



*Let's learn  
together*



# **GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

**SELF-STUDY COURSE IN 16 MODULES**

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
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# Fair Play At Schools

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- Eesti Naisteühenduste Ümarlaua Sihtasutus (Estonia)
- Gender Information Centre NORA (Czech Republic)
- KUN Centre for Equality and Diversity (Norway)

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# How to use the course

The course is divided into 16 modules and is intended for self-study. Learning can take place in the form of individual or group learning. In the former case, we recommend to conduct reflection tasks together with colleagues, friends or other people interested in gender-sensitive education. The course starts with theory and continues with practical modules. It is highly recommended to go through the modules in the given order.

## Table of Contents

<b>Module 1</b> What is gender equality and what are gender equality goals in education?	<b>1</b>
<b>Module 2</b> How are gender equality issues reflected in national education policy documents relating to primary schools in Estonia, Norway and the Czech Republic?	<b>7</b>
<b>Module 3</b> What is sex? What is gender? Why is it important to make the distinction?	<b>17</b>
<b>Module 4</b> What is gender socialisation?	<b>23</b>
<b>Module 5</b> What are gender stereotypes and their short-term and long-term effects on pupils?	<b>31</b>
<b>Module 6</b> What is hidden curriculum and what role does it play in gender socialisation?	<b>39</b>
<b>Module 7</b> What is meant by gender-sensitive and gender-responsive pedagogy?	<b>48</b>
<b>Module 8</b> Takeaways from Modules 1-7	<b>55</b>

<b>Module 9</b> What can the teacher do to challenge gender stereotypes in textbooks and learning / teaching materials used in the classroom?	<b>59</b>
<b>Module 10</b> What can the teacher do to challenge gender stereotypes in primary classroom and daily teaching practices?	<b>66</b>
<b>Module 11</b> What can the teacher do to challenge gender stereotypes in language use?	<b>75</b>
<b>Module 12</b> How to talk about gender equality with primary school pupils?	<b>82</b>
<b>Module 13</b> How to encourage pupils to make choices free from gender stereotypes and engage in STEM subjects?	<b>91</b>
<b>Module 14</b> How are gender stereotypes related to gender-based school violence and bullying and how can schools tackle the problem?	<b>99</b>
<b>Module 15</b> How to empower the teacher to engage in gender-sensitive teaching?	<b>108</b>
<b>Module 16</b> Takeaways from the course	<b>116</b>

# Module 1

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## WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY AND WHAT ARE GENDER EQUALITY GOALS IN EDUCATION?



### Learning objectives

- to support teachers in developing their understanding of gender equality and gender equality goals in education
- to develop teachers' understanding of key issues at school related to the promotion of gender equality.

Are you interested in reflecting on your own classroom and creating a more gender equal learning environment and outcomes for all your students, girls and boys? If so, this material is for you.

To understand what gender equality goals in education are, let's first take a look at some of the key terms, which are used in this module and explained in depth with practical examples in other modules of the training material.

# WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY?

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**Gender equality (equality between women and men)**<sup>1,2</sup> refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys. A gender equal society is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life, in terms of

- power and influence
- financial independence
- work and working conditions
- training and development
- responsibility for the home and children
- freedom from gender-based violence
- health.

## Gender

Gender is a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of women and men, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender is the most basic categorization in society describing the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine.

## Gender roles

Gender roles are roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and boys and for women and girls according to gender norms. Gender roles and norms are socially created through socialisation processes, interactions, and use of language. Gender-based roles and other attributes change over time and vary with different cultural contexts.

## Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are beliefs about women and men that are commonly seen as true and unchangeable.

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (2017) Gender Equality. Glossary of Terms and Concepts  
<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Gender%20glossary%20of%20terms%20and%20concepts%20.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UN Women Training Centre. Gender Equality Glossary  
<https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>

Equality does not mean that girls and boys, women and men will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and access to opportunities and life chances will not depend on whether they are born male or female – on their sex/gender.

At the individual level, gender equality means that girls and boys, women and men feel that they are treated fairly, with equal demands, norms and expectations, free from discrimination and restrictive stereotypical role expectations in shaping their self-image and gender identity.

## **WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION?**

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Gender equality in education is defined in terms of four dimensions: equality of access, equality in the learning process, equality of educational outcomes and equality of external results. Gender equality in education means bringing gender equality to, within, and through education<sup>3</sup>. This approach ensures that both female and male learners not only gain access to and complete education cycles, but are empowered equally in and through education. It implies that girls and boys are ensured and actually offered the same chances and treatment in access, process and outcome of education. For schools, equality is also a matter of values and human rights.

The promotion of rights through education defines ways in which schooling shapes rights and gender equality in aspects of life outside the sphere of education, in the labour market, family life, health, etc. Outcomes from schooling should enable students to cross traditional gender lines in subject choices and post-school pathways and shape their futures in private, economic and civic life.

## **WHAT ARE GENDER EQUALITY GOALS IN EDUCATION?**

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Achieving gender equality in education requires going beyond simply looking at equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in school to also consider the experience that girls and boys have at school. Girls and boys must be given the same opportunities for education and professional development. This means ensuring an education system which allows all individuals, irrespective of gender, to develop their capabilities and freedoms.

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<sup>3</sup>Subrahmanian, R. (2005) Gender equality in education: Definitions and measurements. *International Journal of Educational Development* 25 (2005), pp 395–407.

Gender differences in education are caused by the gender socialisation processes at school. If school creates more possibilities for both girls and boys instead of barriers based on traditional gender norms, individuals and society will experience less gender specific problems such as boys' underachievement and school drop-out, gender-based educational and career choices, gender segregated labour markets, gender pay gap, etc.

While some aspects of gender equality in education must be addressed on a broader state educational policy level, there are many things that can be done at the individual school and classroom level to create a more gender equal environment for students.

**The most common goal of gender equality policies in primary education is to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes.**

**One of the greatest demands on primary schools is to help broaden the aspirations and interests of children about jobs and careers.**

Most of the differences between girls and boys are not biologically or genetically determined but rather socially constructed. Gender differences by themselves are not a problem, but they become problematic for teaching when they involve gender polarisation and gender stereotyping. More ambitious and meaningful aims would be that, once in school, girls and boys experience quality learning and teaching, and that equality in schooling is linked with positive changes towards equality in broader society.

Teachers generally believe that they treat girls and boys fairly and equally at school. The studies, however, show that this is not always the case and teachers treat students differently based on the students' gender. They contribute to the social construction of gender by their expectations of and interactions with girls and boys, classroom practices, choice of educational materials, etc. which help reinforce or break gender stereotypes.

To teach in a way that allows girls and boys to be fully engaged and empowered in the classroom, teachers should provide a learning environment that helps eliminate gender bias and challenge stereotypes about gendered occupations, personality traits, behaviours and intellectual ability.

Emphasising treating each student as an individual, teachers may sometimes lose sight of prevailing gender norms, group behaviour and peer pressure that impact strongly on the behaviour of students. This is why it is very important that teachers become aware of and overcome gender-biased beliefs, attitudes and stereotypes deeply rooted in our societies. This requires understanding and knowledge of gender, self-reflection as well as using and designing educational materials and learning environments which are free from gender stereotypes. To do this alone would be difficult, so try to get support from colleagues and the school management and work together towards achieving gender equality in education.



The next modules provide you with knowledge, examples and tips on how to do this in your daily teaching practices at school.

# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- **Below is a description of the background situation to Equinet report about gender equality in education 2018.<sup>4</sup> Do you observe a similar situation in your country?**

Gender equality has not been reached and traditional gender roles and stereotypes can still be found in textbooks and teaching material. School curricula do not always reflect enough on gender equality. When choosing future careers, girls and boys still follow different paths based on the stereotypical perception of their gender roles. The need to address gender equality in schools is demonstrated by problems such as sexual harassment and bullying in the school setting, stereotypes in school materials, missing focus on gender equality in school curricula, a general lack of gender equality plans and goals, as well as gender segregation in later careers.

- **These are some of the questions concerning the gender equality situation at your school. Reflect on your answers and think if you have thought of these aspects of school life before.**

- What is the proportion of male and female teachers at your school?
- Who are mostly working as teachers at primary school – women or men?
- Are there any subjects that are mostly taught by women?
- Are there any subjects that are mostly taught by men? Why so?
- Is the same standard of behaviour expected from girls and boys? For example, do you expect girls to be quieter and better behaved? Do you expect boys to be more aggressive?
- Do girls and boys sit together or separately in the classroom?

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<sup>4</sup>Equinet (2018) Equality in the classroom: [https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/equality\\_in\\_the\\_classroom\\_-\\_web-1.pdf](https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/equality_in_the_classroom_-_web-1.pdf)

# Learning points



Gender equality in education is an area of specific knowledge (expertise) and cannot be reduced merely to attitudes.



Since gender roles, responsibilities and identities are socially learned, they can also be changed through education.



Breaking down gender stereotypes from a young age helps to stop negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as it can support children to grow into adults who are not limited by expectations based on their gender.

## Videos

- Education and gender equality: main challenges  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5t\\_dBOZ\\_rE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5t_dBOZ_rE)
- Gender stereotypes and education  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrZ21nD9I-0&t>

# Module 2

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## HOW ARE GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES REFLECTED IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY DOCUMENTS

### RELATING TO LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ESTONIA, NORWAY AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

#### Learning objectives



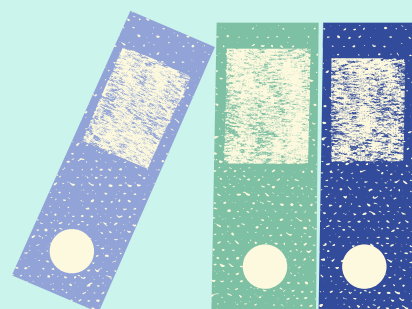
- to learn about the national education systems in the countries participating in the project and define 'lower primary education' in the education systems in Estonia, Norway and the Czech Republic



- to learn about the importance given to gender equality issues as reflected in national laws, education policies and curricula in the three countries



- to get a glimpse into the opportunities and realities of addressing gender equality issues at lower primary schools in Estonia, Norway and the Czech Republic.



# ESTONIA

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The influence of education in the process of creating a more equal society is undisputed. In the Nordic countries, which are considered forerunners in gender equality, the promotion of gender equality was defined as a goal of education in the late 1970s.<sup>5</sup> In Estonia, however, the promotion of equality in the educational setting was first stipulated in 2004 in the Gender Equality Act<sup>6</sup> Article 10 which stipulates that educational institutions shall ensure equal treatment of men and women in vocational guidance, acquisition of education, professional and vocational development and re-training. It further said that curricula, study materials and research shall facilitate abolishment of the unequal treatment of men and women and promote equality.

This commitment was further strengthened in the Government regulations of 2011 (amended in 2014) on the basic and secondary schools' curricula<sup>7</sup> where gender equality was mentioned as one of the core values of the curriculum alongside with other social values derived from the ethical principles specified in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the basic documents of the European Union such as liberty, democracy, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, solidarity, etc. The regulations also demand that school life be organised on the basis of principles of ethnic, racial and gender equality. These regulations, however, provide no guidance on how to promote the principle of gender equality in the daily teaching practices at school. So far, Estonia lacks any national education policy document that would explicitly say what gender equality objectives in education are or what the teacher can do to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes in their daily work.

The school system in Estonia is organised in three sequential levels: pre-primary education (ISCED 0, up to 7 years of age), basic education (ISCED 1 and 2, typical ages: 7 to 16); and upper secondary education (ISCED 3, Years 10-12/13, typical ages: 16 to 18/19). Basic education is organised according to two stages: primary education (ISCED 1, Years 1-6); and lower secondary education (ISCED 2, Years 7-9). School attendance is compulsory until acquiring basic education or attaining age 17. The Estonian education system is effective and ensures equality. In the 2018 PISA tests, Estonia's 15-year-olds ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in reading, 1<sup>st</sup> in science and 1<sup>st</sup> in mathematics in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Heikkinen, M. (2016) Promising Nordic practices in gender equality promotion in basic education and kindergartens, p. 11. <http://jultika.oulu.fi/files/isbn9789526211558.pdf>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/530102013038/consolide>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/524092014014/consolide>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.hm.ee/en/news/pisa-2018-estonia-ranks-first-europe>

Preschool, which is attended by 94% of 4-6 year-olds, provides not only childcare but also learning based on the national curriculum. Besides developing play, cognitive, learning, social and self-management skills Estonian kindergartens teach kids some reading, writing, numerical, etc. skills to prepare them for starting compulsory education.

Basic education which starts at the age of seven, has three stages: Stage I - grades 1-3, ages 7-9, Stage II - grades 4-6, ages 10-12, and Stage III - grades 7-9 which are followed by secondary school grades 10-12. In Estonia lower primary education would correspond to the first stage of the Estonian basic education, i.e. grades 1-3 when all subjects are taught by the class-teacher. The compulsory subjects taught in grades 1-3 are Estonian, a foreign language, mathematics, natural science; personal, social and health education; music, art, physical education, manual training, handicraft and home economics, technology studies plus elective subjects.

In Estonia, the standard for all stages of basic education is determined by the national curriculum for basic schools which establishes fundamental values of education, teaching and learning objectives, requirements for the learning environment, fundamentals of preparation of school curriculum as well as syllabi of subject areas.

Estonian schools and teachers have a high degree of autonomy in the delivery of the national curriculum. Based on the national curriculum, every school draws up its own curriculum taking into consideration the unique characteristics of the school and the region. In doing so, the school can involve staff members, students, parents and other stakeholders. Schools can adjust the instruction time, contents and the environment of study as long as the required learning outcomes are achieved. They are free to choose educational literature and learning materials such as textbooks, exercise books, workbooks and other teaching aids, including digital ones which are required for the completion of the curriculum. Thanks to government funding, all learning materials at basic schools are free of charge for pupils.

Estonian schools use a pupil-centred approach. Depending on the preparation of the pupils, either a subject-based approach or an option combining a topics-based and subject-based approach may be used at school. To work at basic school, teachers are required to complete master's degree studies.

Estonia is a tech-savvy country. Digital skills are a paramount part of the educational work in schools as well as in the training programmes for teachers. One hundred per cent of Estonian schools use the e-school solution,<sup>9</sup> an online platform which functions as an e-diary, e-learning environment, a communication channel between the school and the parents keeping them up with their child's progress on a daily basis. It is also a great tool for the authorities to get a good overview of what goes on in schools under their management.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ekool.eu/#/en/>

Since the early 2000s, several efforts have been made, including by NGOs, to put gender equality on the agenda of Estonian schools. This has happened largely thanks to projects financed by EU and Norway grants. One of these projects entitled GOAL: Integrating gender in teacher education and training implemented by the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable in 2014-2015 stands out as applying a systemic approach to addressing gender issues on all levels of education. The project also featured one of the very few surveys in Estonia into the attitudes of and experiences with gender equality among pre-, basic and vocational school teachers and students. Not surprisingly, the findings revealed the existence of gender biases. Both genders agreed that overall boys reap more benefits at school than girls and that teachers did not expect boys to perform as well as girls. Girls, on the other hand, were worried about their academic achievement and tried hard even if they performed well. These perfectionistic tendencies were not shared by boys.<sup>10</sup> These findings correspond to the results of similar studies conducted in many other countries.

Aimed at increasing gender awareness in schools the GOAL project produced an online resource Education and Gender<sup>11</sup> (available in Estonian and Russian) which provides guidance to teachers on how to promote gender equality as a core value and a basic principle of the national school curricula and how to integrate the gender perspective into their teaching.

The high degree of autonomy of Estonian teachers and schools in arranging studies would suggest that lower basic school teachers find it easy to integrate gender equality into the content of their teaching. However, this is often not the case because gender issues and short- and long-term implications of gender stereotypes on students' subject and career choices are not prioritised in general teacher education and training programs in Estonia. Coupled with lack of time and high workload, gender awareness and easy-to-use educational materials, gender equality work often falls into the category of can rather than *absolutely must* in Estonian schools.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://eeagrants.org/news/putting-gender-equality-on-the-agenda-in-estonian-schools>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.haridusjasugu.ee>

# NORWAY

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Universal schooling for children was introduced in Norway 250 years ago. From 1889, seven years of compulsory education were provided, in 1969 this was increased to nine years and in 1997 to 10 years. Children start school at the age of six. Primary and lower secondary education in Norway is founded on the idea of a unified school system that provides equal and adapted education for all on the basis of a single national curriculum.

Each year about 60,000 children start school in Norway. Generally, there is a tendency towards fewer and larger schools, but due to demographic factors, there is still a large number of small schools. As a result of the teacher-to-child ratio and increased funding, the number of children per teacher has fallen in recent years, especially in the lower year groups.

A large proportion of pupils are enrolled in out-of-school-hours care (SFO), especially in the first two years of school. High enrolment rates have resulted in increased attention around content and inclusion in out-of-school-hours care.

The Norwegian school system can be divided into three parts: elementary school (“Barneskole”, ages 6–13), lower secondary school (“Ungdomsskole”, ages 13–16), and upper secondary school (“Videregående skole”, ages 16–19). The Barneskole and Ungdomsskole levels are compulsory, and are commonly referred to as “Grunnskole” (literally translates to “base-school”). All under 25 are entitled to an upper secondary education. You either get a vocational diploma (“Yrkesfag”) or you get a diploma that qualifies you to enter university (“Studiespesialisering”). There has been an increase in the number of adults enrolling in primary and lower secondary education, almost all of them minority language speakers.

The collective objectives and principles for teaching in primary and lower secondary schools are laid down in the national curriculum. The curriculum for primary and lower secondary education includes:

- Core curriculum for primary and lower secondary, upper secondary and adult education
- Principles and guidelines for primary and lower secondary education
- Curricula for individual subjects

The subject curricula lay down a common learning content for all pupils, which increases in scope throughout the school and is greatest at the lower secondary stage. This common learning content is enlarged on and supplemented to adapt it to local conditions and to the needs of individual pupils.

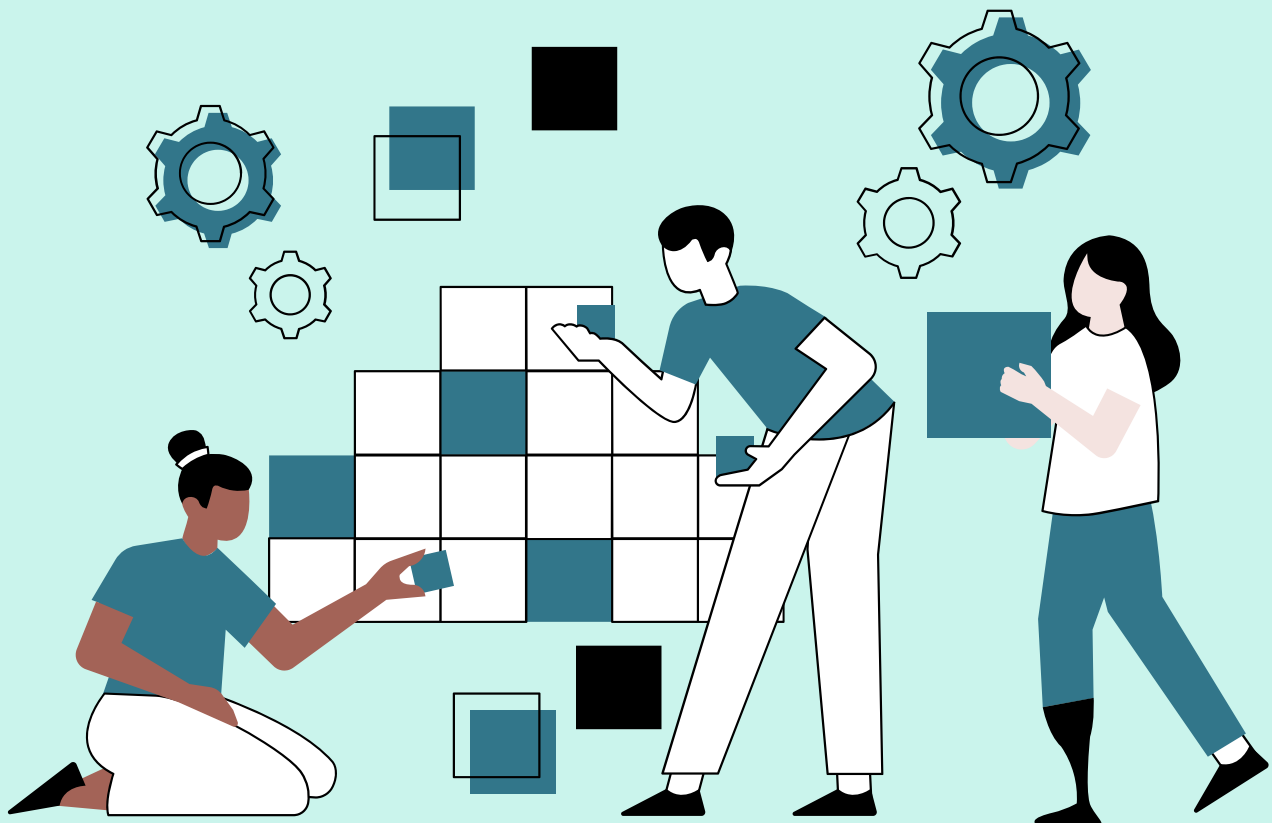
You can find more information on the webpages of the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training<sup>12</sup> (Udir).

## GENDER DIFFERENCES

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Pupils in compulsory education have seen their grades improve in recent years. Girls receive slightly better grades than boys after Year 10. Boys outperform girls in numeracy and English, and in autumn 2019 they performed as well as girls in the Year 5 national reading test for the first time. In the case of 15-year-olds, however, PISA 2018 shows that boys have poorer reading skills than girls.<sup>13</sup>

Norway places great importance on gender equality and anti-discrimination and in schools the legal basis can be found in the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act<sup>14</sup> as well as in the Education Act.<sup>15</sup> The latter Act proclaims that "Education and training must provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual's convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking." (Section 1-1).



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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.udir.no/in-english/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.udir.no/in-english/education-mirror-2019/compulsory-education--facts-and-learning-outcomes/#diversity-in-schools>

<sup>14</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2017-06-16-51>

<sup>15</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61>



# CZECH REPUBLIC

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In the Czech lands, the foundations of six-year compulsory school attendance were laid during the reign of Maria Theresa in 1774. But there weren't enough schools or teachers, so the law was not strictly observed. In fact, compulsory education was introduced in 1869 by the Imperial Education Law (also known as the "Hasner Act" according to the then Minister of Education Leopold Hasner). The compulsory school attendance was extended to eight years. That law was very modern for its time. It also regulated the content of teaching. Children were no longer taught only reading, writing and arithmetic. Subjects such as geography or history began to be taught. The Hasner Act resulted in the abolition of corporal punishment in 1870.

The currently effective Education Act was introduced in 2004. It regulates pre-school, basic, secondary, tertiary professional and other education at schools and school facilities and stipulates broad principles and goals of education. The Act introduces a new system of curricular documents - the two-level system consisting of the framework for education programmes at the national level, and school educational programmes at the school level. Under this law, school attendance is compulsory for nine school years, but no more than up to the end of the school year in which the pupil reaches the age of 17. Usually at the age of 6, children start their compulsory school education.

