

Counting Boys in By Counting Boys out

Marie Nordberg
Centre for Gender Research,
Karlstad University

110 million to increased gender equality in school

Swedish school lacks in gender equality. *The language in classrooms is the most abusive in the whole world* and it often hits girls. Many young girls are stressed and feel psychical illness. *The differences in achievements between boys and girls are large.*

The Government has therefore today decided on a lot of proceedings to promote gender equality in school, for example will a special gender equality delegation be set up. Totally 110 million will be invested during three years, a historically large investment.

Order problems in school are to a great part due to lacks in gender equality and lacks of respect for other people. The fight for gender equality must therefore begin already in school, says gender equality minister Nyamko Sabuni.

Boys' anti-achievement culture must bee broken and girls that do not feel well must get support. If all pupils shall reach as far as possible must gender equality in school increase, says Minister of Education and Research Jan Björklund.

(Press release, 12 June 2008 Ministry of Education and Research and Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, translated by me, no English version found, my emphasizes).

Aim:

- to deconstruct and critically discuss the descriptions of boys, girls, masculinity and femininity and the assumption of “an among Swedish boys spread male anti-achievement culture” articulated and repeated in the contemporary Swedish education debate on boys and schooling.
- To examine how masculinity theories and research are used in the debate.

Three steps

- Achievement statistics and reports.
- Discourse flows, changes in welfare policies and new practices in the education sector
- Gender equality conferences

Theory concepts

- Barrie Thorne (1993): “Big Man-bias”.
- Judith Halberstam (2005): “Metronomativity”.
- Jon McKenzie: Performance as a new hegemonic disciplining concept, “The Teaching Machine”

Three performance sectors

- Organizations: Performance management
- Cultural Performance
- Technical Performance

“Perform or else!”

Efficiency and a focus on organizations and individuals performances

Steep one: entering the teaching machine

In a certain sense, performativity is the postmodern condition: it demands that all knowledge be evaluated in terms of operational efficiency, that what counts as knowledge must be translatable by and accountable in the “1”s and “0”s of digital matrices, (McKenzie 2001, p. 14).

