

# 5 Ways To Promote Gender Equality In The Primary Classroom

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## 1. Identify and Challenge Misconceptions

One of the most important things you can do to promote gender equality in your classroom is to challenge the misconceptions of your pupils. For example, a pupil once told me that, "Girls can't play football." Before correcting him, first I asked him what he meant by that. The sentence had some ambiguity and I really wanted to get to the root of the problem. He responded, "Only boys are allowed at my football club and I support Man U and they don't have girls on their team either." His misconception was based on a lack of knowledge. He had not seen any female footballers and because his football club had a 'boys only' policy, that further cemented his belief. I took the opportunity to explore female footballers with the class as well as other sports where this misconception could be present. Afterwards, the pupil agreed that actually girls CAN play football.

Another child in my class once said, "Mums do all the cleaning." I asked him why he thought that, and he responded, "because my mummy does all the cleaning while daddy is at work." We talked about how there were not 'set jobs' for people. I explained that it is all about choices. I then asked the class if anyone else wanted to share what happens in their family in regard to work and housework. The varied responses helped show the pupil that just because something is the case in your home that does not mean it is the case for every home.

## 2. Look at how Gender is Represented in your Class Books

Go through the books in your classroom. Ask yourself are your princesses always damsels in distress being rescued by a prince? Are your heroes always male? Do you ever have male characters that need rescuing? Do all your princesses want to wear frilly dresses? Do your male



characters have to be strong, tough, and able to fight? It is so important for your pupils to feel represented in the books they read this is not just in terms of gender but ethnicity, disability and so much more. Books can really be important for a child's sense of identity and belonging. Also, if your books are all giving the same representations over and over again this enforces a particular expectation for children of 'the way things are.'

If you want to give your class library a makeover, I highly recommend taking a look at GEC best books. All these titles are great for #SmashingStereotypes and are broken down into categories to help you find what you are looking for to better diversify your collection. Diversifying your books also aids reading comprehension as children are exploring a wide variety of texts. Additionally, it will help promote a love of reading. By giving children a wider variety of books that they can identify with, they are going to enjoy reading so much more.

## 3. Review the Images you use in Lessons and on Displays

If I had not used that image of a girl playing football in my lesson when would that pupil have learnt that actually girls CAN play football? Images are

powerful, more powerful than we often give them credit for. Frustratingly, you may find you have to search for images that #SmashStereotypes. I know I have. The annoyance I would feel having to specifically type something like 'Female builder' then having to scroll past the multiple images of a woman in a skimpy builder's costume. I would also have to input something like "Male nurse." This time I did not get skimpy costumes, but it was still something I had to be really specific about to be able to find. However difficult, it is worth taking the time to diversify your images. Look at how you can turn stereotypes on their head such as challenging the sort of jobs a man or woman is 'expected to do' or the clothes that they are 'expected to wear.' Use images to open discussion, use images to provide great role models to your pupils. If you are learning about famous scientists look to diversify this list. Enable your pupils to be able to see themselves in that role rather than just their white male classmates. You could also take this a step further by having visitors to the school from a range of different careers with different experiences and backgrounds. Having the opportunity to ask that visitor questions and hear about their own personal experiences will really help pupil understanding. This will also be a great way to inspire your pupils.



#### 4. Check Your Own Bias

Often these biases are unconscious but if you really look at your actions or the things you say you may spot them. Here are some examples of things I have seen.

- Giving out different coloured resources based on gender e.g. pink paper for the girls and blue for the boys.
- Using gendered language e.g. 'lads', 'policeman', 'love', 'cleaning ladies'.
- Approaching situations differently dependent on gender e.g. being more comforting to female pupils than male pupils if they hurt themselves.
- Enforcing clothing stereotypes e.g. drawing a girl in a pretty princess dress and a boy in a t-shirt and jeans.
- Expectations of achievement based on gender e.g. "Well he is a boy, so he's bound not to like writing." "His writing his scruffy but he is a boy so that's not surprising." Although there is a gender gap in pupil writing which needs to be addressed, this kind of attitude, especially when voiced to pupils or their parents is unhelpful.

Once you have identified these biases you can then take steps to address them. If your bias is using gendered language, here is something that you could do: When you are planning your next lesson look to see if any of the vocabulary is gendered and consider alternatives. For example, if you were talking to children about different

jobs write neutral job titles on your plan such as police officer to remind you to use them. Eventually, using these terms will become habit and you will have overcome your bias!

#### 5. Evaluate Your Curriculum

Look at what you are teaching and how you are teaching it. Consider if you are offering a diverse and inclusive curriculum. Questions to consider:

- What can your pupils identify with?
- Will they feel represented?
- Does your curriculum provide the whole picture of history?
- Is it too focused on one side of the story?
- Does the curriculum enforce gender stereotypes or challenge them?
- What is not covered that you feel should be?

Where there are areas to address that are not within your role, bring them to the attention of senior management. If they need support direct them to resources such as The GEC App. Using this, leaders can complete a self-assessment of their school's gender equality. Additionally, they can ask their employees to share their views, so they are better informed of gaps to address. Once the assessment is complete, leaders will be able to see the areas where they are doing well and where they could make improvements. They will even have access to e-learning

resources to help them in their next steps. These are just a few ideas of how you can promote gender equality in the primary classroom. There are many more great ideas and resources out there. Do not forget to consult with other staff members, other schools, and local businesses. Within your community I am sure there will be a wealth of information for you to take back and put into practice!

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A member of The Global Equality Collective since the beginning, Kat Cauchi is the Product Manager of ReallySchool from NetSupport. ReallySchool is a cloud-based solution for capturing student learning experiences, assessing pupils, progress tracking and parent communication, that saves teachers valuable time in the classroom. NetSupport is based in Peterborough where they take an active role in their education community, with many of its members working within local schools.

Prior to working at NetSupport, Kat was a primary school teacher who started out as a teaching assistant. She is passionate about student wellbeing, so she endeavoured to make this a key focus for her classroom and the whole school by organising events, activities and resources to support this. She still works closely with the school she taught in, by volunteering at special events and training sessions. As a woman working in the tech industry, she feels it is her responsibility to help close the gender gap in tech.

Kat feels privileged to be a member of the GEC.