Basic education is divided into primary school (1st to 5th grade, for pupils from 6 to 11 years and corresponds to ISCED 1) and lower secondary school (6th to 9th grade, for pupils from 11 to 15 years and corresponds to ISCED 2).<sup>16</sup>

Objectives of basic education according to the Education Act:

"Basic education leads pupils to acquire the necessary learning strategies to motivate them to lifelong learning, to learn to think creatively and solve appropriate problems, to communicate and cooperate effectively, and to protect their physical and mental health, values and the environment, to be respectful and tolerant of other people, different cultural and spiritual values, to recognise their abilities and real possibilities and to apply them, together with the knowledge and skills they have acquired, in making decisions about their future life path and career."<sup>17</sup>

In 2020, 124,001 children were enrolled in the first grade of primary schools, 59,580 of them were girls and 64,421 were boys. Also, 1,676 children out of the total number were admitted to education at some of the alternative primary schools in the Czech Republic.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Czech Statistical Office. [https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/klasifikace\\_vzdelani\\_cz\\_isced\\_2011](https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/klasifikace_vzdelani_cz_isced_2011)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty/skolsky-zakon-ve-zneni-ucinnem-ode-dne-1-2-2022>

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/statistika-skolstvi/zapisy-do-1-rocniku-zakladnich-skol>

# GENDER EQUALITY AND EDUCATION

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The Framework Educational Programme introduces a concept of key competencies which have an interdisciplinary nature and all the activities taking place at school should aim to further their development. None of the key competencies (learning competencies, problem-solving competencies, communication competencies, social and personal competencies, civil competencies and working competencies) mention gender or the equality of men and women.<sup>19</sup>

The educational area Humans and Their World is the only educational area in the Framework Educational Programme Basic Education which is designed only for primary schools. Within one of its thematic areas pupils “gradually realize the importance and essence of tolerance, assistance, mutual respect and solidarity among people, including gender equality.”<sup>20</sup>

In 2017 the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports prepared a methodical material that describes framework requirements that should be fulfilled by study programmes which train students to be pedagogical professionals. However the development of gender competence for future teachers is not addressed there.<sup>21</sup>

So far, gender sensitive education has been promoted mainly by several Czech non-governmental organisations that strive to raise awareness of gender equality at schools and/or the importance of quality sex education.



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<sup>19</sup> <https:gendersensed.eu/outputs/>

<sup>20</sup> <https:www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/zakladni-vzdelavani/framework-education-programme-for-basic-education>

<sup>21</sup> <https:gendersensed.eu/outputs/>

# Learning points



Education systems in European countries, including Estonia, the Czech Republic and Norway differ making direct comparisons difficult.



Legal frameworks and national curricula vary in terms of importance given to gender equality issues at school.



Schools have varying degrees of autonomy in designing their curricula, learning environments and teaching in terms of incorporating gender across subjects and school cultures.



Autonomy does not necessarily mean teachers prioritise gender equality issues due to lack of gender awareness and high workload.



The training modules here are a handy resource for teachers to tackle different aspects of gender in classroom teaching and school environment.

# Further reading

- Gender in national education documents and teaching resources, and in teachers' pedagogical approaches and everyday teaching practices in Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary

<https://gendersensed.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Comparative-report.pdf>

- The ABC of gender equality in education: aptitude, behaviour, confidence. Annex 1 What some countries are doing to promote gender equality in education.

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-gender-eng.pdf>

- Promising Nordic practices in gender equality promotion in basic education and kindergartens

<http://jultika.oulu.fi/files/isbn9789526211558.pdf>

- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020. Equity in school education in Europe: Structures, policies and student performance. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

[https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/equity\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/equity_2020_0.pdf)

# Videos

- Education in Estonia – General overview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32Hw0Va9Jqk>

# Module 3

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## WHAT IS SEX, WHAT IS GENDER?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE DISTINCTION?

#### Learning objectives



- to understand the concept of sex
- to understand the concepts of gender, masculinity and femininity
- to see how distinguishing between the concepts of sex and gender can in principle contribute to designing teaching practices that promote gender equality.

#### What is sex?

The social category of sex, which divides most humans into two groups based on their reproductive functions is one of the basic organisational structures in human society.

Sex refers to the biological and physical differences between men and women. The main biological differences between them relate to the roles that women/females and men/males have in human reproduction - women give birth to babies, while men do not.

#### What is gender?

Sex and gender are not the same. Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society, is constantly changing and looks different in different environments, eras and in different parts of the world. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.

# SEX

- biological and physiological differences between women and men
- has two main categories – male and female
- does not change naturally over time
- does not vary between or within cultures

# GENDER

- social and cultural differences between women and men
- has two main categories: masculine and feminine
- defines what it means in society to be a man or a woman, gender roles and norms
- changes constantly according to time and context

Figure 1. Sex versus gender

Gender is a social construct, not a biological one. Distinctions based on biological sex can be measured statistically, whereas gender differentials entail more subtle distinctions on male and female roles.

Like any social construct, gender implies arbitrary values that can be easily manipulated, altered, or exchanged. For example, something as simple as the colours pink and blue, which today we associate with feminine and masculine attributes, respectively, were entirely applied in reverse until the early twentieth century. Traditionally, blue was associated with delicacy, kindness and temperance, characteristics that nowadays we consider within the female spectrum. At the same time, pink was perceived as a diluted version of red, which projected power, dominance, and proactivity attributes which we associate with masculinity.<sup>22</sup>

As a social construct gender is being created all the time, it is being done at home, preschool and school both knowingly and unknowingly. Consequently, by the time children enter early learning settings they have already developed gender-based expectations and behaviours and to some extent academic preferences and perceived abilities.

The challenge for the teacher comes if they confuse sex and gender and start viewing gender as innate. As we saw, gender is not fixed and should not prevent pupils, girls or boys from participating in any activity or making a life choice. In reality there are very few activities or choices that are not open to both boys and girls.

<sup>22</sup> Opinion: Gender Roles and Stereotypes in Early Education. <https://observatory.tec.mx/education/news/education-gender-role>

There are some languages which do not have a separate word for 'gender', among them Estonian. The term 'sugu' is used interchangeably in talking about biological and socially-derived roles for both men and women.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN 'SEX' AND 'GENDER'?

Distinguishing between sex and gender helps us understand that most of the things girls and boys are expected to do are learned behaviors. So, remember that we learn gender, we are not born knowing who wears pink or who wears blue.

Some people may believe that it is 'natural' for girls to be quiet and that it is 'natural' for boys to be aggressive. However, these are also learned behaviours. These learnt and accepted roles, expectations and behaviours are so entrenched in our cultures that most people, including teachers, cannot imagine they can be changed. However, it is important to bear in mind that everything that is learnt can also be unlearnt.

Teachers contribute to the creation of gender by way they treat girls and boys equally or unequally, by choosing and using curricula, study materials, interactions with pupils and management styles that either contribute to promoting traditional gender roles or challenging them.

You get lots of tips and ideas for challenging traditional gender roles in the classroom in Modules 9-12.

### EXERCISE

## DO THE STATEMENTS BELOW REFER TO SEX (BIOLOGICAL) OR GENDER (SOCIAL CONSTRUCT)?

1. Women give birth to babies, men don't.
2. Most of primary school teachers are women.
3. Women breastfeed babies.
4. In most countries, women earn significantly less than men.
5. Boys' voices break at puberty, girls' voices don't.
6. In most countries, women do more housework than men.

ANSWER: SEX 1,3,5

# EXERCISE

**Exercise.** Think of and write down the three most important achievements in your life that you are really proud of. Having done this, think of and write down the three most important traits of yours that helped you achieve these things? Are these feminine or masculine traits? Or a mix of both?

What could the messages drawn from this exercise for empowering girls and boys be?

# REFLECTION

**Reflection.** The distinctions made above have a critical role in understanding how sex, gender, gender roles and norms are related to educational contexts. To explore the topic further, here you find additional dimensions of gender.

A person's gender is the complex interrelationship between three dimensions: body, identity and expression. Please see below how they are interlinked.

- **Body:** our body, our experience of our own body, how society genders bodies, and how others interact with us based on our body.
- **Identity:** our deeply held, internal sense of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither; who we privately know ourselves to be.
- **Expression:** our public gender. How we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Gender expression is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

**Gender  
Gender roles and norms**

**Gender expression**

**Body / sex**

**Gender  
identity**



# Learning points



Sex and gender are different things.



Sexual characteristics are biologically determined and remain the same throughout time and across societies.



Gender refers to the roles assigned to men and women in a given society which change over time.



Knowing the distinction between the concepts of sex and gender helps design your teaching practices and contributes to broadening your pupils' career and life choices.

## Further reading

- Sex and gender. A number of definitions have been put forward by different organisations. They provide a useful starting point for discussion.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/sex-and-gender>

## Videos

- Sex and gender

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msqj1qEPjc0>

- What's the difference between Sex and Gender

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=727CdJ6C\\_Xw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=727CdJ6C_Xw)



# Module 4

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## WHAT IS GENDER SOCIALISATION?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE DISTINCTION?

#### Learning objectives



- to define the concept of gender socialisation
- to introduce the main agents of gender socialisation
- to understand the development of gender differences
- to make teachers aware of the gender socialisation contexts at school and in the classroom.

## WHAT IS GENDER SOCIALISATION?

In the previous module you learnt that having been born into one sex or another, individuals are then socialized according to gender expectations and roles. Gender socialisation is the process through which children learn about the social expectations, attitudes and behaviours associated with one's gender.<sup>23</sup>

Gender socialisation begins as soon as babies are born. The hospital staff members announce, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!". As soon as the newborn is cleaned up and weighed, it is wrapped in either a pink or a blue blanket. Adults, whether knowingly or not, handle infant girls more gently than infant boys, and comment upon the delicate features of girls but on the strong features of male infants. For example, as soon as 24 hours following the birth of a child, mothers and fathers describe female infants as finer featured, softer, smaller, and more inattentive as compared to male infants. This occurs despite the lack of significant differences between female and male infants in both birth

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<sup>23</sup>Gender. Early Socialisation. <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/syntheses/en/2492/gender-early-socialization-synthesis.pdf>

length and weight.<sup>24</sup>

By the age of three, children have formed their own gender identity. They have also begun to learn their culture's gender norms, including which toys, activities, behaviours, and attitudes are associated with each gender.<sup>25</sup> The most important factors contributing to socialisation into gender roles have been outlined below.

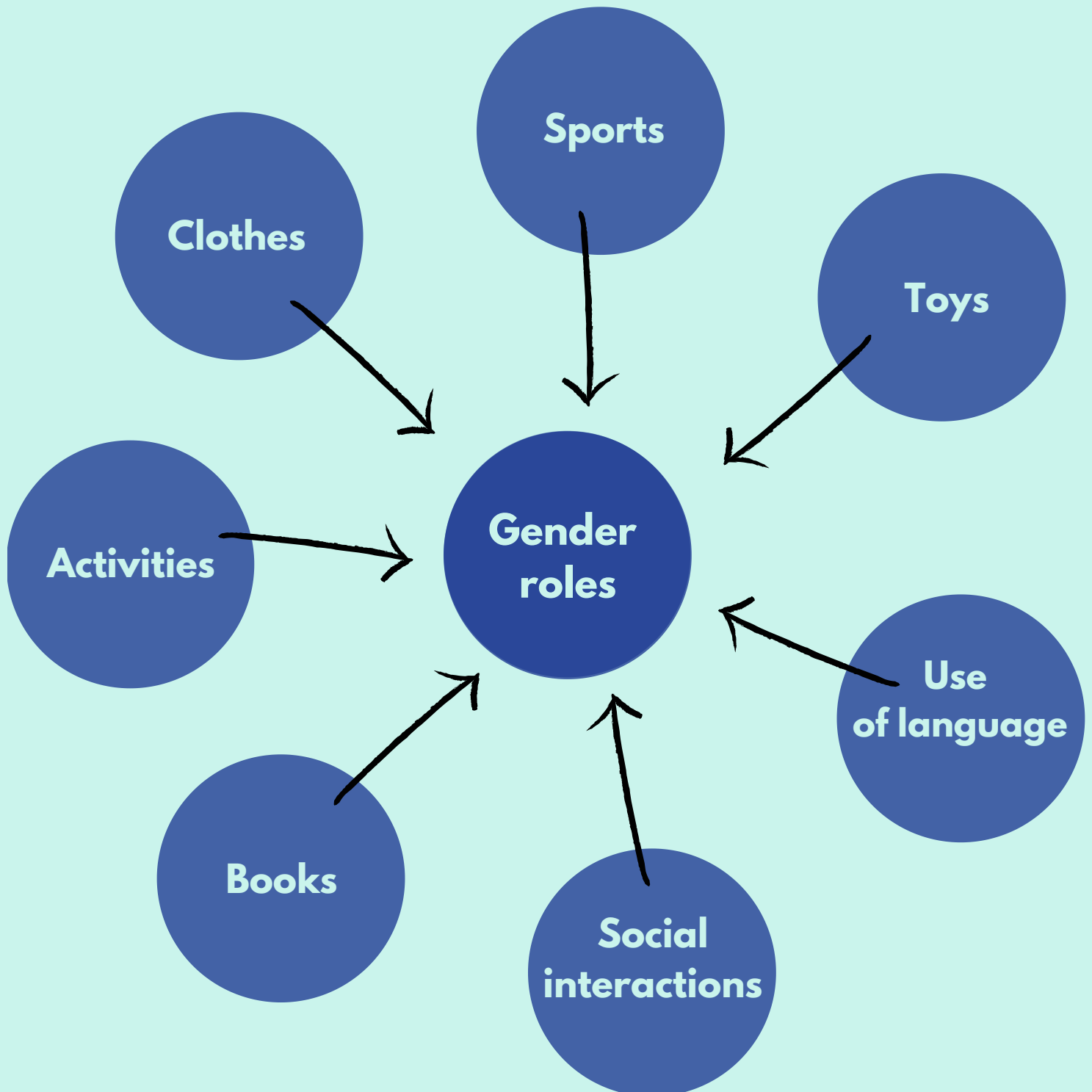


Figure 2. Factors contributing to socialisation into gender roles.

<sup>24</sup> Florence L.(2004) Gender Acquisition in Childhood Encyclopaedia of Applied Psychology, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/gender-socialization>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/gender-socialization-definition-examples-4582435>

Gender socialisation is the process by which we learn our culture's gender-related rules, norms, and expectations and as such it is largely socialisation of gender differences.

From early age on, boys are encouraged to be active and adventurous in their play, they are expected to behave more aggressively and take on leading roles whereas girls are expected to be and to look 'nice', be focused on appearance and take on caring and nurturing roles.

Understanding of gender and gender relations begins at home and at school.

## WHO ARE THE MAIN AGENTS OF GENDER SOCIALISATION?

An agent of gender socialisation is any person or group that plays a role in the childhood gender socialisation process. The four primary agents of gender socialisation for children are parents, teachers, peers, and the media.

Today, it is largely believed that most gender differences are attributed to differences in socialisation, rather than genetic and biological factors.<sup>26</sup>

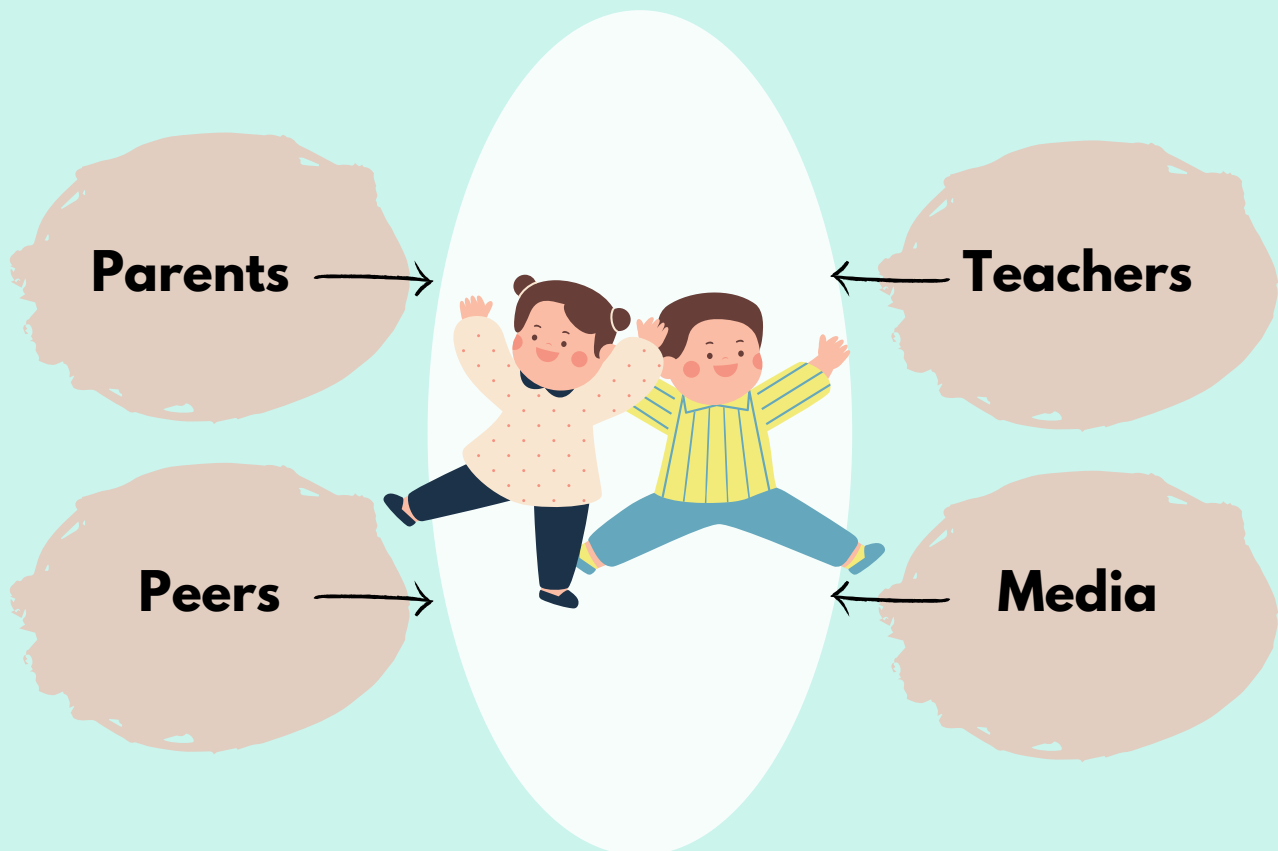


Figure 3. Agents of gender socialisation.

<sup>26</sup> Gender and socialisation. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/gender-and-socialization/>

Parents. Starting at birth, parents communicate different expectations to their children depending on their sex. By giving their daughter a doll or their son a truck they communicate the message that certain toys and activities correspond to a particular gender, even though they may have the best of intentions not to limit children according to assumptions about what makes a girl and what makes a boy. They do so because of their own gender socialisation.

Read more about gender socialisation in the preschool context in [GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A-SELF STUDY COURSE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS](#) (module Why do we talk about gender-sensitive education in kindergartens? and module A pink and blue world).

By the time children reach primary school age, they are imitating the roles of their gender and encourage or discourage certain gendered behaviours among their peers.

Schools are major contexts for gender socialisation. Schools affect gender differentiation via two primary sources: teachers and peers.

Teachers and peers are just as influenced by the stereotypes as parents, after all, and so just as likely to perpetuate them in their own environment. Much of gender socialisation occurs outside of the classroom in the extracurricular and informal activities of the school, where gender-based choices prevail with girls opting for artistic activities and boys for team sports.

Schools act as an agent of socialisation through the hidden curriculum which you can read more about in [Module 14](#).

Teachers' attitudes and expectations and their gendered messages and interactions with students in the classroom have a great impact on shaping gender roles and identities.

For example, separating students by gender for activities or disciplining students differently depending on their gender may reinforce children's beliefs and assumptions about gender differences generally.

Expecting and tolerating different behaviours from boys and girls demonstrates how socialisation at the school level takes place. Whereas risk-taking behaviour in boys, such as challenging teachers' authority, is expected and at times even praised, assertiveness in girls can be viewed negatively and labelled unfeminine.

At some schools, girls are used as a civilising influence on male students. Disruptive boys are reassigned to sit near or with girls. However, this impacts girls' learning and students' attitudes towards the classroom environment. When teachers use this practice, it reinforces the stereotype that boys are undisciplined, whereas girls are cooperative and

orderly. It also implies that boys need looking after, and that it is the girls' maternal role to do so.<sup>27</sup>

If teachers exhibit permissive attitude towards sexual harassment against girls and do not step in, they reinforce the socialization of girls as inferior.

Peer interactions have a significant role to play in gender socialisation. Through peer interactions, children learn what their peers expect of them as boys or girls.

As they reach school age, children begin to play different games based on their gender. Boys tend to play sports and other competitive team games governed by inflexible rules and relatively large numbers of roles, while girls tend to play smaller, cooperative games such as hopscotch and jumping rope with fewer and more flexible rules. Although girls are much more involved in sports now than a generation ago, these gender differences in their play as youngsters persist and continue to reinforce gender roles. For example, they encourage competitiveness in boys and cooperation and trust among girls. Boys who are not competitive risk being called “sissy” or other words by their peers. The patterns we see in adult males and females thus have their roots in their play as young children.<sup>28</sup>

Peers not only contribute to upholding gender roles, but also to impose them on others, telling them that certain things or behaviours are or are not ‘appropriate’ for their gender. For instance, commenting that “long hair is for girls while short hair is for boys”, or teasing and excluding girls who do not correspond to the standards for the female body ideal.

Children who most closely resemble the traditional roles are typically given the most respect. On the other hand, boys and girls who exhibit gender non-conforming behaviour are usually ostracized by same-age peers and can become the target of bullying and harassment. This can lead to negative effects for students, such as lower self-esteem.<sup>29</sup>

Much of peer pressure is beyond the radar of the teacher which makes it often hard for the teacher to step in. Read more about peer pressure and school bullying and how to go about them in Module 14 How are gender stereotypes related to gender-based school violence and bullying and how can schools tackle the problem?

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<sup>27</sup> A teacher's guide to gender sensitivity in the classroom. Preventing and responding to biases and bullying. <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Teachers-guide-to-addressing-gender-stereotypes-in-the-classroom.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Rebecca Laff and Wendy Ruiz (2021) Socialisation and Gender Social Science Libretext. [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education/Book%3A\\_Child\\_Family\\_and\\_Community\\_\(Laff\\_and\\_Ruiz\)/4%3A\\_How\\_Does\\_Gender\\_Influence\\_Children\\_Families\\_and\\_Communities/4.03%3A\\_Socialization\\_and\\_Gender](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/Book%3A_Child_Family_and_Community_(Laff_and_Ruiz)/4%3A_How_Does_Gender_Influence_Children_Families_and_Communities/4.03%3A_Socialization_and_Gender)

Boundless. “Gender Socialisation.” Sociology – Cochise College Boundless, 26 May. 2016.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.boundless.com/users/493555/textbooks/sociology-cochise-college/gender-stratification-and-inequality-11/gender-and-socialization-86/gender-socialization-495-3393/>

Media, including movies, TV, and books often promote rigidly-defined gender roles and teach children what it means to be a boy or a girl whereby reinforcing ideas about which behaviours are or are not acceptable and valued for a particular gender.

Despite some recent advances in children's books and films, the 'princess' culture – in which young girls are encouraged to prize physical appearance and likeability over intellectual ability and to see social status as closely linked to being in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex – is still widely promoted.<sup>30</sup>

Being a very powerful vehicle for information, the media can also shape and promote new gender roles just as seen in the evolution of Disney princess images below.

