

Gender Inequality and Education: Changing Local/Global Relations in a ‘Post-Colonial’ World and the Implications for Feminist Research

Jill Blackmore

1 Gender Matters in the Global Flows of High-Risk, Low-Trust Societies

Gender inequalities are embedded in a multidimensional structure of relationship between men and women, such as the modern sociology of gender shows, operates at every level of human experience, from economic arrangements, culture and the state to interpersonal relationships and individual emotions. (Connell 2005, p. 1801)

Globalisation for the last decades of the twentieth century was the social imaginary framing future possibilities in education for the twenty-first century, simultaneously shaping the context, form and effect of the ongoing transformation of the social relations of gender. This global imaginary has been produced by the media, demographic and environmental change, information and communication technologies, and rapid and uneven flows of goods, people, ideas, images, products and money (Appadurai 1996). It has heightened the sense of interdependence, shared risk and economic and social insecurity (e.g. global warming, terrorism, recession) (Beck 1992). In so doing this sense of instability has reduced trust in some institutions (e.g. churches and government) and raised expectations of others (e.g. education). This chapter will elaborate on how particular educational discourses such as lifelong learning, emerging out of period of transition produced by ‘fast capitalism’ and emergent knowledge economies in the late twentieth century, have had material and social effects through their uptake in policy and practice.

There are two dominant educational discourses arising from a globalised context. One is a promising one about new economies and opportunities in which education, as a key site of social change, individual and collective mobility, mediates

J. Blackmore (✉)

Faculty of Education, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, VIC 3125, Australia
e-mail: jillian.blackmore@deakin.edu.au

and magnifies the tensions within and between postmodernity and the social relations of gender (Connell 2005). The unitary developmental subject of modernist educational discourses is being supplanted by forms of identity or subjectivity that are fluid and hybrid for some, in a constant state of being and becoming in an ongoing production through biography inflected by race, class, gender, culture and sexuality (McLeod and Yates 2006). In these 'unstable, fragmentary social conditions', where all experience increased risk, individuals experience a complexity of choice in which they are expected to 'manage short-term relations and oneself', 'develop new skills, mine potentials, and develop a sustained sense of self' while most 'crave certainty and familiarity' (Sennett 2005, pp. 3–5). Gender is integral to shifting cultural and structural relations in and through education, as gender is performed through a spectrum of historically generated social practices. This optimistic discourse emerges out of social imaginaries about a networked world mediated by information and communication technologies that democratise social and political relations. This imaginary is echoed in policy discourses about lifelong learning and theories of cosmopolitanism. This modernisation aspirational discourse appeals to the notion of education as a human right and argues that nation states will be unable to compete globally and secure political stability unless women and girls participate fully in, and gain the rewards of, education (World Bank 2001), as encapsulated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1989), the Beijing Women's Declaration (1995) stating all women had a full right to participate and have access to power and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 that mentioned gender and schooling in two of the eight targets and explicitly referred to the empowerment of women (United Nations 2005).

The other less optimistic discourse focuses on sedimented and enduring patterns that foreground gender and racial inequality (Teese et al. 2007). This realist discourse charts how contemporary globalisation and the neoliberal policies justified by globalisation have produced in many instances greater inequality and widened existing polarities between the rich and poor in deindustrialising developed countries such as the USA and Australia as well as economically developing countries such as South America and Africa. The proportion of the rich (males) owning larger percentages of national wealth has increased while prior educational and social disadvantage has in many instances been exacerbated (Teese et al. 2007). Risk, this discourse argues, is unequally distributed, with women and children constituting the majority of the poor in both developed and developing nation states, subjected to greater not less violence in both domestic and conflict-ridden contexts, and with young girls forced into marriage or to undergo clitorrectomy (UNIFEM 2009).

While participation rates in education have increased overall, the gender gap persists and indeed worsened during the 1990s in Africa due to IMF- and World Bank-imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes that reduced government expenditure in education, health and welfare. In some countries, the girls have been enrolled more than boys (Chile, Columbia and Nicaragua) and others (Afghanistan) boys more than girls. Generally, while girls' participation in primary schooling has risen from an extremely low base, in 2005, UNESCO estimated of the 100 million children still out of school, 55 % were girls and of 771 million illiterate adults, 88 % were

women (totalling 20 % of world's population). Women's literacy rates are as low as 60 % in some instances (Akman and Unterhalter 2005). The growing gender gap in terms of school participation led to the Education for All Movement in 1990, a coalition of disparate actors seeking increased provision of schooling. Thus women are united as a social category not by their biology but by this ongoing oppression (Mohanty 2003). But there are debates over whether education is a human right because it raises the question of who is obligated to provide education.

Both discourses agree that education and the economic independence of women and girls are necessary preconditions for national economic growth as well as individual human rights. While most often girls' exclusion from education is a result of poverty and not parental lack of desire to educate their girls, it is also due to government policies and a lack of provision of free schooling (Unterhalter 2006). Girls are more often than boys withdrawn to support families where parents have been lost to AIDS/HIV or sold as a commodity in the sex trade in some nations, while their access and mobility is restricted because of cultural norms under sometimes repressive regimes such as the Taliban in Afghanistan in others (Unterhalter 2006 pp. 6–7; Bulbeck 1998). Cultural attitudes about girl's 'lack' of ability can also infuse teaching and reduce girls' opportunities to continue to secondary schooling in most cultures. Even in Western industrialised nations, girls continue to be concentrated in more traditional occupations reproducing gender-segmented labour markets where women are concentrated in increasingly casualised and lower-paid jobs.

