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ABSTRACT

During the past twenty years, important efforts to ensure educational equity for girls have brought about major changes in our schools; yet subtle sex discrimination still pervades many of our classrooms. In the elementary schools girls still are perceived more favorably than boys, disciplined less harshly, and graded more generously than boys; but boys receive more attention, encouragement, and constructive criticism. Boys emerge from this environment ready to move ahead and surpass their female classmates. Girls bring to their future education and career plans a habit of playing it safe and a collection of nagging doubts about their own abilities which often persist in contradiction to their exceptional grades. If this cycle of inequity and lack of confidence is to be broken, teachers and administrators on all levels must provide visible public leadership so that the community at large will be educated about the essential link between equity and excellence. (BZ)

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LEARNING HER PLACE

Sex Bias in the Elementary School Classroom

PEER Report, No. 5, Autumn 1985

by

Project on Equal Education Rights

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Learning Her Place— Sex Bias in the Elementary School Classroom

The classroom provides children their first experience of a role in society at large, beyond the confines of home. In their new "world" of elementary school, children are taught new disciplines and are expected to conform to new rules set by strangers, to learn material chosen by others for its long-range relevance, and to participate in a variety of group activities. The classroom offers more structured opportunities for competition with self and others, a greatly expanded field of endeavor, and wide personal contacts. Children must learn how to deal with the authority of teachers, administrators, and more aggressive children. They learn when to speak, when to act, when to be noticed, and when to do nothing.

Whatever else they may or may not achieve in school, all children learn these lessons very well and their early classroom experiences teach them patterns of thinking, acting, learning, and striving that will shape the rest of their lives.

Indeed, recent research—inspired by the rebirth of feminism during the past two decades—has defined the role of education in transmitting the traditional patriarchal values of our larger society. All too often, stereotyped assumptions about the limited abilities and appropriate roles for female, minority, and disabled students still are operative in the classroom. And all too often the classroom experience still reinforces these limitations and stereotypes instead of helping children overcome them.

For example, numerous studies have provided evidence of biased treatment of disabled students and students of color. In a study as 1985, a New York City elementary school



noted for its concern with mainstreaming disabled students was nevertheless found to have cafeteria seating that required children in wheelchairs to sit separately from the other children.¹ At the same school, children were excluded from a class trip because they were mobility impaired. In another study, Rosenthal and Jacobson found notable differences in teacher expectations for children judged as "looking Mexican."² A study by Leacock found that "children with more ability in the low income and black groups were most likely to be objects of teacher rejection."³ Furthermore, female students who are either disabled or members of minority groups encounter situations of

"double jeopardy" in which they are perceived through overlapping sets of stereotypes. A recently completed ten-year study by Scott and Damico discovered that "teachers from kindergarten through third grade tend to praise white females for academic behavior and encourage them to help other children with academic problems. Black females . . . are praised for helping other children with personal or emotional problems."⁴ Even though the white girls are expected to focus on academics while the Black girls are expected to focus on personal problems, it is interesting to note that *both* are expected primarily to nurture—to "help" their peers.

By the time they are in the fourth grade, girls' visions of occupations open to them are limited to four: teacher, nurse, secretary, or mother.

—Robert O'Hara

"The Roots of Careers," 1962⁵

In one of the workshops I conducted, I was talking to an audience of young high school women about opportunities in technology and I asked how many thought they could be anything they wanted to be. Four girls out of 45 raised their hands.

—Career/Employment
Consultant, 1985⁶

The last twenty years have seen marked changes in the perceptions of women's capabilities and in their own expectations about their occupational goals. Because the classroom mirrors the larger society, it also has been transformed by the civil rights and feminist movements. Sex and race stereotypes that only recently were accepted as "natural" now are seen as inadequate and even shocking. What was assumed to be educationally sound practice is now seen as discriminatory and unjust. For example, in 1966 the respected Fairfax County (Virginia) school system was experimenting with "separate but equal" classrooms, separating boys and girls at its Wakefield Elementary School. The highly favorable report which appeared in *National Elementary Principal* described these classes as follows:

We have found it well to let the interests of the classes guide the teacher in areas such as science and social studies. Depending on the sex of the group, this sometimes results in quite different activities. From studying the atom, for example, a boy's class moved easily into a study of nuclear fission. It is unlikely that girls would respond this way. Or another example, mold can be studied from a medical standpoint by boys and in terms of cooking by girls.⁷

This curriculum assumed that the boys would become nuclear physicists and physicians while the girls would become housewives, with a primary occupational focus on the kitchen. Alternative career ambitions (or abilities) apparently were not considered. The situation was further complicated by the fact that teachers at the time generally were talented women who had been channeled into elementary school teaching as one of perhaps two professions, the other being nursing, appropriate to college-educated women.