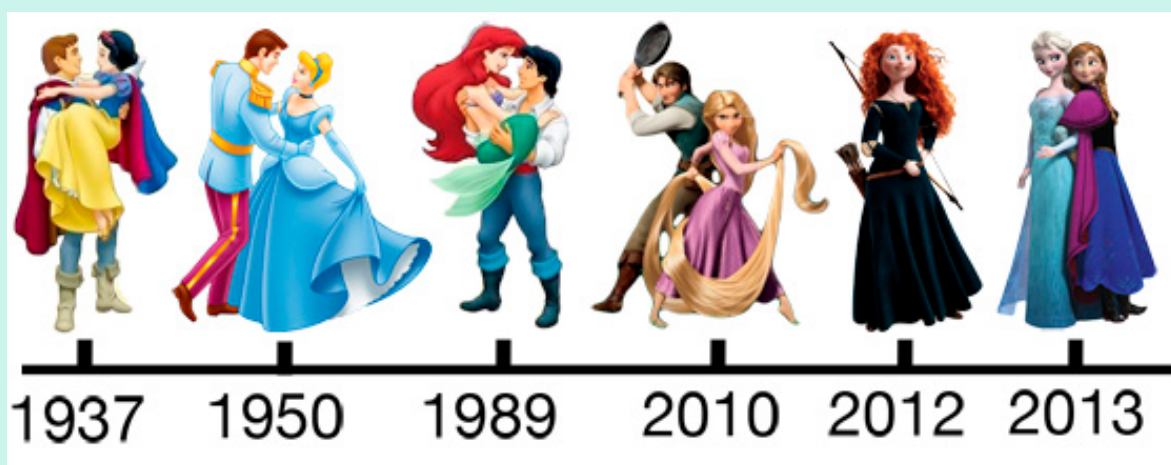


Figure 4. Evolution of Disney Princesses Throughout The Times.<sup>31</sup>

## SOCIALISED GENDER ROLES AND CHILDREN'S CAREER CHOICES

The gendered messages children receive at school about girls' and boys' capabilities influence pupils' subject choices and have an impact on their future careers.

Recent studies<sup>32</sup> demonstrate that boys and girls between the ages of four and nine already have a differentiated perception of the professional attributes that are ascribed to men and women. The boys associated strength and intelligence with males, while women were associated more with kindness and caregiving vocations. This also impacts children's views of who usually have the highest job positions or receive higher wages, whether women or men.

<sup>30</sup> <https://neu.org.uk/media/2926/view>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/the-evolution-of-gender-roles-in-disney-princess-movies>

<sup>32</sup> Irene Solbes-Canales, Susana Valverde-Montesino and Pablo Herranz-Hernández (2020) Socialisation of Gender Stereotypes Related to Attributes and Professions Among Young Spanish School-Aged Children.



Growing older, people's beliefs about gender become more nuanced and flexible, but gender socialisation still has a certain impact on our behaviour at school, in the workplace and in our relationships.

The attitudes and expectations surrounding gender roles are not typically based on any inherent or natural gender differences, but on gender stereotypes, or oversimplified notions about the attitudes, traits, and behaviour patterns of males and females.

To explore the topic further, please read Module 5 What are gender stereotypes and their short-term and long-term effects on pupils?

## Learning points



Gender socialisation is the process of learning one's gender role.



The main socialisation agents are parents, teachers, peers and media.



Gender socialisation practices taking place at school can minimise or exaggerate gender differences.



Knowledge of gender socialisation helps teachers understand and change gender norms to broaden pupils' choices.

# Further reading

- Gender Socialisation  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/gender-socialization>
- Gender: early socialisation  
<https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/gender-early-socialization>
- Peer socialisation of gender in young boys and girls  
<https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/gender-early-socialization/according-experts/peer-socialization-gender-young-boys-and-girls>
- Cole, Nicki Lisa, Understanding Socialisation in Sociology. ThoughtCo, Feb. 16, 2021,  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/socialization-in-sociology-4104466>
- Vinney, Cynthia. What Is Gender Socialisation? Definition and Examples. ThoughtCo, Jun. 29, 2021,  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/gender-socialization-definition-examples-4582435>

# Videos

- Gender socialisation  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QWfCrNHKYA&t>
- What is gender socialisation?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0ke7ar9A0w>
- I am  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvfGyMnEMSs>

# Module 5

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## WHAT ARE GENDER STEREOTYPES

### AND THEIR SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON PUPILS?

#### Learning objectives



- to understand what gender stereotypes are
- to understand the impact of gender stereotypes on girls and boys
- to identify areas for challenging gender stereotypes at school
- to identify new challenges for overcoming gender stereotypes in education.

## REFLECTION

**Reflection.** What characteristics does your society expect from women? What characteristics does your society expect from men? Are these expectations similar or different?

**Reflection.** Picture for yourself a 'typical boy' or a 'typical girl' in your society. What characteristics do they have? In your opinion, are there more similarities than differences between girls and boys?

You have probably heard the phrase 'Women are from Venus, men are from Mars'. It is a phrase that is often used to explain observed differences in the way women and men think, feel, and act and which suggests that women and men are inherently as different as if they were from different planets and species. John Gray's book from 1992 under the same name has been so popular in the world that it has overshadowed much of the research that suggests that perceived differences between men and women are ultimately a social construction<sup>33</sup> and gender differences in social-emotional and cognitive skills have been greatly exaggerated<sup>34</sup> and are caused by gender stereotypes.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Kimmel. "Venus, Mars, or Planet Earth? Women and Men in a New Millennium"

<sup>34</sup>Niobe Way Venus, Mars and Myth Of Gender Stereotypes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeswomanfiles/2011/07/27/venus-mars-and-myth-of-gender-stereotypes/?sh=2287562a7497>

Women and men, boys and girls are not that different. Every teacher knows of individual boys who are not athletic, or particular girls who are especially restless in class. Differences within each gender group are generally far larger than any differences between the groups.<sup>35</sup>

At school, just as in wider society, we tend to expect and stress the differences between girls and boys, women and men which are upheld by prevailing gender stereotypes. International and national educational policy documents refer to gender stereotypes as the biggest challenge for gender equality in education.<sup>36</sup>

## WHAT ARE GENDER STEREOTYPES?

A gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women. Gender stereotypes have descriptive components, which are beliefs about what men and women typically do. However, they also contain strong prescriptive components or beliefs about what men and women should do.

Female stereotypical roles include being emotional, caring and in need of protection. Male stereotypical roles include being rational, career driven and strong. These assumptions can be negative (e.g. women are irrational, men are insensitive) or seemingly benign (e.g. women are nurturing, men are leaders).



Figure 5. Gender stereotypes.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Gender stereotypes. <https://www.issuesonline.co.uk/articles/gender-stereotyping>

Gender stereotypes are a cause and result of gender socialisation: girls and boys are expected to act in certain ways that are socialised from birth. By the time they come to school, much of the process of the internalisation of gender expectations and gender roles has taken place. Already at around five to seven years old, children tend to identify strongly with expectations of their own gender and are likely to actively conform to stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes originate from society, from direct and indirect observation of gender roles. To the extent that people in the same society have similar observations, these beliefs become shared cultural expectations. In many cases gender stereotypes are expressed through the language we use.

	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
<b>Expectation</b>	Strong, adventurous, rational, aggressive, independent, dominant, decisive, logical, unemotional, assertive, tough, boisterous, brave, challenging, leader.	Sensitive, caring, gentle, weak, dependent, passive, kind, intuitive, submissive, emotional, illogical, talkative, indecisive, quiet, carer.
<b>Socialization</b>	<p>Toys focused on: action, construction, technology, fighting and conquering.</p> <p>Social reinforcement through preschool, school, media, parents and carers.</p>	<p>Toys focused on: baby dolls, cooking, princesses, art and craft.</p> <p>Social reinforcement through preschool, school, media, parents and carers.</p>
<b>Gender roles</b>	<p>Men are physically strong, aggression is an acceptable part of male behaviour, a willingness to take risks (superheroes / action figures). Occupations: IT specialists, mechanics, engineers, managers, politicians.</p>	<p>Women put a high value on appearance and being pretty, are nice, sweet and gentle, and perform submissive roles (princesses). Occupations: teachers, nurses, social workers, beauticians.</p>

Table 1. Common gender stereotypes related to expectations, socialisation and gender roles of men and women / boys and girls (adapted from Gender equal play in early learning and childcare<sup>36</sup>)

<sup>36</sup> Gender equal play in early learning and childcare. <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Gender-Equal-Play-in-Early-Learning-and-Childcare.pdf>

There is nothing inherently wrong with behaving in a gendered manner, but stereotypical male or female behaviours may potentially be problematic if children's and young people's opportunities in life are limited because of preconceived notions regarding gender.<sup>37</sup>

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON GIRLS AND BOYS?

The assumptions we make about boys and girls may be conscious or unconscious and can result in different treatment of one group compared to another. Gender stereotypes form the basis of sexism. Sexism refers to prejudiced beliefs that value one sex over another.

The basic aspects of learning affected by gender stereotypes have been given below.

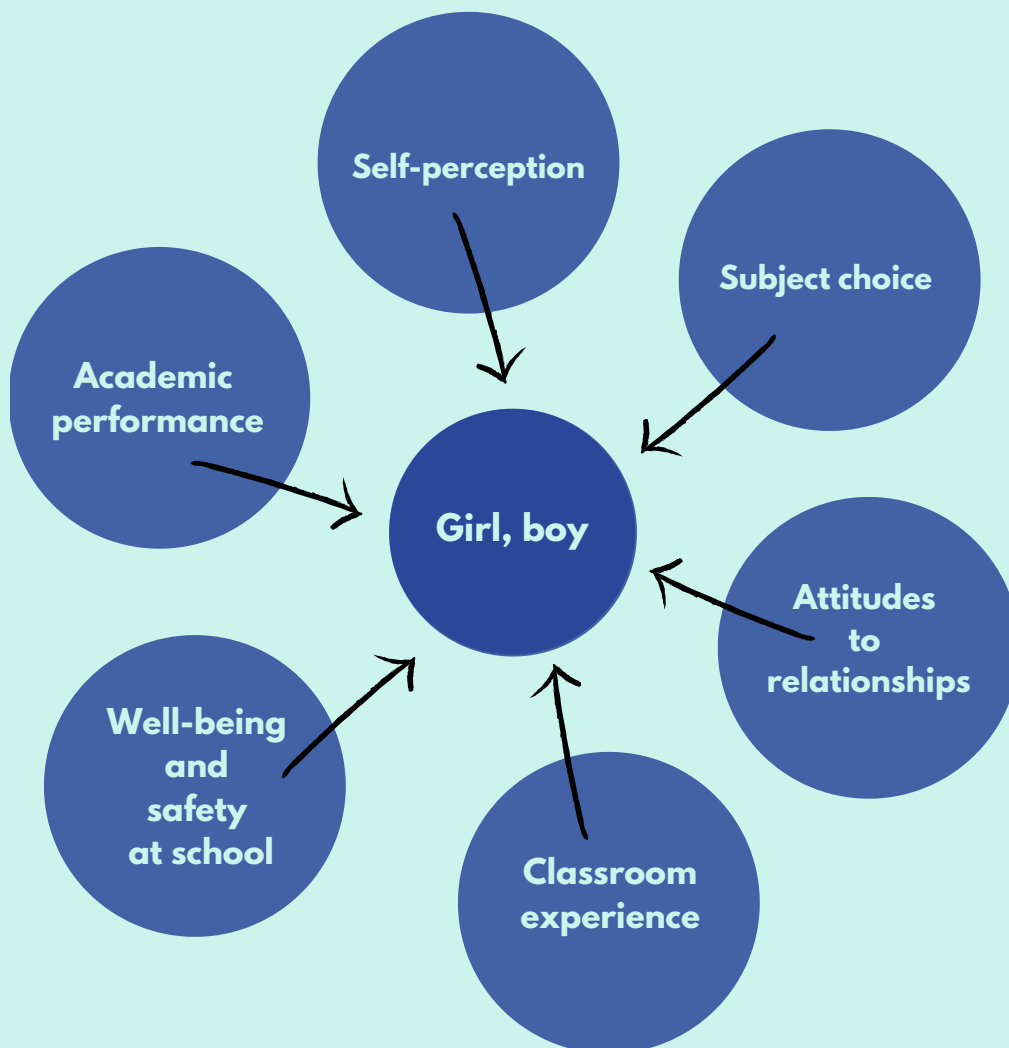


Figure 6. Impact of gender stereotypes at school

<sup>37</sup> Coyne, S., Linder, J., Rasmussen, E., Nelson, D. & Birkbeck V. (2016) Pretty as a Princess: Longitudinal Effects of Engagement With Disney Princesses on Gender Stereotypes, Body Esteem, and Prosocial Behavior in Children *Child Development*, 87(6), 1909–1925

A study conducted in the UK involving about 600 children aged 4 to 10, for instance, revealed that the prevailing social attitudes play a significant role in how boys apply themselves at school. Boys are falling behind girls because they are constantly being told they are not up to scratch with neither parents nor teachers expecting them to do as well as girls. This results in boys' loss of motivation and confidence. The researchers' conclusion was that from a young age, children pick up gender stereotypes that are self-fulfilling.<sup>38</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPING?

**Short-term effects of stereotyping.** The damaging effects of gender stereotypes are experienced by children from a young age. This includes young girls being overly concerned with body image; bullying of children who do not conform to stereotypical ideas of boys or girls; as well as negative feelings about themselves among children who do not conform to expected gender stereotypes.

**Long-term effects of stereotyping.** It matters if we treat boys and girls differently from a young age because it sets up a pattern for life based on difference. Although there is nothing wrong with difference in itself, when it leads to limitations and discrimination it is problematic as it can affect long-term confidence, opportunity, achievement, health, relationships and more.<sup>39</sup>

Stereotyped assumptions also significantly limit youngsters' career choices, which in turn contribute to their future labour market behaviour and the gender pay gap. An international survey 'Drawing the future' asked primary school children aged 7 to 11 to draw a picture of the job they want to do when they grow up. Over 20,000 entries were received from the UK and internationally. The findings suggested that from a young age children often stereotype jobs according to gender and their career choices are based on these assumptions. The majority of boys in the study wanted to be sportsmen and girls teachers.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>The gender gap: why do boys do worse than girls at school? <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/the-gender-gap-why-do-boys-do-worse-than-girls-at-school-1.1591232>

<sup>39</sup>Just like a child. <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Just-Like-a-Child.pdf>

<sup>40</sup>Drawing the Future. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/drawing-the-future-report-published/>

# WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON GIRLS AND BOYS?

The first victims of gender stereotypes are girls' self-esteem, ambition and expectations. Pressures to conform to what is considered 'normal' for one's gender can also have wider health implications, particularly for young girls. The societal importance that is put on women's and girls' appearance can lead to concerns over body image, and the potential development of eating disorders.

Boys' experiences of gender stereotypes can be harmful in a number of ways including through being taught to suppress emotions, pressure to appear 'manly' and strong and to choose subjects and careers in line with stereotypes rather than their interests and potential.

There also remains stigma associated with males taking on caring roles, which can create further barriers to boys choosing 'non-traditional' subjects. Expected to be active, dominant, strong and stoic, young boys grow up with far less emotional awareness than girls.

The BBC's 2017 documentary 'No More Boys and Girls' asked a class of primary school age boys and girls to list synonyms for emotions and found that the girls could name more synonyms than the boys for every emotion except, significantly, 'anger' (BBC, 2017).<sup>41</sup>

Many children can see the limiting effects of stereotypes, yet they are hard to resist when a child wants to fit in with their peers. When we keep saying that 'boys and girls can do anything', we often fail to realise how much pressure there is on them to behave in certain ways – or how much they take the stereotypes for granted. It is not enough for children to be told they can do anything, they need to see those messages reflected in staff attitudes, textbooks and school practices. It takes a gender-sensitive teacher to achieve this.

Read more about the concrete things that the teacher can do to challenge gender stereotypes in Modules 9-12.

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<sup>41</sup>No More Boys and Girls. Can Our Kids Go Gender Free? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09202lp>



# Learning points



Gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs or generalisations about the behaviours, characteristics and roles performed by women and men.



Teachers should challenge stereotypical gender differences and encourage the diversification of skills and interests to broaden horizons and thus improve the life chances of girls and boys.



The gender stereotypes perpetuated by books such as “Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus” damage our ability to tackle serious social issues, including educational underachievement, school bullying and violence.

## Further reading

- Gender Stereotypes: an introduction for practitioners in schools and early learning centres

<https://education.gov.scot/media/khsi24hr/gender-stereotyping-intro.pdf>

- Stereotypes stop you from doing stuff.

<https://neu.org.uk/media/2926/view>

- The Fawcett Society 2019 Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood A Literature Review.

<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/gender-stereotypes-in-early-childhood-a-literature-review>

# Videos

- Gender stereotypes and education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrZ21nD9I-0&t>

The video was produced by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) to show that gender stereotypes are not always obvious. They start to follow us from our earliest days in the toy store and continue to influence us when choosing subjects at school and career.

- Redraw the Balance

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJP1zPOfq\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJP1zPOfq_0)

The video provocatively captures how, early on in their education, children already define career opportunities as male and female. When asked to draw a firefighter, surgeon and a fighter pilot, 61 pictures were drawn of men and only 5 were female. In only three months, Redraw the Balance achieved 25 million views.

- Always #Like a Girl

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxd\\_DKsITXo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxd_DKsITXo)

This hugely popular video shows what doing something “like a girl” looks like. The sharp contrast between the age groups’ responses illuminates the negative effects of enforcing stereotypes.

# Module 6

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## WHAT IS HIDDEN CURRICULUM

### AND WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN GENDER SOCIALISATION?

#### Learning objectives

- to understand the concept of gender bias and hidden curriculum
- to explain the role of hidden curriculum in gender socialisation
- to understand how hidden curriculum contributes to gender inequality
- to learn about tools to make hidden curriculum visible in the classroom.

## REFLECTION

**Reflection.** Think of your daily teaching practices. What is your reaction to the following questions?

1. Do you expect and/or accept different behaviour from boys and girls, for example, quieter behaviour from girls and unruly behaviour from boys?
2. Do you expect girls to be more positive towards learning and less disruptive compared to boys?
3. Do you select boys more often than girls as group leaders when conducting group activities?
4. Do you find boys more interesting to teach than girls?
5. Do you believe boys have a better mathematics and science 'gene' than girls?

Were you tempted to respond to some of the questions 'yes' or 'sometimes'? Because no matter how open-minded or accepting we believe ourselves to be, and no matter how good a job we think we are doing when raising children, we all unconsciously carry prejudice and bias. The effects of gender bias in the classroom are complicated, and research suggests that these biases have disadvantages for both boys and girls, though in different ways.

# WHAT IS GENDER BIAS?

Gender bias occurs when we make assumptions regarding behaviours, abilities or preferences of pupils based upon their gender. Because of these biases, we more easily accept certain behaviours from boys and girls and expect them to succeed in certain fields. Some of the common assumptions and expectations concerning boys and girls in the educational setting have been listed below.

## Boys



- naturally exhibit boisterous, unruly behaviour
- are academically able,
- are rational, and
- are socially uncommunicative.

## Girls



- are quiet,
- polite, and
- studious,
- possess better social skills than boys and
- excel at reading and the language arts.<sup>42</sup>

Have you heard your colleagues express the same ideas? To some extent, we all have unconscious biases. They stem from years of exposure to gendered patterns. However, it is crucial for teachers to become aware of them since it affects the ways they interact differently with girls and boys, the assumptions they make about children and the advice and directions they give to pupils. To do this, they need to understand the concept of “hidden curriculum”, which is a vehicle through which unconscious biases are conveyed to pupils in school and classroom settings.

# WHAT IS HIDDEN CURRICULUM?

While the “formal” curriculum consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities students participate in, as well as the knowledge and skills educators intentionally teach to students, the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> A teacher’s guide to gender sensitivity in the classroom. <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Teachers-guide-to-addressing-gender-stereotypes-in-the-classroom.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Hidden curriculum. <https://www.edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum/>

Through the hidden curriculum pupils acquire a range of rules, values and normative patterns of behaviour such as respecting authority and other pupils' opinions, punctuality, work ethic, acceptance of orders from teachers, conformity, waiting one's turn, competitiveness, individual worth, etc.

An essential element of the hidden curriculum is gender. Just think of a classroom situation where the teacher asks boys to help with technical issues and girls to decorate the classroom. And think of the hidden messages that such instructions convey to children about girls' and boys' abilities and gender roles.

The hidden curriculum is described as "hidden" because it is usually unacknowledged or unexamined by students, teachers, and school management alike. As such, hidden curriculum can be challenging to expose. The hidden curriculum is composed of a wide range of elements. The most important ones in the school context have been shown in Figure 7.

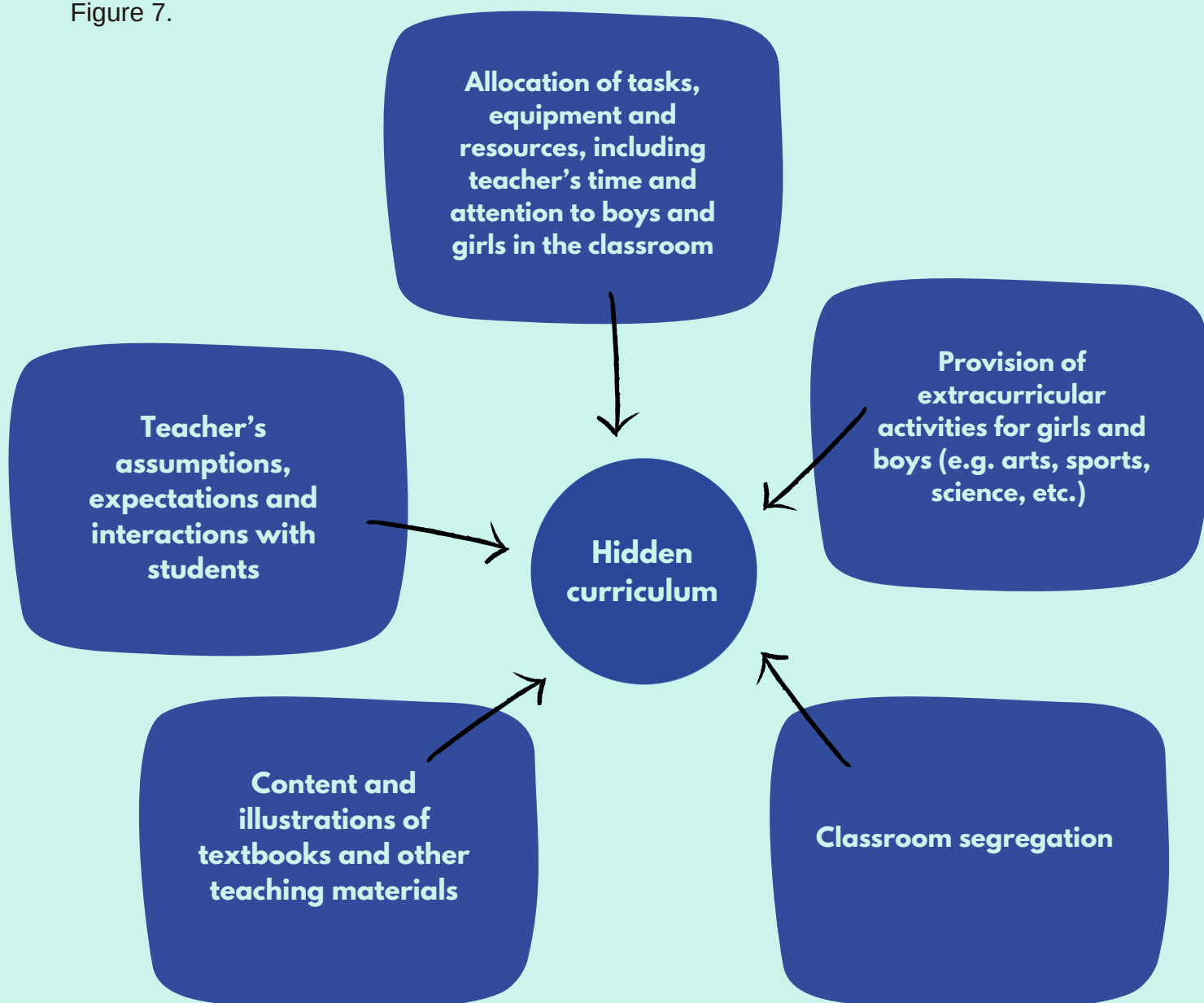


Figure 7. Elements of the hidden curriculum

# WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN GENDER SOCIALISATION?

Children's perceptions of gender roles are affected not only by overt forms of gender bias, such as being told they can or cannot do a task because of their gender, but also by the hidden curriculum. The major flaw of the hidden curriculum is that it can reinforce outdated gender roles and perpetuate gender inequality. Below, you will find a few examples of hidden curriculum in action related to gender role expectations and gender equality issues.