Drawing on both discursive legacies about the intransigence of culture, tradition and nation and the imaginaries of social change, nationality and global citizenship, these educational discourses articulate with differential impact within specific contexts on the opportunities of women and girls (Mohanty 2003). Hoogvelt (2001, pp. 11–12) argues that 'ideas that have become institutionalised may hang on long after the material forces that gave rise to them have been transformed, and well after the hegemonic power that institutionalised and universalised them has demised'. There is an ongoing struggle over ascendancy of emergent equity-driven and hegemonic neoliberal ideals fuelled by rapid economic, social and political change, while old patriarchal practices, sedimented gender relations, and economic, organisational and political structures resist change.

Feminists view gender from different perspectives: as a descriptor of gender difference in terms of patterns of educational access, participation, success and outcomes, as constituting the relationships of power between different femininities and masculinities within specific historical constructions of gender relations, and as a process of gender identity formation through being and becoming masculine and feminine, in which gender is performed through multiple social practices. Feminists—Western, Asian, Black and Arabic—increasingly refer to the 'embodied intersectionalities' of difference and the situated dynamics of how gender, race, class, ethnicity and religion interact to produce differential educational experiences and outcomes (Mirza 2009). The social relations of gender are impacted, in many developing nation states in Africa and the Middle East, for example, because of the material conditions of poverty, social fragmentation through conflict and war and religious orthodoxies, together with political insecurity, all factors determining who gets educated.

In many rapidly expanding economies, for example, in the UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and India, educating women is a major policy imperative, fed by the desire to be economically competitive globally. Women make up a majority of students in the UAE and Iran, but then enter gender-segmented workplaces in which their femininity is 'protected' in ways that ensure male privilege and control. At the same time, all nation states face skill shortages and see women as the new pool of talent. So women are accessing education and work in educational and other workplaces facilitating the global positioning of nation states within constantly shifting political relations. But women are located within an international gender division of labour that intensifies the pressure on women at a time when employment is more precarious, markets more volatile and education more costly to also balance paid and domestic labour.

Empowering women and girls educationally and then economically through paid work does produce social transformations that challenge culture and tradition and therefore what are predominantly unequal social relations of gender. In turn this leads to resistance to protect male advantage (Narayan 1997). Maintaining the 'gender order', in many instances, is equated variously to protecting tradition, culture and religion, which inevitably means protecting male dominance, particularly in more traditional religious societies (Bulbeck 1998). In Western nation states seeking to gain the benefits of knowledge economies, education promises the capacity to mobilise individual advantage as class, race and gender are less likely to automatically do so, thus creating generalised anxiety within aspirant parents and their children increasingly faced with more competitive education markets.

In all instances, educational organisations as well as individual subjects face multiple challenges: the 'new' work order of fast capitalism; the changing social relations of gender; the multiple patterns of familial life (sole parent, same sex, heterosexual, extended families); changing demographic and socio-spatial patterns with increased disparity between global cities and rural regions; cultural and linguistic diversity due to migration, transnational workforces and international education; and fast-travelling education policies promoting devolution, knowledge economies and lifelong learning. In response, neoliberal orthodoxy in global education policy has meant education has been restructured in many nation states through processes of corporatisation, privatisation and commodification in order to meet what are perceived to be the needs of the twenty-first-century global citizen-worker. And as with all social, political and economic change, these processes of educational restructuring are gendered.

2 Restructuring and Re-gendering Education Globally

New modes of governance and work organisation in conjunction with, and in response to, the above globalising pressures have significantly altered relationships between the individual, work, the state, family and education in most nation states (Blackmore and Sachs 2007). The role of the nation state has not been diminished

by globalisation, but has altered its relationship to its citizens and other states, mediating rather than protecting citizens from global and local markets. National identity, sovereignty and citizenship are now challenged by supranational bodies and regionalisation such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Union; borders are more porous due to flows of workers, students, tourists and refugees; and citizenship does not necessarily coincide with national borders.

Clearly evident in the 1990s was the hegemony of neoliberal policies as well as the growing influence of global education policy communities (e.g. OECD, World Bank, IMF) on national policy (Henry et al. 2001). Neoliberal reforms that travelled rapidly transnationally in education were characterised by:

devolving management authority, a focus on results, a service quality orientation, adapting organisational structures, effective leadership and crucially a strengthening of steering functions of the centre to drive reforms strategically and promote policy coherence on cross-cutting issues in the face of complex policy problems and a more devolved public sector environment. (OECD 1997, pp. 86–7)

