

CLASSROOM AND GENDER – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATOR

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Abstract

Gender as a term is widely used to describe the difference between the social role and personal identity of the female/male biological sexes. One's image, behavior, and speech are all factors that help form a representation and gender identity. Unfortunately, Gender at times is viewed in a biased way resulting in oversimplification and unproductive generalizations which could be misleading. Various research studies suggest that gender of the teacher affects the achievement of the students in particular subject and shapes the communication between teachers and students. In case of male teacher the achievement of the girl students is affected and vice a versa. The career choices girls and boys make as well as their attitude also depends on the gender they represent. Therefore as educators, we have to remember that whichever gender we may represent we must take into consideration the needs of other gender and try to facilitate the achievement of both the genders. While teaching in the class we must be gender-sensitive and behave accordingly so that students from both the gender can confide in us. This will be imperative to sustainable development of society which is gender neutral.

Key words: *gender, gender and achievement, gender and attitude, sustainable development.*

WHAT IS GENDER?

Gender as a term is widely used to describe the difference between the social role and personal identity of the female/male biological sexes. One's image, behavior, and speech are all factors that help form a representation and gender identity. Unfortunately, Gender at times is viewed in a biased way resulting in oversimplification and unproductive generalizations which could be misleading.

TEACHER GENDER MATTERS

A study titled 'Teacher's gender affects learning' by Thomas Dee, suggests that boys learn more from men and girls learn more from women. The female teacher raised the achievement of girls in particular subjects and male teacher raised the achievement of boys in certain subjects. When a man led the class, boys did better and girls did worse. Switching up teachers actually could narrow achievement gaps between boys and girls, but one gender would gain at the expense of the other.

One of the researches suggests that the gender of the teacher shapes the communication between the teacher and the students, students are more comfortable while communicating with the teacher who represents the same gender, and students tend to avoid communication with the teacher of a different gender. Another research suggests that the teacher acts as a gender-specific role model, regardless of his/ her talk and behavior. The students are more involved in the teacher of the same gender.

GENDER AND ACHIEVEMENT

The performance of both the genders i.e. masculine and feminine depends on the role played by the schools and classrooms. At the initial stage, both the genders perform similarly on many tests but as they mature there is a gender gap in the achievement and the dynamics are different and there is one important factor contributing to this is gender.

The findings of the study on 'Teachers and the gender gap in student achievements' by Thomas Dee suggests:

- Gender interactions between teachers and students have significant effects on important educational outcomes. Just 'one year with male English teacher would eliminate nearly a third of the gender gap in reading performance among thirteen year olds and would do so by improving the performance of boys and

simultaneously harming that of the girls. Similarly, a year with a female teacher would close the gender gap in science achievement among 13 year olds by half and eliminate entirely the smaller achievement gap in mathematics.’

- A large fraction of boys’ dramatic underperformance in reading reflects the classroom dynamics associated with the fact that their reading teachers are overwhelmingly female.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey, 91% of the nation’s sixth grade reading teacher and 83% of eighth grade reading teachers are female. This results in enhancing girls’ achievements on the one hand and depressing boys on the other hand.

GENDER AND ATTITUDE

Gender plays a vital role in career choice and attitude of the students. The introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) into the education has resulted into new social stereotypes and gender inequalities since the invention of computers, ICT connected activities are viewed as a ‘male domain’ or ‘something for boys’. According to numerous research reviews and meta-analyses, boys were more fascinated by ICT as compared to girls, were heavier users of computers, had more positive attitudes regarding computers and therefore outperformed girls in ICT literacy. Technologies ought to be equally accessible to both, male and female students. However, as girls enter adolescence; a large number of them tend to lose interest in science, math and computer science.

Gender bias discourages or perhaps deters boys to embrace or cultivate their roles as nurturers, caregivers and accepts the fact that there may be a male teacher in ECE. Given the powerful cultural forces that have traditionally dominated the early care and education domain, male integration might not be wide appreciated and threaten some women’s identity and sense of control over this “gendered” domain of early education wherever the work itself is imbued with gendered meanings and defined in a gendered term.

Though the clear importance is given to the gender as a social identity that influences and individual’s educational experiences and realizing the fact that all students are “gendered” and thus affected, attention to gender issues in education, appears to have waned in focus in favor of other educational issues. “Because with boys failure is attributed to external factors and success is attributed to ability, they keep their confidence, even with failure. With girls, it’s just the opposite. Because their success is attributed to good luck or hard work and failure to lack of ability, with every failure, girls’ confidence is eroded. All this works in subtle ways to stop girls from wanting to be astronauts and brain surgeons. Girls can’t say why they ditch their dreams, they just “mysteriously” lose interest.” Mary Pipher.