This is no longer the case. The civil rights and feminist movements raised the consciousness of the country and created opportunities for women to pursue a variety of careers and roles in society. Civil rights laws, such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, mandated equal educational opportunities for women. Despite the recent (1984) *Grove City College* decision, which limited its coverage,⁸ Title IX established a crucial precedent for prohibiting sex discrimination in schools and colleges receiving federal funds and for requiring equal access and treatment for female and male students of all ages and races both inside and outside the classroom. As a result, for instance, industrial arts classes are no longer the exclusive province of male students, and home economics classes attract many young men. "In Home-Ec we get to eat our own cooking," comments one eighth-grade boy, "it's much better than that cafeteria stuff." More importantly, training in nontraditional vocational and technological areas has opened up career possibilities for women and girls. By the time they reach college, many young men and women today tend to view sex discrimination as "ancient history," something they may have learned about in their studies of literature and history, something they will never encounter in a more enlightened society.

Nevertheless, these same students have been shaped more than they know by sex stereotypes, tracking, and behavioral expectations too subtle to be controlled by legal remedies. Token or "paper" compliance with the law is still more typical of academic administrators than is wholehearted endorsement of educational equity. Despite major, well-publicized gains, girls' sports are still relatively underfunded. And many frustrated parents still report that their daughters' teachers often are indifferent to girls' math inhibitions; one parent recently quoted her daughter's eighth grade math teacher's reassurance about the child's lack of interest in math:

Oh, she's such a pretty, little thing. She'll get married at eighteen and won't need to know much math.⁹

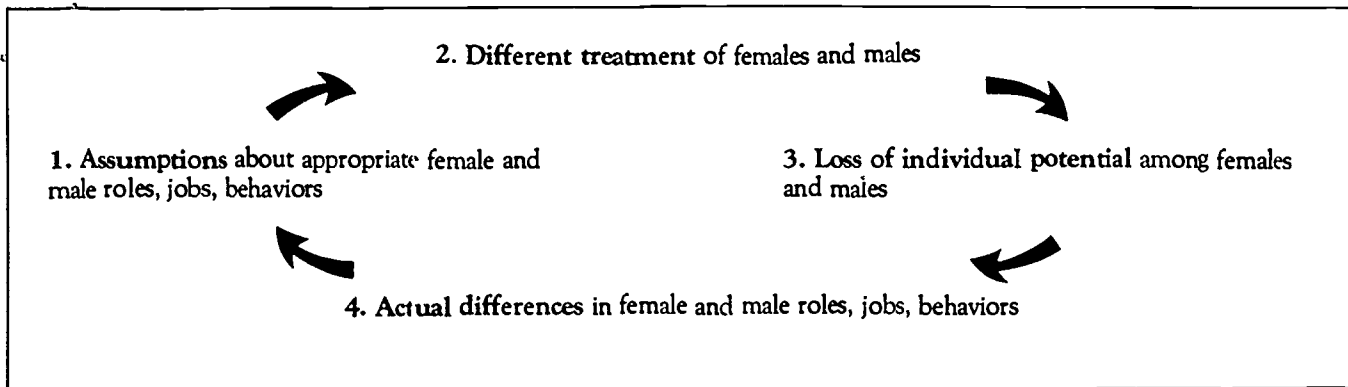
Clearly, despite the many advances of the past two decades, much remains to be done to achieve educational equity.



The "Classroom Climate" for Girls¹⁰

First of all, what is the "classroom climate"? It is, as the term implies, an environmental metaphor. It defines the *growing conditions* for the child's mind, the *atmosphere* within which learning takes place. It is governed largely by the individual teacher, though he or she is influenced by administrators, other teachers, parents, and students. It has its source in the teacher's experience and education, in his/her beliefs and prejudices, and in the methods of communication and interaction learned from both family and formal study; and it is established by the signals the teacher sends the students, the way he or she asks questions, provides feedback, assigns tasks, and maintains discipline.