Whereas neoliberal restructuring of education was largely self-imposed in Western nation states, it was mandated in vulnerable nation states in return for loans by the World Bank and IMF during the 1980s and 1990s. These Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) enforced reduced public expenditure on education health and welfare, paying back international loans, balancing budgets and deregulating labour and financial markets. The IMF and World Bank now recognise that SAPs impacted most of women and girls, given that they were most likely to be withdrawn from education to support families with a decline in the Gender Equality in Education Index from the 1990s in Africa, with any rise linked to democracies (Akman and Unterhalter 2005, p. 69). Structural restructuring in all countries resulted from the dual strategies of managerialism and marketisation (Blackmore and Sachs 2007) as governments devolved risk and responsibility for the daily work of schools, universities and colleges through rule, down to self-managing organisations, a governance mode replicated internally within large institutions. These units were steered from a distance through strong policy and financial frameworks and feedback loops of standardised assessment and performance indicators. Individual units then competed for students as they were funded per capita. Risk and responsibility for educational choices and failures have thus been downloaded onto individual students and families, schools and universities, in marketised systems premised increasingly on choice and efficiency (getting more for less). Blunt measures of success or failure are now disseminated on websites and through media school rankings in the UK and Australia. Governments claim such transparency equates to accountability and will improve quality, despite the lack of little evidence. Devolved governance effectively links social democratic notions of ownership, partnership and community to contractualist market principles of competition and choice, effectively capturing the anxiety of the aspirational classes experiencing greater job insecurity. But only the few have the social, economic and cultural capital necessary to make 'informed' choices.

Such reforms are gendered in their assumptions, processes and effects. Twentieth-century educational expansion in Western nation states (Australia, New Zealand, UK, Canada, USA, Western Europe and Scandinavia), usually managed through central bureaucracies, operated within a social democratic frame that provided some local discretionary agency through the inclusion of previously marginalised groups (Sennett 2005). This was evident with the emergence of gender equity policies as a result of the women's movement of the 1970s putting pressure on the state. In the Nordic and Australian states (Australia and New Zealand), specialist equity units located within state bureaucracies initiated equal opportunity, affirmative action and anti-discrimination legislation (Bacchi 2001; Salisbury and Riddell 2000).

Gender equality it was assumed would eventuate through the meritocratic principle, neglecting to recognise that merit itself is a construct emerging out of the rise of middle-class and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Devolved governance also saw women moving into middle management as principals, heads of department and even vice-chancellors in universities, where they were now managing the stress and distress of systems undergoing serial crises. Responsibility for equity was devolved to self-managing units and individual managers and mainstreamed, as in the European Union, diluting, some argue, both specialist expertise and the commitment to gender equity (Bacchi 2001). Devolution also saw the reassertion of executive power (usually male) in the Anglophone nation states. Evidence suggests women's progress into executive positions in developed nations such as Australia and Denmark has stalled (EOAW 2008; Staunes and Sondergaard 2008). Despite this, the presence of a few women in executive positions symbolises the 'success' of equity policies.

At the same time, devolution focuses attention on performance outcomes measured by narrow indicators of success with little regard to context or how educational institutions 'added value' to their students. While these outcomes focus triggered alarms about boys' educational underachievement, international evidence now indicates that in most Western nation states, devolution and choice policies have perpetuated if not exacerbated educational inequality based on other factors: SES, rurality and race (Teese et al. 2007; Lamb 2007; Thrupp and Lupton 2006 and Power et al. 2003 in the UK). Choice interacts with residential location and wealth, facilitating the creaming of talent by private schools and community ownership in ways that can exclude as well as include (Mitchell 2001). The issue is which boys and which girls experience failure.

In economically developing nation states such as Chile, China and India (Hsieh and Urquiola 2007; Liu and Volkoff 2007; Kamat 2007), existing gender inequalities have grown marked by a clear rural-urban divide. In China, not only has the one-child policy encouraged aborting female foetuses and deaths of female babies due to a cultural preference for males, but girls' participation in kindergartens and primary schools declined from 1994 to 2004. In India, the literacy rate was only 59 % in 2006, yet paradoxically, the expansion of higher education for the elite and the ICT boom has generated rapid national economic growth. Inequality therefore arises from combinations of gender, caste and rural-urban inequalities, with India doing worse than Thailand, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, in reducing inequality (over

90 % of Indian women are illiterate) (Kamat 2007, p. 233). Wider and entrenched social inequality is now a major policy issue. In order to increase retention in primary school, governments have employed paraprofessionals and unqualified teachers, further undermining a feminised profession's status. In contrast, in the Asian economies, student learning outcomes have improved, in part because of the higher status of teachers (Mingat 1998). At the secondary level of education, the gender gap is wide in sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and Western Asia, with only 79 % girls enrolled per 100 boys in Asia compared to 46 in sub-Saharan Africa and Western and Southern Asia (United Nations 2005).

In all countries and regions, the expansion of, and improvement in, education is now seen in a competitive global economy to be critical to economic growth *and* social cohesion, although the economic rationale is emphasised more in Australia and the UK, whereas social integration is of equal value in the European Union and Singapore. The connection between neoliberal policies and increased inequality with GDP lower in 80 countries was recognised by the UN Development Programme Report (1999). Women's education in most global polity policies (UN, OECD, World Bank) is now linked to population reduction, increased health and well-being of families, and increased political participation. But rapid economic development and educational massification from primary to university level is increasingly reliant in developing nation states on privatised provision leading to rising costs within deregulated education markets. These trends encourage segregation and inequality based on gender, class, race, ethnicity and religion and undermine in many instances teacher professionalism and quality.

