

History shows that all-boy classrooms might actually benefit girls

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In recent years, the apparent decline in boys' academic success rates has troubled politicians, researchers, and educators. It has been described as an educational crisis and a failure of the traditional school setting. The decline has spurred scores of potential solutions to the problem, including the adoption of same-sex classrooms as a way to better address boys' educational needs.

New research that will be presented at the 2011 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Fredericton, New Brunswick, indicates that the picture might not be so simple.

Christopher Greig, an assistant professor of [education](#) at the University of Windsor, believes that current analyses of same-sex classrooms are hopelessly ahistorical—that is, they don't look at what happened in the past when such arrangements were tried.

Greig's research looks at a Windsor elementary school that adopted segregated classrooms for grades one through three from 1966-1972. As part of his research, Greig interviewed 10 administrators and teachers who took part in the pilot project.

Shaped by a variety of complex historical factors and fueled by a desire for educational innovation, "All of them were very enthusiastic about doing it," he says. "They thought this would be a way to address boys' underachievement."

While boys did "okay" under the new structure, the real winners were [girls](#), who "took off" academically in same-sex classrooms, says Greig. However, the negatives outweighed the positives. Not only were some of the segregated boys expressing misogynistic attitudes and prone to violence, but the educational gap between boys and girls actually increased over the course of the project, he says.

Greig's research is both a refutation of the idea that boys' academic disadvantages can be solved just by removing girls from the equation and a criticism of the present level of discourse.

"The current discussions around boy-only classrooms typically—and I think problematically—try to address boys' underachievement in simplistic and outdated ways," Greig says.

Greig will be presenting his paper "Creating Boy-Only Classrooms in a Liberal Era: Exploring a case of all-male classrooms in the 1960s" on May 31 at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, co-hosted by the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University.

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