courses in conjunction with childcare and often work. Raising the debt repayment threshold to £21k is also a positive move. But it is disingenuous to suggest that raising this threshold will result in a level playing field. Students from poorer backgrounds will, unsurprisingly, be much less willing to take on the burden of a vast amount of debt in exchange for a spurious promise of a better job sometime far in the future.

The overall picture is very gloomy indeed. Small wonder that students are taking to the streets. Although some portions of the media have tried to portray demonstrators as selfish, entitled middle-class students fighting to retain an unfair advantage, none of the university students marching will be personally affected by the rise in tuition fees: they are protesting for the younger

generation. Those who are still at school or 6th form college may not even be given the chance to try for university, as their Educational Maintenance Allowance, which gives sixth formers £30 per week to encourage them to stay in education, is also being cut.

Yet the UK newspaper, the Daily Mail gives us hope for the new generation, their headline the day after the second day of action on the 24 November was “Rage of the Girl Rioters”. The article outraged at young women taking action against cuts to their educational futures. (The male demonstrators are simply “yobs”). It seems that, while young men “rioting” is only a confirmation that (male) youth is disruptive, violent, worthless, young women doing the same is unacceptably unfeminine. They did not include another iconic photo of the protest: girls surrounding a police van, trying to ward off protesters from damaging it, all too aware of the media’s relentless focus on youth as troublemakers and knowing that this property damage would be redefined as violence and used as confirmation of the illegitimacy of protest, to uphold the status quo.

Speaking to an audience of university, college and school students, occupying a lecture theatre, Cindy Carter of Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies spoke passionately of the historical struggles that women have gone through in pursuit of higher education. These are struggles that have not yet been won, and struggles that are shared with other groups marginalised from education. Higher education is still a distant dream (if that) for many women (and men). The coalition’s cuts and marketisation of education will be a great step back in time for educational equality.

Naomi Holford

PhD candidate,

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A Red Flare at Millbank

Reading the reviews of the year from various newspapers and websites this week, I'm wondering how what has already been baptized as the "2010 student riots" will be memorialized in our collective and individual memories. The process of reporting, recording and narrating events so as to give them meaning happens even as those events are happening – think of all those times you have only half-watched a performance as you endeavour to simultaneously record it on your camera. The 2010 protests have carried this same compulsion to visually record, yet with each day of protest this compulsion has become more urgent. Of course, the complexity of any event, of multiple perspectives and myriad experiences, can never be fully captured on any one camera or through any one account. Particular versions gain weight and currency through repetition, through eye-catching imagery, through our struggles to provide the authentic voice, the objective view from nowhere.

When I think back to the "2010 student riots", my own memories have themselves been shaped by the coverage of those events. Like so much in our ocularcentric world, which privileges the eye above the other senses, I remember them as a series of photographic images, some from my own camera but many from the cameras of others, often of a professional quality and reproduced across numerous front pages. Here, a masked protester caught mid-kick in an attack on a window at Millbank, a red flare in the background providing dramatic lighting. Here, a group of school-girls encircling with their linked hands a wrecked police van all graffiti and smashed windows. Here, a young man in a long coat swinging from a Union Jack flag. Here, a middle-aged couple looking out of their Rolls Royce windows in ap-

palled bafflement, the woman's face caught in a surprised O.

These images jostle for prominence in my memory. Each became briefly-iconic

representative moments because they congealed around particular myths of the student protest movement. The myths are various; that the protest has been hijacked by a minority of anarchists, hell-bent on destruction; that the face of the 'raging rioter' is overwhelmingly female; that the protesters are self-serving, privileged and middle-class; that the protesters are not even students, but vandals jumping on an opportunity bandwagon for wanton destruction.

These disjointed, and sometimes contradictory myths, share common themes – the motif of the baying and unbridled mob, and an attempt to transform the power of collective and radical mobilizing into a senseless and frightening force.