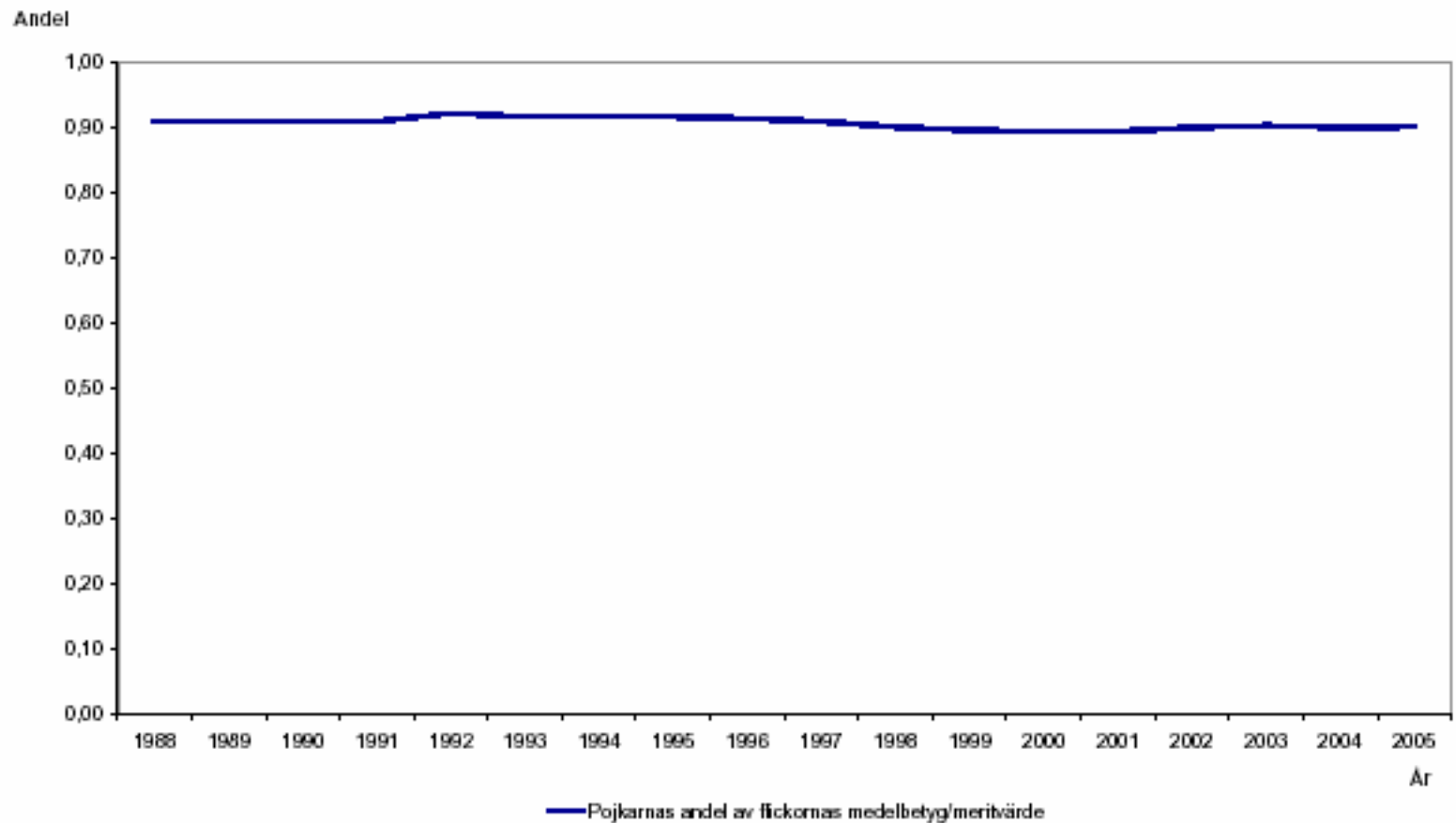


Diagram 1: Könsskillnaden i grundskolebetyg mätt som kvoten mellan pojkars och flickors medelbetyg/meritvärde