The classroom climate is a crucial determinant of a child's intellectual curiosity, sense of self-confidence, ability to handle failure, and acceptance of and by peers. And the classroom climate continues to be heavily influenced by sexism and racism, often despite the good intentions of dedicated teachers. Even teachers who are active and concerned feminists have been shown to maintain subconscious sexist biases. Myra and David Sadker, whose invaluable research on sex bias in teacher-student interaction has helped define these issues, found that teachers who viewed a film of a classroom discussion invariably *perceived* that the girls talked more than the boys, even though the boys had in fact out-talked the girls at a ratio of three to one. As the Sadkers reported in March of 1985, teachers' judgments still were influenced by the old "chatty female" stereotype: "Stereotypes of garrulous women are so strong that teachers fail to see this communications gender gap even when it is right before their eyes."¹¹ There is no doubt that dedication and caring characterize the majority of the teachers in our elementary classrooms, but their perceptions often remain skewed by the sexism of the society which has shaped them. They find themselves perpetuating the vicious circle described by Rita Bornstein:¹²



Perceptions, Expectations, Achievements

The importance of teacher expectations as a determinant of both teacher behavior and student performance cannot be exaggerated, as Rosenthal and Jacobson's famous *Pygmalion in the Classroom* study—involving teacher expectations in the face of IQ testing—makes clear. Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson administered a standard intelligence test to elementary school children in a low-income neighborhood. Teachers were told that the test was a unique new tool to identify "intellectual bloomers." Then Rosenthal and Jacobson chose 20 percent of the students at random and told the teachers that these children had demonstrated "unusual promise" on the test. Eight months later, a second IQ test was administered. The students who had been identified as "intellectual bloomers" scored an average of 12 points higher than on the previous test, while the rest of the students' gains averaged only 8 points. The difference was most dramatic in the first and second grades, where the supposedly promising students increased their IQ scores more than twice as much as the control group.¹³

Although the teachers of these children did not intentionally favor the targeted children, their expectations had been affected by the bogus test results and presumably influenced the signals they sent the children in dozens of subtle ways. Similarly, teachers carry expectations about abilities, intelligence, and ambition based on the sex and race of their students. Myra and David Sadker have reported a 1965 study in which junior high school teachers describe the "good student" in the following terms:¹⁴

Adjectives Describing Good Female Students

appreciative
calm
conscientious
considerate
cooperative
mannerly
poised

sensitive
dependable
efficient
obliging
mature
thorough

Adjectives Describing Good Male Students

active
adventurous
aggressive
assertive
curious

energetic
enterprising
frank
independent
inventive

Other studies demonstrate that while sexism is less acceptable, it is still a part of teachers' expectations. In 1976, Marcia Guttentag and Heler Bray found that teachers almost never reported different feelings toward or treatment of boys and girls. Yet a majority of elementary school teachers, both male and female, believed that boys and girls *behave* or *perform* differently. Furthermore, teachers commonly reported that girls and boys *expect* differential treatment. Given what the Sadkers and others have discovered about teachers' often unconscious and subtle differentiations between boys and girls, it is clear that these reports may not be completely accurate. Even if it is true that girls and boys share these sex biased expectations, it would not be surprising, given the stereotyped expectations manifested by many parents and by popular media. A recent poll by the Roper Organization showed that 46 percent of a sample of adults would like their sons to work in a computer-oriented career, but only 33 percent saw the field as an option for their daughters. Thirty percent saw a career in electronics as appropriate for their sons, as opposed to 13 percent who suggested it for their daughters.¹⁵ Such differing expectations on the part of parents naturally influence the children's expectations of themselves. And yet, in spite of the biases children begin with (or perhaps because of them), at least half the teachers studied by Guttentag and Bray insisted that teachers have "neither the responsibility nor the right to influence children's attitudes toward sex roles,"¹⁶ thus ignoring the impact of prior sexist conditioning as an educational inhibitor that should be corrected. Yet this notion, that the teacher can remain both "impartial" and "nonsexist" in the classroom, has been seriously challenged by studies which examine teacher-student interactions in the classroom.

Good Intentions vs. Classroom Signals

From peer interaction patterns that develop, from the teacher's use of power as he or she offers and withdraws praise and reprimand, from the children's conflicts with school rules and rituals, from reading between the lines in textbooks, and in short, from an incredible variety of incidental contacts with the environment, a hidden curriculum emerges that has a powerful impact on its young students.¹⁷

The "hidden curriculum" is certainly communicated through the pattern of "praise and reprimand" in the teacher's words. But the "incidental contacts" also include nonverbal cues, many of which are selectively directed on the basis of sex. The most obvious of these nonverbal factors involves location of classroom seating. Girls are

more likely to be seated close to the teacher whether they choose their seats or have them assigned by the teacher. The student's choice of such a seat expresses a desire to relate closely to the teacher; its assignment by the teacher encourages such a close relationship. As Raphaela Best's recent four-year study of peer-group socialization confirms, the close relationship with the teacher makes the student highly dependent on the teacher both emotionally and academically. Best found that boys vigorously separate themselves from close dependence on the teacher earlier and more extensively than do girls.¹⁸ But high-achieving boys do tend to sit near the teacher; and when they do, girls and boys receive equal attention from the teacher. Boys in seats far from the teacher also receive much more attention than girls in such seats, largely because they act more independent and are more aggressive in demanding such attention.

