

# Gender-Sensitive Classrooms and Teaching Techniques

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## ABSTRACT

Education is the foundation for a better life, for a better society. Education is meant for all, be it male or female; everyone has the right to be literate and educate. Social scenario has so far found differences between both genders. There are still places where girls and boys are not given equal opportunity for education. They do not receive similar chances for good educated life. In co-educational schools and institutes it is difficult to cope for the female child. In such places teacher plays quite an important part. The problems and hesitations of students can be decreased if the teacher applies proper teaching and classroom strategies. The teacher can provide improve the personality of the student by grooming him or her in proper way and at the same time the teacher can also earn the confidence of the guardian about the child's perfect grooming. In the present paper I have tried to sum up few classroom policies that the teacher can apply in his or her teaching and in managing the class to create a more equal and friendly environment for all the students, and the methods in which the teacher can support and promote gender equality in classroom.

Keywords:- education, classroom, gender, strategies, gender- sensitivity, classroom management, learning environment, equal participation etc.

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The principle goal of education is to create men and women capable of doing new things not simply repeating what generations have done. Men and women who are creative, inventive and discoverers, who can be critical and verify, and not accept, everything they are offered.

Jean Piaget

As a psychologist Piaget well understands the importance of education in framing minds of the folks. How education can change the basic roles designed by patriarchal society. The growth of an individual can be facilitated by education, the quality to differentiate between right and wrong can also be developed when one is educated and understands life logically. One of the major roles that is played by education is to create and comprehend gender sensitivity. When individual understands gender sensitivity he is able to question and contest the gender stereotyping in society across the globe.

Although we are living in times of technological boom, the problem of gender discrimination is rotting that frame work of society which is considered important for individual growth and prosperity. Being male or female is a biological factor, not in control of human being. But this difference of gender, which is actually difference of sex, is a psychological phenomenon, totally controlled by human society. The social roles of both sexes are different, which are determined by the natural differences. Gender roles are quite different from those sexual ones. As sexual differences are biological and god-given but gender roles are manmade. Atrey and Kripal reflect on life of women in society, who are devoid of their independent identity,

The Woman is often regarded as a sex object and a means of procreation. She is known and recognized only through her relation with man and is not expected to have an independent identity. Even in modern times, when women have achieved economic independence and high educational standards, they are still regarded as inferior to men. (Atreya and Kripal, 104)

With increasing feminism and female awareness towards their rights has open access to equal education for both the genders. Now days boys as well girls are equally participating in education. However, there are still places where the right to education is limited to a certain sex. Although there are special schools for girl students, where they can have a free and safe environment. These places, i.e. girls' schools or colleges provide platform for those who have a fear of dealing in a co-educational school or college. A classroom which carries boys and girls, a teacher has to be very much sensible to tackle both kinds of students. In a classroom where there is always a variety of students, where two minds are never same, being physically different is again a point of consideration for the teacher.

To deal with the gender sensitive classroom , the notion of gender sensitivity. So, **what is gender sensitivity?** Gender Sensitivity is the way in which male and female are treated differently. The system which draws line between the two sexes and the determination of role that will be played by both sexes separately, for example:- man will earn money and woman will give birth to children and will do breastfeeding etc; man will deal with grave social issues while woman will ponder over what to cook for lunch. Being sensitive about the roles of gender without considering sex is to be gender sensitive. Gender discrimination is pervading over school environment also. Education that is already mentioned as a tool for development cannot spare itself from claws of this societal difference of gender. The need of hour is to create gender sensitization through education so as to challenge the power structure of society which delimit the chances of growth of women. Mrs. R. Gayatri Iyenger in her article “Gender Sensitization in Education: A Pathway to Women Empowerment” defines:

Gender sensitization refers to the modification of behavior by raising awareness of gender equality concerns. This can be achieved by conducting various sensitization campaigns, workshops, programs etc. Gender sensitization refers to theories which claim that modification of the behavior of teachers and parents (etc.) towards children can have a casual effect on gender equality, Gender sensitizing “ is about changing behavior and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and the other sex”. It helps

people in “examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the realities though they know. (Iyengar, 2006).