At primary schools, for instance, just observing that the overwhelming majority of teachers are women may reinforce the stereotype that women are especially suited to look after and teach children.

A casual question asked by the teacher "Is anyone's dad an IT manager?" might reinforce the idea that mums cannot be IT managers. Or a brief remark "Did your mum check your homework?" might suggest that women are mostly expected to carry the main bulk of childcare at home.

A further way of reinforcing gender differences is asking boys more questions than girls, giving boys more time to speak or allowing them to interrupt when girls are talking, which makes girls believe that they are unequal to boys.

These numerous unintentional messages, if repeated and accumulated, create long-lasting effects on children's lives, at times limiting their self-image and their perception of the opportunities that are available or appropriate for them.

## HOW DO GENDER BIAS AND HIDDEN CURRICULUM CONTRIBUTE TO GENDER INEQUALITY?

There is an impressive amount of research into the hidden curriculum, teachers' differential treatment of girls and boys as well as its impact on gender equality and children's future. Below is a summary of the report sponsored by the American Association of University Women (AAUW).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> 6 ways you can promote gender equality in the classroom.  
<https://www.teachthought.com/education/6-ways-can-promote-gender-equality-classroom/>

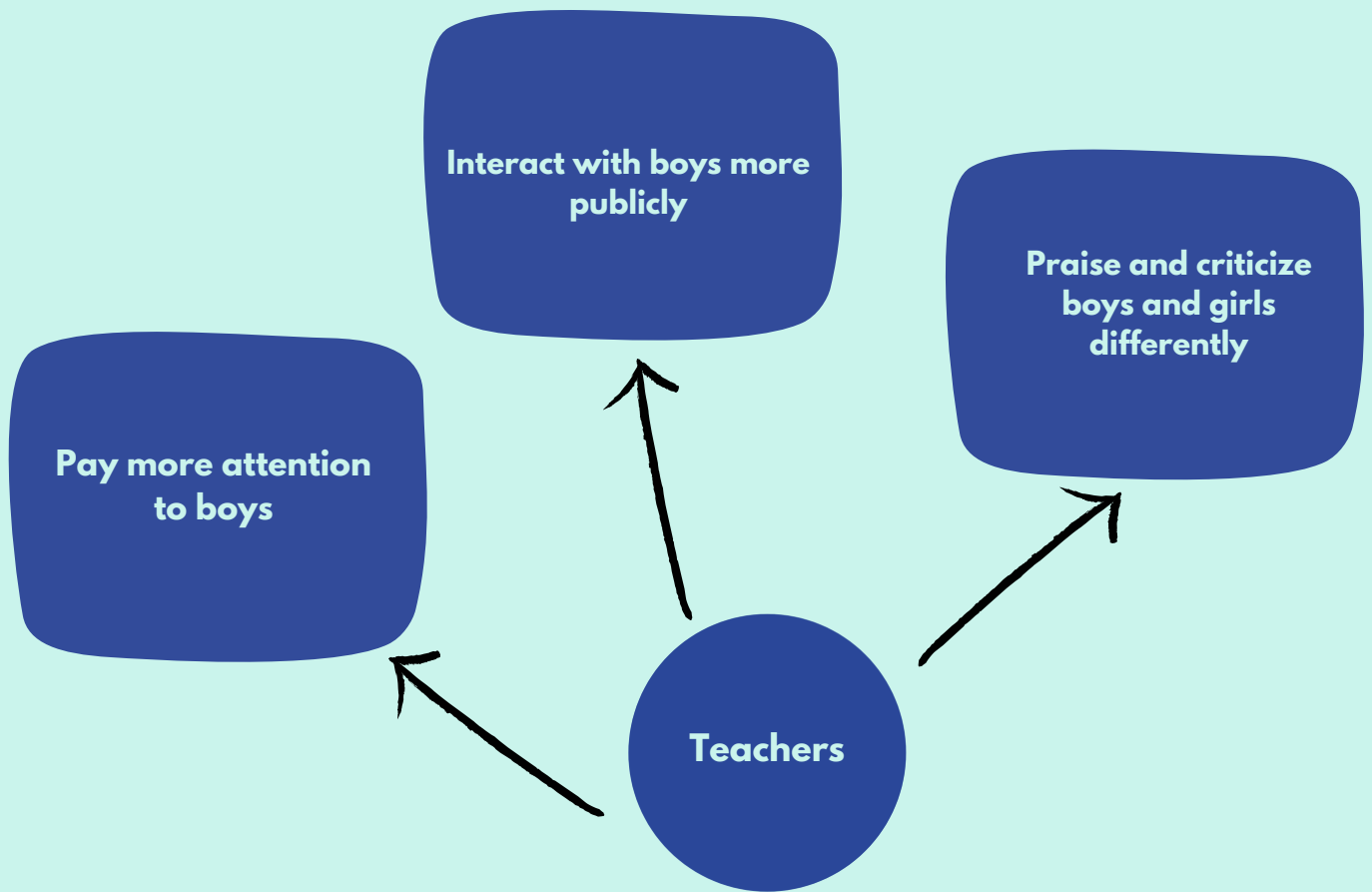


Figure 8. Hidden curriculum and teachers' interaction with students

**1. Teachers pay more attention to boys.**

Girls receive significantly less attention from teachers than boys do. This is due in part to the fact that, in general, boys are more likely to call out answers to questions posed to the class even if they have not been called on by the teacher. This trend may also exist because boys are often perceived as being more mischievous, causing teachers to monitor and engage with them more actively in class, giving a perceived 'opening' to speak without permission. Over time, this can discourage female pupils from speaking up even when they feel like they have something worthwhile to say to contribute to a discussion.

**2. Interactions with boys are more public.**

Teachers often have a tendency to talk to boys from a greater distance than girls. This is possibly due to an expectation that they should communicate in a more nurturing way with girls and a more business-like way with boys. Because the entire classroom can often hear a teacher's conversations with boys, this contributes to — at least the appearance of — teachers communicating more often and more casually with boys. This encourages girls to reserve their comments and questions for private conversations, denying them the chance to participate in primarily male-focused discussions.

### 3. Praise and criticism differ between boys and girls.

Boys are often praised more than girls for sharing correct knowledge, and wrong answers provided by boys are likely to be overlooked. In contrast, girls are more often criticised for conveying incorrect knowledge, and teachers tend to provide less praise for correct answers given by girls. As with the lack of publicity in teachers' conversations with girls, this makes knowledge provided by girls less visible. From this, an expectation arises that boys' knowledge is more highly valued than that of girls, which can convince girls that they are less competent than boys.

In their book *Still Failing at Fairness: How Gender Bias Cheats Girls and Boys in School and What We Can Do About It*, researchers David Sadker, Myra Sadker, and Karen R. Zittleman observed that there was an uneven distribution of teachers' time, energy, and attention - all in favour of male students.<sup>45</sup> Similar results have been confirmed by numerous other studies.<sup>46</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN METHODS TO MAKE THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM VISIBLE IN THE CLASSROOM?

The basic methods for making the hidden curriculum visible at school are observation and filming.

Observation of the daily teaching practice in the classroom is one of the ways to make the hidden curriculum and teacher's interactions with girls and boys visible. You can conduct observations by engaging your colleagues interested in the topic. Discuss with them what you are interested in observing. Then make a template for observation. Then decide how, by whom and when the observations should be made, and when the reporting back takes place. While using the observation method, it is important to remember that occasional observations do not give a complete picture of reality and they have to be repeated to make the gender patterns visible.

Example of a classroom observation template:

Time and attention given to boys and girls

Observation date: \_\_\_\_\_

Observation situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Observation conducted by: \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>45</sup> Gender equity in the classroom by Rebecca Alber. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/gender-equity-classroom-rebecca-alber>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.ccctc.k12.oh.us/Downloads/Gender%20Bias%20in%20the%20Classroom2.pdf>;  
Gender Pedagogy in Swedish Pre-Schools: An Overview  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12147-009-9076-x>



**Girls**

**Boys**

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How many times addressed by the teacher using the child's name?

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How many questions asked by the teacher?

---

How many times interrupted during speaking?

---

How many times praised by the teacher?

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How many times admonished by the teacher?

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Who gets help first?

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Discuss the results with your colleagues and design the ways to overcome your bias. For further information, please also read GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A SELF-STUDY COURSE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS (module Observation methodology – what to look for and how to see).

In an observation exercise at a Swedish primary school, for instance, it was found that most of the pupils who were assisted by the teacher were boys. They caught the teacher's attention by approaching the teacher, grabbing her arm or shouting at her. The rest of the class, mostly girls, waited until the teacher came to them. One of the girls put up her hand during the entire video observation, about 10 minutes, without getting help. According to the teacher it was a recurring and common pattern, her view was that boys have a hard time sitting still and waiting for their turn.<sup>47</sup> After analysing the video and identifying the gender pattern, the teacher decided to create a list of children waiting to be helped and helped them in that order, making boys wait – equally with girls - until they could access help.

Apart from other things, filming provides opportunities to make visible the aspects of teacher-pupil interaction which are more difficult to observe such as teacher's body language, tone of voice, language nuances, eye contact, etc. in teacher-pupil interaction. It also provides an opportunity to see the same situation several times and focus on different issues.

**Here are some important general guidelines for filming.**

- Parents should approve in writing that the children may be videotaped for internal use for development work to promote gender equality.
- The recorded material should be stored only for the work period/project period and displayed only to the development work participants so it never comes into unauthorised hands.

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<sup>47</sup>Gender equity in the classroom by Rebecca Alber. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/gender-equity-classroom-rebecca-alber>

- Adults react differently to being filmed. Some do not care at all, while others resist it. It is therefore good if everyone in the work team takes turns filming in order to feel involved and secure.
- Children can "act" in front of the camera. It is therefore important to tell the children the purpose of the filming and that it is not a film that the students should then see. The experience is that they will soon lose interest in the filmmaker and act in a usual manner.
- Filming should not exceed 10-15 minutes. Enough time should be set aside for proper analysis of prevailing gender patterns and designing of remedies.

The main principles of filming apply equally for preschool as well as school. So, for detailed instruction for filming and performing analyses of the recordings please read GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A SELF-STUDY COURSE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS (module Film activity. Introduction to video filming as methodology, module Filming your own workday and module Analysis of film material).

Modules 9-15 will provide you methods, ideas and concrete tips of how to minimise gender bias in your teaching and school practice.

## Learning points



The socialisation of gender roles and the use of a gender-biased hidden curriculum lead to an inequitable education for boys and girls.



Unconscious biases are extremely common, also among teachers.



Through the hidden curriculum, educators are implicitly transmitting their own understandings of gender to children; their values and beliefs.



Once teachers have recognized their gender-biased behaviours, they can start acting upon them.

## Further reading

- Amanda Chapman. Gender bias in education  
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/genderbias.html>
- The gender biases that shape our brains  
<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210524-the-gender-biases-that-shape-our-brains>

## Videos

- Hidden Curriculum in Education: Definition & Examples  
<https://study.com/academy/lesson/hidden-curriculum-in-education-definition-examples-quiz.html>
- The Hidden Curriculum | Part 1 of 2: Norms, Values and Procedures  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuLhmDE9Exo>

# Module 7

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## WHAT IS MEANT BY GENDER-SENSITIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY?

### Learning objectives

- to promote an understanding of differences between gender-blind, gender-aware, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive pedagogy and teaching
- to sensitise teachers to gender issues at school.

## REFLECTION

**Reflection.** You are a primary school teacher. You give each child in your class a piece of clay and then leave them alone. The girls are well-behaved and make little clay figures, but the boys make a mess: they throw the clay at the ceiling to see if it sticks and stuff it into the keyhole of the door. Then you come back into the room. What do you do when you come back into the room?<sup>48</sup>

Could a similar situation happen in your school? How would you react? Would you think “boys are boys” and continue with the next assignment? How would you react if the girls behaved the same way as the boys did?

As it was stated in Module 1, gender equality in education requires an approach that ensures that girls and boys not only complete education cycles but are empowered equally in and through education. This, however, requires an understanding of what gender-blind, gender-aware, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive pedagogy mean and how they affect school and classroom practices.

<sup>48</sup>One size fits all. Enhancing gender awareness in teaching. TWIST Towards Women in Science and Technology, p. 67. [https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/twist-onze\\_size\\_fits\\_all.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/twist-onze_size_fits_all.pdf)

# WHAT IS GENDER BLIND, GENDER AWARE, GENDER SENSITIVE AND GENDER RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY?

Let's start with gender blindness.

Gender blindness is the practice of disregarding gender as a significant factor in human interactions. Teachers say that there are no gender differences in their classes often claiming that "We treat all students equally", "A child is a child irrespective of his or her sex." Working from a gender-blind position means teachers do not take pupils' gender into account when teaching.

Gender awareness involves consciousness of social and cultural differences and inequalities all of which are built into educational practices, as well as a belief that these practices can be changed. It also includes an understanding that gender is intertwined with other categories: ethnicity, age, sexuality and health, as well as with local and cultural opportunities and differences.<sup>49</sup>

Gender awareness in education can be achieved when teachers see gender as a process in everyday school life and understand the harmful impact of gender stereotyping. Further, as informed by research results and as described in previous modules, not only teachers subconsciously interact with pupils based on gender stereotypes, but also pupils themselves have more gender stereotypes than we might think.

Boys, for instance, often believe that they are better than girls at mathematics or computing, making girls think science is too difficult for them and choose non-scientific career paths in the future. It is only through awareness of the above-described situations that the teacher can challenge gender stereotypes in education.

Gender-aware teachers understand the different opportunities and challenges for girls and boys, they believe that everyone deserves fair treatment and they are willing to make positive changes in their own attitudes and behaviours.

The teaching and learning processes which pay special attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys are called gender-sensitive pedagogy. Gender-responsive pedagogy refers to using teaching methods that focus on providing equal educational opportunities for girls and boys so as to promote gender equality. These can be identified

<sup>49</sup> Elina Lahelma and Liisa Tainio. The long mission towards gender equality in teacher education: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331416751\\_The\\_long\\_mission\\_towards\\_gender\\_equality\\_in\\_teacher\\_education\\_Reflections\\_from\\_a\\_national\\_project\\_in\\_Finland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331416751_The_long_mission_towards_gender_equality_in_teacher_education_Reflections_from_a_national_project_in_Finland)

by assessing the challenges and gaps in skills and knowledge for both genders.

<b>Gender blindness</b>	<b>Gender awareness</b>	<b>Gender sensitivity</b>	<b>Gender responsiveness</b>
Disregarding gender as a significant factor in education	Regarding gender as a significant factor in education	Recognising that gender is a significant factor in education which needs teachers' and school administrators' attention	Using teaching methods that provide equal educational opportunities for girls and boys and promote gender equality

Figure 9. From gender-blind to gender-responsive pedagogy.

## **WHY DO WE NEED GENDER-SENSITIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY?**

The ultimate goal of gender-responsive education is to tackle gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. To reach gender equality in education, aspects such as the curricula, the learning content, methods and materials, as well as the school environment need to be free from gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

A gender-responsive approach to teaching ensures that issues of gender equality and inequality are incorporated into everything a teacher does like choosing and presenting teaching materials, setting up classrooms, praising and disciplining students, evaluating and assessing students' assignments, etc.

# REFLECTION

**Reflection.** Statements to consider. Probably you are very close to gender-sensitive teaching. Which are the things on the list below you already practise?

1. As a class teacher I think I give girls and boys equal amounts of attention.
2. I try not to make assumptions about the capabilities of children based upon their gender, e.g. assuming boys don't like reading or girls are quieter.
3. I support children when they are trying to challenge gender stereotypes.
4. I have the same expectations of behaviour from both boys and girls.



Figure 10. Dimensions of gender across the teaching and learning aspects to support gender-responsive pedagogy.

A gender-sensitive teacher knows how to adjust the teaching methods and address the different and varied needs of girls and boys. For instance, teachers know that often girls' low self-esteem originates in the cultural context in which women's and girls' status is subordinate to that of men's and boys'. Given this, a gender-sensitive teacher knows how to encourage girls to develop skills for self-confidence and assertiveness.

Likewise, a gender-sensitive teacher can empower boys with skills to de-link from rigid norms of masculinity to help boys overcome the fear of failure, learn to be less aggressive, become more sociable and involved in personal relationships and engage more in the private sphere.

The Modules 9 – 15 provide practical tools, resources and tips for teachers to assist them in breaking down gender stereotypes and using gender-responsive principles in their classroom.

## Learning points



Gender-responsive pedagogy refers to teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys and promote gender equality. These can be identified by assessing the challenges and gaps in skills and knowledge of both genders.



There are many ways to promote a gender-responsive classroom environment.



The ultimate goal of gender-responsive education is to tackle gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.



# Further reading

- Towards gender-sensitive education. A Handbook for teacher trainers.

[www.gendersensed.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Handbook-for-Teacher-Trainers.pdf](http://www.gendersensed.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Handbook-for-Teacher-Trainers.pdf)

- Why misogyny needs to be tackled in education from primary school. March 26, 2021

[www.theconversation.com/why-misogyny-needs-to-be-tackled-in-education-from-primary-school-157276](http://www.theconversation.com/why-misogyny-needs-to-be-tackled-in-education-from-primary-school-157276)

- USAID (2018) Introduction to Gender-Responsive Teaching Methods.

[www.mcsprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2018/11/PowerPoint-Introduction-to-Gender-Responsive-Teaching-Methods.pdf](http://www.mcsprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2018/11/PowerPoint-Introduction-to-Gender-Responsive-Teaching-Methods.pdf)

# Videos

- No More Boys and Girls – Can Our Kids Go Gender Free Episode 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN5R2LWhTrY>

- No More Boys and Girls – Can Our Kids Go Gender Free Episode 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp9Z26YglrA>

- Dr Javid Abdelmoneim undertook an experiment in an elementary school classroom in the U.K. to gauge attitudes about gender roles and gender stereotypes among young children; only seven years-old. He worked with a very open-minded primary school teacher to implement strategies in the class to limit stereotypes that may damage children's long-term growth and potential, in and outside of education. He wanted to explore whether these childhood beliefs impact inequality among adults. Along with interviewing the children,

he collaborated with the teacher to try a couple of strategies to change these attitudes.

Summary of video at:

[www.subsaga.com/bbc/documentaries/families/no-more-boys-and-girls-can-our-kids-go-gender-free/series-1/episode-2.html](http://www.subsaga.com/bbc/documentaries/families/no-more-boys-and-girls-can-our-kids-go-gender-free/series-1/episode-2.html)



# Module 8

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## TAKEAWAYS FROM MODULES 1 - 7

**Having read through materials of Modules 1-7, you are now invited to test your knowledge and take the quiz.**

### **1. Gender equality in education. Which of the following is/are true?**

Gender equality in education

1. means that girls and boys are ensured and offered the same chances and treatment in access, process and outcome of education
2. means that boys and girls are empowered equally in and through education
3. aims at neutralising gender differences so that girls and boys can become the same
4. is a matter of values and human rights

*Correct answers: 1, 2, 4*

**NB.** Gender equality is at the very heart of human rights. Gender equality in education is about equipping girls and boys, women and men with the same knowledge and opportunities to make informed decisions about their lives. Equality does not mean that girls and boys, women and men become the same, but girls and boys are ensured and offered the same chances and empowered equally through education.

## 2. Common goals of gender equality policies in education. Which of the following is/are true?

Common goals of gender equality policies

1. are impossible to define because the topic of gender equality in education is too complex and does not permit us to make any generalisations
2. mean more than just equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in school
3. focus on challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes
4. focus in primary education on broadening the aspirations and interests of children about jobs and careers

*Correct answers: 2, 3, 4*

**NB.** Children still associate certain job roles with women and men. This early-age stereotyping has an important impact on the roles, careers and positions children choose as adults. At school, girls and boys should be treated equally and be provided equal opportunities based on the staff's understanding that equality in schooling is linked with positive changes towards gender equality in broader society.

## 3. Sex and gender. Which of the following is/are true?

Whereas sex refers to biological differences between men and women, gender refers to

1. characteristics of women and men, girls and boys that are socially constructed
2. behaviours and roles associated with being a woman or a man, a girl or a boy as well as relationships with each other
3. femininity and masculinity
4. all of the above

*Correct answers: 4*

**NB.** Gender is distinct from sex and refers to socially constructed and not biologically defined characteristics of human beings. Gender includes the perceptions and conceptions of what is female and male in our society. Division into female and male is a very strong categorization which we all do all the time, usually without being aware of it. Being created all the time, gender is also created at school by pupils and teachers which makes it possible to create gender that leads to equality.

#### **4. Gender socialisation. Home is the first place where children are socialised into gender norms, values and expectations. Family is the first agent of socialisation. Which are the other three major agents of gender socialisation?**

1. gender equality legislation
2. peers
3. media
4. teachers

*Correct answers: 2, 3, 4*

**NB.** Gender socialisation is the process by which we learn our culture's gender-related rules, norms, and expectations. An agent of gender socialisation is any person or group that plays a role in the childhood gender socialisation process. Gender socialisation begins at birth and takes place through four major agents of socialisation: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Schools are major contexts for gender socialisation.

#### **5. Gender stereotypes. Which of the following is/are true?**

Gender stereotypes

1. are linked to the idea that females are emotional, caring and in need of protection, and males are strong, rational and career driven
2. involve, for instance, the belief that girls are better at reading and boys are better at maths
3. affect students' classroom experiences, academic performance and subject choices
4. have negative consequences for both boys and girls including limiting what they can do, be and become

*Correct answers: 1,2,3,4*

**NB.** Simply put, a gender stereotype is a widely held belief or generalisation about the behaviours and characteristics attributed to women and men. Stereotyped ideas about what is suitable for women and men, boys or girls can limit children's opportunities to learn and develop. As such, gender stereotypes influence students' participation in education, their self-perception, career choices, attitudes to relationships, etc. There are numerous ways how schools and teachers can challenge gender stereotypes.