After the first protest, which infamously ended at Millbank (The HQ of the Conservative Party), National Union of Students (NUS) president Aaron Porter distanced himself and the student union from the events at Millbank, claiming it was a 'minority of idiots'. His comments could not have been more ill-judged. Millbank did not feel like a minority of idiots, nor like a baying mob. It felt like a huge surge of people who were very clear about being angry and very clear about the reasons why. Exhilarated, but not senseless. Furious, but not feral. Two thousand individuals who saw the austerity agenda for what it was and who refused to keep calm and carry on. Anger is often caricatured as irrational, a primitive and juvenile emotion. I have never really subscribed to this view. Although there is no nobility in anger, the fury at Millbank had a dignity that continues to propel and ignite. Regret has been thin on the ground – instead the energy of that day has been turned into an incredibly produc-

tive range of activities. For some, Porter's quickfire condemnation represented the final stage of an increasingly irrelevant NUS, offering little more than high street discounts for students and CV points for the careerist would-be politicians who 'represent' them. The final embarrassment for the NUS came on the day of the final student protests of 2010, which were held on the day of the tuition fee vote and which amply demonstrated the growing division between polite fatalism and radical action. As 200 NUS protesters waved glowsticks along the Thames in the 'official' protest, twenty thousand more marched into Parliament Square where they were promptly kettled for up to nine hours.

The failure of the mainstream media to broadcast what they filmed on Westminster Bridge that evening – where thousands of protesters were held between lines of hundreds of riot police for two hours after being told repeatedly that they were to be released imminently – demonstrated the partial and problematic of the news coverage throughout all four protests. The news media have consistently salivated over scenes of graffiti and vandalism and failed to broadcast rally speeches or visit university occupations. They have concentrated universal front-page attention on a brief chance encounter between a splinter group of protesters (prevented from joining the main march by riot police) and the Royal car, at the expense of covering the far more pressing liberty issue, namely that if you plan to protest you must be prepared to be detained for several hours, to face baton-wielding riot police and to be possibly charged by lines of police horses.

It is a curiosity that in this image-saturated, 24 rolling-news world, the images that are congealing in the collective

memory of the "2010 student riots" should be so narrow and so repetitive. For all the photographers (professional and amateur) that were taking pictures at Millbank (and beyond), the one of the masked protester with the red flare has become the preferred image. That image definitely has appeal for both romantics and alarmists, but it does not capture the complexity of the day, or the movement behind it. Maybe it does require determination, imagination and vision to step outside of these repetitions. A good place to start is your local university occupation, activist workshops, conferences and to get involved in the variety of creative ideas, political discussion and radical action. Red flares optional.

Tracey Jenson,

Kings College, UK



“Gender and Education in the Media: an extraordinary revival of boys’ own stories?”

At the start of the new school or academic year, UK broadcaster the BBC, in its wisdom, has decided to present a ‘school season’ in television programmes about the challenges of schooling and, of course, the focus was either gender-blind or specifically about boys! There are 4 programmes – [*Unequal Opportunities*](#), [*Excluded*](#), [*Britain’s Youngest Boarders*](#) and [*Gareth Malone’s Extraordinary school for boys*](#) – that bear comment.

What the programmes amount to is an anti-intellectual and anti-educational approach: they revive traditional dilemmas and turn them into 21st century truisms or even homilies about how we should educate our sons. They are presented like many reality TV programmes and the basic premise is that we all know what learning is about and how to encourage it. These programmes will help re-assert class-based knowledge, educational theories or practices that reinforce gender stereotypes, whilst at the same time acknowledging the educational and social transformations in women’s work.

Given the now easy access and mobile media that are used by almost everyone, it is perhaps no surprise that the BBC, with its ‘all singing and dancing’ website, and very simple means of viewing round-the-clock, should devote a lot of viewing time to questions of schooling and/or learning. 13 years ago, Blair’s New Labour mantra of ‘education, education, education’ dominated the new government’s domestic and public policy agenda. With the new UK coalition government barely 4 months old it does seem appropriate to question what is now going on with schools and how equal they have become.

