



GENDER DYNAMICS IN THE CLASSROOM: TEACHING TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY

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ABSTRACT

In our school system inequities in teacher attention and class participation begin long before a particular student walks into the classroom; however, these patterns can be changed. Classroom dynamics is an area which needs to be researched and worked upon to develop positive and equity based classroom environment which can profit all the students in the course and result in a higher level of intellectual performance. Promoting equity in the classroom does not necessarily mean treating all students equally, however it means giving all students equal opportunities to succeed; it may also mean giving some students more encouragement to perform in class or structuring the class in ways that promote greater participation from a wider number of students Paying closer attention to gender dynamics in the classroom leads to both better teaching and better learning for all students in the classroom. This paper focuses on gender issues prevailing in school system in Haryana (Kurukshetra). The analysis show how factors like classroom dynamics, class room environment, classroom structure, teachers' attitude, student teacher interactions etc create gender biases. This paper suggests for gender equitable school system.

Key Words: Class room environment, class room structure, gender equity, gender equality, gender segregation, gender discrimination, socialization

Introduction

In past few decades have seen a serious debate about how school system can promote gender equity and equality. Many researchers have been carried out indicating an improvement in the treatment of females in classroom methods and curricular materials, but would be early to declare success and dismiss issues of gender bias in school system. In the present time, our girls and boys remain victims of gender stereotypes in text and resource materials. They also suffer due to the unintended or sexist behaviors of educators in classroom and school as a whole. Time and again teachers reveal varied expectations for children, based on a student's gender, class, race and ethnicity. Most teachers care deeply about the youngsters in their classrooms. They are confident that they treat all their students the same. However, when some teachers analyzed their own attitudes and behaviors discovered the subtle and pervasive nature of gender inequity in the classroom.

Gender biases in Institutional practices

Gender bias is subtle because it can be almost invisible. Many researchers have pointed out that classroom structure reinforce gender inequality from the preprimary stage through higher education female students receive very less active instruction, both in the quality and quantity of teachers time and attention. Teachers many a times discriminate against female students inadvertently. Discrimination arises out of ignorance and deeply ingrained ways of thinking related to culturally assigned gender roles. It was very difficult for the researcher to identify the covert and overt form of gender discrimination, the researcher tried her best to give extra effort to insidious form of gender discrimination in institutional practices, particularly student-teacher and student-student interaction.

Gender biases in school practices

In all the eight schools selected for the study in district Kurukshetra Haryana, there were visible gender segregation inside the classroom and school. In 5 schools out of the eight selected

schools male and female students sit in different part of the classroom. In two private schools there were alternate rows of boys and girls. In one government school boys were sitting on the back rows and female in front row. In almost all government and private schools selected for the study girl and boys were lined up separately in the morning assembly. In playground also most of the students were segregated gender wise. It was also noticed that in lunch break also students were seen in peer groups of same gender. Whenever teacher line up or group students by gender they affirm that boys and girls should be treated differently. Many teachers feel that by separating girls from boys they are protecting the girl students but in fact they are encouraging the stereotypical pattern of passivity in female students and dominance and aggression in female students.

Gender biases in classroom practices

During the study the researcher found that the existence gender inequity in the classroom can be analyzed by critical analysis of behavior of the teachers and students in classroom. For example: It was found that male students received more teacher questions than female student during the instructional process. It was also observed by the investigator that minimal wait time was given to female students for answering the questions and more frequent follow-up questions were presented to male students in comparison to females. Uneven ratio of student/teacher interactions results in gender inequity and inequality. Males most of the times were more likely to call out or act out, demanding and receiving teacher attention. Another important area was segregated seating patterns in class rooms which reinforce unequal teacher attention. Almost all schools in Kurukshetra (Haryana) have classrooms which are characterized by gender segregated classrooms. In laboratory experiments or demonstration in classroom boys were more likely to be called up to the front of the room to do demonstrations (for example a science or geography demonstration). In teachers perception boys were more likely to be undisciplined than girls, even when the misbehavior is identical. It was found that girls are more likely to be praised for the appearance and neatness of their work. Female students were often stereotyped into writing jobs and helping teachers in writing notes because of neat notes. Teachers were more likely to offer boys specific feedback on their work – including praise, criticism and remediation. Boys were more likely to receive more attributions to effort and ability in teacher comments in comparison to girls giving them confidence that success and

competence is simply a matter of applying themselves.

Gender biases in School textbooks and supplemental resource materials

School textbooks and supplemental resource materials tend to be filled with male protagonists and stories.