For education, therefore, on the one hand, marketisation, managerialisation and privatisation have thus shifted the locus of power upwards to executive power; outwards from education to the field of politics, economics and the media; and from the national to the transnational arena as global policy communities are becoming more influential on national and local agendas. These tendencies are fed by international ranking mechanisms such as PISA standardised tests, university rankings and professional standards movements (Lingard et al. 2005). The emerging global architecture of educational governance premised around standards, ranking and reputation is tightly linked to education capitalism in ways that reposition both new and old masculinities favourably, disadvantaging women who lack the career mobility and flexibility to work in transnational networks dominated by entrepreneurial masculinities (Connell 2005). Women continue to do the domestic labour, but now at the national context (Metcalf and Slaughter 2008).

On the other hand, and because of the above, equity often requires significant political will exerted by executives and governments. Major global issues (population and economic growth) are closely linked to girls' and women's education. Global polities such as UN, UNIFEM, the World Bank, IMF and OECD are increasingly able, and perhaps increasingly willing, to exert pressure on individual nation states to invest in girls' and women's education in ways that support the ground swell of activities of local social movements and NGOs (Unterhalter 2006).

2.1 Teacher De-professionalisation and Gender Division of Labour

Educational capitalism and global restructuring of educational governance have also produced re-gendering of educational labour. Devolved governance and market-responsive institutions require institutional flexibility that is reliant on flexible workers. Teachers' and academics' work has been increasingly feminised, de-professionalised and casualised (Acker and Dillabough 2007). Research in the UK and Australia indicates that this new contractualism leads to greater compliance and reduces many teachers' sense of professional autonomy (Gleeson and Husbands 2001; Blackmore and Sachs 2007). And women make up the larger proportion of casual and part-time staff—whether in schools, colleges or universities (Blackmore 2009). At the same time, the dispersal down of managerial and market work onto teachers has led to the intensification of educational labour under conditions of reduced funding and raised expectations of performance.

This intensification of labour articulates with a gendered global division of labour and is exacerbated by two interrelated global trends: the quality assurance movement and the internationalisation of education. At the global level, nation states now seek to direct teachers' and academics' work towards national interests and to raise the skill base, thus increasing economic productivity and social cohesion. The professional standards movement within and across nation states is encouraging a form of technical professionalism where teachers and academics merely implement plans and meet standards set by the new professional managerial class (predominantly male) and actors (also male) in global policy arenas. In the academy, the discourse of innovation and user orientation means academics have less scope to define the value of the knowledge they produce as measures of value are determined externally (Blackmore et al. 2010).

Overall, the corporatisation of education has seen a tighter alignment of individuals to organisational and national objectives: trapped between upwardly oriented managerial accountabilities and outwardly oriented market accountabilities to consumers at the very time that the field of education is becoming numerically feminised (Ozga and Deem 2000). This trend has been driven by a discourse of quality and excellence, one difficult to reject, with a focus on processes and procedures to ensure quality assurance as well as ongoing improvement of outcomes. Workers' continually search for self-improvement as they measure up against externally imposed performance management technologies (performance management, indicators, standardised assessments, student satisfaction and industry surveys), becoming reluctantly complicit in reducing their own professional autonomy. Whereas emotions were previously seen to be a 'feminine weakness' inappropriate in organisational life, now the passion of educators for success and to do well for their students is now appropriated by, and aligned with, management (Blackmore and Sachs 2007).

These corporate processes cannot be separated out from the processes of internationalisation of education globally. For rapidly developing economies in Asia

and the Middle East, with their expanding aspirational middle classes, international education and privatisation of educational provision are immediate solutions. Likewise, poor African nation states and India lack the public funds to massify elementary education (Kamat 2007). Gaining Western credentials through international education is seen to be high status and a sound family investment for their children to access local and global labour markets. For Western education systems seeking to widen participation in higher education to enhance the skilled workforce, international students have become a major source of export income (but paradoxically not domestic labour).

With English as the lingua franca, the flows are towards Anglophone nation states from which flows of teachers, curriculum and assessment packages, and policies emanate to dominate the global education market. Quality *and* 'being international' are now the markers of distinction for nation states, organisations and individuals. Again, these phenomena are situated within a wider reconfiguration of a global gender division of labour. Accessing the growing international education market in India and China is again contingent on teachers' flexibility and mobility and therefore less likely for women with familial responsibilities. At the same time, within the domestic market, privatisation and language policies interact in gendered ways as cultural values are foregrounded. For example, in China more males attend subsidised private English medium schools, with upper-class males reading in English 22:1 and for females 15:1 (Liu and Volkoff 2007, pp. 188–9).

Meanwhile Western school systems confront issues about how to attract and retain the next generation of teachers and academics, particularly males, with policy ambivalence evident in the discourses of panic and anxiety about abusive masculinity on the one hand and the need for males as role models due to boys' educational underachievement on the other (Mills et al. 2004). For women in Western nation states, the issue is about gaining family-friendly work conditions as educational work is losing its comparative advantage relative to other professions. Across nation states, while the norm is that of the caring female teacher, teaching is seen to be appropriate for women in most cultures, although often a means for advancement for men in many developing countries where highly educated women continue to be paid only 80 % on average of their male equivalent's salary (Unterhalter 2006, pp. 10–11). The growth of a paraprofessional class of teachers has long-term implications for the profession and emergence of 'second-class' education systems (Akman and Unterhalter 2005, p. 50).