Gender equality or sensitivity in education would imply that girls and boys are ensured and actually offered the same chances and treatment in access, process and outcome of an education of good quality and which is free from any stereotypes (gender analysis, learning and information Pack, UNDP, 2001). Two simple words are enough to define gender sensitivity: respect and equality. And what this requires is the right attitude. And to develop this attitude classroom teaching and the teacher can play an important role. To quote Ritika Sharma,

The specific process of socialization which teaches children their gender role is called gendering or gender role socialization. In this process, education and educational institutions play a central role. For instance, stereotypes pertaining to responsibilities, roles and opportunities to which we are initially exposed in family settings are endorsed at educational institutions. So, educational institutions are the places where the socializing process is reinforced and given legitimacy and authenticity. The social knowledge relating to gender is constructed, validated and perpetuated by schools through textbooks, pedagogy skills, assessment and the academic milieu. (Sharma, 2017)

**Role of teacher in creating gender-sensitization in a gendered classroom** is very important and dominant. When we lay emphasis on teacher's important role in any classroom one must keep in mind that a teacher is a human being and not god who can manage things with a wink only. So the teacher has to gather all his efforts to manage a classroom. Often teaching and learning equipments are not scrutinized as per the gender discrimination. However, students are still sensitive towards the material provided to them. It is the duty of teacher to tackle it with both genders. Sometimes boys are more active and girls are more sensitive towards education. Boys can deal some subjects easily and girls are comfortable with other subjects. The teacher should learn the biological differences of the class and learn to differentiate between the learning capacity of each student and differentiate the teaching strategies accordingly. Here the teacher should keep in mind **a few points that can create a better classroom environment...**

**The language** and the tone used by teacher is very much important. Teacher should never use words that can make one particular sex feel inferior. For example- there should not be words used by teachers that express that boys are more intelligent than girls or girls need not to perform well because they will be married and taken care by a man. Girls students should not be treated as meek and submissive rather equal in logic and comprehension of subject. The teacher should not address class with male pronouns like 'guys', rather teacher can use the word class or everybody. Or making statements like 'boys don't cry' or 'girls don't fight', can limit the sensibility of the student. It will not let any of the students to feel estranged or alienated. The way a teacher addresses a class is very important. Very often it is seen that the teacher is comfortable with students of the same sex. Like female teachers are more comfortable with girls and male teachers with boys. For teacher a student should be only a student and

not a gender. His address can encourage or discourage any student so the teacher should be neutral when he or she addresses the class. The way the teacher speaks and addresses and interacts have a great impact on the learners and it determines their performance and participation. Hema Kalakoti writes,

We all know that the teachers sometimes “inadvertently” make disparaging remarks about capabilities or characteristics of either gender, so we need to cope with knowledge, attitude, skills and methodologies that promote gender equality.

The classroom **seating arrangement** should also be planned as per the convenience of all students not only for girls students. Many times it is seen that in a common classroom girls student either sit in a corner or in the back of class. And when girls are more in numbers boys sit in the back of the class. The seating management should not be planned according to gender rather according to the performance of the students. those who need special attention should be given seats closer to the teacher and it should be done in alteration. So that each student can sit close to teacher and every performance can be marked.

Among other pursuits the teacher should plan **group activities** for the whole class. Teacher should try to create friendly and familiar environment in the class, where the male and female students should not feel any hesitation. In group activities the teacher should assign equal work to all students and include both girls and boys in each group. Sometimes it is difficult to communicate in a large classroom but in smaller groups it is easy to exchange ideas and the students regardless of their gender can understand the concept of equality. The teacher can ask to divide in several small groups and discuss with them gender equality and gender inequality, that will change many students' expectations and concept of gender. Sometimes the teacher can plan to change the traditional role of males and females. For example, role-playing, where the girls will become the professionals and the boys will be the helpers, girl as a doctor and boy as a nurse, or girl working outside and boy taking care of kids and daily chores or girl as a construction worker or soldier and boy as a helper etc.

