

from the book
PINK AND BLUE WORLD
Gender Stereotypes and Their Consequences
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TEACHING METHODS/CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

How to Do It or Almost Instructions for Use

A gender role is one of the roles that we play throughout our lives. However, contrary to other roles we also play, it is shrouded in a mythical veil of permanency – as something that is given once for all; something about which we cannot and don't need to contemplate. But gender stereotypes are a restricting trap. All of us, the grown-ups and children, are socialized into some gender roles. The objective of the following activities is to reflect upon gender roles and loosen their boundaries that can be discriminating against us.

General principles of working with children

It is likely that children and young people with whom we work have already been confronted with some negative implications of gender stereotypes (gender-based violence, eating disorders as a consequence of the pressure to look “beautiful”, self-destructive behaviour as a consequence of the child's inability to meet stereotypical gender expectations, sexual harassment and abuse). Every discussion about gender stereotypes as root-causes of these experiences can be for children distressful. Therefore it is necessary to approach these themes with sensitivity.

Under all circumstances, it is necessary to approach children's responses with respect and to be on their side (we must believe a child who has experienced violence or discrimination and show her/him that s/he should not feel guilty of the situation).

To foster cooperation, friendly and respectful atmosphere it is important to prefer cooperative activities and methods rather than competitive ones.

What to keep in mind

Children and young people always find it hard to come to terms with the fact that they may be marked as those whose life is not in order. Therefore, in all activities the goal of which is the reflection of one's own gender role it is very important not to judge children's statements and hence avoid „labelling“.

For children, many experiences can be painful or they find it difficult to speak about their own life and family. It is therefore better to prefer an approach when children can work with examples, models, i.e. images (historic personalities, examples from textbooks, the media, fictional characters, and the like) but they don't have to speak about people that they are close to. This way we can avoid secondary victimization.

Most activities aiming at reflecting gender roles and gender stereotypes require from children to articulate the stereotype in their own words before they start thinking about it. To avoid reinforcing the stereotype (rather than subverting it) it is necessary to end each activity with a discussion about the stereotype's alternatives. It is useful to point out that issues of gender stereotypes also concerns human rights and remind them that according to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child all children have the right to develop their interests and capacities irrespective of their sex, which can equip them with a good argument in potential situations of conflict.

We can also mention The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially its Articles 5 and 10, which helps boys and girls to know their rights and request equal treatment in school. In the end, we will also bolster the development of children's legal consciousness.

The activities do not have a single "correct answer".

All activities we present here are designed to foster a discussion about the problem. The discussion is more important than the classroom activity. Regardless of the outcome of the activity, the very fact that children think about given issues opens up space for discussion. Very stereotypical attitudes just like very liberal ones can serve as a discussion starting point.

With this kind of activities, requiring keeping an open mind and respectful approach, the aim is not to hide the objective of the activity. We don't want to "trick" the children, but to have an open discussion with them. Hence, it is not an obstacle to tell the children the objective of the given activity. In any case we should never leave out the discussion.

The decision whether to choose a whole-class or small-group discussion will depend on our experience, possibilities and a concrete situation in the group of girls and boys. Especially as the first steps in working with themes of gender stereotypes, single-sex group work has proved useful. In the single-sex group girls and boys can have a freer and more open discussion about their gender roles with which it is not easy to cope especially in adolescence. In separate groups there is a higher chance to get to the root of the gender stereotype restraining the lives of girls and boys. They can better and more openly focus on their own gender role rather than on that of the opposite sex. In mixed groups the gender role discussion lapses into some kind of competition – "who is better", "who has a worse lot", and the like. If the time and space do not permit a to work with boys and girls completely separately it is at least good to form ad hoc same-sex groups to work together. We motivate children to present the results of their group work in the possibly most diverse ways – ranging from simple verbal summarization to creation of posters to role-play, pantomime and the like.

The importance of gender-sensitive language

Language is one of the most powerful tools for expressing and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Therefore, all our verbal statements should be gender-sensitive. The Slovak language distinguishes between the feminine and masculine gender and we should use it consequently. If we use seemingly gender-neutral but grammatically masculine terms, we reinforce gender stereotypes and make girls and women invisible. When we speak about important personalities, it is good to explicitly say that important personalities are both men and women. We speak about female writers, rulers, scientists. When we speak about house chores we do not stereotypically presume that it is only women's task but we emphasize that both women

and men carry them out. Besides creating opportunities, this gender-sensitive approach also makes visible gender inequality, gender occupational segregation and the like. Most school textbooks use gender-stereotypical language. We can discuss this fact with children or we can motivate them to modify the text to make it more gender-sensitive.

We wish to the older and the younger, the more or the less experienced, women and men, boys and girls not only a lot of new knowledge but also much fun on the road to knowing themselves and the world that surrounds us.