## 6. Hidden curriculum. Which of the following is/are true?

In the classroom, hidden curriculum gets expressed in the following:

1. giving boys more attention than girls
2. praising girls for being well behaved and boys for their ideas
3. accepting mischievous behaviour and verbal opposition from boys, but less so from girls
4. ignoring the national curriculum when teaching children

*Correct answers: 1, 2, 3*

**NB.** The hidden curriculum refers to the unspoken and unofficial norms, behaviours, and values that children learn at school in addition to the official curriculum of maths, reading, science, etc. Gender is an important element of the hidden curriculum. In the classroom, hidden curriculum manifests itself, among other things, in boys receiving more of the teacher's time, energy and attention. Teachers have to be aware of the hidden curriculum since it can reinforce gender stereotypes, biases, and prejudices and perpetuate gender inequality.

## 7. Gender-sensitive and gender-responsive pedagogy. Which of the following is/are true?

Gender sensitivity and gender responsiveness mean that

1. teachers use interactive and diverse learning techniques that meet the interest of girls and boys
2. teachers check the performance of boys more frequently because of boys' inattentiveness
3. teachers demonstrate equally high expectations of success for both girls and boys
4. teachers are aware of and try to consciously avoid gender bias in their teaching

*Correct answers: 1, 3, 4*

**NB.** Gender-responsive teachers not only understand and respond to the specific needs of girls and boys in the teaching and learning processes, but they also encourage equal participation and involvement of boys and girls both in the class and extracurricular activities. A gender-responsive approach to teaching ensures that issues of gender equality are incorporated into everything a teacher does like choosing and presenting teaching materials, setting up classrooms, praising and disciplining pupils, evaluating and assessing pupils' assignments, etc.


# Module 9

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## WHAT CAN THE TEACHER DO TO CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES IN TEXTBOOKS

### AND LEARNING/TEACHING MATERIALS USED IN THE CLASSROOM?

#### Learning objectives

- 
- to understand the importance of textbooks and learning/teaching materials in conveying gender stereotypes
  - to develop skills to identify gender stereotypes in textbooks/books, learning/teaching materials and illustrations
  - to learn how to challenge gender stereotypes contained in textbooks/books, learning/teaching materials and illustrations.

Having familiarised yourself with the general background to advancing gender equality in education, it is now time to get down to everyday teaching practices and explore ways how traditional gender stereotypes could be challenged in the classroom. First, consider the curriculum which functions as the strongest tool to transmit and transform the culture, values and beliefs of society to the student. What does the curriculum say about gender equality? Where is space in the curriculum for challenging outdated gender roles and norms and promoting new ones? When doing so remember that you prepare children for a changing world where traditional gender roles are no longer valid.

The curriculum is implemented through textbooks and teaching/learning materials, including nowadays digital materials, videos, images, posters, etc. which offer students new interactive and engaging learning opportunities. Furthermore, the recent spread of

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the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated development of new e-learning environments and content which can better reflect the changing realities and contribute to increased action on gender equality. And yet, even though we can observe fast changes, gender stereotypes still remain common and we can still find undeniable sexism in textbooks across the globe.<sup>50</sup> Studies of textbooks, storybooks, and educational software have consistently shown more numerous male characters along with greater male representation in titles, pictures and central roles.<sup>51</sup> To work for the future, it is therefore essential for the teacher to develop skills for identifying, challenging and defying intentional and unintentional prejudices and stereotypes hindering gender equality.

## IDENTIFYING STEREOTYPES IN TEXTBOOKS/BOOKS

The nature of textbooks and educational reading material, the images and the language conveyed with respect to gender are highly influential on children as they contribute to the construction of beliefs and values about gender norms, occupational choices and future opportunities. When girls see themselves represented in textbooks/books as being passive they may assume that they should be passive too.

There are four basic kinds of gender stereotypes in most societies which also get reflected in school textbooks and reading material:

### Personality traits

women are accommodating and emotional, while men are self-confident and courageous.

### Domestic behaviours

women take care of the children, cook, and clean the home, while men take care of finances, do home repairs, and fix cars.

### Occupations

women are teachers and nurses, men are pilots and engineers.

### Physical appearance

women are thin and graceful, men are tall and muscular.

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<sup>50</sup> The undeniable sexism in textbooks designed for the world's children.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/03/08/the-undeniable-sexism-in-textbooks-designed-for-the-worlds-children/>

<sup>51</sup> The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis By Jeanne H Ballantine, Jenny Stuber, Judson G. Published July 30, 2021 by Routledge. Chapter: Gender socialisation in elementary school.



# IDENTIFYING GENDER BIAS IN SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS/BOOKS

When checking the textbooks for gender bias, consider the aspects given above. Check the storyline, the characters, the relationships and ambitions of the characters. How are females and males depicted in the textbooks? Who are the main characters? What sort of things do they do? What sort of relationships do they have? Who has the power? Who makes decisions? Who is in leadership or subordinate roles?

Even at a young age children can respond well to discussions about what is and what is not acceptable for boys and girls. As a teacher you can choose texts and illustrations specifically for their ability to challenge perceptions of who can do what. You could challenge your students by asking if the same story could be told if the actions or roles given to men and women in the story were reversed.

## TIPS

### Tips for the teacher when choosing and using children's literature for challenging gender stereotypes

- Stop limiting children's interests by promoting some of the books as only suitable for girls, and others only for boys.
- Ask children to rewrite a traditional fairy tale with the main characters' roles swapped.
- Ask the children to write a story about a brave heroine, or a male protagonist who needs rescuing.
- Alternatively, provide learners with modern stories that specifically challenge stereotypes. Try to include those with caring male characters as well as strong female protagonists.<sup>52</sup>

There are also several websites giving you good ideas for and detailed instructions on using children's books for breaking gender stereotypes, for instance a resource for teachers: "It's child's play" published by the National Education Union, UK.<sup>53</sup>

For further information on the topic, please also read GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A SELF-STUDY COURSE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS (module Children's books, films, songs and fairy tales).

<sup>52</sup> An action guide for primary schools.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/sci38-primary-action-guide.pdf>

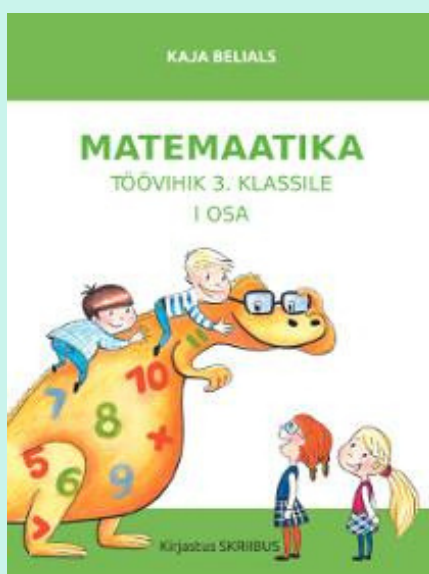
<sup>53</sup> The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis By Jeanne H Ballantine, Jenny Stuber, Judson G. It's child's play. Challenging gender stereotypes through reading. <https://neu.org.uk/media/2921/view>

# ILLUSTRATIONS AND PICTURES. CHILDREN CANNOT BE WHAT THEY CANNOT SEE.

Textbooks and reading material come with pictures and illustrations. Visual images are often treated as decorations, although they are much more than that as they help children formulate their own gender roles. To analyse illustrations/pictures for gender bias, you can ask questions such as:

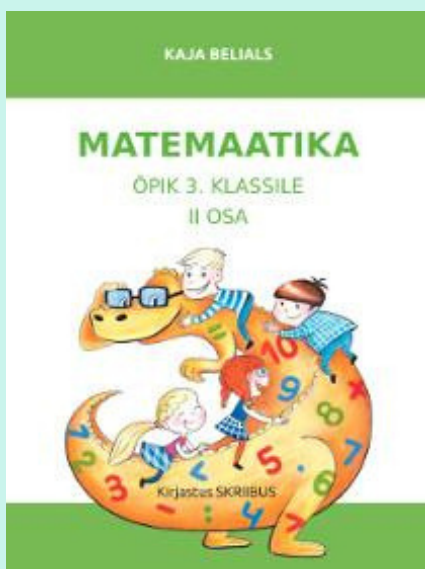
- How many female and male characters are presented in the picture/illustration?
- Who is in the foreground, who is in the background?
- Who is active, who is passive – female or male characters?
- What traits are attributed to female and male characters?
- Where are female and male characters shown – within the domestic walls or outside of the home?

If you find gender bias in educational resources, it does not mean these resources cannot be used. Every book, text, illustration, even the ones with gender stereotypes can offer an opportunity to ask critical questions and talk with students about gender roles and stereotypes. As an example, take a look at the cover pages of two Estonian resources, a maths textbook and workbook for 3rd grade students.<sup>54</sup> How are the girls and boys portrayed in the picture? What sort of messages do these illustrations convey to children? For the analysis and initiation of discussion with students, you can ask the following guiding questions:



1. Who dares to climb the dinosaur?
2. Who is passively looking at and admiring those who dare?
3. Who has more fun?
4. Who gets ten points and experiences a sense of victory?
5. What sort of gender stereotypes could have prompted the cover page designer to draw such a picture?

<sup>54</sup> A maths textbook and a workbook for 3rd grade students (2017).  
<https://www.skriibus.ee/views/oppevara.xhtml?id=43&form=3>



1. Who dares to climb higher?
2. Could the girls also climb as high as boys?
3. What sort of gender stereotypes would prevent girls from doing so?
4. Where do these stereotypes come from?
5. What do you think: can girls and boys be equally good at climbing the dinosaur and equally good at maths?

If you were to choose the cover page for the book/workbook, which version would you prefer? What would you change? Why?

These are just two cover pages. Do they really matter? Yes, they do because such micro-messages get accumulated over time. “As with the findings of Let Toys Be Toys toy catalogues and TV ads research, the problem is not one ad/book. The problem is with how the message builds into a wider picture. An image of a girl playing with a doll – great. A catalogue with 16 pages of girls and dolls and no boys – more of a problem. A book with a male protagonist and villain, fine. A whole bookshelf where males do most of the doing and the talking ... maybe time to consider whether this is really what we want to tell our children about who matters and how the world works?”<sup>55</sup>

## DIGITAL MATERIALS ARE NOT FREE FROM GENDER STEREOTYPES

One might presume that since digital materials have been developed more recently, they contain no or fewer gender stereotypes. This is, however, not the case, at least in Estonia. A survey into the representation of gender in illustrations of lower-basic school and 4th grade digital textbooks<sup>56</sup> conducted in 2019 showed prevalence of traditional gender roles; dominance of boys, also in numerical terms; activities undertaken in groups segregated by gender; and lack of communication between female and male learners.



<sup>55</sup> Constructing bias – the wonky world of picture books. <http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/constructing-bias-the-wonky-world-of-picture-books/>

<sup>56</sup> Soolisuse representeerimine põhikooli esimese astme ja 4. klassi digiõpikute illustratsioonides <https://enut.ee/ulle-marike-papp-soolisuse-representeerimine-pohikooli-esimese-astme-ja-4-klassi-digiopikute-illustratsioonides/> Tallinn, 2019

On the other hand, digital textbooks increasingly feature girls and boys engaged in the same kind of activities and being equally capable.



Digital materials are interactive and playful offering flexible opportunities to add teacher's own material, choose the doer of the action, whether a girl or a boy, etc. Just the gender-balanced portrayals of girls and boys and female and male characters acting in non-traditional gender roles would be one step toward increased gender equality.

## PREPARING GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEARNING/TEACHING MATERIALS

- Do the themes, subjects, and pictures connect to the life experiences of both girls and boys?
- Are there equal numbers of boys and girls shown/involved?
- Are girls and boys doing things/playing/learning/sitting together?
- Do girls and boys pursue the same kind of interests and hobbies?
- Are girls and boys equally shown in the role of a leader?
- Are girls and boys both shown as daring and caring?
- Are girls and boys both shown as capable, intelligent, and smart?
- Are girls and boys using the same equipment and digital tools?
- Do the materials contain situations where girls and boys act outside narrow gender roles?
- Are the materials free from gender colour associations such as blue for boys and pink for girls?
- Is gender-inclusive language used in the material?

You can find an excellent resource for revising teaching and learning materials in *Mainstreaming gender equality in curricula and teaching and learning materials*.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Mainstreaming gender equality in curricula and teaching and learning materials*, pp. 7-9. Under UNESCO Education 2030 series, Toolkit 18. [https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/article/Education/publications/GENIA2019/19\\_Dec\\_GENIA\\_Toolkit\\_18.pdf](https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/article/Education/publications/GENIA2019/19_Dec_GENIA_Toolkit_18.pdf), pp. 7-9.

# Learning points



Textbooks are central to the way learners shape their understanding of themselves, others and the world, based on which they develop their attitudes and patterns of behaviour.



Before choosing, preparing and using teaching materials, they need to be reviewed for gender bias and stereotypes.



All teaching materials, whether featuring gender stereotypes or not, can be used to challenge traditional and promote new changing gender roles and norms.

## Further reading

- Preventing Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Gender Equality in School Textbooks and Materials, a Methodological Guide. Agency of Gender Equality Kosovo.

[www.abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/ENG-ManualSteriotipetGjinore-ENG\(1\).pdf](http://www.abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/ENG-ManualSteriotipetGjinore-ENG(1).pdf)

- Promoting gender equality through textbooks. A methodological guide.

[www.researchgate.net/publication/44838920\\_Promoting\\_gender\\_equality\\_through\\_textbooks\\_a\\_methodological\\_guide](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/44838920_Promoting_gender_equality_through_textbooks_a_methodological_guide)

- Brugeilles, C., Cromer, S. (2008, 2009, 2015) Promoting Gender Equality through Textbooks: A methodological guide. UNESCO.

[https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000158897\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000158897_eng)

# Module 10

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## WHAT CAN THE TEACHER DO TO CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

### AND DAILY TEACHING PRACTICES?

#### Learning objectives



- to learn about how classroom and daily teaching practices in primary school are shaped by gender stereotypes and prejudices
- to learn to use a gender-sensitive approach to classroom interaction, lesson planning, seating arrangements and teaching methodologies
- to get tips and ideas for challenging gender stereotypes in the classroom.

Having familiarised yourself with previous materials, you are aware of subconscious gender-related behaviour exhibited by teachers. Be it assumptions unconsciously made about boys' and girls' preferences of academic subjects or the belief that girls outperform boys in reading. Now it is time to explore what changes could be made in classroom practices to challenge gender stereotypes and create a more equal and balanced learning environment for all.

Most teachers teach because they want the best for their pupils. However, everybody of us has unconscious biases, and so do even the most dedicated and well-meaning teachers, even if they are strong believers in gender equality. Research shows that teachers' gender stereotypes and prejudices shape their classroom behaviour in at least three ways: they often model gender stereotypical behaviour, exhibit differential expectations for males and females and facilitate children's gender biases by marking gender as important. In one study, teachers were asked to use gender to label children and to organise classroom activities by, for example, greeting children with "Good morning, boys and girls" and asking children to line up by gender. Other teachers ignored

students' gender. Young children whose teachers labelled and used gender showed higher levels of gender stereotyping than their peers.<sup>58</sup>

Teachers need to think of children as individuals and not impose expectations on them linked to gender. They should be aware of the hidden curriculum and gender bias as these feed into their lesson planning and delivery as well as pupils' experiences of the classroom.

## CLASSROOM INTERACTION

To challenge gender stereotypes, the first task of teachers is to explore whether and how their classroom environments reinforce or challenge conventional gender roles, stereotypes as well as relations and hierarchies between boys and girls. To find out what happens in the classroom, the teachers could ask the following guiding questions:

- Who, boys or girls, demands and gets more teachers' attention?
- Who speaks out in class more often, boys or girls?
- Who speaks for longer?
- Who, boys or girls interrupt the lesson more frequently?
- Who conforms and who challenges the teacher, boys or girls?

Secondly, teachers should monitor their own classroom interaction. Many teachers participate in gender biased actions without realising it. Here are some questions teachers can use to analyse gender biased behaviour and identify if it exists in their classroom.

- Who do I call on more frequently when hands are raised in class: boys or girls?
- Do I have the same expectations of all of my pupils?
- Do I provide boys and girls equal amounts of help, feedback, encouragement and praise?
- Do I interrupt one gender more often than the other?
- Do I spend more time prompting boys to seek deeper answers while rewarding girls for being quiet?
- Do I give equal attention to undesirable behaviour of boys and girls like running in the classroom or giggling during instruction?
- Do I use a differential voice tone with girls and boys?
- Do I use examples of both genders when teaching a lesson?

Videotape your classes and review your interactions with pupils. Looking for gender bias

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<sup>58</sup> The Role of Schools in the Early Socialisation of Gender Differences  
<https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/textes-experts/en/2492/the-role-of-schools-in-the-early-socialization-of-gender-differences.pdf>

can be a challenge. But you can overcome it if you begin seeing it as an opportunity rather than a challenge and once you find reflecting on your biases leads to better teaching. Especially if you engage your colleagues. Just to remind you that you can find detailed descriptions of the classroom observation and filming methodologies in **GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A SELF-STUDY COURSE FOR PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS.**

# TIPS

## Tips to challenge gender stereotypes in the classroom

- Make sure you treat girls and boys equally, and give them equal amounts of time and attention.
- Make sure your expectations are the same for all students - both genders can succeed at maths, science, language, arts and reading.
- Make sure you offer the same kind of praise and feedback to both genders, not opting for praising girls for their good behaviour and neat handwriting, and boys for their ideas and smartness.
- Do not stereotype tasks for pupils such as asking 'strong boys' to move furniture and 'helpful girls' to hand out worksheets.
- Do not offer gendered awards, such as fairy stickers to girls and motorbike stickers to boys when rewarding students for the work well done.
- Do not make labels pink and blue when using them in the classroom. Either select one colour, such as yellow or green, or allow pupils to pick their favourite colour from a mix.

# LESSON PLANNING

Lesson planning involves a wide range of decisions such as the learning materials to use, content, learning activities, methodologies, etc. It may seem a challenge to look at the school's curriculum and ensure that it is fully inclusive. Do not overcomplicate things. When starting to plan your lessons, you do not need to start from scratch. Look first at what is already in place. Different subjects present different opportunities for discussing gender stereotypes and broadening students' non-traditional roles and choices. There are certain topics that allow teachers to explicitly question gender roles, for example, topics about different professions and what family members do and are responsible for around the home.



# TIPS

## Tips for the teacher

- Think about the resources and role models when planning your lessons and activities.
- Select stories for the classroom that don't play up gender stereotypes.
- Ask learners to draw a range of professionals such as a firefighter, scientist, teacher, nurse, bus driver, etc. Ask students to identify which ones they have drawn as women and which they have drawn as men. Why did they make those choices? Are there any jobs only women/men can do?
- When arranging guest speakers or parents to come in and discuss their job with the children, think about the gender balance and actively seek a wide range of different jobs and roles.
- Ask students to explore toy catalogues. How do you know they are aimed at boys or girls?
- What colours are used? What images are used? Do you think we should have different toys/Legos for boys and girls?
- Make family trees and compare the situation of women and men over time.

Students do not need to be told everything about everything at every opportunity. The teacher should highlight relevant things when they come up, when the situation feels comfortable and fit for initiating meaningful conversations about gender roles and stereotypes.

When planning activities, remember that you want your students to realise that boys and girls can do the same tasks. So there is no need to plan separate activities for boys and girls.

You can access fascinating ready-made lesson plans with detailed instructions and questions designed to challenge gender stereotypes in the educational resource: Outside the box. A whole-school approach to promoting gender equality and tackling sexism and sexual harassment prepared by EqualiTeach, UK.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Outside the box. Resource for educators. Activities and lesson plans. Activity Space invaders, pp. 63-65; Activity The World Around Us pp. 65-66 <https://equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/>.

# GROUPING AND SEATING CHILDREN

Even small changes in the classroom matter, be it just dividing and seating children in the classroom. Splitting learners into groups according to gender can have several unintended consequences. The divide between boys and girls can reinforce the idea that boys and girls should be separate, have separate interests, roles, and friendships. Therefore, try seating and grouping students intentionally to avoid girl-boy division if it is not absolutely necessary.

Try to avoid assigning disruptive boys to sit near or with girls who are often used as a civilising influence on male students. This has a negative impact on girls' learning and on students' attitudes towards the classroom experience. When this practice is used, it reinforces the stereotype that boys are undisciplined, whereas girls are cooperative and orderly. It also implies that boys need looking after, and that it is the girls' maternal role to do so.<sup>60</sup>

It would be much more effective and inclusive to get to know students and organise the room based on their individual behaviours and on how well they work together. Setting up desks in a U-shape or seating students around tables would also contribute toward an inclusive learning environment.

By creating dynamic seating charts, you can break up boys-only or girls-only groups and encourage students to engage with each other.

Which of the seating arrangements works better for equal participation and forming mixed-group teams and friendships?



<sup>60</sup> Teacher's guide to gender sensitivity in the classroom.  
<https://d2t1lspzrjtif2.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Teachers-guide-to-addressing-gender-stereotypes-in-the-classroom.pdf>

# TIPS

## Tips for the teacher

- As far as possible, avoid separating students by gender.
- Actively integrate groups by not allowing self-segregation.
- Go in alphabetical, age or height order, or divide the class into those who prefer green or yellow, to avoid division based on sex.
- Put students into mixed-gender learning groups to encourage cross-gender friendships.
- Use seating arrangements for learning, not for behaviour management.

# TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

When choosing teaching and learning methodologies these must be responsive to the needs of all students, both girls and boys. Try to ensure that you offer activities that allow students to learn in a variety of different ways. Use teaching methodologies, such as group work that encourage the equal participation of all learners. When students get the chance to interact with their peers, they will develop skills for interacting effectively and comfortably with their own and with the opposite sex.

# TIPS

## Tips for making teaching and learning methodologies gender-responsive<sup>61, 62</sup>

### Question and answer method

- Give equal chances to both girls and boys to answer questions.
- Phrase questions to reflect gender representation – use names of both men and women, use both male and female characters.
- Allow sufficient time for students to answer questions, especially girls who may be shy or afraid to speak out.
- Since boys more so than girls are prone to interrupt other children<sup>63</sup> give girls the tools to say “I haven’t done speaking yet,” or “I have not finished.”

<sup>61</sup> Adapted from: UNICEF (2020) Gender responsive pedagogy. A toolkit for teachers and schools 2nd edition. Unit 6. Gender responsive lessons planning. pp. 59-63.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/6726/file/GRP-A-Toolkit-for-Teachers-and-Schools-2020.pdf>

Teachers: 20 Ways to Reduce Gender Bias at School.

<sup>63</sup> <https://thinkorblue.com/teachers-reduce-gender-bias-at-school/>

Ibid

# CONDUCTING GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- Make sure that groups are mixed (both boys and girls).
- Make sure both girls and boys are offered the opportunity to talk and to lead the discussion.
- Make sure that group leaders are both boys and girls.
- Encourage both girls and boys to present the results.
- Make sure groups consist of girls and boys of different academic ability.
- Make sure that the topic of the group discussion takes gender into account – include both male and female heroes in a reading or history class, both men and women in a discussion on leadership.

The ways teachers interact with students have a great impact on their ability to participate in education. It is therefore important for teachers to take time to evaluate every aspect of their teaching and actively seek out where assumptions about gender may be affecting young students' experiences of the classroom.