**The body language** of the teacher is again an important effective factor for the class. The body language is again very important aspect of classroom teaching. A teacher should not show his nervousness, if he is nervous, or should not show indifference through the manner of body language. The teacher should carry respectful gestures and tone. The teacher should stand up straight addressing the whole class, should not fold his arms, smile and try to make eye contact with each student. The facial expressions should be respectful and balanced.

The teacher or the institute can also arrange **interactive session among students and teachers on the theme of gender sensitivity**. This will allow students to learn about gender related problem of which they may be unaware. The problems of society should be discussed. Students can provide solutions to the societal problems of gender. They will be able to conceptualize the problems and can be capable of providing solutions for the same.

**Imparting awareness in parents** can also be a beneficial pursuit. Parents should also be made aware of the problems of gender sensitivity and its adverse effects on society. So that they can keep their female children safe

from such situations and can protect the rights of the other sex. The institutes can marshal parents teachers and students in interactive sessions where parents. Frequent events of this type can eventually manipulate the psychology of gender-biased parents. It will encourage gender sensitivity not only within the classroom or institution but in society also. To quote Hema Kalakoti again,

We can promote gender awareness in parents by

- School-parent partnership needs to be strengthened to identify gender issues in homes
- Promoting girl education in rural areas
- NGOs awareness training and counseling

**Gender –responsive classroom plan** can be another productive strategy. A gender responsive lesson plan takes into consideration the specific needs of girls and boys in all the teaching–learning processes – content, learning materials, methodologies and activities, classroom arrangement, and so on. The teacher should select teaching method after understanding the syllabus so that the equal participation of the class can be ensured. Role play, debates, group discussion, case studies, practices etc. ensure equal participation of all the students. Teacher should observe that in such activities the dominant students do not prevail the whole activity and each student participate equally.

Teacher should also work on **management of gender constraints in the class-room**. The teacher should give time to understand the problems of both the genders in the class beside teaching the syllabus. Some time should be allowed where students can counsel with teachers about their personal problems beside studies. For example if some girl is being bullied or insulted by any boy it should be brought to teacher’s attention. There can be household chores or activities that stop girls to participate fully in all assignments; the teacher should understand such problems also.

The fact is that one cannot deny the difference of sex which is god-given and inbuilt in every human being. And one should not ignore that both male and female have different capabilities and excellence in different fields. We can ignore the physical or biological differences but keeping these differences in mind individual should groom his or her positive qualities. Education plays a great role in understanding these capacities. By applying these strategies a teacher can create a gender friendly classroom where all students are only students and not males or females. Supriya Sarkar gives some suggestions over teacher’s role:

Classrooms need to be gender sensitive. Teachers can play the following roles:

- Encourage both male students and female students to be class leaders (perhaps one of each gender).  
Appoint two monitors in each classroom, a boy and a girl

- Address and call on girls and boys equally. Do not segregate boys and girls in the classroom in primary classes
- Make mixed groups including both boys and girls for group activities and games
- Try to 'switch role' for breaking down gender barriers and stereotyping of gender roles
- Make both boys and girls share activities like cleaning, moving furniture, to the chalkboard during a lesson.
- Plan and conduct activities that give opportunity to all children accepting one another as equals.

Besides these the school should ensure that the infrastructure is designed in a gender friendly way and provisions should be made for the safety and security of girl students. There should be teacher training programmes that improve the teachers in making better teacher- student relationship. There should be feedback sessions time to time to observe the teacher's behaviour with students. Parents should also participate in feedback sessions. Society is changing continuously so is the education where gender sensitivity is pervading over gender biasness.

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