2.2 *Vocationalisation*

With post-industrial post-colonial global discourses about knowledge-based economies and lifelong learning, education has become a 'global positioning device'. Governments, industry and educational organisations now seek to control the processes of production, dissemination and application of knowledge in order to compete internationally. In general, neoliberal education reforms were user

driven. Education is now treated as a positional rather than a public good, a means for individuals, institutions and governments to gain comparative advantage over others in rankings.

There are multiple gendered trajectories around these themes of knowledge, lifelong learning and opportunity (Brine 1999). Vocationalisation has led to a short-term focus on work-related skills and outcomes rather than long-term benefits in the form of participation and citizenship, with implications for adult women's access to education in order to be able to fully participate in society (Leathwood and Francis 2006). Teacher-proof competency-based approaches developed in vocational education have permeated into the tertiary and school sectors with a focus on graduate attributes and outcomes. These have undermined both the emancipatory capacities of feminist pedagogies around building literacy as an aspect of community capacity building in both Western developed nation states and third-world, diasporic and indigenous communities (Mehran 1999; Heward and Bunwaree 1999). Antisexist and anti-racist pedagogies in classrooms in developed nation states are rejected in 'consumer satisfaction surveys' by students as they to lead to discomfort and resistance, discouraging activist teachers.

Ironically, despite the discourse of interdisciplinarity of new knowledge work, vocationalisation has reinvented, not collapsed, the vocational/liberal tensions of twentieth-century education, maintaining its gendered stratification with women being channelled into the lower-paid jobs in the service sector (Brine 1999). While girls overachieve in education, masculinity is still rewarded more in the workplace (Collins et al. 2001). The gender gap in pay (18 % between average male and female wage in Australia) in even the most developed nation states has not reduced by 2010 as women make up the majority of workers. Educational credentials as cultural capital are enhanced by the gender capital of masculinity.

While discourses of lifelong learning promise to recognise multiple forms of experiential and informal learning that could benefit women and girls and marginalised populations, they assume 'gender-neutral' economic models of life pathways derived from human capital theory that both ignore women's life experiences and discourage working-class aspirations (Leathwood and Francis 2006). The privatisation of educational costs and individual responsibility for educational choice, together with deregulated workplaces, assume individuals have equal resources and life conditions that enable them to make viable and informed choices. Women are entering the workplace in greater numbers at a time when lifelong learning is increasingly 'unprotected' for, and self-funded by, families and individuals as the nation state is either not able or not willing to provide universal education and training.

3 Policy and Politics Reframing Gender Equity Reform

With the shift to devolved governance, policy has taken on a new power to steer from a distance institutions and individuals. Within the global education policy community, major drivers for gender equity in education have been the Beijing

Conference Declaration of 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals of 2000. At the same time, fundamental shifts have occurred within the field of gender equity policy in different global arenas, with paradoxical effects, as indicated in the following.

In the Anglophone states, equity policy in the 2000s is framed by the 1990s politicisation of education mobilised through media discourses of shame and blame heaped on schools, teachers and universities for educational failure. Linked to this discourse was a social conservatism marked by the backlash against affirmative action, multiculturalism, feminism and reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Neoliberal policies, in assuming the gender-neutral subject on the one hand and mobilising discourses of crisis in education on the other, facilitated the 're-masculinisation of the political rhetoric' (Connell 2005, p. 1816). In particular, the identification in universal standardised outcomes of boys' underachievement in literacy provided a ready justification for 'recuperative masculinities' to refocus policy and resources towards boys that positioned men as victims of feminism (Lingard 2003). In reinvigorating the 'gender wars', this essentialising discourse privileged *all* boys' academic and social well-being and men's welfare while ignoring the structural and cultural advantages that came from just being male without regard for class, ethnic, racial and linguistic difference. This regressive policy move ignored the conceptual frameworks informing gender equity for girls around intersecting differences (race, gender and class) and the social relations of gender. Feminist educators and researchers were positioned as resistant and thus excluded from informing what became an ideologically driven equity policy (Francis and Skelton 2005).

This media-generated conservative discourse of masculinity in crisis not only took away responsibility of all men for equity in general, as recommended in the 1995 Beijing Conference Declaration (Connell 2005), but distracted attention from the real policy problem indicated in achievement results in the West: that socioeconomic background, rurality and indigeneity not gender are the *key* predictors of educational underachievement (Skelton and Francis 2004). Educational underperformance is linked to locational disadvantage in communities characterised by poverty, isolation, poor health and well-being produced by an intergenerational legacy of social and economic exclusion. But gender *is* the best predictor in the workplace (Collins et al. 2001).