What the future might hold for children (whether girls or boys), parents (mums and dads), and beyond schools and into further or higher education, universities and employment is also now of interest and even anxiety. These questions are now much more discussed in the media, especially over the summer, with exam results dominating agendas, and girls’ success at GCSE and A levels, now so evident that all the imagery is of smiling and whooping girls ... almost always nice, white and middle class.

Perhaps as an antidote to this kind of portrayal of educational achievement and hopeful social mobility, the BBC has developed a series of alternative pictures of boys. But who are the

programmes aimed at? Will the children or their parents watch and learn anything? How will they inform educational policies and practices?

Equality is presented very traditionally. Social class or educational disadvantage with boys in secondary school was the core theme of two of the programmes (John Humphrys of Radio 4’s *Today* programme on *Unequal Opportunities* and *Excluded*, a drama about a newly qualified maths teacher, Ian, coping with a disruptive boy).

John Humphrys did his own research on secondary schools around the question of the ‘achievement gap’ and social mobility for a special hour-long programme. Without discussing different notions such as the ‘gender gap’, his programme included interviews with a Professor of Education and asking about boys’ and parental anxieties about educational futures. All the imagery was of struggling boys in school uniforms (including two portrayals on the BBC website). [*Mumsnet*](#), the mothers’ online pressure group for, and advice about, parental choice came in for a lot of implied criticism – extending advantage to the already advantaged white middle classes. And yet no alternative policies were proposed, although the programme provided a critique of sorts.

Another British television drama, Excluded, on the other hand, portrayed a white working class boy, becoming disruptive as he witnessed and went through his parents’ messy separation. He was defended by his maths teacher against the other unsympathetic mainly male teachers, especially a bullying art teacher. The women in the programme are portrayed as soft or weak but not necessarily subordinate. For example, the headteacher is a woman and portrayed as being committed to inclusive practices, curiously taking it upon herself to decide without a case conference about how to deal with the mother of the disruptive lad. The drama ends with the implied criticism of the head for only giving the boy a week’s suspension against official advice and the other teachers. And yet in a complex twist the new maths teacher is also seen as vindicated in his support for a ‘budding mathematician’, given his poor home circumstances: naivety perhaps?

The other two programmes, about primary schools, make boys explicitly the centre of attention, although the class divide is also evident. *Britain’s Youngest Boarders* traced the lives of 3 upper middle class boys (one called Clegg) leaving home

aged 8 to go to an exclusive boys' prep school in anticipation of going on to either Eton or Harrow (the top private schools in England). The boys' and their mothers' feelings are explored in some depth: burying feelings of home-sickness is part of the essential quality of becoming an educated and successful man. Mothers, true to tradition, bury their feelings of loss, to ensure the success of their baby sons. Training in interviewing skills for leadership and adulthood is also emphasised by the Cameron-sounding head as he prepares the boys for early interviews at Harrow! Learning how to compete successfully is the essence of the educational approaches at the school: performances in music and drama are also important and the programme ends with one of the young boys' singing performance.

Oddly, traditional educational approaches are side-stepped in the 3 part series entitled *Gareth Malone's Extraordinary School for Boys*. A primary headteacher in a suburban school in Harlow, Essex, South England, has invited a young choirmaster – Gareth Malone – to help deal with the problems of the boys' resistance to formal learning in class. This resistance is contrasted with all the girls' diligence and application: boys and girls are always contrasted starkly. The school's catchment area is never described but it appears as a lower middle class white suburban environment, with plenty of green playing fields. Malone lacks any educational training and was presumably chosen on the basis of his earlier successful reality television shows in which he teaches choral singing. However, we never learn about his skills as a choirmaster and it appears that it is the fact of his being a young man with skills in performance that 'qualifies' him for the teaching role. He never sings in the episodes but he often wears odd clothes and dresses up as different characters: he is, in sum, a white middle class 'short back and sides' character. The head and the other teachers in the school, true to form, are all white women and are also cardboard caricatures of either 'mumsy' or rather young women.