Children, especially younger ones, often learn by imitation. Teachers act as role models for children. It is therefore critically important that teachers possess knowledge and tools to correct their biases as they notice them. In doing so, they can take young people's opinions, concerns and ideas on board so they can challenge gender stereotypes together.



# Learning points



To challenge gender stereotypes in the classroom, teachers should be aware of their own gender bias.



Teachers can challenge gender stereotypes in a variety of ways, including through lesson planning, classroom interaction, seating and grouping arrangements as well as teaching methodologies.



There are millions of teacher resources for challenging gender stereotypes available online. Besides the ideas and tips provided in this module, check the resources for detailed lesson plans and activities given under Further reading.



# Further reading

- Marissa Floro (2021) How to Promote Gender Equality in the Classroom

[www.wikihow.com/Promote-Gender-Equality-in-the-Classroom](http://www.wikihow.com/Promote-Gender-Equality-in-the-Classroom)

- Improving gender balance Scotland. An action guide for primary schools

[www.iop.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Improving-gender-balance-guide-primary-schools.pdf](http://www.iop.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Improving-gender-balance-guide-primary-schools.pdf)

- Outside The Box. A resource for educators. Step Four: Activities and lesson plans, pp. 60-86.

[www.equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box)

# Video

- Made to be underpaid.

[www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05d9kmg](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05d9kmg)

# Module 11

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## WHAT CAN THE TEACHER DO TO CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES IN LANGUAGE USE?

### Learning objectives



- to raise teachers' awareness of the importance of language in reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes
- to help teachers develop gender-inclusive language skills
- to give teachers tips for challenging gender stereotypical/sexist language used by pupils.

Language runs through the heart of children's learning about the world and – intended or otherwise – conveys profound and lasting messages to children about how they should look and behave, what they should aspire to, what and who they should play with.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE LANGUAGE IN REINFORCING OR CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Children are surrounded by gender stereotyping from birth, in every aspect of their lives: from how they are praised (girls as 'pretty' or boys as 'big and strong'), the slogans on their clothes (pink 'too pretty to do math' or blue 'here comes trouble' t-shirts) to the toys marketed to them (with girls frequently in the domestic realm and boys active and adventurous). The ubiquity of these stereotypical influences means that, unless challenged, children grow up thinking this is 'just the way the world is'. Children – and adults – carry the effects of this stereotyping with them

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This is why it is important to address gendered language<sup>64</sup> in schools as part of a wider whole school approach to challenging gender stereotyping, so that children gain the tools and confidence to challenge stereotypical messages for themselves, wherever they may encounter them.<sup>65</sup>



Without sexist intent, language can often perpetuate ideas about what it means to be 'normal' as a girl or boy. In terms of the language use, examples would be addressing boys as 'mate' or girls as 'sweetie', or using phrases such as, "We need a strong man to open that", or "Make sure you ask Mummy to sign the form".<sup>66</sup>

## **SPOTTING INSTANCES OF GENDER STEREOTYPICAL LANGUAGE USED BY TEACHERS**

The ways in which teachers speak to male and female students play a role in how girls and boys learn to view each other and the world around them. Even typical phrases such as 'What a pretty girl' or 'What a brave boy' used in the classroom can reinforce stereotypes about genders.

Research shows that use of sexist language is commonplace in schools.<sup>67</sup> Sexist language is the language which is outright sexist such as 'Man up' or telling a boy or girl that they run, cry or throw 'like a girl' but often it is more subtle and sometimes even well-intentioned such as complimenting girls on their appearance or emphasising 'putting a brave face on it' for boys – yet can be just as damaging in the context of gendered messaging.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Gendered language is commonly understood as language that has a bias towards a particular sex or social gender. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/what-is-gendered-language> / gender stereotypical language <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/gender-equity-classroom-rebecca-alber>

<sup>65</sup> Gendered language in schools by Caren Gestetner. March 15, 2019 <https://www.genderaction.co.uk/latest-news/2019/3/14/gendered-language-in-schools>

<sup>66</sup> Gender stereotypes: Primary schools urged to tackle issue <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-57256075>

<sup>67</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/report-its-just-everywhere-neu-uk-feminista/168079cee0>

<sup>68</sup> Gendered language in schools by Caren Gestetner. March 15, 2019 <https://www.genderaction.co.uk/latest-news/2019/3/14/gendered-language-in-schools>



One particular expression which slips easily off the tongue is 'Boys will be boys'. This might be spoken – something you hear in the staffroom – or it might be an unspoken opinion, informing expectations of 'boys' as a group. We all know what is meant by this expression – it is used to excuse, justify or anticipate rough or disruptive behaviour from boys. It's never used when a boy has been helpful or kind. Its effects are harmful and unfair, suggesting that boys can't help bad behaviour, suppressing the individuality of the many boys who are not behaving in this way and anticipating that 'girls' (again, as a group) will be better behaved.<sup>69</sup>

Often, when boys express vulnerability, they are told "Boys don't cry", "Take it like a man" or even "Don't be such a girl". These incredibly common phrases are used as a way to get boys to stop being emotional and upset about something. Some might claim that they are harmless, or that they teach boys how to be tough. What they are actually doing, however, is telling boys to suppress their genuine emotions, which is both limiting and damaging. Just like "Don't be such a girl" as an insult works to reinforce the prejudicial view that girls are emotional, weak and inferior and a real boy never wants to be anything like that.

Implying that girls are not good at maths demonstrates an unconscious bias against women. An example would be saying „Boys, you're good at maths. I'll wait for one of you to answer,“ when doing maths exercises. Such a bias may particularly affect girls who do not excel in learning maths, which leads to a gender gap in maths-heavy STEM fields in the future. It is a well-known fact that people are prone to underperform – most unconsciously - when they are told that they are not supposed to be good at something.

Subtler gender stereotypes in language are not always easy to track. For example, questions like “Is anyone's father an engineer?” or “Did your mother check your homework?” can reinforce ideas about men's and women's roles and responsibilities suggesting that moms cannot be engineers and that women are supposed to do the bulk of childcare.

So, try to consciously check your language for gender bias. Being conscious of the language you are using is the first step in combating gender stereotypes.

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<sup>69</sup> Gendered language in schools by Caren Gestetner. March 15, 2019  
<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/latest-news/2019/3/14/gendered-language-in-schools>

# DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR USING GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Think about whether what you say to the children reinforces gender stereotypes, and if so, use more neutral and inclusive language. This will support students' understanding that everyone can do or like anything, regardless of gender.



<https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/think-about-your-language/>

## TIPS

### Tips to improve gender-inclusive language skills of teachers

- Try greeting the children with “Hello everyone or children” instead of “Hello girls and boys”.
- Take special care to avoid stereotypes when talking about people’s occupations since professions and occupations are often gender stereotyped.
- Avoid gendered or male-masculine forms of professional titles. For example, instead of policeman or chairman use gender-unmarked forms police officer and chairperson to avoid reinforcing assumptions that women and men are restricted to certain roles and professions.
- Don’t use ‘female’ before stereotypical male roles if the job is performed by a woman. Simply state the role: writer, engineer, composer, doctor, etc.
- Present girls and boys, and men and women as being ‘equally good’ at something; do not say girls are ‘just as good as boys’ which suggests that boys are naturally better, and girls must work harder to equal them.
- If using gendered language is necessary, be clear that you are referring to specific people, not boys and girls in general: avoid “Boys are good at video games”, use “Those boys are good at video games” or avoid „Girls like pink“ and use „Some girls like pink“ instead.
- Use the same words of flattery for girls and boys.
- Tell boys it’s OK to be scared, upset or emotional.
- Tell girls it’s OK to get angry and express this in a healthy way.
- Challenge colleagues to reflect on their use of language and to ensure that they do not perpetuate stereotypes.

These simple changes are effective at helping children to think about each other as individuals, rather than as stereotypes.

# SPOTTING AND CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPICAL LANGUAGE USED BY STUDENTS

Amongst children, language which demarcates certain play, activities, behaviours or roles in life as being 'for girls' or 'for boys' remains common – such as 'this is a boys'/girls' game', 'girls can't play football' or ' ... you can't be a president/nurse because you're a girl/boy'.<sup>70</sup>

The teacher's role is to highlight gender stereotypical language and use it as an opportunity to invite broader discussions with students. Sometimes it is not as easy as one might think. Teachers often claim that even if they hear sexist language being used, they are not sure how to react or respond.

So, here are some suggestions.

- If a student says 'girls or boys should not or cannot do something,' ask why? Open a brief discussion about particular activities, or about where such stereotypical ideas come from, or simply affirm that, in fact, girls and boys can do most things equally well.
- If a student says, „Boys can't wear pink“, do not just say, “Of course boys can wear pink.” Challenge them by asking, „Who made that rule?”

Teachers can also design and use assignments to stimulate students' discussion about gender stereotypical language. For example:

Ask learners to write three words they associate with girls and three words they associate with boys. Ask:

- Do you see any patterns in the words?
- Are the words fair?
- Do the words apply to all girls and all boys?
- How do the words make you feel?
- Is it okay to use them?<sup>71</sup>

Change the language within your lessons to help expand pupils' perspectives beyond gender stereotypes. For example, you can challenge pupils' expectations by including a female pilot or a business owner, or a male primary school teacher or a nurse, etc. when discussing professions which are typically associated only with one gender.

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<sup>70</sup> Gendered language in schools by Caren Gestetner. March 15, 2019  
<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/latest-news/2019/3/14/gendered-language-in-schools>

<sup>71</sup> Improving gender balance Scotland. An action guide for primary schools  
<https://education.gov.scot/media/wvogktrj/sci38-primary-action-guide.pdf>

“So, does hearing a bit of gendered language in school really matter and do staff have a responsibility to address it? Yes, because if we let gendered language lie we approve or endorse its message – what is left unchallenged becomes for children just the way the world is. By challenging gendered language, you start to develop children’s ability to challenge it for themselves – a win-win situation.”<sup>72</sup>

Challenging gendered language is crucial work for any school wishing to challenge gender stereotyping and support children in countering the limiting effects of stereotypes they are and will be exposed to again and again at school and in the wider world.

## Learning points



Gender stereotypical language is widespread both among teachers as well as students.



Teachers can develop skills for using gender inclusive language.



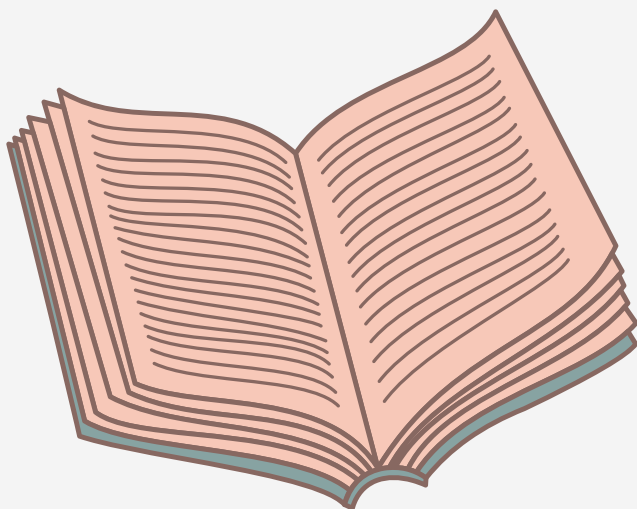
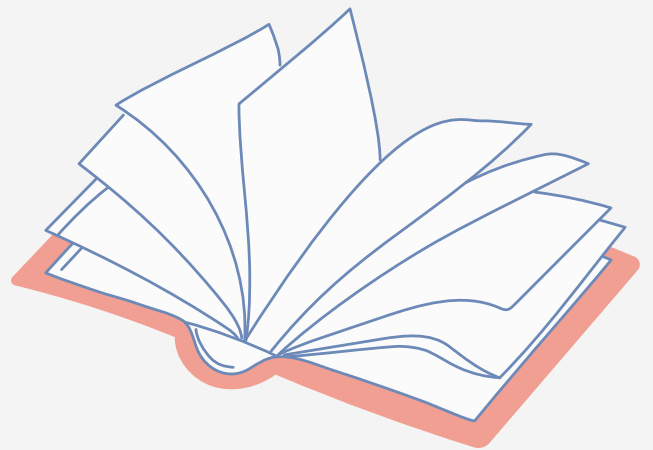
It is possible to challenge the sexist language used by students by initiating broader discussions and confirming boys and girls can do equally well in all academic subjects and activities.

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<sup>72</sup> Gendered language in schools by Caren Gestetner. March 15, 2019  
<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/latest-news/2019/3/14/gendered-language-in-schools>

# Further reading

- UK Feminista (2017) Tips for primary school teachers.  
[www.ukfeminista.org.uk/resources/primary/](http://www.ukfeminista.org.uk/resources/primary/)
- Outside the Box: Promoting Gender Equality & Tackling Sexual Harassment in Schools.  
[www.equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/)



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<sup>72</sup> Gendered language in schools by Caren Gestetner. March 15, 2019  
<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/latest-news/2019/3/14/gendered-language-in-schools>

# Module 12

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## HOW TO TALK ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY WITH LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS?

### Learning objectives

- to understand why it is important to engage students in discussions about gender, gender stereotypes and gender (in)equality
- to gain ideas and inspiration for addressing gender and gender equality issues in the classroom
- to learn how to create a safe space for boys and girls to discuss masculinities and femininities and gender equality.

Today, as gender equality is incorporated as a learning objective in national curricula, teachers need guidance and tools to discuss and positively promote gender equality in their classroom.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GENDER, GENDER STEREOTYPES AND GENDER (IN)EQUALITY?

Children are not born thinking one gender is better and more powerful than another.<sup>73</sup> Their understanding of gender is influenced by interactions and experiences with family, peers, culture,

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<sup>73</sup> How to teach children about gender equality by Kelly Wallace, CNN  
<https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/26/health/gender-equality-teaching-children-parenting/index.html>

the media, education and the wider community. They all send children clear messages about the expectations and 'rules' for boys and girls as well as consequences for violating them. By the time children start primary school, many of them already self-select activities, books, toys and friends according to their gender-based beliefs. When children start school, many of them have expectations that girls are inherently quiet, compliant and nurturing, while boys are boisterous, confident and should avoid anything traditionally considered feminine.

When young children get caught up in stereotypical notions of gender, it can harm their self-image and the way they interact with peers, and not only. Gender expectations significantly limit children, causing problems such as lower self-esteem in girls and poorer reading skills in boys. Stereotypes also contribute towards the mental health crisis among children and young people, are at the root of girls' problems with body image and eating disorders, higher male suicide rates and violence against women and girls. Stereotyped assumptions also significantly limit career choices, contributing to the gender pay gap.<sup>74</sup>

It is therefore crucial that in primary school children are offered opportunities for challenging their internalized gender roles and stereotypes. The more information we give students, the more we develop their skills for critical thinking, the better we can build their agency to challenge stereotypes inside and outside the classroom.

## TALKING ABOUT GENDER IN LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL<sup>75</sup>

When we discuss gender with children, we talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in, how they feel about themselves and social roles performed by women and men. We do not discuss sexuality or biological characteristics. People are born male and female but learn to be boys and girls who grow into women and men.

But how to begin discussing gender with children? The step-by-step guidelines below have been abridged from Gender Equality for Kids: How to Teach Kids about Gender Bias and Discrimination.<sup>76</sup>

1. First, before you start teaching anything, the golden rule is to test the waters. Find out about your pupils' understanding of gender and explore any unconscious bias they may have.
2. Use that knowledge as a starting point for conversations and introduce the topic of gender equality in an age-appropriate manner.

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<sup>74</sup> Stereotypes damage us all. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/smashstereotypes>

<sup>75</sup> We refer to 'girls' and 'boys' in this guide in order to allow discussion of the impacts of gender stereotypes on all learners. This is not to imply that gender categories are binary or opposite.

<sup>76</sup> Adapted from Gender Equality for Kids: How to Teach Kids about Gender Bias and Discrimination. <https://kidskonnnect.com/articles/gender-equality-for-kids/>

3. Proceed by explaining how those kinds of assumptions are faulty observations and not real knowledge. We all know that men can cook and women can drive – and yet seem determined to keep these facts from children.
4. Explain to children that our mistakes and words can hurt and do harm to other people.

## IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS TO DISCUSS GENDER AND GENDER EQUALITY WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

You can use a range of assignments to identify your students' gender stereotypes, norms, and unconscious biases. There is no one right way to discuss gender with children. You can create your own materials, consult different sources given at the end of the module, or use the assignments below.



- Ask boys and girls to identify characteristics of boys and of girls. Make two columns. In one column, list what is perceived as female characteristics. In the second column, list what is perceived as male characteristics. When you are finished, change the word 'female' to the column of male and the word 'male' to the column with female characteristics. Point out what characteristics boys and girls have in common and stress that boys and girls are much more similar than different.



- You can create a list of words and read it out. Ask students to raise the hand if they think it is a girl's thing or a boy's thing. Examples of words: teacher, rescuing, cooking, racing cars, spinner, glitter, scientist, diet drink, pink, nurse, computer games, etc. You can see instantly what children in your class think. You can ask: Is it true that these are just girls' or boys' things? What makes you think so? Why do you think there was so much agreement amongst you?



- You can also divide your classroom into sectors marked agree/disagree/unsure. Ask students to move into an appropriate sector as you read out several gender-related statements. Examples of statements could be: Boys are troublemakers; Everybody should go for the jobs they think they are good at; Girls don't cry; Boys don't cry; Girls like makeup; Science is a boys' subject; Girls are smarter; Boys are better at maths; Males and females are equal; Only boys play football; Women do all the housework; Girls like adventure, etc. Record results according to gender. Facilitate discussion after pupils have positioned themselves asking them why they have stood in that sector. Discuss and allow time to change their mind after the discussion.





- You can ask students to pick and use catalogues/magazines/newspapers/internet to find examples of toys advertised to boys, girls, or both. Ask them to cut these out and make a team collage. Once the collage is ready, you can ask the pupils to consider colours, how children are depicted in the advert, the use of adjectives and language and identify how these affect their choices.
- An interesting approach would be inviting representatives of non-traditional gender roles and jobs into the classroom. Just watch this fabulous video *A Class That Turned Around Kids' Assumptions of Gender Roles*<sup>77</sup> for inspiration and ideas.

# TIPS

## Tips for the teacher

- One of the main aspects of gender equality is letting boys and men show their emotions since hegemonic masculinity teaches children that expressing emotions other than anger is 'unmanly.'
- If someone says, „Boys don't cry“, discuss feelings and emotions. Explain that it is healthy to feel all your feelings and there are no 'boy's feelings' and 'girl's feelings'. Everybody cries, girls and boys, women and men. Crying is nothing for anybody to be ashamed of. Ask children if they have seen any incidents where boys and men cried? Has anybody seen famous footballers cry when winning or losing a match? Or after an injury? Was it OK for them to show their emotions?
- If some children believe only women should do the housework, invite class to contribute and share what happens in their family with regard to work and housework. Probably the varied responses help you to show that just because something is the case in one home does not mean it happens everywhere.

Most importantly, discussing gender with children should reinforce the message that boys and girls are equal. Every girl and boy can learn anything, engage in any hobby they like and choose any job they want. This enables children to explore and develop their unique interests and talents free from gender stereotypes.

<sup>77</sup> A Class That Turned Around Kids' Assumptions of Gender Roles. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3Aweo-74kY>

# IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS TO DISCUSS GENDER AND GENDER EQUALITY WITH OLDER PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

You can undertake more complex assignments with older primary school children to discuss topics such as gender pay gap and lack of women in managerial positions. It is a fact that by about 6 years of age, children know that men are associated with higher social status than women.<sup>78</sup> You could, for instance, ask questions given in the video 'How Children Responded to Questions about Gender Equality'<sup>79</sup> and then compare the answers given by your students with those given by youngsters in other countries. In the video, the children were asked:

- Are there jobs that women cannot do?
- Are there jobs that men can do better than women?
- Should a woman earn as much as a man?
- Do you believe men make for better leaders?
- Do you want a man or a woman to be your boss?

You can proceed with the discussion and ask if it is fair for women to be paid unequally. Watch and discuss a magnificent video made to mark the International Women's Day entitled 'Gender Equality Explained By Children'<sup>80</sup> where Danish primary school children perform the same task and are rewarded differently. And what they thought about this and how they considered it unfair! The script of the video has been provided at the end of this module.

You could continue discussions by asking: Would it be OK if women earned more than men? Households where the woman is the higher earner are not uncommon anymore. Remember that you are educating students for the future where gender roles are changing rapidly and becoming more flexible, especially for women.

Talk to pupils about sexism and underline the fact that while sexism is often a personal prejudice, it is also a system embedded in society that devalues women and girls. For example, strength tests used by firefighters value the kind of strength men typically have (lifting the heaviest thing one time) over the kind of strength that women typically have (lifting something lighter but doing it a hundred times), which is why it's harder for women

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<sup>78</sup> The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender.

<sup>79</sup> How Children Responded to Questions about Gender Equality. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOuzkNgKaEw>.

<sup>80</sup> Gender Equality Explained By Children. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLr2GNRnmXM>

to become firefighters.<sup>81</sup>

Today, you see women occupying top ranking positions such as government ministers or presidents as well as men working as nurses and kindergarten teachers. In every country, you can find such role models around which you can build discussions about gender roles nowadays and in the historical perspective.

## EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

Discuss with pupils what equality means. Write the word: Equality. Equality means making sure that every girl and boy, and every woman and man, has the same chances to make the most of their lives and talents. Explain that equality is about being fair. Stress fairness because it resonates easily with primary school age children. Discussing gender and gender equality, put across the message that

- both genders are equal
- there are very few things men and women cannot do equally well
- both genders have the right to study for and perform any kind of work they wish to
- equality between women and men, girls and boys is an issue of human rights and fairness.

## HOW TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR DISCUSSING GENDER?

Learning should take place in an environment where there is comfortable and easy communication between the teacher and pupils and amongst pupils. If a pupil asks you a question, answer as honestly and respectfully as you can. When facilitating discussions, tell students there are no right and wrong answers, just different views and that they must respect each other's views.

Further, if we really want to initiate meaningful change, make sure you involve boys. Engaging boys in discussions around gender stereotypes poses particular challenges.<sup>82</sup> The 'we should all be able to do whatever we want' argument has more resonance for girls since they tend to experience more exclusion. Crucially, boys can find it much more difficult to admit liking anything that was traditionally thought of as 'girly'. There is more pressure on boys to conform to fairly narrow gender stereotypes. So, if we offer the girls

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<sup>81</sup> An age-by-age guide to talking to your kids about gender.  
<https://www.todaysparent.com/family/parenting/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-gender-age-by-age-guide/>

<sup>82</sup> Stereotypes stop you doing stuff. <https://neu.org.uk/media/2926/view> p 18.

the chance to say that not every girl wants to wait for a prince to come and save her, we should also discuss the images of a superman with boys and give them the chance to say 'Hey, this is not what every man in the world looks, does or feels.'

One of the most important things teachers can do to promote gender equality is to challenge the students' misconceptions about traditional gender roles and norms. As role models, teachers should also live gender equality in their daily practice by treating children equally and objectively and by choosing and using teaching materials which are free from gender stereotypes.

## Learning points



Primary schools have the responsibility to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality through their curricula and teaching.



Discussing gender (in)equality in the primary classroom helps to empower children and protect them from negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as they grow into adults.