(ed.)

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Seeming Differences

Objective: To show that stressing the difference between men and women may lead to creation of constraints for both girls and boys; to point out that this differentiation is not based on the biological difference but arises from the difference created by culture and socialisation.

Duration: 45 minutes

Age Group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: We ask boys and girls to write down three characteristics about each assignment:

- three characteristics *common* to both men and women;
- three *exclusively male* characteristics (that no woman has);
- three *exclusively female* characteristics (that no man has);

After 5-10 minutes of allocated time we collect the papers (it is important that that girls and boys are not made to reveal what they wrote – anonymity facilitates a more open discussion). Since there is no exclusive male characteristic that no woman has, and vice versa, in an ideal case students should not come up with any characteristics in the second and third question. However, it is likely that some characteristics will be presented as exclusively male or female because the students may feel that if they do not answer all questions they don't know the correct answer. In that case we make sure not to ridicule anyone. Just like with any other exercise, also in this assignment we can use the “wrong” answer as it creates a very good space for discussion.

Discussion: We lead the discussion to question the “impassable” barrier between femininity and masculinity, which can create limitations in self-realisation and self-development of boys and girls. *Why do people think that men and women should have completely different characteristics? Where are the biggest differences – between individual people regardless of their sex or between girls and boys (women and men)?* We point out that these seeming differences may influence, for instance, the occupational choice or life priorities of individual people.

Redistribution of Advantages

Objective: To inspire girls and boys to think about which characteristics are usually expected from women and which from men or which characteristics are usually ascribed to women and which to men and what consequences this has for both women and men.

Duration: 40 minutes

Age Group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: On the blackboard, we write down two separate columns: men – women. We ask girls and boys to name characteristics that are usually perceived as ‘typically male’. We write down each individual characteristic in its respective column and we do the same with ‘typically female’ characteristics. When we collect enough characteristics to start a discussion we go over them with the children and look at differences or similarities between both columns. Then we divide girls and boys into four groups. The first group will think about advantages or opportunities that “male” characteristics confer upon men; the second group will think about disadvantages and constraints. The third and fourth group will do the same with “female” characteristics. After 10-15 minutes of group work the students present their findings.

Discussion: *How many and what advantages have we ascribed to men and how many and what advantages have we ascribed to women? Are there any differences in these advantages? How many and what kinds of constraints are related to the traditional stereotype of the male role for men? How many and what kinds of constraints are related to the traditional stereotype of the female role for women? Which of the constraints would the girls and boys like to eliminate? How can that be done?*

If we come across some characteristic common to both men and women (for instance diligence) we can ask the students to specify what they understand “by diligence” in a man and what in a woman, or we can point out how society perceives the work of men and the work of women.

“Men’s” and “Women’s” Activities

Objective: To inspire students to think about which activities and roles in society are usually attributed to women and which to men.

Duration: 45 minutes

Age group: Primary School can be modified for Middle School

Tools: glue, newspaper and magazine clippings

Instructions: We ask girls and boys in advance to bring to class newspaper and magazine clippings showing men and women engaging in various activities. First we go over the clippings together with the children and notice in what kind of activities men and women are represented. We can also create categories of the most frequent “men’s” and “women’s” activities and write them down on the blackboard. Then we will make an “upside-down” world. We let the children to redraw the pictures or modify them in such way that women will

do the male activities and vice versa. We can motivate the children to create the “funniest” pictures depicting women doing “typically male” activities and men doing “typically female” ones.

Discussion: The “funniest” picture can be the starting point. *Why does a muscular man holding a baby look funny? And is it really that funny?* We lead the children to understand that most activities that people do can be easily done by both women and men.

Transformation

Objective: To inspire children to realise that the roles and behaviour stereotypically attributed to women and men are constraining and that they prevent people from expressing and taking advantage of their individual abilities.

Duration: 45 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: We divide girls and boys into four same-sex groups and give the following assignment – description of a situation:

Imagine that you woke up in the morning and when you entered the bathroom you found out that for some mysterious reason you have been transformed from a girl into a boy or vice versa. You don't know how much this transformation will last. What are you going to do? How are you going to behave in the family, school, sport practice, disco dance? Would you want to try something you couldn't do while you were a girl/boy? What does this transformation allow you to do differently? What do you like about your current situation?

We let the children to discuss the issue in groups. After 15 minutes of group work we ask them to present their ideas. Then we have an all-class discussion.

Discussion:

Did the children like to be in “the shoes of the other”? Would they like to stay in this transformed form forever? Why or why not?

Johnny and Mary

Objective: To show children that “typically female” and “typically male” behaviour is not “given by nature”, but it is instilled in us from early childhood.

