

The Pros and Cons of Co-Ed

Educators and academics cannot agree on whether it is better to separate the boys from the girls in the classroom. As for the students, they're split, too

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Are girls better at writing than boys? Are boys superior at math? Are male and female brains really all that different?

If you want a straight answer to these questions, you're out of luck. The jury's still out.

Nevertheless, many educators and academics insist that the genders are so different, they all belong in separate classrooms.

Not so fast, say students who have experienced both gender-separate and co-educational schools.

While many agree that all-girls and all-boys schools offer a great classroom environment, they also appreciate the differences that mixed classrooms can bring.

Just ask Xina Cowan. Three years ago, she moved from an all-girls institution to St. George's School, where boys and girls learn alongside each other.

"There's not that much of a divide," said the 16-year-old student council president. "Our differences are overstated. If the

teacher can direct the class in an appropriate manner, all students will learn at a similar rate."

And she's not alone in her thinking. About 20,000 students had similar things to say in a recent survey, Perceptions and Attitudes of Students Toward Their Academic and Social Experiences in Canadian High Schools.

"The world is co-ed," said Chris Shannon, headmaster of the co-educational Lower Canada College, which participated in the

study. "A co-educational environment is a natural thing. The most confident students, the ones with the most respect for their peers, are in co-educational, independent schools.

"But that's not to denigrate single-sex schools. Their students are reporting themselves as happy where they are."

Sixteen-year-old Maryam Cisse has been in a co-ed environment for three years. She doesn't think students in segregated

schools have the upper hand.

"Some of my friends are at all-girls schools. I don't see the difference," said the Grade 11 student at St. George's. "With boys, it makes everything more competitive. It's a different learning experience. We take it to a new level."

As for the notion that girls often take a back seat when boys are around, in an effort not to look too "brainy," she totally disagrees.

"I think participation is very equal," she said. "I don't think it becomes an issue between guys and girls. Whoever has the answer, has the answer."

Stephanie Maris, 17, agrees. Last year, she went to the all-girls Sacred Heart School - which she

absolutely loved. But this year, she's doing Grade 12 at Appleby College in Oakville, Ont.

"The co-ed environment gives perspective," she said. "Boys and girls take part in different ways, but just as much. It's not like either the boys or the girls will answer all the questions."

In fact, she was pleasantly surprised by some of the ideas she was hearing from the boys.

"In engineering class, we were discussing the role of women in society," she recalled. "And the boys were budding feminists. It was a fun discussion."

Jemma West, 17, also switched from an all-girls school to Lower Canada College, where she's currently enrolled in the

Grade 12 optional year. She concludes that both models have their advantages. Which one is right for you depends on what type of person you are and what environment you fit into.