Deconstruction of stereotypes can be taken up within different classroom assignments and addressed within a range of subjects across the curriculum in the student's age-appropriate way.



Students need to be provided a safe environment for engaging in discussions about gender roles and gender equality so they can become promoters and defenders of gender equality themselves.

# Further reading

- Challenging gender stereotypes through primary education. Stereotypes stop you doing stuff.  
[www.neu.org.uk/media/2926/view](http://www.neu.org.uk/media/2926/view)
- Improving Gender Balance Scotland | An action guide for primary schools  
[www.education.gov.scot/media/vvogktrj/sci38-primary-action-guide.pdf](http://www.education.gov.scot/media/vvogktrj/sci38-primary-action-guide.pdf)
- Lesson plans for primary schools ages 9-11  
[www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/resources/lesson-plan-for-upper-ks2/](http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/resources/lesson-plan-for-upper-ks2/)

# Video

- No More Boys and Girls - Can Our Kids Go Gender Free episode 1 (Classroom intervention)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN5R2LWhTrY&t](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN5R2LWhTrY&t)
- Talking to Kids About... Gender Equality  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Jy5dU2rAI&t](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Jy5dU2rAI&t)
- Help kids learn about gender [with Foxy] Age 7+  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbhd-23mloc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbhd-23mloc)

# Video

Script of the video: **Gender Equality Explained By Children.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLr2GNRnmXM>

**Children introduce themselves:** I'm Selma. I'm Martin. I'm Ask. I'm Victoria. I'm Lars. I'm Felicia.

**Instructor:** I have a job for you, guys. I want you to put the blue balls in one vase and the pink ones in the other.

**Everybody:** OK.

**Martin:** Shall I put the pink ones in this and the blue ones in this?

**Selma:** No. The other way round? Blue in this one.

**Instructor:** ... OK, it's time for your reward. She gives every child a glass filled with pebbles.

**Selma:** Oi. What is this?

**Instructor:** Open your eyes.

**Lars:** I got a little bit more than you.

**Instructor:** Molly, the reason you got less than Thomas is because you're a girl.

**Molly:** That is just weird!

**Selma:** That is so unfair!

**Instructor:** What do you think, Felicia?

**Felicia:** We did the same job, but we didn't get the same amount.

**Ask:** She was just as good as me, so we should get the same reward.

**Victoria:** Why?

**Ask:** Because otherwise it's unfair.

**Molly:** There is no difference between boys and girls.

**Selma:** It's just wrong!

**Instructor:** Why is this wrong?

**Ask:** Girls aren't worth any less than boys.

**Thomas:** It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl.

Children redistribute the pebbles, so boys and girls get the same amount.

**Victoria:** I think it's equal now.

**Ask:** No. (He gives some more pebbles to Victoria.)

**Selma:** Now it's equal.

Unequal pay is unacceptable for children. Why should we accept this as adults?


# Module 13

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## HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO MAKE CHOICES FREE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

### AND ENGAGE IN STEM SUBJECTS?

#### Learning objectives

- 
- to understand the importance of primary school in broadening children's career aspirations to prepare them for the future
  - to understand and challenge students' stereotyped beliefs about jobs
  - to understand gender stereotyped beliefs about girls in STEM<sup>83</sup>
  - to provide teachers ideas how to encourage primary school students, especially girls to engage in STEM.

The role of the school is to prepare children for the future and tomorrow's job market. By one popular estimate, 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that do not yet exist.<sup>84</sup> To help students to choose from a full range of jobs available in tomorrow's labour market, teachers should help them to break down gender-based perceptions of jobs and trigger students', particularly girls' interest in STEM as a key to the jobs of the future.

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<sup>83</sup> STEM = acronym of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

<sup>84</sup> The future of jobs report. <https://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/chapter-1-the-future-of-jobs-and-skills/>

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL IN BREAKING DOWN GENDER STEREOTYPES ABOUT JOBS AND CAREERS

Studies over recent decades have all come to the same conclusion: the perceptions children have about certain jobs and careers are formed and sometimes cemented at a young age. Drawing the future, the biggest survey of its kind ever conducted, asked primary school children aged seven to eleven to draw a picture of the job they want to do when they grow up. The findings showed that from a young age children often stereotype jobs according to gender and their career choices are based on these assumptions with the majority of boys wanting to be sportsmen and girls wanting to be teachers.<sup>84</sup> This suggests that even though our children are growing up in a fast-changing world, outdated gender stereotypes and roles are still very much present today. Schools and teachers have an important role to play here to bring about meaningful change.

## CHALLENGING CHILDREN'S STEREOTYPICAL BELIEFS ABOUT JOBS AND CAREERS

Knowing that early interventions can bring a lasting impact on children's development and perceptions of different occupations, the earlier we start challenging rigid job-gender perceptions, the better. Challenging gender stereotypes in the classroom has been addressed in earlier modules, especially in Module 9: What can the teacher do to challenge gender stereotypes in textbooks and learning/teaching materials? Here are a couple of additional ideas for classroom assignments to challenge gender-stereotyping of jobs.

- Drawing is a useful tool because it allows pupils who may not be ready or able to communicate complex ideas in writing or speech to communicate their beliefs about professions. Ask pupils to draw a range of professionals (such as a bus driver, nurse, architect, teacher, doctor, or farmer). Ask them to identify which ones they have drawn as women and which they have drawn as men. Why did they make those choices? Discuss and challenge if there are any jobs only women or men can do.
- Ask children to create A Book of Me inviting them to also write down what kind of a

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<sup>84</sup>Drawing the future. Exploring the career aspirations of primary school children from around the world. January 2018. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/DrawingTheFuture.pdf>



job they would like to do in the future. What's the best thing about being a girl or a boy? Discuss if the jobs they suggested are traditionally male or female jobs and why they made such a choice. Ask what they would have chosen for a profession if they had been of the opposite sex?

Debate if both girls and boys can choose any profession, including such as astronauts, engineers and scientists and what subjects they should study to prepare themselves for the profession. Doing so, you can also stress the value of maths in pursuing interesting future careers like designing and building robots.

## **TIPS FOR THE TEACHER TO DISCUSS AND BREAK DOWN GENDER STEREOTYPES ABOUT JOBS**<sup>85</sup>

- Create opportunities to discuss assumptions about 'who can do what job' as often as possible and ensure that all staff are involved in doing so.
- Encourage children to tell you why assumptions about particular jobs being exclusively for women or men are wrong.
- Employ real and fictional role models that challenge stereotypes. While storybook characters – princesses, pirates, animals – are engaging, ensure that you also include 'realistic' examples that children can relate to in their own lives.
- Look for simple opportunities to point out assumptions – such as the use of words like 'policeman' or 'fireman'. Remember to use non-gendered terms yourself when describing jobs, regardless of the gender of the individual performing them.
- Challenge assumptions that generalised qualities like 'strength,' 'bravery' and 'kindness' are exclusively male or female characteristics. Point out that, nowadays, most jobs that require 'strength' involve machines that anyone can operate – and that many women are 'stronger' than many men anyway.
- Try to limit the impact of peer pressure. For instance, when reading out a list of jobs, ask students to close their eyes before putting up their hands to show their preferences. It can produce less stereotypical choices – especially amongst boys.
- Encourage children to think about whether we sometimes make choices because we believe other people think we should.

You can also ask your class what sort of subjects they are looking forward to studying in upper-primary and secondary schools and if these include STEM subjects. Discussing STEM early has great benefits for triggering, nurturing and maintaining students' interest in science over time, especially among girls. If there are children in the class who have already participated in hands-on technology or coding activities in kindergarten, ask them to share their experiences and tell others that science is for real things, it is great and fun!

<sup>85</sup> Adapted from Boys' things and girls' things. Practical strategies for challenging gender stereotypical choices and behaviours in primary schools. <https://neu.org.uk/media/2931/view> p. 15

# GIRLS' BARRIERS TO STEM EDUCATION

At school, there is the wide (unconscious) belief amongst teachers and students that girls are more hard-working, but have less talent for STEM, while boys are lazy, but more talented in STEM. Such biases and commonly held views that 'science isn't for girls' and that there are 'boys' subjects and 'girls' subjects dampen girls' interest in STEM.

Girls start believing they aren't good at maths, science, and even computers at a young age<sup>86</sup> even though research suggests young girls and boys have the same ability in maths.<sup>87</sup> When girls become aware through both subtle and overt cultural messages of male superiority in maths, it makes each encounter with maths and technology filled with more fraught, triggering self-doubt in even the most studious young girls.<sup>88</sup>

Persistent, subconscious images of male mathematicians and scientists present one further explanation why girls enter STEM fields at dramatically lower rates than boys. Mathematicians and scientists seem to be, at least in the eyes of children, socially awkward men who wear glasses.<sup>89</sup> Girls who typically want to perceive themselves as caring, creative and socially and environmentally conscious, find it hard to relate to anti-social, geeky and boring male STEM role models.



It is also teachers that may hold subconscious gender-biased views on girls' ability in STEM. In one striking study from 2015<sup>90</sup>, Israeli researchers divided sixth-grade exams into two sets for grading: One batch was graded by the teachers and included students' names, and the other contained no student names and was graded externally. In maths, teachers graded boys higher, while external graders rated girls higher. Those low teacher grades then dissuaded girls for years to come. Knowing this, the teacher can design and choose activities to remove those barriers.

<sup>86</sup> Can robots convince girls they're good at STEM? April 28th, 2017 <https://www.futurity.org/robots-girls-stem-1414332/>

<sup>87</sup> Trending Science: Are boys really better at maths? No, says new study. <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/411610-trending-science-are-boys-really-better-at-math-no-says-new-study>

<sup>88</sup> Keeping Girls in STEM: 3 Barriers, 3 Solutions. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/keeping-girls-stem-3-barriers-3-solutions>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> On the origins of gender human capital gaps: short- and long-term consequences of teachers' stereotypical biases by Victor Iavy and Edith Sand, January 2015. [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w20909/w20909.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w20909/w20909.pdf)

# HOW TO ENCOURAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN -ESPECIALLY GIRLS - TO ENGAGE IN STEM?

A child's curiosity about the world they live in coupled with limitless creativity, imagination and natural curiosity about how things work, is most active at primary school indicating this is the optimum age for engagement with STEAM subjects.<sup>91</sup> If we want more women in tech jobs, this early interest needs to be nurtured and supported throughout primary school and beyond. A survey commissioned by Microsoft found that young girls in Europe become interested in so-called STEM subjects around the age of 11 and then quickly lose interest when they are 15 due to conformity to social expectations, gender stereotypes, gender roles and lack of role models which continue to channel girls' career choices away from STEM fields.<sup>92</sup>

## TIPS

### Tips for the teacher to encourage girls in STEM:

- Plan plenty of hands-on science and maths activities in your primary classroom to trigger children's interest in STEM. Make maths and science exciting, fun, and learnable! If students enjoy a subject, they are more motivated to put in the hard work and stay engaged with it over time.
- Give girls a chance to talk about what STEM looks like for them. Ask girls about what they like and dislike about maths and science and why. Discuss what careers exist that they may have never heard of or considered.
- Stress the idea that science is a fascinating area for learning since technological solutions help to better care about other people, animals and the environment.
- Find STEM role models that girls can relate to. Invite women who work in STEM to speak about their career and answer pupils' questions in your classroom. That way girls can clearly see that they have a place in science.
- Use your lessons to teach students about famous and notable women in STEM.
- Direct girls into in-school and out-of-school STEM Clubs or hobby groups to develop their tech, coding and digital skills.
- Be mindful of the hidden curriculum and the hidden biases you might have towards women in STEM.
- Whenever possible, develop pupils' creativity and resilience as well as problem-solving and critical thinking skills to prepare them for multiple and flexible careers.

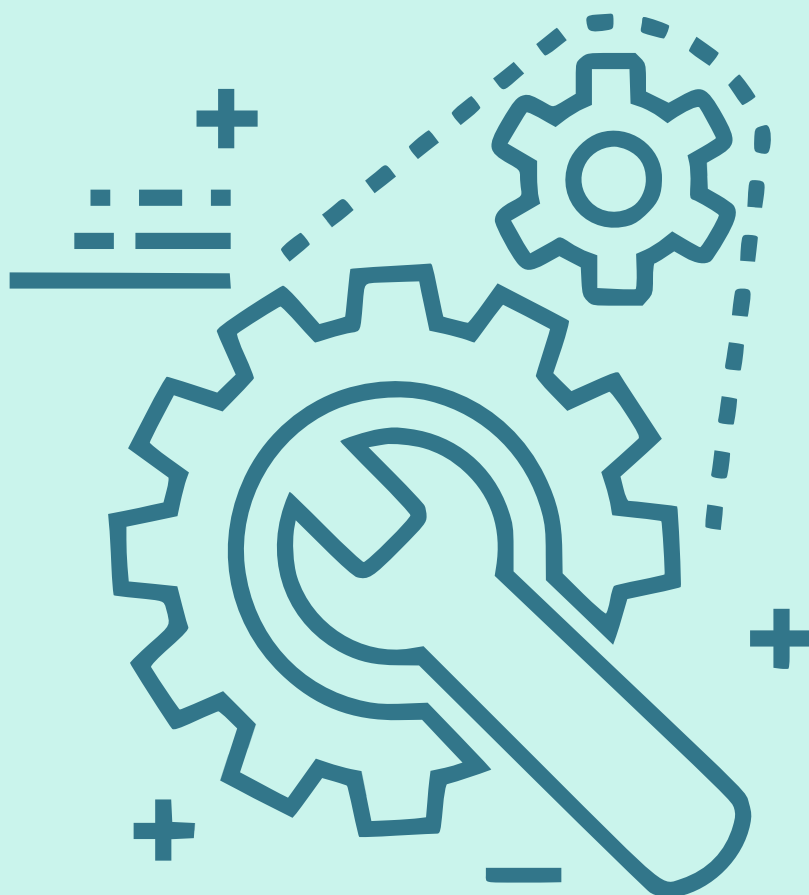
<sup>91</sup> CSTEM/STEAM. <https://www.teesvalleycareers.com/education/primary/toolkit-of-resources/stem-steam/>

<sup>92</sup> Succeeding in the New Global Economy. The exact age when girls lose interest in science and maths. <https://money.cnn.com/2017/02/28/technology/girls-math-science-engineering/index.html>

For further ideas, you can also consult the EU STEM Coalition website<sup>93</sup> which offers best practice cases for STEM education.

The website also features the activities of Unicorn Squad, a privately funded technology hobby group movement which was created in 2018 in Estonia.<sup>94</sup> The founders of the movement started a 'girls-only' technology hobby-group since their daughter was kicked out from the technology hobby group at school given the explanation that the field is more suitable for boys. The demand for girls-only technology hobby groups has been impressive. The movement has by now engaged 1200 girls aged 7-14. Unicorn Squad girls meet up once per week to focus on some real-life phenomena such as magnetism, sound, and speed, or electricity. The aim is to let girls create something real with their own hands. The girls also met Estonia's first female president Kersti Kaljulaid, in office 2017-2021, to deliver the message that girls have no limit to what they can become and achieve.

The role of the primary school teacher is to foster and harness young talent and get children ready for the future world of work. Breaking down gender-based perceptions of jobs would allow children to choose from the full range of jobs without being limited by gender stereotypes. This benefits both girls and boys helping them cope with newly emerging challenges posed by the tech-filled future. In terms of gender equality, it is important to tell the children that girls and boys are equally capable of learning and embracing STEM as a key to future jobs.



<sup>93</sup> <https://www.stemcoalition.eu/about>

<sup>94</sup> HK Unicorn Squad (technology hobby groups for girls)

# Learning points



Schools and teachers have a critical role in preparing students for careers and challenges that do not even exist yet.



Gender stereotypes about jobs, careers and subject choices, including in the domain of STEM need to be discussed and challenged at an early age, including in primary school.



There are many ways to encourage children, especially girls to take up STEM subjects and careers.



# Further reading

- Boys' things and girls' things. Practical strategies for challenging gender stereotypical choices and behaviours in primary schools.  
[www.neu.org.uk/media/2931/view](http://www.neu.org.uk/media/2931/view)
- Increasing Gender Equity in Elementary School. Seeking to bring more girls into STEM classes, educators examined their students' and their own attitudes about gender. By Dorothy Venditto, September 10, 2018  
[www.edutopia.org/article/increasing-gender-equity-elementary-school](http://www.edutopia.org/article/increasing-gender-equity-elementary-school)
- Girls in STEM. Education Services Australia 2020. The GiST provides resources to inspire and inform girls, schools and families about science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Explore activities, resources, case studies, lessons, study pathways and careers.  
[www.thegist.edu.au/](http://www.thegist.edu.au/)

# Video

- Redraw the Balance – challenging gender stereotypes. Posted March 11, 2020.  
[www.educationandemployers.org/17497-2/](http://www.educationandemployers.org/17497-2/)

# Module 14

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## HOW ARE GENDER STEREOTYPES RELATED TO GENDER-BASED SCHOOL VIOLENCE

### AND BULLYING AND HOW CAN SCHOOLS TACKLE THE PROBLEM?



#### Learning objectives

- to understand school violence and school bullying in its many forms
- to understand the role of gender stereotypes in school-related gender-based violence
- to learn how to respond to gender-based school violence and bullying and create a safe learning environment for all students.

Schools are major contexts for gender socialisation and reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes. Breaking gender stereotypes not only leads to girls' increased interest in science, technology and maths and boys' interest in reading but also to lower levels of gender-based violence and peer-bullying thereby creating a safer and more stimulating learning environment for all.

## WHAT ARE SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?

School violence is a global issue. It refers to all forms of violence that take place in and around schools and is experienced by students and perpetrated by other students, teachers and other school staff. According to UNESCO, one of the most pervasive forms of school violence, which affects 1 in 3 young people, is bullying.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> What you need to know about school violence and bullying. 03/11/2020  
<https://en.unesco.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-school-violence-and-bullying>

Although there is no universal definition of school bullying, it is widely agreed to be targeted aggressive behaviour, characterised by hostile intent, an imbalance of power and repetition over time.<sup>96</sup> Primary school children are likewise affected by bullying, which can occur in many different forms such as<sup>97</sup>

### **Emotional<sup>98</sup>**

hurting someone's feelings, leaving someone out

### **Physical**

punching, kicking, spitting, hitting

### **Verbal**

teasing, calling names

### **Racist**

calling names because of the colour of the skin or religion

### **Cyber**

saying unkind things by text messages and online



School violence and bullying affect both girls and boys, but there are differences between the sexes.

Boys are more likely to experience physical bullying, while girls are more likely to experience psychological bullying<sup>99</sup> like leaving someone out on purpose, spreading rumours, telling other children not to be friends with someone, etc.

<sup>96</sup> Focus On: Can we prevent bullying in school? March 19, 2019

[https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/focus-can-we-prevent-bullying-school\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/focus-can-we-prevent-bullying-school_en)

<sup>97</sup> Outside the Box. A whole-school approach to promoting gender equality and tackling sexism and sexual harassment. <https://equalteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/> p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> Emotional and psychological bullying frequently carry the same meaning.

<sup>99</sup> How to talk to your children about bullying. <https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-talk-your-children-about-bullying>



When talking about bullying, it is important to remember that not all bad behaviour between children qualifies as bullying. Bullying is a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated incident. Teasing, for instance, becomes bullying only when it is repetitive or when it involves a conscious intent to hurt another child.

School violence and bullying can have devastating consequences for the victim such as difficulties concentrating in class, missing classes, avoiding school activities, playing truant or even dropping out of school. As such, violence and bullying should never be ignored or accepted in educational contexts.

Studies have confirmed that bullying at school can be found anywhere and in any class even under the supervision of a good teacher whom children respect and listen to.<sup>100</sup> Bullying takes place not only in the classroom, but also in areas where the level of supervision by teaching or school staff tends to be lower like in the playground, in corridors, cloakrooms etc. where it can often go unnoticed.

## WHO GETS BULLIED?

Students who bully are seeking power and choose to target others to gain that power. All children can be bullied, yet evidence shows that children who are perceived to be 'different' in any way are more at risk. Factors that cause bullying are physical appearance, ethnic, linguistic or cultural background, gender, including not conforming to gender norms and stereotypes; social status and disability.<sup>101</sup> Children who deviate from gender norms and expectations often become the target for gender-based violence and bullying at school.

## WHAT IS GENDER-BASED SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is any act or threat of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics.<sup>102</sup> Gender stereotypes directly influence the socialisation of young children into gender roles. Many bullying behaviours are acts of gender policing<sup>103</sup> and much of the aggression that occurs within student social culture can be connected to gender norms.

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<sup>100</sup>The Role of the Teacher in Preventing Mobbing and Bullying at School  
<https://ekidz.eu/how-to-deal-with-bullies-emotional-bullying-at-school>

<sup>101</sup>What you need to know about school violence and bullying.  
<https://en.unesco.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-school-violence-and-bullying>

<sup>102</sup>School-related gender-based violence. <https://www.togetherforgirls.org/schools/>

<sup>103</sup>Gender policing aims to keep gender roles rigid and aligned according to the gender binary.

A lack of safety in schools can be attributed to ideas about what constitutes masculinity. 'Real' men use strength, toughness and violence to show power. Research has shown that even at primary school level, there is significant pressure on boys to prove their masculinity through objectifying and teasing girls.<sup>104</sup> Ideas about what it means to be 'normal' as a girl or boy are perpetuated by language. A lot of bullying in school involves verbal abuse. Phrases like 'Only boys can...' or 'Girls can't ...' do harm to both girls and boys. When a boy is called a 'sissy', he is criticised for expressing emotion and vulnerability which undermine the notion of a 'real man' who should be strong and tough. Using the word 'sissy' is meant to hurt and communicate the idea that being feminine or associated with females is an insult.

And when girls are called 'bossy', they are chastised for having opinions or a sense of authority which should be a male characteristic. Often, what is viewed as 'bossy' in a girl is considered leadership in a boy. Using words like 'bossy' for girls prevents girls from learning how to be self-confident and assertive. Such language does not contribute to creating gender-equal relationships between girls and boys.

Schools and teachers have a great role to play in stopping and preventing gender-based violence and promoting a culture that challenges stereotypical behaviours and respects differences.

## **WHAT CAN SCHOOL DO TO COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?**

Most importantly, schools should make gender equality a commonplace ethos of the school. They should further develop a clearly communicated anti-bullying policy explaining to students what bullying is, who children can turn to for help and what happens if the student bullies. Such a policy should tell children that it is never acceptable to hurt or harm others and that they need to take responsibility for their actions.

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<sup>104</sup> Outside the Box. A whole-school approach to promoting gender equality and tackling sexism and sexual harassment. <https://equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/>

# WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO TO COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND BULLYING?

First and foremost, teachers should promote a gender-equal, respectful and non-violent culture in the classroom challenging gender stereotypes and developing students' social skills. The number one rule for teachers is not to ignore even the smallest instances of bullying and not assume that children will settle the problem themselves.