Duration: 45 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: We will create a present (a piece of clothing, toy, book) for babies and children. We divide girls and boys into groups and give them the following assignment:

You are going to visit your relatives and they have a small child. It's a really small baby and you haven't seen it yet. The only thing you know is that she is a girl and her name is Mary. What kind of present would you give to her? A piece of clothing? What kind of it? A toy? What kind of it? A book? What kind of it?

(The second group will be told that the baby is a boy and his name is Johnny. The other two groups will be told that Mary or Johnny is in the fifth grade of elementary school.)
The groups will speak about what presents they came up with for “their” child. They can write (draw) them down on the blackboard.

Discussion: We “take stock” of the presents and each group will explain why they picked their present. *Why do we think this present is good for Mary and some other for Johnny? Would we buy the same presents if Johnny and Mary were twins?* We use ‘non-traditional’ ideas for innovative disruption of stereotypes. If the children came up with some dangerous or otherwise inappropriate presents we can also discuss the issue of responsibility.

A Visitor from the Outer Space

Objective: To show that although people are both women and men, “the human being” is often automatically identified with a male figure. (The prerequisite of this activity is that students have already worked with gender stereotypes).

Duration: 45 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: The activity requires that students have previously defined the content of male and female gender stereotypes, i.e. that in the previous class activity they created a list of characteristics considered to be “typically male” and “typically female.”

We introduce the students to the following situation: *the Earth has been visited by a being from another planet who asked us to describe a human being – an earthling: its characteristics, activities and the like. We ask girls and boys to spontaneously name human characteristics and activities by means of which they could try to describe a human being to the visitor. We write all ideas on the blackboard. If we are working with a group of more than 15 students we divide them into smaller groups so that everybody can they actively participate in the description of the “human being.”*

Discussion: We compare the list of characteristics and activities by which the students described the human being with the list of characteristics by which they described a “typical woman” and “typical man.” We look whether the list contains more “female” or more “male” characteristics. In our culture, it is likely that it will contain more “male” characteristics. *Do the children from their experience know some examples how people regard typically “male” features as generally human?* We lead the students to uncover the falsity of the seeming gender neutrality that masks the fact that the “blueprint” for a human being is usually the man and that women’s experiences are less visible and mostly marginalized. If our list contains more “female” characteristics we can use it as an interesting impulse for a discussion about invisibility of women’s experiences in textbooks (history, biology), the media (e.g. using gender insensitive language) and the like.

A Winning Lottery Ticket

Objective: To inspire children to realize that the fact that they are either boys or girls is a mere coincidence. Therefore, it is important to treat every person equally.

Duration: 30 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Tools: pieces of paper of two different colours (one for each pupil)

Instructions: Each girl and boy will draw a “lottery ticket” (from a box, hat...) and they will be divided into two groups - according to the colour of their ticket. One group will do “pleasant” activities (listen to music, chat, play on a computer, and the like), the other group will do “unpleasant” activities (take trash out of school desks, dust, clean a blackboard, and the like). After 15 minutes they will sit down to a discussion.

Discussion: *How did girls and boys in the first group feel? How did girls and boys in the second group feel? Was this division of activities fair? Could the first group do something for the second one to feel better? And would they want to help? Why should they help? We motivate children to understand that good coexistence is possibly only when each group has a chance to feel “satisfied”. Has the other group an idea what would help them to feel better?*

With this activity, it is very important that children have enough time to step out from their roles and not to feel aggrieved.

Word Game

Objective: To show hidden gender occupational inequality caused by gender stereotypes.

Duration: 45 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: We will make pairs of names of occupations and ask girls and boys to speak about the first ideas related to them that come to their mind (Examples of occupations: a male cook – a female cook, a male secretary – a female secretary, a male hairdresser – a female hairdresser, a male soldier – a female soldier, a male politician – a female politician, and the like). We ask children to characterize women and men in these occupations and whether there is any difference between, for instance, a male cook and a female cook. If they think there is some then what kind of difference that is. We write the pairs of words on a blackboard in the order in which the children mention them. We can tell the children that their task is to notice how an unequal occupational status of men and women is contained also in language (in a shorter – 10-minute version of the assignment, it suffices to demonstrate 2 examples of difference in perception of men and women: a male cook – a female cook and a male secretary – a female secretary).

Discussion: We make sure that girls and boys realize that gender inequality is real and that it is anchored already in language. We can speak about how male names of occupations are

used also to denote women in these occupations, although the Slovak language distinguishes between the male and female form of these names.

Advertising

Objective: To show gender stereotypes in advertising.

Duration: 90 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Tools: A TV set and VCR, videotape with taped gender-stereotypical adverts. In case we do not have these tools available, students can also work with printed advertisements.