Second, in the West, the focus of corporate governance moved towards monitoring rather than proactive professional development and policy production in equity. Responsibility for implementation of equity policies was devolved to individual managers often without the knowledge or commitment. Without pressure from above to change, managerialist approaches to decision-making sidelined both equity experts and practitioners (Bacchi 2001). This 'embedding' of EO policies symbolised not just women's success but also their advantage, even though 30 years of equity policies indicates women continue to be underrepresented cross-nationally (Sobehart 2009). Overt discrimination in leadership selection panels (Lumby 2009) and covert discrimination around long hours of work, mobility and flexibility continue to favour incumbent senior male managers, promotion structures rely more on continuous careers, and performative cultures position women with

familial responsibilities as not having the ambition or time for leadership (Blackmore and Sachs 2007). In Middle Eastern, Asian and African societies, the tension is between societal pressures to preserve traditional gender roles, while economic growth in often conflict-ridden societies requires women to be leaders, but with significant personal and professional constraints as well as dangers (Optlaka and Hertz-Lazarowitz 2006). Women educators still do not feel that the workplace is more equitable, yet men feel threatened by a loss of their 'naturalised' advantage (Lyman et al. 2009).

Third, with 'gender mainstreaming', particularly in the EU, there has been a policy 'language' shift (Macha and Handschuh-Heiss 2009). More powerful notions of equity, equal opportunity and social justice that signified structural and cultural group disadvantage have been supplanted by the notion of diversity (Ahmed 2007; Staunes and Sondergaard 2008). While diversity promises recognition of multiple forms of difference (class, race, linguistic, cultural, religious), it is conceptually slippery and readily reduced to a matter of individual preference (e.g. learning styles, psychology) or symbolic cultural representations (e.g. food fairs) (Coleman and Cardno 2006). The diversity discourse fits well with other neoliberal discourses about the individualisation of responsibility, productive diversity in management, parental choice and personalised learning pathways for lifelong learning, market and managerially oriented education systems (Staunes and Sondergaard 2008). While parental choice policies may recognise the rights-based claims of different class, cultural or faith groups for schools for 'people like us', equity in learning outcomes and lifelong opportunities often does not eventuate without some resource redistribution based on consideration as to the differential education offered to boys and girls (Gewirtz 1998). Similarly, the New Labour notions of social inclusion lack legal clout and assume assimilation within 'the dominant'.

Finally, both neoliberal and New Labour governments in the Anglophone states have thus marginalised the women's movement and educators in education policy-making, ironically at a time when women have become key policy actors in many developing nation states and global policy forums (Stromquist and Monkman 2000). This has led feminist policy activists to bypass the nation state by linking with grassroots movements and creating strategic alliances in global forums that can then exert pressure upon individual nation states (World Bank, IMF and UNESCO) (Blackmore 2005). The rationale for gender equality is that global security, environmental sustainability and reduced poverty are contingent on the education of women and girls (Akman and Unterhalter 2005). Nation states seeking access to the new regional polities such as the European Union can then be pressured to adhere, at least symbolically, to equity policies (Heward and Bunwaree 1999). Thus at the global level, performance indicators (e.g. Gender-Related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure) have strategic value as they indicate cross-national disparities which can justify policies such as the new Millennium Development Goal promoting the education of girls (Unterhalter 2006).

The above examples indicate first that successful equity policies require multiple levels of action, bottom-up and top-down activism as well as political will. Executive advocated equity must work in synergy with policy makers, researchers, equity practitioners and communities to legitimise localised activity. Second, emergent

policy discourses such as globalisation or knowledge-based economies can supplant, appropriate or marginalise equity discourses. For example, the contemporary policy equation of science to innovation has again privileged 'scientific' over social research (e.g. *No Child Left Behind*, quantitative systemic reviews for evidence-based policy, innovation, research assessment, etc). Outdated and gendered binaries between the humanities and science again trouble definitions of what counts as valuable research and knowledge, and the complexity of equity policy, its contradictions and internal tensions, is often not realised.

Finally, Giddens (1994) refers to the simultaneous processes of de-traditionalisation and re-traditionalisation in and through education due to the contradictory imperatives of cultural and economic globalisation. De-traditionalisation is in part driven by neoliberalism that treats markets and Western curriculum and organisation as gender and culturally neutral, in part demographics and in part globalisation from below (e.g. NGOs) and from above (e.g. OECD). Re-traditionalisation emerges from the rise of religious fundamentalism and social conservatism, often together with resistance to Western cultural imperialism, thus reaffirming traditional familial gender roles in both developed and developing nation states. Educational reformers need to realise that schools and universities have become sites of contestation between sociocultural and market values in the production of culturally hybrid and gendered identities.

4 Forward Thinking About Gender Equity

Analysing the scope and effects of gender equity work requires addressing relations at and between multiple levels—global, international, national, local and institutional—and how these articulate through education within specific cultural contexts. Strategically with regard to policy, this may require using multiple leverages around issues of educational inequality. These include exploiting moves in educational governance towards 'joined up' governance, interagency collaboration and community capacity building (formal and informal education) to broaden notions of lifelong learning to be not just about work but also social capital formation (Mehran 1999). It calls for supporting professional and non-government organisational networks to sustain effective equity reforms. It means recognising the need for localised strategies as similar policies can have differential effects. Thus performance indicators that chart trends and offer comparisons of gender inequality such as the Gender Development Index that monitors girls' and women's progress are important for developing nation states as benchmarks. At the same time, prescriptive and standardising international and national ranking mechanisms claimed to offer accountability and comparability can also thwart equity policies advocating authentic curriculum and assessment that address difference at the local level in Western nations (Thrupp and Lupton 2006). Whereas private schooling can provide access for girls and women to education in developing nations, the same policies of choice can residualise public sector schools in Western nation states, reducing access to education for working class and refugee girls.