The most effective methods to stop and prevent bullying among primary school-aged children are conversation and condemnation. Regardless of the type of bullying, the effects of bullying and how to deal with bullies needs to be discussed. At this young age, students are still in the process of developing moral principles and children rely largely on the guidance of the teacher. A simple confrontation can show the teacher's own condemnation of bullying and the unacceptable nature of the aggressor's behaviour. An effective method for how to deal with bullies is also to discuss with the class the rules and consequences for their misbehaviour so that children themselves propose the rules on which they agree to live and communicate in school.<sup>105</sup>

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TO TACKLE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND BULLYING

- Map hotspots for bullying

Take a large sheet of paper and make a simplified sketch of the school and the outdoor environment. Mark different spaces such as classrooms, corridors, toilets, the dining room, cloakroom, gymnasium, etc. Ask students to mark with colours or stickers where girls and boys do and do not like to be. Explore the reasons why students try to avoid or dislike certain places. Is it because of violence and bullying taking place there? It would make sense to discuss the results separately in girl and boy groups, as there may be power relations that hinder the conversation. One mapping exercise, for instance, revealed that girls felt uncomfortable entering the school building in the morning as some of the boys lined up at the door made nasty comments on girls' appearance and clothing. Some girls remarked they hated boys jumping the queue in the dining-room. You can also invite students to write down their ideas on post-it notes and place them on the defined hotspots to suggest ways to tackle bullying and solve the problem together.

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<sup>105</sup> How to deal with Bullies & Emotional Bullying at School.  
<https://ekidz.eu/how-to-deal-with-bullies-emotional-bullying-at-school>

- Challenge verbal abuse

As we saw above, words help to create gender roles and power relations between boys and girls. Ask students to write down as many words for girls and boys as possible, both negative and positive. Then write them down on the board and ask students to agree amongst themselves what words to use or not to use when referring to boys and girls. It cleans the air and suggests what is an acceptable language in the classroom in reference to girls and boys. You can use the exercise to explain what sort of harm derogatory words may cause. You can watch the video 'Bullying Activity for Any Classroom' which makes it easy to understand the harm done to other children by bullying.<sup>106</sup>

Teachers should likewise mind their own use of language. They can take an active part in combating the culture of violence and inequity by eliminating use of the following common phrases: 'Man up', 'Stop acting like a girl', 'Boys don't cry', 'Be a man'. These statements may make boys believe that the only acceptable way to express their emotions is through anger or physical action. These statements also imply that men cannot feel hurt or express emotion, preventing them from reaching out if they need or seek help for abuse. Also calling girls 'sweetie' or boys 'mate' in primary school reinforces gender stereotypes.

Apart from these activities, you can also use ready-made age-appropriate lessons available online to discuss gender-based violence and bullying as well as develop students' social skills. For instance, 'Stopping sexism'<sup>107</sup> focusing on treating someone badly or unfairly because of being a boy or a girl; 'What is power', 'It's a choice', 'Respect and online safety' discussing what power is and how it is used and how to develop non-violent solutions to situations happening at school along with taking care of online safety.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Bullying Activity for Any Classroom. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j6foVLceD8>

<sup>107</sup>Outside the box, Promoting Gender Equality & Tackling Sexual Harassment in Schools, pp. 67-69  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/3n4hbd6n1qg18za/EqualiTeach-%20Outside%20The%20Box.pdf?dl=0>

<sup>108</sup>Respect. Primary lessons, starting from page 15

<https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/RESPECT-Primary-Lessons.pdf>

# TIPS

## Tips for the teacher to tackle gender-based violence and bullying<sup>109</sup>

### 1. Challenge gender stereotypes.

If you teach your students that gender stereotypes are not true or fair, it will be much harder for bullies to use them to justify their actions.

### 2. Set classroom rules at the beginning of the school year.

Let your students draft (with your help) a set of rules and norms they are to follow for the rest of the school year. If bullying occurs, you can go back to these rules and discuss how they have been broken and what the consequences should be.

### 3. Discuss cases from other schools.

Before anything happens in your class, you can discuss with your pupils an event that occurred in another school. This will allow them to discuss it with some detachment, unpack some of the consequences of bullying, and, hopefully, prevent similar cases.

### 4. Make it a learning opportunity

If bullying does happen, use it as an opportunity to start a conversation on how we behave with each other and why this sort of violence is never acceptable.



<sup>109</sup> A teacher's guide to gender sensitivity in the classroom preventing and responding to biases and bullying  
<https://d2t1lspzrjtif2.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/Teachers-guide-to-addressing-gender-stereotypes-in-the-classroom.pdf>

# Learning points



School violence and school bullying in their many forms are a growing concern the world over.



Gender stereotypes and enforcement of rigid gender roles are responsible for gender-based violence and bullying happening at school.



Developing anti-bullying policies by school and combating prevailing gender stereotypes by teachers help to reduce the levels of gender-related school violence and bullying and create a safe learning environment for all students.



# Further reading

- Outside the Box: Promoting Gender Equality & Tackling Sexual Harassment in Schools

[www.equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/)

- Gender equality matters. A primary school resource to tackle gender stereotyping, gender-based bullying and gender-based violence

[www.file.coffee/u/d4jMhMjwbtb.pdf](http://www.file.coffee/u/d4jMhMjwbtb.pdf)

# Video

- Together against school bullying (long version).

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgMwh5Fnp3I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgMwh5Fnp3I)

- Five Ways To Stop Bullying

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFlrCuSyhvU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFlrCuSyhvU)

- Anti-Bullying Videos for Students Age 7 – 11.

[www.childhood101.com/bullying-videos-kids/](http://www.childhood101.com/bullying-videos-kids/)

- The Meanest Girl In Second Grade

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFWfFCmjH\\_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFWfFCmjH_s)

# Module 15

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## HOW TO EMPOWER THE TEACHER TO ENGAGE IN GENDER-SENSITIVE TEACHING?



### Learning objectives

- to identify steps in initiating change toward gender-sensitive teaching in school
- to identify ways to overcome resistance and mobilise support
- to learn about the whole-school approach to tackling gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in education

Having read through this material and feeling motivated to improve your teaching along the lines of gender-sensitive pedagogy, the question remains where and how to start. Applying some of the ideas provided in this resource to challenge gender stereotypes would be relatively easy and give you aha moments and new perspectives within a short time. To work for a meaningful change and embed gender equality across the whole school in the long-term requires, however, time and commitment by the entire staff, parents and stakeholders.

## INITIATING CHANGE AND INVOLVING OTHER STAFF MEMBERS

A focus on sexuality, relationships, gender and gender equality is included in the school curricula of most European countries. How teachers deliver the curriculum and tackle gender stereotyping is, however, often left to the discretion of teachers and schools them-

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<sup>110</sup> Equinet report: Gender equality. Equality in the classroom: equality bodies and gender equality in education. Equinet report, 2018, p. 10 . <https://equineteurope.org/publications/equality-in-the-classroom-equality-bodies-and-gender-equality-in-education/>



selves. It is no wonder therefore that gender equality work in schools features a broad spectrum of interventions ranging from applying the whole-school approach to taking only the first steps by a few enthusiastic teachers based on their own interest. If the latter is true, you can think of taking gender equality work forward step-by-step.



An equal school is not something that someone else creates, but where every teacher participates every day as they all contribute to creating gender. Taking up new topics is not easy, so do your best to rally others to your cause. Invite your colleagues to join informal conversations about gender equality in society, in your organisation and the classroom. Doing so, you can use questions for reflection given in previous modules.

You might find yourselves discussing the gender pay gap, lack of male teachers in primary school or the fact that disruptive boys seem to take the bulk of teachers' attention and time in the classroom. You can also ask if and in what ways your colleagues have addressed gender in their lessons and what sort of a place it occupies in the delivery of the curriculum. Invite them to share their observations, experiences and ideas. Such discussions would not only help to map the existing situation in terms of staff's awareness of, interest in and action toward gender equality, but also build a common knowledge base for creating a gender-inclusive classroom and school.

Sharing experiences and reflecting on teaching can be highly useful. However, as with any experiential learning you should avoid certain traps since we are tempted to notice and pick up things that are consistent with what we already believe in and know. You should therefore do your best to engage a gender expert to provide gender sensitization training so your work can be underpinned by gender knowledge and research instead of relying on your colleagues' own assumptions and attitudes regarding boys and girls.

# TIPS

## Tips for creating an environment for productive gender equality conversations

- Make sure you promote respectful and active listening.
- When talking about equality, go beyond experiences with one's own life and family situations. It is human to talk about them, but if such reflections take up too much space in the conversation, you run the risk of relying on opinions and personal experiences only. Remember that you can and should work with gender equality in school regardless of the gender equality situation in your home.
- Avoid making anyone feel uneducated or ignorant; such feelings would block thoughts and conversations.
- Make sure reflective conversations do not turn into a debate or argument about what is right or wrong to do or whether anyone should be for or against working with gender equality.
- Do not judge anybody for their views; if you identify unconscious biases mention that having an unconscious gender bias does not automatically make a person sexist – everyone has biases as a result of years of exposure to gendered patterns;<sup>111</sup> the important thing is that with a bit of knowledge you can minimise their impact.
- Tell your colleagues that they have an ideal opportunity to encourage gender equality and respectful relationships in the classroom using simple but effective practices such as described in Module 10: What can the teacher do to challenge gender stereotypes in primary classroom and daily teaching practices.
- Be constructive and convey the message that gender equality work helps to raise the quality of teaching and broaden children's opportunities and life choices.

## WHY MAY SOME TEACHERS BE RELUCTANT TO JOIN GENDER EQUALITY WORK?

Even though what you are proposing may be a wonderful improvement, not everybody would be enthusiastic and willing to embark on gender equality work. There might be many reasons for that.

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<sup>111</sup> Improving gender balance Scotland. An Action guide for Primary Schools.  
<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/sci38-primary-action-guide.pdf>

- Some may firmly believe that equality between women and men, boys and girls has been achieved and thus, the topic may seem irrelevant.
- Some may be in favour of gender equality but are not ready or willing to take any action claiming that it means additional work and that the curriculum is overloaded anyhow.
- Some may hold essentialist views suggesting that men and women are born to be fundamentally different. They are convinced that differences in boys' and girls' interests, behaviours and achievements are natural and nothing can and should be changed.
- Some firmly believe school offers equal opportunities to everyone without realising that certain activities (e.g. extracurricular activities such as music, arts, sports) are open to all does not necessarily mean pupils feel comfortable choosing those activities as they are held back by gender stereotypes.
- Some teachers may also try to diminish their role in breaking stereotypes and shift the responsibility to other actors suggesting the biggest impact comes from home, parents, kindergartens, media, etc.
- Or there might just be that teachers are tired of running yet another project with gender equality being seen as another issue to be squeezed into their tight schedule.
- Some may regard gender issues as sensitive and politicised and hence do not want to get involved.

The list could be prolonged. Often, resistance just comes down to teachers' lack of awareness and training in gender roles and norms and equality issues as well as to the lack of visible support from the school leadership. Due to this, teachers may not fully understand what gender equality work entails or what sort of support and resources are available for discussing and questioning gender stereotypes in the classroom. This is where you can help and support each other.

## **START WITH SMALL PROJECTS**

Overcoming the perception that there are no problems with gender equality in our society or school is the most important step in creating a truly equal learning environment for children. To set the work in motion, you do not have to have the whole staff on your side. It would, however, be essential to gather support from school leadership from the very beginning as they have the most power to initiate and support change.

Having got some of your colleagues on board, you can start with 'mini projects' focusing on one aspect of gender equality at a time. Looking at classroom interactions and activities through a 'gender lens' does not take much extra time or expertise. However, it has a great potential for providing you with interesting insights into the hidden messages and gender inequality in the classroom.

You can, for instance:

- involve colleagues in observing each other's classrooms and analysing, suppose, how children are addressed, how talking time is distributed between girls and boys or what sort of tasks are assigned to female and male students, etc. using the observation and filming methodology. The latter is especially useful for making visible aspects that are more difficult to spot like body language, tone of voice, eye contact, etc. in pupil/teacher interactions. Revisit the material GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A SELF-STUDY COURSE FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS (modules Observation methodology – what to look for and how to see, Filming your own workday, Analysis of film material).
- analyse teaching materials and textbooks to identify what assumptions they make about the role of men and women, girls and boys
- perform statistical analysis of extra-curricular activities (e.g. music, dance, sport, robotics) to identify gender patterns in participation and encourage choices free from gender stereotypes
- make an inventory of the physical school environment, including notice boards and displays to find out how women and men, girls and boys are depicted and what sort of role models they provide; do so together with your class.

## PLAN CHANGE TOGETHER

Such initial projects should be treated as a relevant piece of the puzzle in making gender patterns visible. Joint analyses of findings in small teams are highly useful and give rise to new ideas. They also provide your argumentation power in favour of gender equality work.

When the analysis is complete and the observed situation described from a gender perspective, it is time to make a simple plan and describe what and how you want to change, how to measure progress and design next steps together. Introduce the topic at staff meetings and set aside time for discussing gender stereotyping, unconscious bias and ways to overcome them. Such individual initiatives and one-off events to challenge gender stereotypes can make a real difference, but comprehensive, long-term change requires further steps and adopting a whole-school approach.

# WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

It is the role of the school leadership to create a gender friendly learning environment and make gender equality visible throughout the school as well as communicate the message that it is everybody's responsibility to do so. According to UK Feminista, there are basically three steps to a whole-school approach:<sup>112</sup>

1. Put in place a framework. Action to tackle sexism in school should be underpinned by a strategy, supported by school policy, and driven by leadership.
2. Train and equip teachers. All school staff should be equipped with the knowledge, resources and confidence to tackle sexism.
3. Support students. Every student should be supported to learn about sexism, to report incidents and to take action for equality.

A whole-school approach also involves the school's culture, policies, procedures and school ethos. Every school must have a values statement, and this constitutes the perfect place for making a specific reference to gender equality.

To embed gender equality across the school, it needs first to conduct a baseline audit to assess what good practices are already present and where the gaps are. An audit should include reviewing policies and procedures, monitoring sexist incidents, analysing attainment by subject, monitoring rewards and sanctions and analysing representation of gender in the curriculum and resources.<sup>113</sup> Should you take an interest in research and ideas on gender imbalances and gender-responsive data collection in school, you can consult the resource "Improving gender balance and equalities. Data guide for primary school, early learning and childcare settings".<sup>114</sup>

Attempting to make changes that may be different to a socially agreed set of norms, the school needs to engage with parents and give them the opportunity to meet with school staff to voice any concerns that they might have. Most parents and carers will appreciate the transparency and the school will have the opportunity to bring on board the very people who influence their young learners. You can also get some tips for working with parents in GENDER-SENSITIVE EDUCATION: A SELF-STUDY COURSE FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS (module Parents: working with the home).

Developing a whole-school approach takes time, involvement of the entire staff, students, parents and ideally, stakeholders. You and your 'team' of enlightened teachers who are willing to initiate change can become an indispensable resource for taking the gender equality work forward and contribute to this process.

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<sup>112</sup> How to take a whole school approach to tackling sexism. <https://1url.cz/hrHsO>

<sup>113</sup> Outside the Box. A whole-school approach to promoting gender equality and tackling sexism and sexual harassment, p. 17. <https://1url.cz/HrHsc>

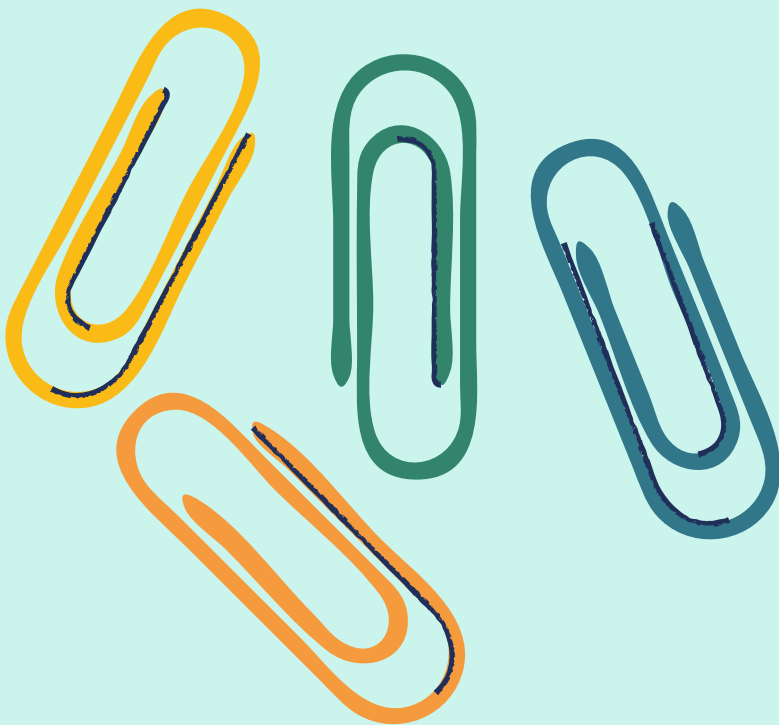
<sup>114</sup> Improving gender balance and equalities. Data guide for primary school, early learning and childcare settings. <https://1url.cz/NrHs9>

# FURTHER IDEAS FOR EMPOWERING THE TEACHER TO TACKLE GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES IN SCHOOL

There are several ways to further empower yourself and your colleagues to embark on the path to gender-sensitive teaching. You can

- create or join networks of professionals engaged in promoting gender equality inside and outside the school for mutual support, inspiration and ideas
- look out for additional resources, courses, webinars, blogs, etc. and keep learning. Visit, for instance, the Resource Library,<sup>115</sup> which contains a collection of resources, reports and guidance from across the internet to help inspire and inform your own gender action projects
- consult other resources developed by Erasmus+ programme projects, e.g. expanding the use of the 'Gender Equality Charter Mark' for schools across Europe<sup>116</sup> which provides you a framework for a whole-school approach to gender equality in schools across Europe.

There is a long way to go to change negative gender stereotyping and foster gender equality. This work needs time and committed people. Any step, however small, in this direction, can make a difference and this is where you can be instrumental.



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<sup>115</sup> Resource Library. <https://www.genderaction.co.uk/online-resources>

<sup>116</sup> Gender Equality Charter Mark (GECM). <https://genderequalityinschools.org/>

# Learning points



To challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality, teachers and school staff need to be empowered to do so.



Change can start with small steps initiated by 'gender champions', teachers aware of and interested in gender issues.



Meaningful change over the long term requires promotion of a whole-school approach and involvement of the entire school staff, parents and stakeholders.

## Further reading

- How to take a whole school approach to tackling sexism.  
[www.ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/How-to-take-a-whole-school-approach-1.pdf](http://www.ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/How-to-take-a-whole-school-approach-1.pdf)
- [www.ukfeminista.org.uk/resources-hub/](http://www.ukfeminista.org.uk/resources-hub/)

# Module 16

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## TAKEAWAYS FROM THE COURSE

Gender equality work in primary school is needed, important and possible. It is needed because of the reality of gender inequality in society at large such as unequal access to power and resources. The root causes of these problems are gender stereotyping, underlying social norms and unequal power relationships – all of which can be challenged within schools. Schools are not only microcosms of society but can also be places where change in society can be seeded and nurtured.<sup>117</sup>

Gender stereotyping is one of the most important barriers to achieving gender equality de facto. Gender stereotypes limit children's potential, subject and career choices and can cause life-long harm. It is therefore of utmost importance to question and challenge gender stereotypes on all levels of education. The main purpose of these training materials was to enhance teachers' sensitivity to gender issues to help them to create more inclusive classroom environments where girls and boys can develop their competencies in a safe and welcoming atmosphere without the pressure of restrictive gender norms.

The precondition for engaging in gender equality work is the willingness of teachers and the whole school staff to evaluate their own practices and interactions with children as their unconscious gender biases and expectations can have a major influence on students' academic performance, school experience, well-being and safety in school. So, they should be aware of how their words, actions, and content choices in the classroom can perpetuate or combat gender stereotypes.

This material was targeted at primary school teachers working with young children aged 6-11. Approaches to and action on gender equality in education vary across European countries. There is no uniform educational policy in Europe with each country being entirely responsible for its education policies, systems and curricula. A focus on sexuality, relationships, gender and gender equality is included in the school curricula of most European countries.<sup>118</sup> How prominently gender issues feature in school curricula and

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<sup>117</sup> Helen Griffin. Gender Equality in Primary Schools. Guide for Teacher. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018, p. 175.

<sup>118</sup> Equinet report: Gender equality. Equality in the classroom: equality bodies and gender equality in education. Equinet report, 2018 <https://equineteurope.org/publications/equality-in-the-classroom-equality-bodies-and-gender-equality-in-education/>



policies varies, and so do the ways how gender stereotypes are tackled in the classroom and school. This task is often left at the discretion of schools and teachers themselves. In terms of gender equality work, primary school teachers have a common starting point, though, as by the compulsory school age, children already identify strongly with expectations of their own gender and are likely to actively conform to stereotypes. The topic of gender stereotypes is not as difficult to teach as one may think and if taught effectively, students will leave the classroom with the understanding that they can be more than what society expects them to be or tells them they should be.<sup>119</sup>

It is important to remember that we refer to girls and boys in this material to enable discussion of the impacts of gender stereotypes on all students. This does not imply that gender categories are binary or fixed.

Further, it is not only gender that matters. Seeing and understanding how gender is created in collaboration with other categories such as class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and/or disability in the classroom helps teachers to counter stereotypical roles and create an inclusive and affirmative environment. This increases the opportunities for children to dare to transcend traditional patterns, which is positive for their learning. Using such an intersectional lens when investigating gender equality issues is gaining ground in many countries now.

Use the materials offered here, consult the sources provided at the end of each module. Adapt them and supplement them to suit your own situations and purposes because the contexts where you operate, as we saw, can be very different.

Hopefully this material gave you inspiration and ideas to move toward gender-sensitive teaching so you can make a difference to the lives and futures of the girls and boys living in our complex and fast-changing world.

Reflecting on the material provided, identify for yourself

1.The three most important aha moments concerning the gender equality knowledge gained.

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2.The three key messages you want to deliver your colleagues to trigger interest in gender equality work.

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3.The three most important things you are going to do to challenge gender stereotypes in your classroom and teaching practices.

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<sup>119</sup> Teaching about gender stereotypes. <https://educators4sc.org/topic-guides/teaching-about-gender-stereotypes/>

## Pictures

pp. 54: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN5R2LWhTr>

pp. 54: [www.subsaga.com/bbc/documentaries/families/no-more-boys-and-girls-can-our-kids-go-gender-free/series-1/episode-2.html](http://www.subsaga.com/bbc/documentaries/families/no-more-boys-and-girls-can-our-kids-go-gender-free/series-1/episode-2.html)

pp. 62: <https://www.skriibus.ee/views/oppevara.xhtml?id=43&form=3>

pp. 63: <https://www.skriibus.ee/views/oppevara.xhtml?id=43&form=3>

pp. 63: <https://www.opiq.ee/Kit/Details/141>

pp. 63: <https://www.opiq.ee/Kit/Details/158>

pp. 64: Lõhmus, T., Saks, M. Matemaatika 1. klassile. Avita

<https://www.opiq.ee/Kit/Details/112>

pp. 64: Elvisto, T., Laug, V., Hallik, M. Loodus- ja inimeseõpetus 2. klassile. Avita

<https://www.opiq.ee/Kit/Details/56>

pp. 70: <https://www.huvitavkool.ee/2018/04/>

pp. 78: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/think-about-your-language/>

pp. 94: <https://www.istockphoto.com/cs/vektor/vektorov%C3%A9-ilustrace-d%C4%9Bt%C3%AD-ter%C3%A9-maj%C3%AD-lekci-chemie-gm946621146-258499372>

pp. 94: <https://cz.depositphotos.com/29175561/stock-illustration-cartoon-scientist.html>