



Our Hidden Gender Biases in the Language Class and How they Affect Our Students: (from Pre-School Onwards)

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PRESCHOOL		
Biases in...	Ask yourself...	How this affects your students...
Clothes 1	<p>How often do you pull up and/or adjust girls' dresses, tights, underwear (without asking her permission)?</p> <p>How often do you adjust boys' clothes?</p>	<p>Girls receive the message that others can control them, and that others can touch their bodies without their permission.</p> <p>Boys see this happening and realise that they have more control over their bodies and personal space.</p>
Clothes 2	<p>How often do you praise girls on the clothes they are wearing, their hair, the adornments they have on, etc.? And the boys?</p> <p>How often do you praise boys for their physicality (sports, growth spurt, etc.)? And the girls?</p>	<p>Girls learn that above all, their appearance is how they will be judged.</p> <p>Boys learn that above all, their athletic abilities are how they will be judged.</p>
Voice	<p>How often do you ask girls to speak more quietly? And the boys?</p> <p>How often do you answer boys even when they interrupt you or another student, don't raise their hand, or ask questions that are off topic?</p>	<p>Girls are taught that speaking loudly (having a voice, being assertive) is inappropriate.</p> <p>Boys learn that they get attention when they are assertive. They also learn that they have more rights to be heard than girls.</p> <p>(Studies show that girls are reprimanded three times more often than boys for raising their voices. Using one's voice is also very physical and when girls are asked to speak more softly, they also gesture less, again, taking up less physical space. This can translate later to girls not speaking up when they are in danger or need help.)</p>
Norms and Consequences	<p>How often do you forgive boys for not following the norms in your classroom? (speaking without raising their hands, laying down instead of sitting during circle time, going beyond established physical limits of play or work areas, etc.) And the girls?</p> <p>And the girls?</p>	<p>Boys receive the message that they can make their own rules.</p> <p>Girls receive the message that boys have more rights than they do.</p>
Physicality	<p>How often do you ask girls to close their legs or push their legs together when they are on the floor or in the playground?</p> <p>And the boys?</p>	<p>Girls learn that they need to restrict the space they occupy, that there is something wrong with their bodies because they need to close up parts of their bodies, whereas boys are not corrected when they are in the same posture.</p>
Discipline	<p>How often do you control boys by touching them in some way and in anger?</p> <p>How often do you use nothing more than meaningful looks to control girls' movements?</p>	<p>Boys learn that discipline is associated with struggle and anger and will more likely be aggressive in the future. They are not taught to reflect on their behaviour.</p> <p>Girls learn to read emotional clues from the teacher at a very young age and react accordingly.</p>
Mixed gender play/study	<p>How often do you encourage boys and girls to work and play together?</p>	<p>When teachers insist on dividing up the class into boys and girls (lining up, playing games, cleaning up, etc.), students lose the natural tendency to work together in mixed genders, thus losing important socialization opportunities.</p>
Praise	<p>How often do you praise boys for their effort? And the girls?</p>	<p>Studies show that even Pre-school teachers regularly praise boys for their efforts in Maths and Sciences, but dismiss girls' efforts almost completely, believing that girls are not capable of doing well in these subjects.</p>

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Perserverance	How often do you encourage the boys to try again? How often do you let the girls give up?	Studies show that teachers encourage boys to find different ways to arrive at an answer, while over-helping girls, thereby giving the girls the message that they're not capable of the task without help. The boys, on the other hand, learn that determination is the key to achieving goals.
Determination	How often do you encourage boys to keep trying to learn new math functions? And the girls?	Boys receive the message that they have a promising future in mathematics while girls get the message that math is beyond their skills.
Gender Pronouns	How often do you use 'he' when you are talking about generalities? How often have you dared to make 'she' a general?	When asked about this, both male and female teachers often say that 'girls don't care' and that 'it's part of the language but means nothing.' In fact, girls become <i>used to</i> the omnipresent 'he', but they internalize it. It's one more way of society affirming that boys are more important, and girls might as well be invisible.
Lining up students	How often to do you divide up students between boys and girls?	This points out gender as a relevant category. Is it? Further, at this age, some of your students may be experiencing gender fluidity issues* and by forcing them onto a gender category that they are ambivalent about they will experience unnecessary confusion.
Norms and Consequences 1	How diligently do you maintain the norms in your classroom? Do you let boys call out without raising their hands? Do you let the girls do the same or do you insist they follow the rules?	Since pre-school, boys are often allowed to call out without raising their hands, and so they naturally ignore these rules in Primary as well. They shout over girls, interrupt them, and teachers often do intercede. This reinforces the message to the boys that they are entitled, can be dominant, and girls get the message that they can be dominated, and rules are only for them.
Norms and Consequences 2	How often are you ruled by the boys' behaviour?	Studies show that teachers give more than half their attention to the boys who choose inappropriate behaviour in class. They seat these boys close to them or stand close to them, give them more help in their work than to the others, all to try and control their behaviour. In doing so, however, they ignore the students (boys and girls alike) who choose to adhere to the norms and consequences of the class.
Male/Female role models	In your lessons, how often do you make sure there is a balanced gender representation of: authors mathematicians scientists inventors composers	Students who were asked to spend 5 minutes writing the names of as many famous male and female people as they could (who were not athletes or entertainers) on an average included 12 men and 5 women. Some of these women included Aunt Jemima, Princess Di, Fergie. When asked why it was easier to name famous men, the boys said, 'How can women be famous when they stay home and take care of the house while men go out and discover things and work?'
STEM subjects	How much do you encourage girls to persevere when they are having difficulties in computer, science and math? And the boys?	Is this the lesson you want your male and female students to take away from your classes? By Upper Primary, girls have already internalised the messages given by their teachers that they don't have the wherewithal to succeed in STEM subjects. Teachers devoted to deconstructing these misleading messages have found that they can counteract them by giving girls lessons to study outside of class first, so that during class time they can follow the flow of the lesson. They also encourage girls to join computer and other STEM clubs.

