



STEPS

Study of Transitions and Education Pathways

# Newsletter December 2010

## High School and Beyond

### Project Update

Thank you again for participating in the “STEPS” study during your Maths and English classes between 1996 to 1998. A total of 1,323 students participated in the research, from Killara, Carlingford, and Killarney Heights High Schools. 120 of you also participated in intensive interviews during Year 9.

It has been 12 years since I last saw you back in high school! I am recontacting you to find out about what you are doing now.

All the information that you and other students provided has been put to good use, providing valuable insights about what motivates boys and girls in high school Maths and English, as well as associated career plans.

A recent book based on these data is featured on the following page. You can access the full set of publications from my webpage, if you are interested to see what has come from your valuable time and information. This newsletter summarises some of the main findings

I welcome your comments anytime.



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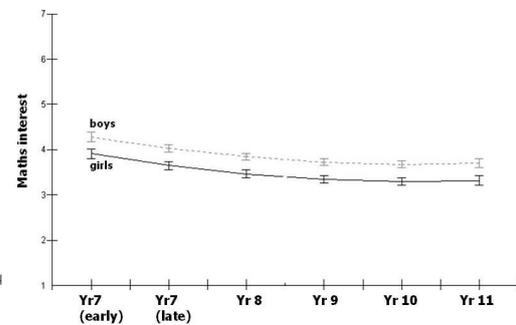
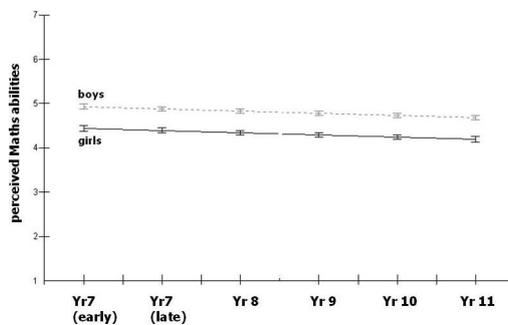
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### Motivations at School

Interestingly, educational and career aspirations remained rather stable through secondary schooling.

Perhaps not surprisingly, overall, interests and perceived abilities had the strongest influences on education and career plans. But, on average, motivations for schoolwork declined throughout secondary school.

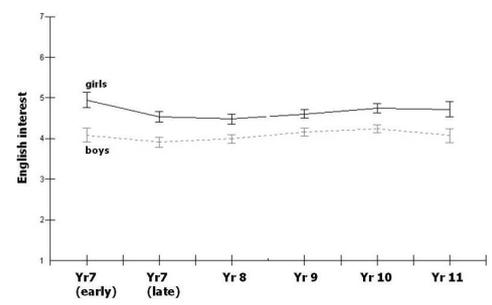
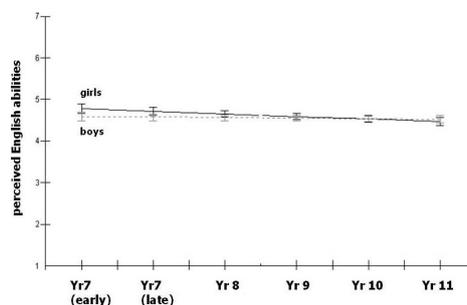
- In Maths, perceived abilities declined slightly for both boys and girls,
- interests also declined, mostly in junior secondary school, but did not “recover” later on, and
- boys both perceived their abilities higher, and had more interest in Maths, than girls.



“You expect a boy to be a rocket scientist or whatever or a mathematician more than you would expect a girl to be. I just think girls have other interests other than maths.” (Year 9 girl)

“If I say to girls ‘boys are better’ they get really angry, but it’s true I reckon.” (Year 9 girl)

- In English, perceived abilities also declined slightly for everyone,
- interests declined through Year 7, especially for girls, recovered up until Year 10, then declined again afterwards, more so for boys, and
- girls maintained greater interest in English than boys.



“Boys don’t like to read books as much as girls... and it’s not as accepted to do well in English for a boy as it is for a girl.” (Year 9 boy)

These findings highlight the importance for teachers and schools to work to engage students in these key learning areas; and, the points at which interest losses occur, where interventions are most needed.

## Gender and Work

Girls and boys perceived differences in the kinds of careers pursued by women and men.