How gender equity is achieved requires various approaches. Despite Western ‘cognitive imperialism’ in the field of educational leadership (Battiste 2005), secular, Christian, indigenous and Islamic feminist scholars are identifying the basis for cross-cultural dialogue between respective cultural belief systems around shared discourses of community, collaboration, moral or servant leadership. This highlights how leadership is aligned with institutional authority of individuals in secular societies, with community in indigenous societies and with religious position in religious societies (Ah Nee-Benham 2002; Shah 2006). Thus any organisational analyses of gender change at the micro-level need to be linked to macro-critical analyses of the role of education (Optlaka and Hertz-Lazarowitz 2006). As explicated here, educational inequality requires us to confront cultural belief systems around gender, race, class and ethnicity.

5 Conclusion

The struggle for social justice in education is bound up in wider political debates around the structure of work, cultural identity and competing human rights principles of universalism and particularism, recognition and redistribution, citizenship rights and responsibilities, and global and national imaginaries. Feminists struggle over how to recognise and respect difference (gender, racial, cultural and sexual) but also advocate basic human rights and access to equal education without the imposition of universalisms. Should gender justice be a universal principle overriding other value systems through cross-national and national government interventions, or should only certain aspects of gender equity be required (e.g. access to education), imparting weight to local values, tradition and culture as reform relies on localised support for gender equity (Blackmore 2005). The compromise may be for strong interventions in establishing regulative principles that would focus on equal worth, dignity and accountability, but with some provision for local differences, while still seeking to impart agency through education and enable life choices for all driven by local initiatives (Akman and Unterhalter 2005).

References

- Acker, S., & Dillabough, J. (2007). Women ‘learning to labour’ in the ‘male emporium’: Exploring gendered work in teacher education. *Gender and Education*, 19(3), 297–316.
- Ah Nee-Benham, M. (2002). An alternative perspective of educational leadership for change: Reflections on native/indigenous ways of knowing. In K. Leithwood et al. (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 133–165). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ahmed, S. A. (2007). The language of diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(2), 235–256.
- Akman, S., & Unterhalter, E. (Eds.). (2005). *Beyond Access. Transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*. Oxford: Oxfam.

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Bacchi, C. (2001). Managing equity: Mainstreaming and diversity in Australian universities. In A. McKinnon & A. Brooks (Eds.), *Gender and the restructured university: Changing management and cultures in higher education* (pp. 119–135). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Battiste, M. (2005). Leadership and aboriginal education in contemporary education: Narratives of cognitive imperialism reconciling with decolonization. In J. Collard & C. Reynolds (Eds.), *Leadership, gender and culture in education: Male and female perspectives* (pp. 150–156). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Beck, U. (1992). *A risk society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beijing Women's Declaration*. (1995).
- Blackmore, J. (2005). Feminist strategic rethinking of human rights discourses in education. In W. Hesford & W. Kozol (Eds.), *Just advocacy? Women's human rights, transnational feminism and the politics of representation* (pp. 243–265). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Blackmore, J. (2009). Re/positioning women in educational leadership: The changing social relations and politics of gender in Australia. In H. Sobehart (Ed.), *Women leading education across the continents: Sharing the spirit, fanning the flame* (pp. 73–83). London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Blackmore, J., & Sachs, J. (2007). *Performing and reforming leaders. Gender, educational restructuring and organisational change*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Blackmore, J., Brennan, M., & Zipin, L. (Eds.). (2010). *Repositioning the university: Governance and changing academic work*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishing.
- Brine, J. (1999). *Under educating women: Globalising inequality*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bulbeck, C. (1998). *Re-orienting western feminism. Women's diversity in a post colonial world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, M., & Cardno, C. (2006). Special issue: Leadership and diversity. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 34(2), 181–199.
- Collins, C., Kenway, J., & McLeod, J. (2001). *Factors influencing the education performance of males and females in school and their initial destinations after leaving school*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). Change among the gatekeepers: Men masculinities and gender equity in the global arena. *Signs*, 30(3), 1801–1825.
- EOAW. (2008). *Gender workplace statistics at a glance*. Retrieved from: <http://www.eowa.gov.au/>
- Francis, B., & Skelton, C. (2005). *Reassessing gender and achievement*. New York: Routledge.
- Gewirtz, S. (1998). Conceptualising social justice in education: Mapping the territory. *Journal of Education Policy*, 13(4), 469–484.
- Giddens, A. (1994). *Beyond left and right*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gleeson, D., & Husbands, C. (2001). *The performing school. Managing, teaching and learning in a performance culture*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Henry, M., Lingard, B., Rizvi, F., & Taylor, S. (2001). *The OECD, globalisation and education policy*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Heward, C., & Bunwaree, S. (Eds.). (1999). *Gender, education and development. Beyond access to empowerment*. London: Zed Books.
- Hoogvelt, A. (2001). *Globalisation and the postcolonial world. The new political economy of development*. London: Palgrave.
- Hsieh, C., & Urquiola, M. (2007). The effects of generalised school choice. In R. Teese, S. Lamb, & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International studies in educational inequality: Theory and policy* (pp. 67–108). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Kamat, S. (2007). Walking the tightrope: Equity and growth in a liberalising India. In R. Teese, S. Lamb, & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International studies in educational inequality: Theory and policy* (pp. 207–238). Dordrecht: Springer.