SECONDARY

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Math problem-solving	<p>How often do you encourage the boys to be creative in how they solve problems rather than always using the traditional algorithms?</p> <p>How often do you insist the girls follow computational methods and rules?</p>	<p>Studies show that teachers encourage boys to use creative means, giving them the message that they are innately capable of mathematical computation.</p> <p>They insist girls stick to the computational methods used in the books, inferring that they are not innately capable of mathematical thinking. They are also found to overhelp girls in maths and sciences, insinuating that they are not capable on their own to finish the tasks.</p>
Counselors/educators giving biased advice for advanced studies 1	<p>How often do you encourage a girl who is meticulous and detail-oriented to study social science instead of forensic science (the more logical choice)?</p> <p>How often do you encourage a boy who is a good problem solver to consider engineering instead of nursing (the more logical choice)?</p>	<p>Along with the obvious biases, forensic science and engineering are higher paid and are more typically held by males.</p> <p>Ask yourself: Am I giving this advice because of the person in front of me, or because of larger social patterns related to gender?</p>
Counselors/educators giving biased advice for advanced studies 2	<p>How often do you recommend students who excel in writing and the arts to study careers that are not connected to STEM subjects?</p>	<p>Scientists and engineers also need to be good writers, communicators and collaborators. STEM careers may not be limited to those with strictly a strong interest in science and math.</p> <p>Ask yourself: Just because this student has strong Humanities skills, couldn't she/he also excel in a STEM subject?</p>
Gender Pronouns	<p>How often do you use 'he' when you are talking about generalities?</p> <p>How often have you dared to make 'she' a general?</p>	<p>When asked about this, both male and female teachers often say that 'girls don't care' and that 'it's part of the language but means nothing.'</p> <p>Girls become <i>used to</i> the omnipresent 'he', but they internalize it. It's one more way of society affirming that boys are more important, and girls might as well be, invisible.</p> <p>It may not comfortable at first, but it becomes more natural if you make an effort to balance both genders in examples, prepared lessons, worksheets, tests, etc.</p>
Norms and Consequences	<p>How often do boys raise their hands to answer a question? And the girls?</p> <p>How often do you get distracted by an irrelevant, silly, off-topic answer by the boys?</p> <p>What if the girls do the same?</p>	<p>Studies show that in Secondary classes, boys continue what they have learned since Pre-school: to ignore classroom norms and consequences. They not only interrupt the teacher, but their classmates (overall whenever a girl tries to answer a question), are loud, expressive themselves with their bodies (pounding on desks, throwing things, miming physical threats, etc.), all to gain attention.</p> <p>By this time, girls have learned that teachers will not wait patiently while they attempt to verbalise their thinking, that their male peers will interrupt them without disciplinary measures, and that they are most likely going to be ridiculed no matter what they say. They become quiet, don't volunteer information and don't even attempt to answer even when they are sure about the information.</p> <p>If you reflect honestly on your lessons as if you were a guest to your own class, could this be true about your students?</p>
Male/Female role models	<p>In your lessons, how often do you make sure there is a balanced gender representation of:</p>	<p>Secondary teachers are often defensive about their choices or feel that they are not paid to make an extra effort to introduce more gender equality in their material. They often refuse to admit that there is any sexism in their curriculum.</p>

	<p>authors mathematicians scientists inventors composers</p>	<p>Girls are given the message in yet one more way that they are invisible and males inside and outside the classroom are more important.</p>
<p>Appearance vs Quality</p>	<p>How often do you give grades based on the appearance of the work and not its quality?</p> <p>How often do you grade based on labels you've placed on students regarding their physical appearance, their hygiene (or lack thereof), their choices of clothes, etc.?</p>	<p>Studies of Secondary teachers show that they are very often influenced by the neatness of a task, its design, whether it is sloppy or neat, etc., instead of the insights and content of that work.</p> <p>Teachers often publicise and publically present work presented by the girls, who have taken pains to make the finished product more attractive in a variety of ways. The content is not necessarily critiqued. This reinforces the importance of appearance for girls, and not their intellectual capacities.</p> <p>Teachers are human, but we need to reflect on our impulses and whether they reflect our students' knowledge or how they present themselves or their finished tasks.</p>
<p>Sexist comments</p>	<p>How often do the boys in your class say degrading, sexist, aggressive comments to their female classmates without having these comments checked or asked to make amends for any hurt caused?</p>	<p>Teachers often brush off these comments as insignificant because they are given in the heat of an intense conversation, or the teacher claims that the boy 'meant nothing by them'.</p> <p>These comments become part of the general community of sexism promoted – or at the very least not challenged – in the classroom. It is one of the reasons girls become more silent as they advance in their Secondary studies. They learn that they cannot expect to be protected by the adults in their lives.</p>