Malone is given over 30 (all white) boys aged 9 to 11 to work with, across 3 traditional areas of the curriculum, viz literacy, reading and writing. Curiously, no mention is made of the third R – arithmetic, nor of how this fits in with the other curricular activities and what the girls and teachers are doing whilst Malone is with the boys. Occasionally we are given comments about what the two teachers think of Malone's work with the boys, and it is not always complimentary. They think that he has made them more excitable and disruptive...

The 3 programmes explore, in turn, Malone's ways of developing literacy, then reading and finally writing. All are about competitiveness through the prism of outdoor and sports activities. As the programmes progress, Malone becomes more adventurous, and experiments with outdoor adventures, such as exploring in the woods, climbing trees, and evening activities around campfires. The emphasis is always on competition with 'the other', namely girls and so the boys and girls are set up in juxtaposition to each other. In addition, all the boys spend time telling us how bored they are with aspects of lessons in school, especially traditional teaching and learning – reading and books. Their uses of computer games are often referred to as are their lack of interest in traditional activities. In the final episode, the boys learn to write by developing a play for performance in front of the whole school. Competing with the girls' play is again emphasised.

In an extra-ordinary co-incidence both the Malone programme and the one on the boys' boarding school reach their climax with school plays and performances. From contrasting social class and teaching perspectives, we learn again that educational success is best achieved through muscular male performances.

These programmes have left women and girls once again on the sidelines and indeed revived boys' own stories! The future remains one likely to be dominated by the 'gender gap' despite the rhetoric about the (class or disadvantaged) 'achievement gap'. Whilst girls clearly do well at school and go on to have educational careers, such as being headteachers of both primary and secondary schools, women are disproportionately represented in lower status areas of education and employment and there remains a significant gender pay gap in favour of men. Despite this, as these programmes show, public concern centres on how best to educate boys!

Miriam David,

GEA Policy Officer

Campaigns and resources

There are a number of new campaigns that may be of interest to the membership.

LGBTQ resources

In the first initiative of its kind in Australia, the Victorian Government has provided funding for the **Safe Schools Coalition Victoria (SSCV)**, a partnership between Rainbow Network Victoria and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA).

SSCV will establish a network of schools dedicated to creating safer educational environments, free of homophobia and supportive of same-sex attracted and gender-questioning students. Under the program, schools will be encouraged to set up gay/straight student alliances, share resources and provide teacher training that identifies – and stamps out – homophobia in the classroom. Students and teachers will get access to support networks and be encouraged to create posters, newsletters or forums that support sexual diversity in schools.

To find out more about the coalition, including how to join Safe Schools, visit the SSCV website at <http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au/>.

Also available at the site is a national study on the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender questioning Australian young people, which includes a chapter on sexuality and school experience, and evidence of an increase in the level of homophobic bullying present in schools.

YWCA becomes Platform 51

After 155 years The YWCA in England & Wales has recently re-launched itself as **Platform 51**. The 51 is intended to indicate that women and girls make up 51% of the UK population.

Platform 51 has a number of downloadable resources that may be of interest to GEA members including downloadable info sheets on a range of issues including:

- ◆ *Apprenticeships*
- ◆ *Body image*
- ◆ *Education, employment and skills for young women.*

For the **briefing on education and skills** see: http://www.platform51.org/downloads/resources/infosheets/P51themesheet_education.pdf

For the **briefing on gendered occupation segregation** and the **gendered pay gap** see: http://www.platform51.org/resources/briefings/car_mechanic_or_cleaner

For the **Platform 51 response to the Wolf Review of 14-19 Vocational Education** see: <http://www.platform51.org/downloads/resources/policy/responsetotheWolfreview>

GEA website.

The new interactive site provides exciting opportunities to find out about the latest GEA news, discuss pertinent issues in the field. Recent discussions have included discussions of the role of women in electoral politics and debates around the increased sexualisation of girl culture.