Boys also are less dependent upon eye contact, while girls still are socialized to rely on eye contact for communication; when they cannot see the teacher well, they tend to be silent. The opposite happens with boys and men, who speak more to compensate for reduced eye contact.¹⁹ Their high rate of verbal input goes well beyond compensation, leading male students to dominate classroom discussions. Thus something as simple as the seating plan sets the stage for sex-linked inequity in classroom dialogue.

Teacher and Students: Classroom Dialogue

The noted educator, Haim Ginott, used to tell the story about the little girl who came home from her first day of school. "How did you like it?" her anxious mother queried. "Oh, school was just fine," the young scholar replied, "except for this one lady who kept interrupting."²⁰

—Myra and David Sadker
Between Teacher and Student

Talk is central to classroom learning, and teachers do most of it—over 1000 verbal exchanges each day.²¹ What they say, how they say it, and to whom they say it, forms the most constant stimulus of the school day for the child. Even more crucial, perhaps, are the comments elicited from the students. There is increasing evidence that the quantity and quality of teacher-student interchanges are heavily influenced by the race and sex of the students. Teacher-student dialogue typically involves four areas of interaction: assignment of classroom chores, maintenance of discipline, active instruction, and evaluation and feedback. The assignment of classroom maintenance chores is, perhaps, the least crucial of these concerns; but even here, traditional sex roles are thoughtlessly reinforced. Boys tend to be called on for tasks requiring strength and allowing movement. "If stacks of heavy tests are to be moved from one room to another, a small boy may be found struggling under their weight, while a girl—perhaps larger and stronger—sits and watches."²² Boys are called upon to run audio-visual equipment (a marketable basic skill); girls vie with each other for the "privilege" of helping the teacher tidy the room. Typically, girls dust desks; boys move desks.

More important, of course, is the matter of classroom discipline. Almost all studies confirm what any first-grader will report: elementary school boys get into much more trouble than girls. Boys receive eight to ten times more

"prohibitory control messages"—messages demanding that they stop an activity or avoid it in the future—than girls do.²³ Furthermore, such messages are delivered more harshly to boys than they are to girls; even when both girls and boys join in misbehavior, teachers are still more likely to punish the boys, and when all the disruptive children are



reprimanded, the boys are generally treated more harshly. In short, the evidence is overwhelming that, by and large, teachers express far greater disapproval of boys than of girls.²⁴

However, this apparent prejudice against boys has another aspect. Boys do indeed receive more disapproval and punishment in the elementary school. But they also receive more approval and more attention. Boys, whether high-achieving or low-achieving, are more salient for their teachers. They speak up and raise their hands in class. They may cause trouble, but they demand the teacher's attention. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to seek approval by quietly avoiding trouble.²⁵ Even punishments often work to the long-run advantage of boys. Raphaela Best describes a typical example of two children, "Elizabeth" and "Denver," sitting on a bench outside the principal's office awaiting punishment for disrupting the cafeteria routine. A passing teacher took Elizabeth by the hand and interceded for her, calling her a "good girl" and getting her excused from punishment because "she didn't mean to do what she did." Denver was left to take his punishment because *he was assumed to be responsible for his actions*. "The lesson," says Best, "was indirect but clear: girls, being weak, could expect mercy; boys were strong enough for justice."²⁶

Guttentag and Bray theorize that "boys benefit from teachers' efforts to extend control as they learn to gauge limits and direct energies. But the same process reemphasizes an already existing conformity and dependency on the part of girls."²⁷ Once again, the school acts as a microcosm of society. Socialization seems to demand that boys have an impact on their environment. As Best's recent work confirms, it is still too frequently true that "the boy is being prepared to mold his world, the girl to be molded by it."²⁸

