



BRITISH
COUNCIL

TeachingEnglish

A top-down view of several children sitting around a table, drawing on a large sheet of brown paper. The drawings include a sun, a whale, a car, a bicycle, a recycling symbol, a girl, a bear, and various plants. Several colored pencils are scattered on the paper.

British Council: TeachingEnglish

A podcast series for teachers
of English



**Episode 2: How can I
make my teaching
gender fair?**
Show notes



Episode overview

Although classrooms are becoming increasingly gender fair, the educational impacts of COVID-19 have affected females more than males. Now, more than ever, teachers need to continue to make their classrooms gender-fair places. In the first part of Episode 2, we learn about a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) recently created by the British Council, in which we explore its three modules, *Gender representation in teaching materials*, Understanding gender equality in teaching practice and Working with Gender equality in Education. In the second part, gender expert and educator Bhavna Gupta identifies simple ways in which all teachers, whatever their context, can ensure that all students are given equal opportunities.

In this episode

Research shows that girls' education leads to stronger economies, more stable societies, and reduced inequality

When we say things like “Good morning boys and girls”, or organise students into groups according to gender, that's enough to encourage gender bias

What do you mean by girls' topics?

And it's not just the job of female teachers to do this, it's everybody's responsibility

There is a lot of scope for having questions that make them think a little more deeply

So, what do the images portray? Do they show women as always being caregivers of the family or attending to household chores?

So why do you think here there's a why the girl is playing with dolls and why is the boy playing football? Couldn't it be the other way around?

Classroom application

Think about how you could use the ideas in this episode in your own teaching.

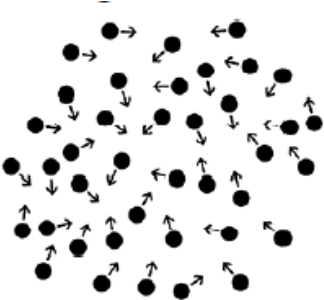
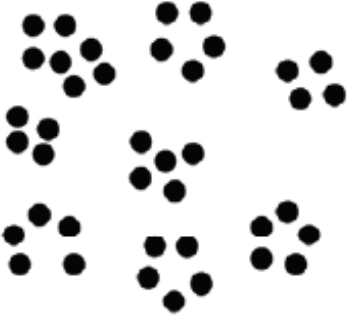
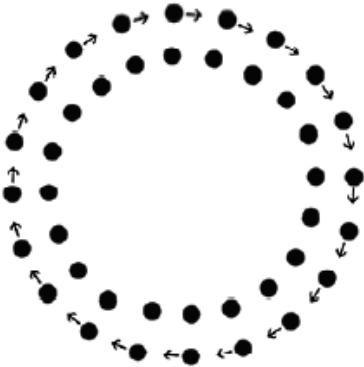
Think about your own practice

- Do you address male students more than female students? Does your body language favour one group over another? This can particularly be an issue in classrooms where boys sit on one side and girls sit on the other.
- Do I ask my female / male students the same *type* of questions? Or, for example, do I subconsciously ask male students more complicated questions?
- Is there gender bias in the textbooks / coursebooks which you use? If there is, what can you do about it? For example, you could ask your students these questions:
 - What does this text say about your community / society?
 - Do you agree? Why / why not?
 - What are the problems of portraying your community / society in this way?
 - What does the text *not* say about your community / society?
 - Why do you think these facts have been omitted?
 - What would be a more accurate way of portraying your community / society?
- Do you ever use masculine words (e.g. 'he', 'policeman') when you could use more neutral ones (e.g. 'he or she', 'police officer')?
- If you have a classroom / school library, is there a good balance of books by female and male writers? Do these books contain strong female as well as male protagonists? Do students feel comfortable reading books by male and female writers?

It can sometimes be difficult to answer these questions about your own teaching. And sometimes we may not even be conscious of what we are doing. As such, perhaps work with a colleague and observe each other's lessons – or else record your own lesson and watch it afterwards.

Try this classroom activity

In mixed classes, especially as students get older, it can be hard to get male and female students to work together. The three diagrams below show ways in which this can be done. Sometimes it can take time for students to understand what they have to do, but once it is clear, you can repeat it many times. The following is adapted from Chris Sowton's book 'Teaching in Challenging Circumstances', published by Cambridge University Press (2021).

