

## **WILL BOYS ALWAYS BE BOYS?**

By Mike Baker

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"Boys are not behind, they are ahead." That is the view of two American educational researchers. Their argument appears to go against the evidence, particularly in the week when the latest official statistics showed that, in England, girls continue to out-perform boys in most subjects and at most ages. However, their case is interesting and worth closer inspection. First, though, what do the statistics for the national tests at seven, 11, and 14 and GCSE show about the gender gap?

In the 2003 National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science, girls scored better than boys in virtually all subjects and at all ages.

The exception was in maths at age 11, when boys were marginally ahead.

It is in English that the girls are forging ahead fastest. At age seven, 88% of girls achieved the expected level for their age, compared to 80% of boys. There is a similar gap in writing.

A similar "gender gap" is evident in the US and some other countries. Why?

American educational researchers William Draves and Julie Coates claim to know the answer.

In their new book - *Nine Shift: Work, life and education in the 21st century* - they argue that boys are leading society into the internet age.

According to them, it is not boys who are the problem but schools. For while boys are developing the skills they will need in the "knowledge jobs" of the future, schools are still preparing students for an industrial age which is passing.

They believe schools in the US had to go through a similar adjustment between 1900 and 1920, as the education system adapted to produce the skills needed for industrial and office employers instead of the rural economy.

Draves and Coates say boys dropped out of school in huge numbers in the first two decades of the 20th century. Yet it was young men, experimenting with technology, who led America's manufacturing boom, especially in the automobile industry.

They say something similar is happening today: boys are into the internet and computers. They like to innovate and experiment. They "like taking risks, being entrepreneurial, being collaborative, all behaviours that lead to success in the workforce today". But while they are rewarded for their behaviour in the workplace, they are punished in school because they are non-conformist, poor at listening and following instructions, and restless.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3494490.stm>