Thus, the tendency to pay more attention to male students which leads teachers to punish them more firmly also leads the same teachers to reach them more actively. Teachers, it seems, follow the students' lead; they tend to be reactive rather than proactive when it comes to sex-linked expectations.²⁹ They reinforce the existing tendencies toward male independence and female dependence, unintentionally magnifying existing inequities rather than minimizing them. For example, when boys and girls both raise their hands, teachers are more likely to call on the boys. They tend to allow boys to call out answers informally whereas they usually reprimand girls for such behavior. Teachers

consistently ask boys complex, open-ended questions requiring abstract reasoning, creative thought, and extended answers. Girls, on the other hand, are more often asked basic memory-type questions requiring docile absorption of material.³⁰ In a classroom discussion of Christopher Columbus, for example, boys would be called on more often to explain the reasons behind Columbus's voyages or the reactions to them, whereas girls would more likely be asked to recite dates, names of ships, and points of departure. Furthermore, teachers reveal an association of complex ability with male students when they give boys extended, detailed directions for complex tasks and refine and repeat these directions when the boy has trouble, encouraging him to continue his efforts.³¹ Girls receive much more cursory directions and are gallantly "bailed out" by the teacher if they have trouble with initial attempts at a task. As in disciplinary situations, the girls may appear to be favored, but the boys have the benefit of the struggle to master the material.

The tendency to treat girls and boys differently continues through the evaluation of their work and influences the kind of feedback the children receive. The tendency to continue challenging a boy when he has trouble is typical of this difference. The message sent by such a challenge is that an adequate answer or a successful experiment depends on effort. Girls, probably because they are expected to be more passive, are not often challenged to expend more effort. They are either given the correct answer by the teacher or told they are wrong while the teacher finds another student to answer the question. They thus logically come to regard their failures as evidence of lack of ability.

The idea that boys make mistakes because they do not try hard enough and girls make mistakes because they are not smart enough is further emphasized by the nature of teachers' criticism of student assignments. As a matter of fact, girls tend to receive higher grades than boys through high school. However, when criticizing boys' work, teachers tend to give equal attention to intellectual, content-oriented mistakes and to formal problems such as sloppy handwriting or incorrect format. Thus, carelessness is perceived to be as much at fault as is failure to understand the material. Indeed, 90 percent of praise directed to boys' assignments is based on intellectual achievement, while girls receive only 80 percent of their positive reinforcement for intellectual matters.

This difference may not appear significant until we note that twice as much of the praise girls receive in school (20 percent as opposed to 10 percent for boys) is based on relatively inconsequential achievements, such as "neat handwriting" and "tidy erasing." Furthermore, unlike boys, girls receive 90 percent of their negative feedback on the intellectual inadequacy of their work, compared to only 50 percent for boys. Thus, fully half of boys' shortcomings are presumed to be a matter of format, and they receive the implicit message that they "can do better if you try harder."³² Girls, on the other hand, are not told that they are careless; presumably they have done their best. Again, they are left to assume that they lack ability.

Girls, despite their superior grades, are sent a series of unconscious messages in class discussions and in the comments on their oral and written work to the effect that their achievements depend on care and compliance and their failures are due to inadequate abilities. Is it any wonder that by the time they reach high school, girls tend to rate

themselves lower than boys do on intellectual ability and leadership?³³ They also greatly underestimate their mathematical skills and their abilities to acquire computer expertise.³⁴ Girls are not helped by the tolerance in schools of a "computer jock" culture that, by and large, excludes girls from the "intellectual equivalent of football."³⁵ Nor are they well-served by counselors who insist that "every girl should learn to type" and direct them into nonacademic business education courses that will lead them into the low-paying "pink collar ghetto" of female-dominated menial office jobs. Such poor guidance furthers girls' underestimation of themselves. In the face of this, it is not surprising that of the brightest high school graduates who do not go on to college, the vast majority—75 to 90 percent—are women.³⁶

Even the successful female students who do attend college find their self-esteem easily eroded. A recent survey of high-school valedictorians and honor students found that 23 percent of the men and 21 percent of the women rated themselves as "far above average" in intelligence during their senior year of high school. But by their sophomore year of college, only 4 percent of the women still thought of themselves as exceptionally bright as opposed to 22 percent of the men.³⁷ Obviously something is wrong on the college level;³⁸ perhaps the habits of "playing it safe" and dependence on supportive teachers which girls learn early in order to excel in the elementary school continue to be liabilities in the more competitive world of the college classroom.