Visitors can also read brief overviews on many key topics in the field – from the boys' underachievement debate, to feminism and pedagogy – each topic area provides links to useful reading and important research in the area. In addition, the up-to-date international web links include various downloadable resources for educators to use when exploring issues of gender equality within a range of education settings.

As always, we are keen to hear feedback from GEA members, so encourage you to visit, blog and contribute links to make this an evolving, essential resource for all those with an interest in gender and education issues. (www.genderandeducation.com)

GEA Conference 2011

The Gender and Education Association 8th International GEA Conference will be held in the Graduate School of Education at Exeter University from 27th-30th April 2011.

Conference Theme

The theme for the 2011 conference is '**Gender and Education: Past, Present and Future**'. A theme that was inspired by a special edition of the journal 'Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education', published in 2008. In this special edition the guest editors sought to trace the changes that have occurred in the field of gender and education in recent years, to discuss the explosion of interest that has arisen and to 'trouble – in a generous sense – the field from the vantage point of insiders...to inquire into the state of the relationship now and to see where new possibilities may be emerging' (Dillabough et al 2008: 302).

The conference organising committee welcome a range of papers (from a wide variety of academic disciplines, a range of theoretical backgrounds and authored by practitioners working in a number of different fields) which will seek to draw on these notions of 'troubling', 'reflecting' and 'imagining'. Given the current interest in this field, the changes that have occurred over time and the current crossroads that some believe we are facing in the present, the conference will present scholars and practitioners alike with an exciting opportunity to 'take stock' of the field – to look backwards and to look forwards in order to assess what has previously constituted the field of gender and education, what is shaping it now and what it may look like in the future.

Conference Fees

There are various rates including discounts for GEA members and early bird reservations. Day tickets are also available.

The main conference fees will provide delegates with: access to all paper sessions, key-



notes, and workshops (Wednesday to Friday), morning and afternoon refreshments, a conference pack, a buffet lunch (Wednesday to Friday), wine receptions on Wednesday and Thursday evening, and a fork buffet on Thursday evening with entertainment.

We do hope to meet many GEA members at what is shaping up to be an exciting event.

For more details please see:
www.genderandeducation.comn

To register, please visit :
<http://education.exeter.ac.uk/conferences/gea2011/booking2011.php?>



Gender and Education Association

Forthcoming events

CONFERENCE:

A Carnival of Feminist
Cultural Activism
3-5th March 2011
York, UK

This carnival is part-festival and part-conference. The event brings together people from many nations to learn from each other, celebrate activist creativity, and advance feminist work. Come along for craft workshops, papers, performances and small exhibitions which explore ways in which art in many forms can open up spaces for thinking and for action.

For further details see:

<http://www.feminist-cultural-activism.net/>

CONFERENCE:

18th Annual Lesbian Lives Conference:
Revolting: Bodies, Politics & Genders

11 -12 February 2011
Brighton, East Sussex, UK.

For further detail see:

<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/lesbian-lives>

CONFERENCE:

Global Discourses in Women's and Gender Studies,

Middle Tennessee state University,
Murfreesboro, United States

24 – 26th March 2011.

Our conference theme reflects our interest in promoting feminist perspectives that foreground the influence of global forces on women's and/or gendered existence and in examining connections between local/national and global issues that relate to women's and/or gendered existence. We welcome scholars, activists, non-profit professionals, students, and others who engage issues of social justice, particularly those related to women and gender

For further details see: <http://www.mtsu.edu/womenstu/conference>

CONFERENCE

Childhoods Conference: Mapping the
Landscapes of Childhood,

5-7th May 2011,

University of Lethbridge, Alberta,
Canada

This multidisciplinary conference will engage scholars and practitioners from a wide variety of academic disciplines (including the sciences, arts, humanities, social sciences, policy studies, and education) in a consideration of the state of child studies, which has changed significantly in recent decades. Various disciplines consider childhood as an experience, as a biological fact, as a social category, as an artistic and literary construct, as a category for historical and demographic analysis, as a category of personhood, and as

Forthcoming events

a locus for human rights and policy interventions. Participating scholars will examine childhoods of the past, present, and future from around the world, and will present research results, policy approaches, and theoretical paradigms that are emergent in this re-engagement with the child and childhood. Bringing together divergent networks of expertise, this conference offers the opportunity for new research collaborations and the scholarly dissemination of innovative research.