“Women tend to want to sort of help people and care for them and maybe men think that they have to support the family. They might have to have a good job which is really complicated and to earn a lot of money.” (Year 9 girl)

They were also aware of social gender stereotypes, but, thought that things were changing.

“Because girls when they get older when they get married, they stay home and look after children, and men have to go to work... I think that's what people think in general.” (Year 9 boy)

“I think that things are probably changing these days because you know, it's the 90's and everybody's equal, but I still think that men have the high powered jobs and the women have more of a battle getting up there even if they do have the ability.” (Year 9 boy)

“Take us with you” if you move house, please send STEPS an update with your current details!

## Social Influences

Parents, then friends, then teachers had the most influence on beliefs about ability. Often their influences were supportive and encouraging, but, not always.

“It's embarrassing sometimes because I get called silly names, but you know - just for fun from friends. It's like embarrassing - not anything bad, because I know they're just joking. They don't mean anything.” (Year 9 girl)



Watt, H. M. G. & Eccles, J. S. (Guest Eds.). (2006). 'Understanding women's choice of mathematics and science related careers: Longitudinal studies from four countries'. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 12(4).

## Can You Help?

The STEPS study will be the first of its kind in Australia, tracking the career paths of secondary students after 12 years of graduating from high school. I have been delighted by the interest from participants, and look forward to sharing the findings with you all.

My team and I have been working hard to recontact all the previous participants in the study from back during your high school years, however, there are still some whom we have not been able to find. If you are still in contact with others from your Year at Killara, Carlingford or Killarney Heights High Schools, or, have a way of reaching them, would you be willing to forward this newsletter, or ask them to get in touch so that I can also invite them to continue in the research?

We value and respect the privacy of all participants; I am not asking for you to send the contact details of any individual directly. Any help you can provide in helping reach “lost” participants will be greatly appreciated.

The success of the STEPS study depends on maintaining contact with participants over the long term, if they would be willing to call on (+61 3) 9905 3818 or email their name and contact details to [STEPS@monash.edu](mailto:STEPS@monash.edu)

## 12 Years On: Where Are You Now?

Much research has focused on young people's future intentions, but, we lack reliable information about later actual outcomes.

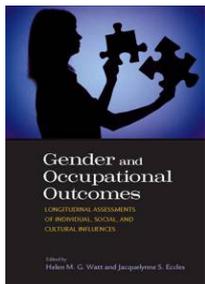
I would like to conduct a follow-up study involving you, and the other 1,322 participants from the STEPS study 12 years ago, to ask about what you are doing now, and whether it is what you had thought, 12 years ago. You would also receive a summary newsletter of those findings, which should be very interesting based on such a large number of people over such a long timeframe!

Are you willing to receive the research invitation? Agreeing to receive it does not mean that you necessarily will agree to participate in the future survey.

So that I can correctly send you the future research invitation, I would be grateful if you could email your updated contact details to [STEPS@monash.edu](mailto:STEPS@monash.edu)

You may also be interested to check out STEPS on Facebook - you are welcome to add STEPS to your profile if you would like! <http://www.facebook.com/steps.study>

Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon. Warm regards, Helen Watt.



Watt, H. M. G. & Eccles, J. S. (Eds.). (2008). *Gender and occupational outcomes: Longitudinal assessments of individual, social and cultural influences*. Washington, D.C.: APA

Despite concentrated research and important legislative milestones on gender equality over the past quarter century, gender-related disparities in science, technology, and math careers persist into the 21st century. This persistence sustains a troubling state of gender inequity in which women are not sharing in the salary and status advantages attached to scientific and technical careers. In this landmark volume, editors Helen M. G. Watt and Jacquelyne S. Eccles, both well known for their research contributions in this area, have compiled a rich source of longitudinal analysis that places the problem in context. Experts from different countries in the fields of developmental and social psychology, human development, biology, education, and sociology draw from longitudinal data on the gender-related variables that influence occupational outcomes. Together, the studies bring a variety of perspectives, theoretical models, and cultural settings to bear on the book's central questions. Further, the contributors highlight policy implications, suggesting which circumstances best promote a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of gender differences in career choice and persistence. Detailed explanations of study design will serve as an invaluable resource for future researchers in this area.



Book launch (Professor Rhonda Craven far right; Assoc. Prof. Helen Watt on left), December 2008.