GENDER BIAS AND GIFTED STUDENTS

Gifted males are sensitive, intelligent, detail-oriented and creative. Unfortunately, these traits are not seen as “manly” among mainstream society. The abilities of extremely capable girls have seldom received serious recognition, support or guidance. Although there is increasing interest in attracting girls to positions of social, political, educational and scientific leadership, several obstacles inhibit girls from realizing their potential in these areas. Gifted and talented females face conflicts between their own abilities and the social structure of their world. They confront both external barriers (lack of support from families, stereotypes and acculturation) and internal barriers (self-doubt, self-criticism, lowered expectations and the attribution of success to effort rather than ability. Gifted boys and girls have to cope with their giftedness as well as rigorously follow prescribed gender roles if they want to avoid the rejection of their communities. Gifted girls as well as gifted boys experience conflicts between gender identity and achievement motivation. This can prevent gifted young people from attaining the education they need, from following through career goals, and from forming satisfying and healthy relationships.

An understanding of gender and giftedness will facilitate counselors to guide youngsters through the important “milestones and danger zones” where the fulfillment of talent is threatened by gender socialization.

TEACHER’S ROLE

The political climate and continually shifting education foci and demands seem to be blamed for this oversight and the general lack of knowledge. We have to think about including meaningful attention to gender issues in education in both pre-service and in-service teacher preparation.

Teacher educators’ viewpoints and understanding of gender relations are inevitably connected to socially constructed webs of emotions and intellectual rationales. Therefore, efforts are to be made through curriculum modifications, training, and numerous means and measures where it is appropriate and acceptable to infuse gender- sensitivity among students from all teacher education programs.

Teachers vary in their perceptions about gender variations. Some believe these variations are rooted in strictly biological factors; others attribute gender variations in the processes of socialization, and a lot of people believe they result from a blend of both the factors. Opinions held on this crucial issue typically determine the extent to which teachers believe they will and may plan to impact gender roles in their classrooms.

Grossman and Grossman (1994) suggested the role of the educators in the development of their students’ gender roles. Educators need to - prepare the genders to meet the completely different roles, prepare students for gender-neutral roles, decide if they require to prepare students for various gender roles or not, facilitate students decide for themselves whether or not they wish to adapt to any particular gender roles or desire to be androgynous.

There are differences in opinions with regard to these various standpoints. The viewpoint is often criticized for its suggestion that students ought to be socialized to meet traditional gender roles, as this suggests a limitation to individual freedom to make decisions. However, proponents of that viewpoint believe that individual decisions are typically ruled by innate differences between the genders. Persons promoting androgynous behavior, on the other hand, believe that educators and schools ought to work towards creating society less sexist by discouraging gender-stereotypical behaviour among students.

The other positions discuss the extent to which the academicians ought to play a role in shaping students’ choices concerning the gender roles the students should adopt. Few people believe teachers who are finding it difficult to deal with gender issues have the right to not address this issue in their classroom. Some say teachers need to address gender issues as students who are never encouraged to question assumptions behind gender portrayals might settle for traditional gender roles as *fait accompli* (Mitchell, 1996). Some educators believe gender role socialization is primarily a function of the home and schools must maintain a neutral stance. As per these people, schools need to treat all children equally and empower them to make their own choices regarding gender roles. Others believe schools need to encourage each gender to adopt forms of behavior that replicate the values of the local school and community.

In general, educators find that they need to maintain a balance between playing an active role in student discussions on gender issues by introducing alternative viewpoints to ingrained ways of thinking about gender and not becoming oppressive themselves through their active involvement in students’ discourse (Evan, 1996). Teachers also need to realize that there are often more differences within each gender group than between them.

CONCLUSION

As educators, we have to remember that whichever gender we may represent we must take into consideration the needs of other gender and try to facilitate the achievement of both the genders. While teaching in the class we must be gender-sensitive and behave accordingly so that students from both the gender can confide in us. In absence of integration of beliefs and actions, it is difficult to consistently implement gender-sensitive strategies in the classroom. It is clear that educators will need to frequently examine their position in shaping gender

perceptions among learners. Teachers need to reflect upon the strategies they have been using to address gender issues in their classrooms and to explore the validity of alternative views. All these initiatives will result in sustainable development of the society.

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