For further details see:

<https://www.uleth.ca/conreg/childhoods/content/general-information>

CONFERENCE

Feminism and Teaching Symposium

8th – 9th April 2011

University of Nottingham, UK

This is a two-day interdisciplinary event for feminist activists, artist, teachers and academics to discuss the relationships between feminism and teaching.

There will be keynote workshops/sessions by:

- ◆ Professor Gina Wisker (Brighton),
- ◆ Professor Sara Mills (Sheffield Hallam)
- ◆ Dr. Louise Mullany (Nottingham),
- ◆ Professor Ruth Holliday (Leeds)
- ◆ Dr. Ben Brabon (Edge Hill),
- ◆ Annette Foster (Performance Artist).

For further details see:

<http://feminismandteaching.org/>

WANT TO HOLD AN EVENT?

All GEA members are eligible to apply for up to £300 seedcorn money for a GEA event. Applications for alternative amounts will be considered on the basis of their merits.

Seedcorn funding is also available for practice-based events on a gender and education theme.

If you wish to apply please email GEA with the following details:

- ◆ **Your name;**
- ◆ **Institution where the event is to be held;**
- ◆ **Title of event;**
- ◆ **Indicative outline;**
- ◆ **What you plan to use the money for;**
- ◆ **Why GEA should fund the event rather than another organisation.**

We encourage applicants to consider securing co-funding from other sources where appropriate.

All applications will be considered by the GEA committee. Priority will be given to applications that demonstrate why GEA is the most appropriate body to fund the event.

If you have any queries relating to this fund, please email :

admin@genderandeducation.com

Get involved with the GEA:

There are several ways to become more involved in the GEA.

We have over 30 regional representatives who represent the GEA internationally. For details of your nearest rep, please see: <http://www.genderandeducation.com/contactus/regReps.html>

If you would like to become a GEA representative in your local area, please contact us at: admin@genderandeducation.com

The **Gender and Education Association (GEA)** has been set up to represent those with feminist interests in gender and education. Its aims are:

- ◆ To promote feminist scholarship and encourage the advancement of feminist understandings of, and practices in, gender and education internationally, nationally and locally; and in these fields:
- ◆ To provide an authoritative and influential voice;
- ◆ To promote, problematise and disseminate knowledge;
- ◆ To encourage teaching, learning, research and publication;
- ◆ To provide a source of expertise and knowledge for policy makers and practitioners;
- ◆ To create networks to facilitate and develop the exchange of information between its constituent members.

Membership Benefits

- ◆ Access to, and participation in, a vibrant network of committed feminists through e-mail subscriber lists, regional day seminars and regional meetings;
- ◆ Reduced rate for personal subscriptions to the journal *Gender and Education*;
- ◆ Advance information of, and a reduced rate for the Gender and Education conferences, and associated seminars and workshops.
- ◆ **How to Join or Renew Membership**
Membership is open to practitioners, academics, policymakers, managers and administrators who have interests in the field of Gender and Education.

You can join GEA online (see our new website for further details—www.genderandeducation.com).

We have reduced rates for unwaged members/students and members from eligible countries, details of which can be found on the website.

Alternatively, send your details and £24 waged/ £12 reduced rate to:

Gender & Education Association
c/o Department of Educational Research
Lancaster University
Lancaster, LA1 4YD,
UK

GEA

Gender and Education Association

Newsletter compiled by Fin Cullen



Please note that all pieces reported in this newsletter represent the viewpoints of individual authors, and are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the wider GEA membership or the association's executive committee.

If you would like to contribute to our next edition, please send any copy (text or images) as word or PDF files to admin@genderandeducation.com by June 15th 2011.

admin@genderandeducation.com
www.genderandeducation.com