

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE SWEDISH PRESIDENCY ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT, 17-18 November 2009, Uppsala, Sweden.

Tuesday 17 November

The conference was opened by Dr **Tobias Krantz**, Minister for Higher Education and Research and by Mr **Adam Pokorny**, European Commission, DG EAC. Odile Quintin, Director General for Education, Training, Culture and Youth was excused. Mr Pokorny insists on the fact that the aim of the European Commission is, at one hand, to have excellence in education, and at the other hand, to have access for all to education. In this perspective, the gender issue is important.

The first keynote speech is on 'Gender differences in educational achievement – disaster, cul-de-sac of a new road towards the future?' by **Agneta Stark**, Professor and Rector, University of Dalarna, Sweden. Her speech presents inequalities, reflects earlier inequalities and highlights gendered norms. It shows how current and past explanations of gendered education patterns may be used to understand the many mechanisms upholding societal gendered work norms inside and outside the labour market. Two important quotes of Professor Stark: 'Education is no longer a competitive advantage in a global perspective; it is simply an entry ticket to global markets'. Education is as important as clear water for each individual. And: 'If boys don't succeed, there must be something wrong with schools, they will have to adapt. If girls don't succeed, there must be something wrong with those girls, they will have to adapt..'

The second keynote speech is from **Eurydice (Bernadette Fortshuber and Akvile Motiejunaite)**, presenting the report on gender differences in educational outcomes. The report is still a working document, and will be published in January 2010. The study was requested by the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union especially for this conference. The presentation highlights the main policy measures taken to tackle gender inequalities in 31 educational systems in Europe. Specific examples are employed to illustrate the extent to which European countries have been implementing concrete policy measures that target gender inequalities in education. Gender patterns in international and national assessment survey are also briefly discussed.

Dr **Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin**, Senior Education Analyst at **OECD**, makes a contribution with the title 'Are boys getting smarter at the expense of girls?' The speech looks at the tertiary education level and presents some statistics showing that gender inequality in participation and achievement in higher education has reversed in almost all countries in the OECD area, and looks at what the factors for this reversal could be. Dr Vincent-Lancrin argues that this will likely not lead to a reversal of the gender wage gap but that this new trend might have social implications that we are still unaware of and that gender mainstreaming policies in education should put a higher emphasis on boys where they are exclusively focused on girls.

Professor Dr **Gaby Weiner**, Centre of Educational Sociology, Edinburgh University, UK presents an overview of Gender and Education in Europe. The presentation draws on debates and research arising from the gender and education field and also studies of the extent and causes of gender difference in education across Europe. Shifts in ideas are considered as well as those in policy and practice. There has been a shift from gender and education as a field concerned with righting the wrongs against girls and women, to a policy field influenced by cross-cultural studies of examination performance and boys' so-called educational underachievement. It shows that most countries in Europe have engaged with feminism to some extent, with a variety of implications for educational policy and practice; and also the influence on gender policy-making of the EU, in particular on countries which have recently joined or wish in the future to achieve membership.

The report made by Professor Dr Gaby Weiner is included in the Eurydice report.

After lunch, Professor **Ann Phoenix**, Thomas Coram Research Unit Institute of Education, University of London, UK, presents 'Masculinity and schooling': theories and research concerning boys and girls schooling in London. It reflects upon education in non-academic context, young masculinities, understanding boys in contemporary society and different gender strategies in how to handle schools increased individuality and self directed learning.

EUNEC participated at Workshop 4 on 'Gender and educational achievement – comparative perspectives', moderated by Ms **Inga Wernersson**, Professor at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. There were critical remarks from the audience on the use of PISA results. It is not always clear where the results come from, how the measurement is done; maybe the impact of the PISA results is too strong? Other critical remarks had to do with the fact that, indeed, young women have a higher degree of education than young man, but, are more stressed, more depressed. Research should be done in this area.

Wednesday 18 November 2009

Anna Ekström, Chair of the Committee for Gender Equality in School, makes a presentation on 'Equality in school – importance for growth, employment and social inclusion'. She puts that gender equality is one of the fundamental democratic values which, in Sweden, are part of the national goals for schools. Nevertheless, girls achieve better than boys; furthermore, the choice of subjects is very gender stereotyped. This is not only negative for the individual student, but also for Sweden as a nation, since it affects other areas, among them the labour market.

The last keynote speech is by **Pamela Sammons**, professor at Department of Education at the University of Oxford, UK. Her presentation outlines recent findings from research on school and teacher effectiveness and studies of successful school leadership on what factors help promote better outcomes for students: 'Enhancing equity and raising standards: messages from school and teacher effectiveness research for educational policy reform'.

EUNEC participated at Workshop 7 on 'Gender perspectives in teacher education', moderated by Fredrik Bondestam, PhD researcher on gender, teaching and critical and feminist pedagogy at the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University. Participants reflected on the current state of gender knowledge of teachers as they begin their careers, in the context of current research about

strategies which have the potential to raise boys' and girls' achievements. A very important issue as teachers are a critical factor, being the agents of change.

All presentations will be available at the website www.se2009.eu. The final report is expected to be published at the beginning of December 2009.