

Role of Teachers' in Creating Gender Sensitised Classroom to Bridge Gender and Social Gap

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Submitted: 25-01-2021

Revised: 05-02-2021

Accepted: 10-02-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

"It's a baby boy", says the nurse and from then on, subtle stereotyping begins. Guns and cars are bought for him, preferably blue and never pink! While growing up, if he cries he will be told "doesn't cry like a girl". He perhaps learns to suppress his emotions as he thinks it is girlish to express them.

On the other hand, if the nurse says "it's a girl" the equations tend to change from that minute. Her room is perhaps decorated with the supposed feminine colour pink as pink for girls and is a rule. Dolls are bought for her. Good manners like talking and laughing gently and not loudly, being delicate, being sacrificial, caring etc are the most likely to be taught to her.

There is always a thin line between 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Stereotyping women is unknowingly locking her to stay within the present rules of the society. Somehow in all these chaos, the real self of an often is often lost. Many of us realise this but wonder how to get out of these boxes that seem to be so deeply ingrained to us. Perhaps the best way we can bring about change in our society is by becoming aware of our own biases and stereotypes.

To minimize these gender issues we need to start changing the mindsets of the younger generation of society as they are those who can bring about further change in society, with their innovative ideas, thought and practices. Teachers play a very important part in the early upbringing of the child and their ideas and beliefs can change the thought patterns of young students.

In this regard teachers are strategically positioned to act as agents of change in order to achieve gender equality, especially through what they teach, how they teach, and how they role model their own attitudes, beliefs and practices in the classroom and beyond.

This paper explains the need of gender sensitisation in educational institution and the role of teachers to promote gender sensitized classroom.

Following the process of gender sensitisation programme we will be able to bring social change relating to women. This paper also suggests what pedagogic strategies teacher should follow to promote gender sensitive classroom.

II. OBJECTIVES

- Clarify the meaning of gender.
- To identify gender bias and stereotypes in everyday life and classroom environment.
- Foster gender sensitivity in our everyday lives and classroom practices.
- To encourage teachers to adopt participatory approaches in the teaching and learning process.
- To suggest strategies to make classroom environment gender sensitised or gender inclusive.

III. MEANING OF GENDER, GENDER STEREOTYPE, AND GENDER SENSITIZATION

Before we look at the process of how gender sensitised classroom can be achieved, let us briefly focus on the terms Gender, gender stereotypes, and gender sensitivity.

Gender refers to the socio cultural differences between the males and females in terms of their strength, ability, performance, wage earning capacity and social acceptability etc. In fact the biological process does not discriminate between man and woman, but socially, women are regarded as weak, need protection and hence become subordinate to men.

A stereotype is a conceptual image that may lead to a simplified view of a person or a thing. Inaccurate stereotypes serve to constrict and limit vision and perception. Men and women because of these stereotypes are forced to ignore their personality traits, temperament and unique characteristics that make them who they are.

There are basic examples of gender stereotypes:

- **Personality traits:** women are supposed to be shy, passive, and submissive.
- **Domestic behaviour:** women are supposed to cook for her family, look after her child and as a caregiver. Offcourse women love being mothers, but it is not a good practice to stereotype women only as a caregiver.
- **Occupations:** women are supposed to have clean job such as teacher, nurse etc.
- **Women should not go sporty:** women climbing tree, women running, loving adventure, and all these falls under the category of “no” for women as a part of gender stereotypes in India.

“After all, you are a women” – this will be the most annoying thing that almost all Indian women hate.

Gender sensitivity is not about pitting women against men. On the contrary, education that is gender sensitive benefits members of both sexes. It helps them determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. Gender awareness requires not only intellectual understanding and effort but also sensitivity and open-mindedness to change one’s views and limited perspectives and values. It opens up the widest possible range of life options for both women and men and builds their capacities to be more wholesome and humane. Gender sensitizing "is about changing behaviour 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' they thought they know

IV. NEED FOR GENDER SENSITIZATION

Sensitization is the most effective approach of reforming the society. Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype mind set of men and women- a mindset that strongly believes that men and women are unequal entities’ and hence have to function in different socio- economic space.

As any form of gender bias is an obstacle on the way of attaining an equitable social and economic order Gender sensitization increases the sensitivity of people at large towards women. Gender sensitization is first instance, tends to change the perception that men and women have of each other. It creates a mindset in men that no longer sees in women the stereotypical image. The perception that women are a weak and unequal entity no more clouds the minds of common man .Rather they are seen as responsible and equal partners in socio- economic development. Women

also tend to develop the perception that they are not the counter part of men and they have an equally important role to play in decision making at household, community and organization level.