Instructions: We watch the adverts and ask students to pay attention to the way men and women are depicted. We can help them by asking questions such as:

- What kind of activities do women and men in the adverts usually do?
- What products are men promoting and what products are women promoting?
- What jobs do women and men in adverts do?
- What qualities and features of women and men (assertiveness, caring about others, emphasis on appearance, and the like) are stressed in the adverts?

Girls and boys work individually for some allotted amount of time, e.g. 10 minutes. Then we ask them to exchange their ideas.

In the second part of this exercise, we try to draw their attention to the “traditional” depiction of men and women in advertising. We motivate them to think about advertisements showing women and men in “non-typical” roles or doing “non-typical activities”.

In the third part, the students will be divided into groups and they will make advertisements breaking gender stereotypes.

Discussion: *What kind of ideas about men and women does advertising present? Are these closer to traditional ideas about men's and women's role or do they divert from them?*

We can expand on children's ideas by, for instance, introducing the issue of representation of women as caring mothers or housewives, or point out that advertising often emphasises beauty as one of the most important female characteristics. We can speak about the fact that the representation of “masculinity” in advertising is related to activity, strength, success in, e.g., business or sport. We can also compare the representation of aging in men (vitamins for vitality) and women (anti-wrinkle skin care).

We can speak with children about the extent of differentiation of the ideas about men and women in literature, film, fine arts, and also everyday life. At the end we can together discuss the implications of one-sided representation of men and women for our ideas about men and women in society and for real lives of people.

Textbooks under the Microscope

Objective: To look at textbook through different “lenses” so that girls and boys see how textbooks represent men and women.

Duration: 90 minutes

Age group: Middle School and Secondary School

Tools: textbooks, pastels or crayons

Instructions: Pupils can work with textbooks they have at hand (e.g. history, social sciences, ethics, foreign languages, i.e. those textbooks that speak about people or contain appropriate illustrations). We divide girls and boys into small groups of 4-5 people. Each group gets one topic and we ask children to go over the given textbook and focus on how it depicts women and men and what activities they do.

Examples of discussion topics:

- How are men depicted? How frequently do they occur and what do they do?
- How are women depicted? How frequently do they occur and what do they do?
- How are older people depicted? How frequently do they occur and what do they do?
- How are boys depicted? How frequently do they occur and what do they do?
- How are girls depicted? How frequently do they occur and what do they do?
- Who is missing from the textbook? In what situation could they occur in it?
- What activities do people in the textbook do? What characteristics and faculties do they represent?

After about 20 minutes of group work, girls and boys present their findings to the rest of the class. If you have enough time and the children are interested you can continue with the discussion on how to complement the textbooks, what to change and what to leave out, etc.

Discussion: *Are the characters and situation in the textbook identical to or different from real life? What other activities of people, not included in the textbook, can you imagine? What implications can the one-sided depiction of certain groups of people have? What stereotypes does this one-sided depiction of women and men, boys and girls reinforce? We can speak about diversity of everyday life that is often missing from textbooks (e.g. fathers taking care of babies, female pilots, different types of families – a single mother, foster parents and families with adopted children, childless couples, gay and lesbian families).*

A History Conference

Objective: To inspire the interest of girls and boys in female personalities missing from the school curriculum.

Duration: homework – 45 minutes, “the conference” - 90 minutes

Age Group: Middle School and Secondary School

Instructions: We prepare a list of topics or personalities about which students will do a project – e.g. an essay, a seminar paper or presentation – either individually or as a group. We

can link it to the exercise “Textbooks under the Microscope” in which the students analysed gender stereotypes and the one-sided nature of textbooks, and name what topics and personalities are either missing from them or are not well elaborated. We give the students an opportunity to broaden their knowledge and to do a project on one of the topics missing from textbooks (women and their access to power in Ancient Rome, the role of nunneries in the Middle Ages, women’s suffrage, Nobel Prize winners and the like). We adjust the topics as well as the type and length of the project’s output (a presentation, poster, an essay or seminar paper) to the subject. In each subject – be it literature, history, physics or social studies, we will together with the students certainly discover a lot of interesting impulses (some of them are in this book, some on the Internet or in encyclopaedias).

In the next class we will organize a small conference where the students will make short presentations (5 minutes) of their projects. A discussion can follow either after each presentation or after several presentations with a similar topic. When the audience is asking questions and the discussion has unfolded, it is important to keep an agreed upon time frame.

Discussion: In the concluding discussion with students we speak about their preparations for the presentation. What problems did they have? What did they find the most difficult/the easiest? What new things did they learn? Which of their previous knowledge did they have to correct change? Where did they find the most interesting material? If it turns out that the project has captured the students’ attention we can discuss with them how they could further use their projects and share them with others – e.g. as contributions to the school magazine, their own collection of papers, internet presentations, and the like.