Some Answers for Teachers

During the past twenty years, important efforts to ensure educational equity for girls have brought about major changes in our schools; yet subtle sex discrimination still pervades too many of our classrooms. In the elementary schools, girls still are perceived more favorably, disciplined less harshly, and graded more generously than boys, but boys receive more attention, encouragement, and constructive criticism. Boys emerge from this environment ready to move ahead and surpass their female classmates. Girls bring to their further education and their career plans a habit of playing it safe and a collection of nagging doubts about their own abilities which often persist in contradiction to their exceptional grades.

If we seek to break this cycle of inequity and lack of confidence, we must begin with the teacher. The teacher is one of the principal determiners of the "classroom climate." But he or she shapes that climate within a fast-paced and varied series of interactions with twenty or thirty students who often enter school already well-provided with sexist expectations and sex differentiated mannerisms. Indeed, Marlaine Lockheed concluded in a 1980-82 study that "the major determinants of inequities were the children, themselves."³⁹ This observation verifies the findings of Best's study of the "second curriculum" of gender-role socialization as developed by children entirely apart from teacher input.⁴⁰

But if teachers are not primarily responsible for creating bias in the classroom, they are generally quite passive when it comes to combatting the problem. This is hardly shocking. Teachers, like everyone else, give attention to those who demand it, avoid challenging those who express reticence or embarrassment, and are grateful for those who

do well without requiring undue attention. Busy teachers rarely concentrate on counteracting stereotyping and inequities in the status quo. According to Lockheed:

Sex segregation and male preeminence were found uniformly in the school classrooms we observed. Even if they were not created there by the behavior of teachers or students, they were not reduced there, either. Rather, the classrooms served as environments in which these two inequities could flourish unbounded and without restraint. The structures of the larger society were reproduced without active agents of reproduction other than the children, themselves.⁴¹

Furthermore, the elementary school classroom does not provide much feedback whereby teachers can evaluate their own performances. In the vast majority of cases, when teachers are offered a chance to receive reliable feedback on their teaching methods, they are eager for the opportunity.⁴² Brophy and Good found that a treatment study which increased teacher awareness of discrimination by documenting classroom interaction patterns was very successful in equalizing teachers' interactions with their students.⁴³ Similarly, the Sadkers' recent study found that a four-day training program to establish equity in classroom interactions not only eliminated race and sex bias but it improved overall teaching effectiveness as well.⁴⁴

Teachers generally are motivated to improve their classroom interactions with their students. But they do not operate in a vacuum. In the course of their training, teachers are given little background in encouraging equity in the classroom. Education texts tend to range from inadequate to counterproductive in this respect. For example, of nine reading and language arts methods texts analyzed in a Sadker study, four ignore the issue of sexism entirely and four more devote less than two paragraphs each to the issue. The remaining text cautions against stereotypes but then goes on to say, "It has been found that boys will not read 'girls books' . . . Therefore the ratio of 'boy books' should be about two to one in the classroom library collection."⁴⁵ While some of these texts provide extensive bibliographies on Black literature, Asian literature and Eskimo literature, they neglect to include a heading for non-sexist literature or for literature by women, including women of color.

Other educational methods textbooks—those dealing with learning difficulties—alert student teachers to sex differences in achievement and approaches to dealing with such problems in areas where males tend to have problems, such as reading, but give the teachers little guidance on counteracting girls' math anxiety and avoidance.⁴⁶ Educational psychology textbooks frequently offer education students information on the psychology of sex differences that is inconsistent and outdated.⁴⁷

Finally, when they graduate, teachers enter a profession where men advance to direct and administer schools and women remain classroom teachers—working for male bosses. Fewer than 20 percent of elementary school

principals are women; barely 3 percent of secondary schools are headed by women; and less than 2 percent of the superintendents are women.⁴⁸ Certainly both the children and the teachers can tell who is in charge and this imbalance affects the classroom "climate."

In addition to the problems of biased background and limited opportunity for advancement, teachers can expect little from the standard classroom materials available to them. Despite the promulgation of idealistic guidelines during the past decade, textbook publishers have made relatively few changes to increase the visibility and decrease the stereotyping of female figures in elementary-school texts. Often stories about female or minority persons are included in one or two books in a series or added to a single grade level. At times the "non-biased" material is added to the center or end of a text without any attempt to integrate it



with the overall format of the rest of the book. Perhaps in response to demands for non-stereotyped characters, there has been an increased tendency in recent years to emphasize stories about animals of indeterminate gender in primary textbooks, thus avoiding the problem altogether! In short, classroom materials rarely portray women and minorities as normative characters.⁴⁹

In the face of such obstacles as lack of feedback, inadequate or outdated methods texts, inequitable opportunities for professional advancement, and stereotyped classroom materials, it often appears that the teacher is being asked to single-handedly create an equitable climate in the classroom despite being surrounded by a "real world" of bias and limitation. It is crucial, therefore, that all the significant role groups—from school board members to parents to administrators—recognize that they share with teachers the responsibility for promoting equity in the classroom as a part of their shared concern for educational excellence.