The main problem of Indian society is lack of women recognition and appreciation for women’s involvement in multifarious activities. The men, who are reluctant to acknowledge women’s contribution, come forward under the influence of sensitization to recognize their contribution. The gender sensitization process develops understanding that women do possess wisdom and therefore they must be involved in decision making process. They have concerns and therefore should be treated with dignity and equal chance in sharing of social and economic benefits.

Therefore gender sensitivity encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences and incorporate these into strategies and actions.

V. ROLE OF TEACHERS TO CREATE GENDER SENSITIZED CLASSROOM

The influence of teachers and educators on gender roles of their students immensely impacts their educational outcomes as well as their role in contemporary society. It is necessary to raise the awareness of teachers to address prevailing gender and social issues in academic setting and in society at large. This gender sensitivity of teachers will hopefully produce a rippling effect in the school manifesto. A teacher must therefore constantly be aware of the fact that his or her actions, attitude, behaviour, approach, manner, mindset will help to shape a child’s gender role.

Teachers are required to be serious about the gender issue. Teachers need not only gender sensitive curriculum and text book but also gender equality education. Teachers can serve as the changing agent and role models in this respect.

VI. STRATEGIES TO CREATE GENDER SENSITIZED CLASSROOM

Use Of Gender Sensitive Vocabulary

Teacher should promote gender neutral language at all levels and throughout the institution for students, staff and faculty. Gender inclusive terms that can be used:

GENDER BIASED TERMS	GENDER INCLUSIVE TERMS
Mankind	Humankind
Policeman	Police/police officer

Chairman	Chairperson
Businessman	Business executive
Brotherhood	Kinship
Manpower	Human power
The evolution of Man	Human evolution

VII. REVIEW OF LEARNING MATERIALS AND TEXT BOOK

In contemporary times globalisation has led to expansion in information communication technology. Children now have access of internet. However in rural areas or small suburb areas printed textual materials continue to be an important learning aid. As textual materials are pivotal sources of knowledge it is important that all text, reading materials and books be free of notion of gender inequality as bias is embedded in textual materials. This type of gender bias is part of hidden curriculum taught implicitly to the students through the everyday functioning of their classroom. Thus gender roles, expectations reflected by written text and pictures should be gender sensitive to promote gender equality.

Teacher should analyse the content, visuals and exercises of the textbooks from a gender perspective as following:

- How are gender relation portrayed in the content and visual?
- Whether content relates to all disciplines address contributions and achievements of men and women in an adequate manner?
- Whether text books bridge all segments of society related to gender?
- Whether they sensitise on promoting critical thinking among children for questioning stereotypes, myths and misconceptions to the status of women?
- Adjectives used for boys and girls, men and women in the text?
- Gender representation in occupations: who perform the activities related to production for income generation?
- Who performs activities related to collection of water, nursing, child care, and all activities related to household?

Here are some examples of gender biased picture incorporated in the books of different classes of west Bengal Board of secondary Education.

VIII. TEACHERS' ROLE TO CREATE GENDER SENSITIZED TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS

While teaching subjects at the secondary stage, the pedagogical process has to be well designed for making classroom gender sensitive. To break the gender barriers teacher should take the following initiatives to ensure the gender inclusive teaching learning process.

- Teacher should encourage team work.
- Teacher should use quiz, debates and other techniques for better participation and understanding.
- Teacher should discuss student's doubts and difficulties.
- Teacher should involve boys and girls in conduction of different activities and projects.

IX. TEACHERS' ROLE TO CREATE GENDER SENSITISED CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Teacher should avoid using adjectives like beautiful, pretty, obedient, submissive for girls and brave, strong, handsome for boys.
- Teacher should use eye contact for all children in the class.
- Encouraging remarks like excellent, very good, well done should be used for both boys and girls.
- Teacher should not use abusive and stigmatic language.
- There should be an environment for the students to share their view point freely.
- Teacher should ensure that physical and social environment of the classroom promotes healthy relationship between boys and girls.
- Sitting arrangement should be done in mix up.
- Teacher should ensure equal participation of boys and girls in classroom activity.
- Teacher should allocate classroom duties in a manner which reflects gender neutrality.
- Teacher should be careful while giving examples of both men and women from different walks of life so that the message of equal capacity gets highlighted.

X. CONCLUSION

Thus we can conclude that gender sensitization through education can be as a forceful, effective and primary tool to bring change in the thought process of students through formal school education. The main focus should be on breaking the stereotypes and set patriarchal notions prevalent in the society. The time has come for women to rise

up and force the patriarchal society to underline the importance and necessity of the role played by women in cultivating a strong, rational and progressive society. In this respect teacher can play a role as an agent of social change.

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**International Journal of Advances in
Engineering and Management**

ISSN: 2395-5252



IJAEM

Volume: 03

Issue: 02

DOI: 10.35629/5252

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