Specific Teaching Strategies to remove gender bias

1. Teacher need to tell about his/her expectations about participation of students at the beginning of the course. Teacher not expect every student to participate in every class, but he /she do expect every student to participate at some time and that students who find this difficult should speak to teacher individually.
2. Teaches should ensure that more assertive students do not dominate; he or she may announce that you expect all students to listen carefully to one another and periodically encourage such listening during the course.

Discussion and Lecture:

1. Establish class norms or ground rules for discourse (e.g., Critical analysis must be of ideas not persons, etc.) during the course. Enlisting the students in creating and enforcing these rules helps create an environment in which students feel safe enough to take intellectual risks, even if they make mistakes in the process.
2. Call all students by name and attribute students' contributions to class discussion by name.
3. Use examples that include men and women in other than merely stereotypical ways.
4. Avoid making any student a spokesperson for his/ her gender.
5. Teachers should not single out female students as if they expect female students to have difficulty (as in consistently asking one female in the class, "Do you understand, Geeta?") This

is especially problematic in courses with predominantly male enrollments.

6. After asking questions, teacher should look around the room to make eye contact with both male and female students. This eye contact should be nonverbal encouragement for student participation. Teacher should watch students for nonverbal clues that may signal interest or disagreement, and call on them in addition to those who raise their hands. Teacher should be aware of the nonverbal clues which may be giving to students as they speak. Teachers' nonverbal messages (i.e., leaning forward, which suggests interest, or flipping through papers and looking at your watch, which may be seen as signs of disinterest) may have an important effect on which students speak again.

If teacher find that he or she consistently lecture or sit next to certain students, he or she should move to new locations, or move around the room he or she speaks. If he or she moves from one group to other group of students during laboratory projects, check to make sure you spend as much time among groups containing female students as among predominately male groups.

Teacher should increase his or her wait time for responses. Average teacher wait time is one second, but a wait time of three to five seconds produces significantly more, higher quality responses among a wider variety of students.

Classroom Dynamics

When students view laboratory demonstrations as a group, teacher should make sure smaller and shorter students do not become shouldered to the side or hindered from full view (Hall and Sandler).

Teacher should be aware that female students from an underrepresented group may feel the effects of gender, ethnicity and race in different ways. Teachers should not assume that all the female students in his or her classroom have similar thoughts, attitudes or experiences.

Assessment

Teacher should use frequent brief feedback techniques to gauge students' understanding.

Classroom Structure:

In the first week or two of the course, teacher should arrange to have every student talk briefly in class or in small groups. Students can introduce themselves to the class or to each other or report group solutions of problems. Whatever teacher does may set up a structure that helps everyone say something out loud, if not to the entire class then to a small group. Studies have shown that a student who does not talk in the first two weeks of class is much less likely to speak up later. Teacher may give students sufficient instructions about how to complete assignments or solve problems on their own rather than taking over and completing the project for them. Give students sufficient opportunity to all male and female students practice the hands-on skills necessary for your course. Some female students in science and engineering courses, for instance, may be less experienced with course procedures or equipment than other students. Providing sufficient time for observing experiments allows all students to feel comfortable with the required instruments.

Questions teachers can use to reflect upon and analyze gender biased behavior and identify if it exists in their classroom

Many teachers participate in gender biased actions without realizing it. It is an unconscious act that has many effects on the students in a classroom. Here are some questions teachers can use to reflect upon and analyze gender biased behavior and identify if it exists in their classroom:

1. Who do I call on when hands are raised in class: boys or girls? Do I address them in the same manner?
2. Do I equally scold both genders when problems and issues arise in the classroom?
3. Do I distribute classroom duties equally or do I contribute to the stigma that girls should clean and boys should deal with technical issues?
4. Do I ask higher level questions of each gender?
5. Do I have the same expectations of all of my students?

6. Do I provide equal amounts of help, feedback, encouragement and praise?
7. Do I use gender free language in the classroom?
8. Do I interrupt one gender more often than the other?
9. Do I use examples of both genders when teaching a lesson? Is the text I use contributing to gender biased actions?

Strategies for promoting gender equity in classroom

- Give all students equal attention in advising and mentoring.
- Don't overlook capable but quiet students.
- Revise curricula if necessary to include female experiences and to include them in more than just stereotypical ways.
- Give each student equal attention and equally specific feedback.
- Monitor classroom dynamics to ensure that discussion does not become dominated by verbally aggressive students.
- Vary the structure of the classroom to include more than just competitive modes of learning.

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