Administrators on all levels are in a position to provide the visible public leadership so crucial in this area.⁵⁰ Together with teachers, they can assign a high priority to equity issues and keep abreast of research in the area, provide training opportunities to help raise the consciousness of teachers regarding the need for unbiased treatment of all students, particularly when more subtle, even unconscious, biases may be involved. Administrators can have an important impact by encouraging and recognizing teachers who make progress in eliminating bias from their classrooms. Finally, administrators should promote curriculum reviews that assess sex, race, and disability bias in classroom materials

and ensure that new materials are equitable.

Teachers are on the cutting edge of efforts to give all children equal access to learning and can initiate changes in their individual classrooms that will eliminate bias. Many useful ways to begin an attack on inequity from inside the classroom have been developed by teachers and equity advocates during the past several years. Included among these are the following suggestions to teachers: Be alert to your own patterns of interaction with students and make a conscious effort to involve female, minority, and disabled students in all classroom discussions. Make special efforts to avoid letting the most assertive students dominate discussions. When offering praise and correction, be careful to offer sufficient academic direction to all students. Avoid "bailing out" girls from confusion or from deserved punishment and try to praise and criticize all students based on the same standards and expectations. Insofar as possible, work with administrators and parents to urge the adoption of non-sexist, non-racist classroom materials that also are inclusive of persons with disabilities. When such materials are not available, develop classroom activities and presentations (including question-and-answer sessions about what is wrong with the materials) to compensate and transform a biased text into an object lesson for students. Work from within professional organizations to make equity issues top priorities for these groups and to provide further training and resources for teachers.

Finally, parents also have numerous avenues for action in ensuring an equitable education for their children; they can become active in community organizations (including their PTA) and urge them to work for equity in the schools; parents also can develop "partnerships" with their children's teachers—to offer them assistance in understanding the equity issues, developing new strategies for change, and mobilizing additional support for teachers' efforts to make change from within the school system. Above all, parents should be alert to their children's experiences in school—to recognize and counter the biased treatment and curricular materials that their children may face. Parents can bring these incidents to the attention of school personnel and share information about resources that will help improve the classroom climate for all children.⁵¹ Finally, parents should use the current concern for quality education to focus attention on equity as an essential component of educational excellence for all children.

National, state, and local women's groups and teachers' organizations offer publications and workshops to assist teachers in their methods and to provide them with classroom materials for their students. Parents' groups can draw on the same resources to help them in their support of classroom learning, in their leadership of extracurricular activities, and in their ongoing efforts to minimize sex bias in the home. Public concern for quality education is widespread today; there should be little problem "selling" the need for educational excellence. But equity is often misperceived as irrelevant to quality education or even detrimental to it. The community at large needs to be educated about the essential link between equity and excellence, to truly improve the quality of education provided to all of our children. And there is no better place to begin this critical effort than in the elementary school classroom—where the foundations of essential



knowledge and skills are laid, where children also learn about their own intellectual, social, and career potential, and where they first learn to dream and shape their own futures.

Footnotes

¹Response to a Spring, 1985 PEER Survey of its Affiliates, who were asked to share both anecdotes and data about sex, race, and disability bias in the classroom of the 1980s; for additional information about the survey, contact PEER.

²Cited in Jere E. Brophy and Thomas L. Good, *Teacher-Student Relationships: Causes and Consequences*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974, p. 170.

³*Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴UPI, "Study of Black Females Cites Role of Praise," *The New York Times*, Tuesday, June 25, 1985, p. 10.

⁵Robert O'Hara, "The Roots of Careers," *Elementary School Journal*, February, 1962, Vol. 62 No. 5, p. 277.

⁶Response to PEER Survey, Spring, 1985.

⁷Cited in Nancy Frazier and Myra Sadker, *Sexism in School and Society*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p. 78.

⁸For further information about the *Grove City College* decision and its impact on educational equity, contact PEER for a copy of *Injustice Under the Law: The Impact of the Grove City College Decision on Civil Rights in America* (\$3.00/copy).

⁹Response to PEER Survey, Spring, 1985.

¹⁰We are indebted to Bernice Sandler and Roberta Hall, who used this term in *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?*, Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, Project on the Status and Education of Women, 1982.