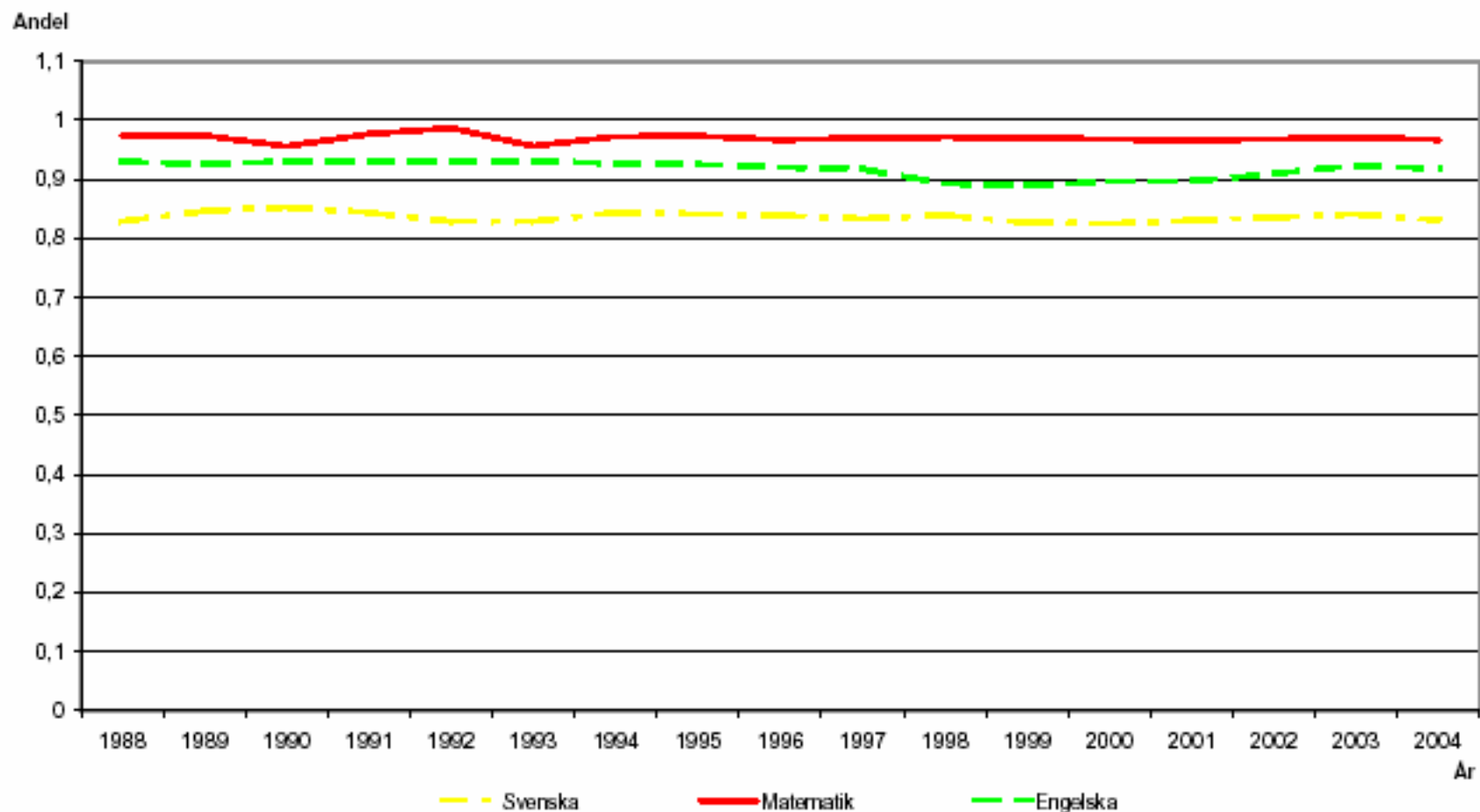


Diagram 2: Könsskillnaden i grundskolebetyg i tre ämnen mätt som kvoten mellan pojkars och flickors medelbetyg/meritvärde (Svenska, matematik och engelska)