	<p>A mingle activity is a way for students to talk to lots of different people, especially people who they might not normally work with.</p> <p>For example, tell children they have to ask a question (e.g. <i>What's your favourite colour?</i>) to at least six people in the group (girls and boys). They go around the group and ask the question. You can then take feedback.</p>
	<p>A share activity is good for students to see what other groups have done. It is a bit more structured than a mingle activity.</p> <p>For example, groups do work on a large piece of paper. When the activity is finished, 1-2 members of each group stay in their place, and hold their paper up. The other students then circulate and look at what all the groups have done. They can ask questions if they wish.</p>
	<p>A doughnut or onion ring activity is useful for when you want students to share their work with each other in a more structured way. The steps are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Half the group makes a small circle, facing outwards2. The other half of the group faces them in a bigger circle3. Each pair talks for a short time (e.g. one minute)4. The outer circle then moves round one place, clockwise. They repeat the activity5. This can be repeated several times

Social media

Please share your views about this episode, and the series as a whole, on social media using the hashtag #TEBC. Let us know your thoughts, reflections, comments and whether you have been able to use any of the ideas in your teaching.

Detailed notes

Use these notes to find out more about the contents of Episode 1.

Phrase	Explanation and Further Information
Field Report: Gender and Language Education	
“Gender equality in education is becoming a global priority”	<p>UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 is “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. Gender equality is also a central component of SDG4 (education). Targets for 2030 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education;▪ Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education;▪ Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university;▪ Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training.
“And research shows that girls' education leads to stronger economies, more stable societies and reduced inequality”	See this article by McKinsey's about the economic benefits of gender parity. Furthermore, according to this article , girls' education has wide-ranging and transformative health benefits, which can be passed on through generations. Every additional year of school a girl completes cuts rates of infant mortality – the death of children under one year – by five to ten per cent. And if all girls received the proposed twelve years of fee-free, quality education, the frequency of early births would drop by 59% and child deaths would decrease by 49%.
“There's been some progress	According to UNESCO : “Large gender gaps exist in access, learning achievement and continuation in education in many settings, most often at the expense of girls, although in some regions boys are at a disadvantage. Despite progress, more

towards this kind of equality”	girls than boys still remain out of school – 16 million girls will never set foot in a classroom (UNESCO Institute for Statistics) – and women account for two thirds of the 750 million adults without basic literacy skills.”
“MOOC – a massive open online course”	Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are free online courses available for anyone to enrol.
“When we say things like 'good morning, boys and girls”	In this article for British Council Voices , Elsa O’Brien discusses ‘challenging gender bias in the classroom with language’. It begins as follows: “We learn gendered language when we are young. Gender shapes children's speech and conversational turn-taking. Boys learn to be more outspoken and take longer turns in a conversation. Girls learn to be less outspoken and take fewer turns. This continues into adulthood.”
“Stereotyping”	A mistaken idea (or bias) which people have about a particular group, which may be based on, e.g., their sex, ethnicity, nationality, age, sexuality, religion or social class.
“How teacher-learner interactions are often influenced by gender”	Often this may happen indirectly and subconsciously. It is not deliberate, but it does happen. In an article for the British Council , Fatma Özdemir Uluç writes: “People unconsciously reinforce gender roles. Normally, teachers will protest that they treat both sexes the same. Our challenge is to make them aware that they often behave differently towards boys and girls – perhaps without realising it – and reveal how this behaviour affects their students.”
“How females and males perform – or are expected to perform – differently in group work”	See, for example, this interesting article in <i>The Atlantic</i> magazine. In it, the writer focuses on this central idea: ‘Girls who continuously take on the "secretary" role in school might be primed to take on organizational roles, as opposed to leadership ones, later in life. I’ve dubbed this phenomenon "The Secretary Effect.”’
“I’m a transgender educator”	You can find out more about Katherine’s work on her blog .
“Specific genders”	The World Health Organization writes about gender here .
“Girls' topics”	This article in the Guardian newspaper provides some interesting insights into gender-biased textbook content.