- Lamb, S. (2007). School reform and inequality in urban Australia: A case of residualisation of the poor. In R. Teese, S. Lamb, & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International studies in educational inequality: Theory and policy* (pp. 1–38). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Leathwood, C., & Francis, B. (Eds.). (2006). *Gender and lifelong learning*. London: Routledge.
- Lingard, B. (2003). Where to in gender policy in education after recuperative masculinity politics? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7(1), 33–56.
- Lingard, B., Rawolle, S., & Taylor, S. (2005). Globalizing policy sociology in education: Working with Bourdieu. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(6), 759–777.
- Liu, Y., & Volkoff, V. (2007). Equity and Policy: Challenges faced by China's education. In R. Teese, S. Lamb, & M. Duru-Bellat (Eds.), *International studies in educational inequality: Theory and policy* (pp. 185–206). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Lumby, J. (2009). Disappearing gender choices in identity. In H. Sobehart (Ed.), *Women leading education across the continents. Sharing the spirit, fanning the flame* (pp. 29–40). London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Lyman, L., Anathanasoula-Reppa, A., & Lazaridou, A. (2009). Leadership, change and gender: Reflections of Greek and USA leaders. In H. Sobehart (Ed.), *Women leading education across the continents. Sharing the spirit, fanning the flame* (pp. 115–127). London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Macha, H., & Handschuh-Heiss, S. (2009). Gender mainstreaming: Women in leadership and the physics of calamities. In H. Sobehart (Ed.), *Women leading education across the continents. Sharing the spirit, fanning the flame* (pp. 175–187). London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- McLeod, J., & Yates, L. (2006). *Making modern lives. Subjectivity, schooling and social change*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Mehran, G. (1999). Lifelong learning: New opportunities for women in a Muslim country. *Comparative Education*, 35(2), 201–215.
- Metcalfe, A., & Slaughter, S. (2008). The differential effects of academic capitalism on women in the academy. In J. Glazer-Raymo (Ed.), *Unfinished agendas—New and continuing gender challenges in higher education* (pp. 80–111). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Mills, M., Martino, W., & Lingard, B. (2004). Attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers: Policy issues in a male teacher debate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(3), 355–371.
- Mingat, A. (1998). The strategy used by high-performing Asian economies in education: Some lessons for developing countries. *World Development*, 26(4), 695–715.
- Mirza, H. (2009). *Race, gender and educational desire. Why black women succeed and fail*. London: Routledge.
- Mitchell, K. (2001). Education for democratic citizenship: Trans-nationalism, multiculturalism and the limits of liberalism. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(1), 51–78.
- Mohanty, C. (2003). *Feminism without Borders. Decolonising theory, practising solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Narayan, U. (1997). *Dislocating cultures, identities, traditions & Third World feminism*. London: Routledge.
- OECD. (1997). *Managing across levels of government*. Paris: OECD.
- Oplaka, I., & Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Women principals in a multicultural society. New insights into feminist educational leadership*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Ozga, J., & Deem, R. (2000). Carrying the burden of transformation: The experiences of women managers in UK higher and further education. *Discourse*, 21(2), 141–153.
- Power, S. T. E., Whitty, G., & Wigfall, V. (2003). *Education and the middle class*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Salisbury, J., & Riddell, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Gender, policy and educational change. Shifting agendas in the UK and Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Sennett, R. (2005). *The culture of the new capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shah, S. (2006). Educational leadership: An Islamic perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 347–363.

- Skelton, C., & Francis, B. (Eds.). (2004). *A feminist critique of education: 15 years of gender education*. London: Routledge.
- Sobehart, H. (Ed.). (2009). *Women leading education across the continents. Sharing the spirit, fanning the flame*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Staunes, D., & Sondergaard, D. (2008). Management and gender diversity. In E. Manussi, M. Ronnblom, & H. Silius (Eds.), *Critical studies in gender inequalities* (pp. 135–160). Copenhagen: Makadam.
- Stromquist, N., & Monkman, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Globalisation and education. Integration and contestation across cultures*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Teese, R., Lamb, S., & Duru-Bellat, M. (Eds.). (2007). *International studies in educational inequality, theory and policy, Vol 3. Inequality: Educational theory and public policy*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Thrupp, M., & Lupton, R. (2006). Taking school contexts more seriously: The social justice challenge. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 53(3), 308–328.
- UNIFEM. (2009). *Results based approach to human rights program*. Retrieved from: <http://www.unifem.org/>
- United Nations. (1999). *Development Program Report*. New York: UNDP.
- United Nations. (2005). *The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2005*. New York: United Nations.
- Unterhalter, E. (2006). *Gender, schooling and global social justice*. London: Routledge.
- World Bank. (2001). *Engendering development*. New York: Oxford University Press.