Betygsfördelning för pojkar och flickor 2003/2004

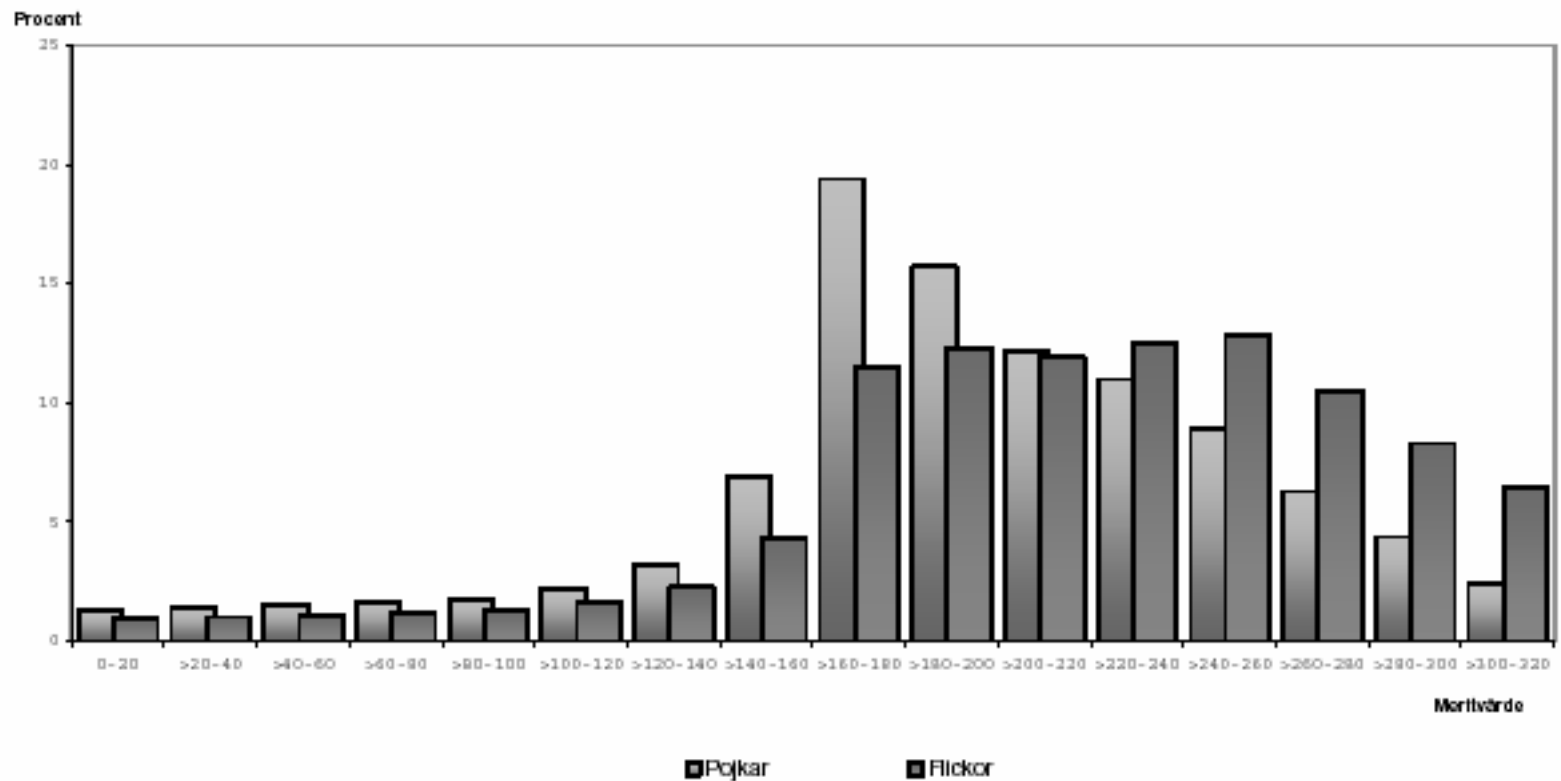


Diagram 9: Histogram över meritvärdet i år 9

Report

In many school it exist a powerful anti-achievement culture (*anti-swot*) among the pupils that specially influence boys in the early school year. This culture is a part of how boys interpret and in different grade strives for popularity and masculinity. It have been stated that masculinity in many situations is connected to hardness, aggression, confrontation and hierarchal power relations and racism. The result of this, means Phoenix, is that boys that are prepared for schoolwork and put school ideal high on their agenda, risk to be mobbed and get low status not only among boys, but also among girls (!). (Björnsson, 2005, p. 33, my translation.)

The Big Man-bias...

One problem with these pictures – one can assume – is that they show such an ‘obsolete’ picture of men, that differs from the picture we in general have of the modern Swedish man. This could to some parts be seen as a consequence of gender- and masculinity research,

which mainly tends to focus on the spectacular and extraordinary and to little extent have studied for example “the white heterosexual middleclass man” (Björnsson 2005, p 30, my translation)

Steep two: Moving into a broader context

Perform or else!

Counting in Boys

Björklund: New grading scale fairer

"Hard work will pay better when pupils can get higher grades instead of just extra praise. Studying at school must be worthwhile." That's how Minister for Education Jan Björklund comments the Government's decision today on the Bill A new grading scale (Govt Bill 2008/09:66).