¹¹Myra and David Sadker, "Sexism in the Schoolroom of the 80's," *Psychology Today*, March, 1985, p. 54.

¹²Rita Bornstein, *Sexism in Education*, U.S. Dept. of Education, Women's Educational Equity Act Program, 1980, p. 4.

¹³Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, New York: Longman, 1982, p. 20.

¹⁴Myra Pollack Sadker and David Miller Sadker, *Sex Equity Handbook for Schools*, New York: Longman, 1982, p. 20.

¹⁵Roper Reports (84-6), Questions 58 X and 58 Y, p. 15.

¹⁶Marcia Guttentag and Helen Bray, *Undoing Sex Stereotypes. Research and Resources for Educators*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976, p. 19.

¹⁷Frazier and Sadker, p. 80.

¹⁸Raphaela Best, *We're All Got Scars*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 13.

¹⁹Nancy M. Henley, "Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication," in Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley, eds., *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*, Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1975, p. 196.

²⁰Myra and David Sadker, *Between Teacher and Student: Overcoming Sex Bias in Classroom Interaction*, U.S. Dept. of Education, Women's Educational Equity Act Program, 1980, p. 15.

²¹Phil Jackson, *Life in Classrooms*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

²²Frazier and Sadker, p. 86.

²³Phil Jackson and Henriette Lahaderne, "Inequalities of Teacher-Pupil Contacts," in Melvin Silberman, ed., *The Experience of Schooling*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, p. 123.

²⁴William Meyer and George Thompson, "Teacher Interactions with Boys as Contrasted with Girls," in Raymond Kuhlens and George Thompson, eds., *Psychological Studies of Human Development*, New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1963, p. 518.

²⁵Brophy and Good, p. 234; also see Myra and David Sadker, "Schoolroom of the 80s," p. 56.

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²⁷Guttentag and Bray, p. 24.

²⁸Uri Bronfenbrenner, "Some Familial Antecedents of Responsibility and Leadership in Adolescents," in Luigi Petrucco and Bernard Bass, eds., *Leadership and Interpersonal Behavior*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961, p. 260.

²⁹Brophy and Good, p. 230.

³⁰Myra and David Sadker, *Handbook*, p. 105.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 109.

³³Patricia Cross, "College Women. A Research Description," *Journal of the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors*, Autumn, 1968, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 12.

³⁴*Sex Bias at the Computer Terminal—How Schools Program Girls*, Washington, D.C.: PEER, 1984, p. 3.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Frazier and Sadker, p. 86.

³⁷Barbara Zigli, "College Hurts Self-Esteem of Bright Women," *USA Today*, April 2, 1985, p. 1D.

³⁸Contact the Project on the Status and Education of Women (1818 R Street, N. W. Washington, D. C. 20009) for information on the "climate" of the college campus for women and strategies for improving it.

³⁹Marlane Lockheed, *A Study of Sex Equity in Classroom Interaction Final Report* Submitted to the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1984, p. 7-1.

⁴⁰Best, pp. 4-5.

⁴¹Lockheed, p. 7-4.

⁴²Brophy and Good, p. 270.

⁴³Ibid, pp. 280-291.

⁴⁴Sadker and Sadker, "Schoolroom of the 80's," p. 57.

⁴⁵Myra Pollack Sadker and David Miller Sadker, *Personal Pictures and Problems: Sexism in Teacher Education Textbooks*, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Women's Educational Equity Act Program, 1980, p. 25.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁸Myra and David Sadker, *Between Teacher and Student*, p. 4.

⁴⁹Myra and David Sadker, *Handbook*, p. 86.

⁵⁰Susan S. Klein et al. provide an excellent table of "Recommendations for Achieving Sex Equity in and through Education" in *Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity through Education*, Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, pp. 501-518.

⁵¹A bright spot in education today is the burgeoning of resources in the area of sex equity. The Sadkers' *Sex Equity Handbook for Schools* offers an extensive bibliography of many of these resources. As a first step, parents and teachers can contact the WEEA Publishing Center (Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02160; 800-225-3088), which sells (at cost) the products developed by Women's Educational Equity Act Program grantees, including both curriculum and training materials, and also can provide information on other sources of similar materials.

Learning Her Place—Sex Bias in the Elementary School Classroom

This report was written by Mary de Nys, a consultant to PEER, and Leslie R. Wolfe, Director.

For more information on sex bias in the classroom and other educational equity issues, contact PEER at 1413 K Street, N.W., 9th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005; (202) 332-7337.

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