

‘The Gateway to Everything’: The Relationship between Gender Safety, Gender Violence and Learning Processes in Two Primary Schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya

Catherine Vanner

Abstract

The ways in which gender violence in schools (GVS) relate to teaching and learning processes and the extent to which aspects of gender safety in school (GSS) create an empowering, protective learning environment form this study’s central topics of investigation. Using a multiple qualitative case study of two primary schools in Kirinyaga County, Kenya, this dissertation explores the elements of gender safety and gender violence that exist within each school and relate to student learning. The following qualitative methods were used over seven months in 2015: participant observation, individual teacher interviews, individual art-based student interviews and member-check interviews with teachers and students. GSS is promoted within the national policy framework and through teacher and student actions but is prevented from flourishing by a prioritization of discipline, authority, and examinations that reinforce traditional hierarchies, power discrepancies and competition. These practices define a school culture that enables GVS to continue and undermine efforts to promote GSS. Findings show that efforts to eradicate GVS cannot be designed in isolation from broader teaching and learning processes. Ensuring school safety and equality requires collaboration between education and child protection systems and reflection on current and historical power structures that shape school cultures. Efforts to eradicate GVS should build on existing opportunities for enhancing GSS and thus learning for girls and boys and address the systemic constraints that limit teachers’ ability to promote protection and equality for their students.

Keywords: Gender Safety, Gender Violence, Learning Processes, Primary Schools, Kirinyaga County, Kenya

Full text: <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/36748>