The Bill means that in the future the grading scale in all types of schools will contain six levels, A-F, and a seventh coding, a horizontal dash. The five levels A-E will stand for pass results and level F will be for results that are not passes. If there is no basis at all for an assessment, no grade will be given, and this will be noted with a horizontal dash.

THE CHILD AND RECREATION PROGRAMME

SPECIAL BRANCH: FIRE, PROTECTION AND RESCUE



Have you ever thought of what it would be like to be on your way in a raging fire truck? Saving people from a burning building or working on saving someone's life in an ambulance?

Maybe your interests are in catching criminals as a police officer or guiding tourists on a hiking trail?

Our program is the start to make those dreams become your reality. With our program you will get a fundamental education in emergency care, fire and rescue that will be useful throughout your entire life.

Your basic subjects that will be needed for eligibility to apply for University are included in the program. Setting high standards on our cooperation with the people in your chosen line of future profession, will make your education more reality based.

You will have the opportunity to try out different professions on your APU – practical training which is about 15 weeks during your 3-year education.

We educate to prepare you for the global labour market and actively involve other countries for an international understanding.

FUTURE AREAS OF PROFESSION AND EMPLOYMENT:

- Fire fighter
- Treatment of Offenders
- Ambulance paramedic
- Guard
- Police
- The Swedish armed forces
- Security Officer

CONTACT US

The child and recreation programme, special branch: fire, protection and rescue is located at Hammarö Utbildningscenter just outside Karlstad, Sweden.

If you want more information about the programme, feel free to contact:

Lennart Fernström, headmaster
+46 54 29 82 21, lennart.fernstrom@karlstad.se

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(Information sheet "The Child and Recreation Programme, special branch: Fire, protection and rescue, 2008)

Step three: Becoming a part
of the teaching machine...

At Gender Equality Conferences

Charlotta enters the stage. She shows a slide where a thick boy with a cap lies on a sofa with a TV-control in his hand. "Nine women of ten cultivate sofa potatoes" is the text message printed on the advertisement image from IKEA. The audience in the crowded conference room laughs. Charlotta waits until the laughs quits before she began to talk about the problem with "an among boys spread anti-achievement culture". The humoristic voice has now been replaced and with seriousness in her voice she points out the problem; boys is not interested of achieving well in school and prefer "to soft" and be lazy. "The softening culture" is highlighted as an explanation to way boys as a group do not achieve as well as girls as a group. Before Charlotta entered the stage another lecturer has presented statistics showing the differences between boys and girls in grades from year nine in secondary school. "Softening" is described by Charlotta as a typical male problem and is not linked to girls at all, who instead are described as hard working and disciplined. The audience is told that many boys have big problems both to write and to use the Swedish language to express them self. (Observation, Gender Equality conference, autumn 2006)

Disciplining small parts
disturbing the machine:

The children are working in their book. They are not aloud to talk or help each other and is silenced immediately if trying help someone or trying to say something to a friend or the teacher. A boy is sitting on a chair in front of a table placed just below the whiteboard. He has a pair of earmuffs placed on his head. When a boy is asking if they cant read a book he is immediately silenced. The female teacher tells the pupils that they have been working well today and not caused any trouble so they will get a new ball in the jar. She also tells them that they might be given the possibility to see a film when the jar is full. The pupils starts suggesting films they want to see, but is immediately silenced again and the teacher tells them that she will be the one deciding. Passing the door I noticed a box full of earmuffs that is placed on a small table near the door. The boy in front of the table turn his head and is immediately corrected by the teacher and told to continue to work.

(Field notes school year four, autumn 2008)

But contradiction and counter hegemonies
also exists and knowledge and
masculinity concepts produced in the
teaching machine can always be
switched!

Intertwined discourses

- The failing boy discourse
- Critical Masculinity Studies focus on stereotype masculinity
- Sex Role Theory presenting a complementary gender manuscript
- Performance discourses
- The rational man – a rational, authoritarian masculinity concept
- Leadership discourses fetched from the military sector
- Gender Equality discourses
- Metronormativity