“Female athletes”	Famous female athletes which you could discuss in class include: Serena and Venus Williams (tennis); Simone Biles (gymnastics); Marta (football); Junko Tabei (mountaineering); Florence Griffith Joyner (Athletics); Lindsey Vonn (skiing).
“Female inventors”	Famous female inventors which you could discuss in class include: Marie Curie (radioactivity); Grace Hopper (computing); Rosalind Franklin (DNA); Hedy Lamarr (GPS / Bluetooth / WiFi); Maria Beasley (life raft); Katharine Burr Blodgett (non-reflective glass). Useful links for more information include: ‘A mighty girl’ ; ‘Inventionland’ ; ‘BBC’
“Masculine pronouns”	When textbooks talk about ‘students in general’, they often use specifically male pronouns, i.e. <i>he / him</i> . Other common gendered words found in textbooks include: <i>businessman, mankind, manpower</i> . Furthermore, the kind of words used for females may be more emotive (e.g. <i>kind, gentle, honest</i>) whilst for men be connected to dominance (e.g. <i>strong, powerful, confident</i>). Instead, use non-gendered pronouns (e.g. mix <i>he</i> and <i>she</i> , or use <i>they</i> as third person singular, or other neutral terms like <i>we, students, everybody or a person</i>). Use gender-neutral terms like <i>businessperson, humankind or workforce</i> . When you use non-gendered language, explain to students why you are doing this.
“Gender-equality campaign for our school”	The following links may be of interest and use in organising gender-equality campaigns in schools: The Malala Fund ; UKfeminista ;

Interview with Bhavna Gupta	
“Learning Sutra, Lifelong Learning”	Discover more about this here .
“Hard skills ... soft skills”	Hard skills are teachable and measurable abilities, such as writing, reading, maths or the ability to use computer programs. By contrast, soft skills are personality traits such as communication and listening, getting along with other people, empathy, time management, teamwork and leadership.
“They as a singular pronoun”	Read this article by the Oxford English Dictionary entitled “a brief history of singular they”.

<p>“The number of male characters in the reading comprehension ... Do they show women as always being caregivers of the family or attending to household chores?”</p>	<p>See, for example Tarrayo (2014), “Gendered Word (Or World): Sexism in Philippine Preschool English Language Textbooks”. The abstract notes the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Males appeared more frequently than females in the illustrations of the textbooks; ▪ In terms of "firstness", males appear before females more often; ▪ Females are far less visible than men in occupational roles. The occupational roles for females are less diverse and are restricted to stereotypical types of occupation/profession while male occupations show a wider range; ▪ Females are usually attributed with their "good" looks and passivity; by contrast, males show aggression, dominance, and activity; ▪ Females are more particularly represented in indoor activities, i.e., household chores.
<p>“Role play”</p>	<p>Click here to read an article / lesson plan entitled “Role Plays to Reduce Gender Stereotypes”</p>
<p>“If it's a Maths exam, okay, please tell your father to help you with your Maths”</p>	<p>Click here to read an article entitled “The Myth of the Male Math Brain”.</p>

Useful links

- [British Council lesson plan on ‘gender equality’](#)
- [British Council learning resources on ‘gender equality’](#)
- [An article about ‘building girls’ confidence’ in the British Council’s *Voices* magazine](#)
- [UNICEF data about gender and education](#)
- [Mind the Gap: 5 Facts About The Gender Gap in Education](#)

Glossary

The following words at the B2, C1 and C2 level (according to the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)) are used in this episode.

B2 Level

academic
acquiring
additional
affect
agree with
alternatives
aspect
aspects
associated with
assuming
aware
basically
came to
cause
coming up
competitive
complex
conscious
consultant
context
contexts
contributing
contributions
council
current
daring
deeply
delivered
dialogue
division
dominated
economies
educating
effective
elements
ensure
ensuring
entire
episode
equality
equally
estimates
evolution
expectations
exposed

extent
extract
features
females
firstly
focus
fox
furthermore
gender
genders
getting into
getting on with
global
go through
google
got to
highlight
host
household
ideal
images
impact
influence
influenced
innocent
innocently
inventors
leads to
learner
live up to
look at
looking at
major
males
massive
master
opposing
outer
participated
passage
passionate
positively
potential
practical
primary
priority
process

progressive
publication
raise an
refer to
referring to
reflections
relevant
researchers
resources
responsibility
reverse
rewrite
rights
separating
specific
specify
statements
strategies
sufficient
tasks
thought over
throughout
treated
try out
variations
widely
widened
worldwide

C1 Level

addressing
alongside
assign
assumption
awareness
biased
campaign
chores
completion
convey
discriminated
duration
evolving
fund
illustrations
inclusive

indirectly
integrate
interactions
leadership
make it
masculine
mean for
mentality
neutral
outlook
perspective
radical
regardless
reinforcing
related to
rethink
scope
self
sensitivity
sheer
stable
stereotype
stereotypes
superior
when it comes to

C2 Level

bias
constrained
empathy
explicit
founder
inequality
lifelong
onwards
portray
practitioner
prompts
quest
reforms
seating
talking about
unconsciously