

**THEME: ADDRESSING THE QUALITY AND NUMBERS OF
TEACHERS IN AFRICA**

SUB-THEME: GENDER ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Gender Issues in Teacher Education

Fennema (1990) defines gender equity as the set of behaviors and knowledge that permits educators to recognize inequality in educational opportunities, to carry out specific interventions that constitute equal educational treatment, and to ensure equal educational outcomes. Accordingly, what should teacher educators be teaching pre-service students about gender equity? This document intends to address these and many other issues

In Uganda, the notions that males excel in mathematics, science, and technology and that females excel in the arts are two of many beliefs and cultural influences that are passed down through generations. The dynamic is all the more powerful in that; adults may not realize they are holding these beliefs and acting on them. Subtle and unintended messages can create the idea among girls and boys that there are fields they cannot be successful in because of their sex. Children reflect and reinforce this attitude through their peer interactions.

Gender-biased attitudes become a self-fulfilling prophecy, strengthened by the fact that many girls attribute their success as due to luck, which is fickle, while many boys attribute theirs to ability, which is reliable. This helps to explain the lower self-confidence, despite higher performance, of many girls in school. It is essential that pre-service students in Uganda develop the ability to decipher these messages in order to counteract them.

Curriculum materials that are biased in language, content, and/or illustrations reinforce the idea that some fields are gender specific. Pre-service teachers in Uganda, need to learn to perceive the usually subtle but powerful cumulative impact of curriculum materials on girls' and boys' understanding of the world and their places in it, and to learn to teach in ways that enable students to relate to all aspects of the world without limitation (Rosser, 1990). It is important for in-service educators in Uganda, to understand gender equity and the relatively easy ways to reverse the messages of inequity (Sanders, 1994). However, teacher education textbooks virtually ignore the subject.

Evaluation results in a Teacher Education Equity Project at the City University of New York Graduate Center indicated that 85% of the professors made significant improvements in their gender equity teaching behavior, with a tripling of syllabi containing gender equity (Sanders, Campbell, & Steinbrueck, 1996). Materials including gender equity in teacher education via

classroom observations, action research projects, and student assignments are now becoming available (Sanders, Koch, & Urso, in press).

In gender equity, teacher education is a last frontier that is finally beginning to open up, and that is the purpose of this document. Materials are now being developed, professional publications are beginning to cover gender equity issues, professional meetings are devoting some time to it, and individual teacher educators are starting to become concerned about it. Gender equity could become a hot topic in teacher education, just in time for the next two generations.

Gender Issues in Teacher Education

Two decades ago, the gender issue was new in our professional consciousness, and much of the important research was yet to come. Shirley McCune and Martha Matthews (1975) surveyed schools and departments of education and discovered that most pre-service teacher education faculty was simply unaware of sex-equity issues.

Now, more than 25 years later, significant research documenting gender bias exists, yet the gender information gap persists. Patricia Campbell and Jo Sanders (1997) surveyed science and math education professors and found that more than 90% considered gender equity an important social issue, yet they devoted less than 2 hours of instructional time per semester to the topic. Notably, these teacher educators cited the absence of information in teacher education textbooks as a critical obstacle to their teaching of gender equity.

Although females have made impressive strides in college attendance and in closing the math and science gap in recent years, persistent barriers remain. Females are underrepresented in school administration and leadership positions, continue to encounter harassment from male students and adults, and have fallen behind in crucial career fields including technology. And although today's textbooks are less offensive than those published more than 20 years ago, they are far from equitable. Jordan Titus (1993) conducted a study of eight introductory/foundation teacher education texts. Titus concluded that the treatment of gender issues in the most widely used foundation textbooks "is still cursory or nonexistent" (p. 39). In fact, since the Titus study was published; the political backlash against women has grown. Some introductory texts now include these backlash arguments, suggesting that equal educational opportunities for females come at the expense of males

and that feminists are conducting a “war against boys” in America’s schools (Sommers, 2000). Progress has indeed been slow.

Those learning how to teach today will be responsible for teaching the next two generations of Americans. If we want an America in which girls and boys are treated, and treat each other, with respect and kindness, and in which girls as well as boys are urged and expected to fulfill their potential without restriction, then we must begin teaching about gender equity in our teacher education programs as a matter of course.

INTRODUCTION TO TEACHER EDUCATION TEXTS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION, LEAVING OUT HALF THE STORY

If there is any field in which women have made significant contributions, both individually and collectively, it is education. Twenty years ago, a reader would be hard-pressed to find these contributions in teacher education texts (Sadker & Sadker, 1980). Today, the situation has improved. In the seven introductory/ foundations books, gender issues comprised 7.3% of total content. As an example, all of these texts describe the same school, and three texts note that dame schools often provided the only formal education for girls in colonial America.

Unfortunately, beyond “mentioning” such events, the extent of women’s role in education is shallow and often isolated from the main body of the discussion. For example, Ornstein and Levine’s (2000) chapter on “Pioneers in Education” champions the work of nine males and one female (Maria Montessori), imparting a message that males are the unquestioned educational leaders. Parkay and Stanford’s (2001) chapter, “Ideas and Events That Have Shaped Education in the United States” discusses women’s contributions to education, particularly the feminization of teaching, in 6 disconnected paragraphs. The life work of Emma Willard, Margaret Schurz,

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Susan Blow, Ella Flagg Young, Catherine Goggin, Margaret Haley, and Jane Addams is given approximately 3 sentences.

HOW IS GENDER INEQUITY MANIFESTED?

Fennema (1990) defines gender equity as the set of behaviors and knowledge that permits educators to recognize inequality in educational opportunities, to carry out specific interventions that constitute equal educational treatment, and to ensure equal educational outcomes. Accordingly, what should teacher educators be teaching pre-service students about gender equity?

EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES

The notions that males excel in mathematics, science, and technology and that females excel in the arts are two of many beliefs and cultural influences that are passed down through generations. The dynamic is all the more powerful in that adults may not realize they are holding these beliefs and acting on them. Subtle and unintended messages can create the idea among girls and boys that there are fields they cannot be successful in because of their sex. Children reflect and reinforce this attitude through their peer interactions.

ATTRIBUTIONAL THEORY

Gender-biased attitudes become a self-fulfilling prophecy, strengthened by the fact that many girls attribute their success as due to luck, which is fickle, while many boys attribute theirs to ability, which is reliable. This helps to explain the lower self-confidence, despite higher performance, of many girls in school. It is essential that pre-service students develop the ability to decipher these messages in order to counteract them (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation [AAUW], 1992/95).

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

Curriculum materials that are biased in language, content, and/or illustrations reinforce the idea that some fields are gender specific. Pre-service teachers need to learn to perceive the usually subtle but powerful cumulative impact of curriculum materials on girls' and boys' understanding of the world and their places in it, and to learn to teach in ways that enable students to relate to all aspects of the world without limitation (Rosser, 1990).

CLASSROOM CLIMATE AND HARASSMENT

Years of research have documented unequal and too often unfriendly classroom environments for girls and for some boys (Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996; Sadker, M. & Sadker, D., 1994; Lockheed, 1985). Teachers are almost always unaware of the biased behaviors they exhibit through verbal interactions, eye contact, and body language, which means they cannot correct themselves. When pre-service teachers learn about these behaviors at the start of their careers, bias is much more amenable to conscious control.

Student-to-student behavior is another problem area when boys are permitted to harass girls (and other boys) sexually or otherwise because this is seen as normal male behavior. Pre-service students need to understand that the recipient of such behavior cannot be expected to learn well and that those who perpetrate it are also poorly served (Streitmatter, 1994).

ADMINISTRATIVE MODELING

In many schools of education, the administration department faculty tends to be more male, which parallels superintendents and principals in school districts, especially at the high school level. The curriculum department faculties tend to be more female, which parallels classroom teachers, especially at the elementary level. Education deans are more likely to be male; however the number of female department chairs is increasing. This

overall model perpetuates an unequal division of influence and reward in the education establishment.

GENDER EQUITY, TEACHER EDUCATION, AND REFORM

Gender equity has received considerable attention in education since 1972, but not in teacher education. Unlike special and bilingual education, for example, gender equity is not thought to merit whole departments or even courses. Yet, teacher education is the point at which future educators are accessible in methods and foundations courses, are there to learn, have time to learn, and don't have years of bad teaching habits to undo. Unlike one-shot in-service workshops, semester-length courses permit real change. This is also the only point when future teachers are able to observe equities and inequities by other teachers in the classroom, and to experiment with their own teaching methods.

It is important for in-service educators to understand gender equity and the relatively easy ways to reverse the messages of inequity (Sanders, 1994). However, teacher education textbooks virtually ignore the subject. A 1980 analysis of 24 commonly used texts published since 1972 found that 23 of them gave less than 1% of space to gender issues, and a third didn't mention the topic at all (Sadker, D. & Sadker, M., 1980). In a 1993 update on this theme, Titus analyzed 8 post-1990 teacher education textbooks and concluded that the most widely used foundations textbooks still do not include significant material on gender equity.

In a Michigan survey of 30 administrators and 247 faculty members from 30 pre-service teacher education programs statewide, it was found that only 11% of respondents reported extensive gender equity instruction and 38% reported minimal to no gender equity instruction. Respondents thought gender equity should be taught more and said more interest from students and colleagues and more coverage in the professional literature would help (Mader, 1994).

A survey of 353 methods instructors in mathematics, science, and technology nationwide revealed that while three-fourths of the respondents said they taught gender equity, they did so less than 2 hours per semester. Respondents felt that specific teaching strategies would be most helpful and that gender equity was an important social issue (Campbell & Sanders, 1997).

WHAT EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE?

The Teacher Education Equity Project (1993-96, National Science Foundation (NSF), IBM, Hewlett Packard, and AT&T funding) was conducted at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Sixty-one professors of mathematics, science, and technology education from 40 colleges and universities in 28 states learned how to teach gender equity to their pre-service methods students and carried out mini-grant projects. Evaluation results indicated that 85% of the professors made significant improvements in their gender equity teaching behavior, with a tripling of syllabi containing gender equity (Sanders, Campbell, & Steinbrueck, 1996). Materials for including gender equity in teacher education via classroom observations, action research projects, and student assignments are now becoming available (Sanders, Koch, & Urso, in press).

A statewide project, Integrating Gender Equity and Reform (1995-98, NSF funding), involves Georgia Institute of Technology as the lead institution among six other universities and organizations. This project will help teacher educators with materials and methods for teaching gender equity to pre-service teachers.

The Teacher Education Mentor Project (1996-99, NSF funding) is designed to make gender equity instruction more systemically taught in mathematics, science, and technology education programs. Teams of teacher educators, partner school personnel, and others at seven colleges and universities will participate.

The Mary mount Institute for the Education of Women and Girls in Tarrytown, New York, has a major focus on gender equity in teacher education.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education's Gender Equity Expert Panel, including a sub-panel on teacher preparation, began work to design and implement a process for identifying, reviewing, and recommending promising and exemplary programs, products, and practices to educators and community members.

CONCLUSION

In gender equity, teacher education is a last frontier that is finally beginning to open up. Materials are now being developed, professional publications are beginning to cover gender equity issues, professional meetings are devoting some time to it, and individual teacher educators are starting to become concerned about it. Gender equity could become a hot topic in teacher education, just in time for the next two generations.

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