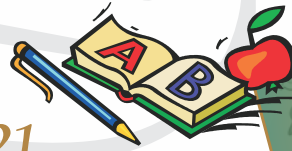


Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Shattering the glass ceiling



Kamala Harris:
Vice President of the USA



Angela Merkel:
German Chancellor

It eventually had to happen. At the 46th American presidential inauguration, Kamala Harris was the first woman to be elected as Vice President. To add to the significance of the occasion was that she was the first African-American – the daughter of a Jamaican father and an Indian mother. Kamala Harris had shattered a glass ceiling in United States political history.

Angela Merkel was another person who has shattered the political glass ceiling of politics. In 2005 she became the first woman Chancellor of Germany. When she was first elected, it was seen as a stop-gap measure until a suitable new Chancellor could be found. What irony. When she steps down later this year, Merkel has seen male politicians come and go at the speed of a revolving door at a busy hotel. She has seen four American commanders-in-chief, five UK prime ministers as well as seven Italian prime ministers.

Why is political leadership often seen as the preserve of men? The situation is not dissimilar to that seen in many areas of education leadership. If the majority of educators in South African schools are women, why isn't it reflected in the top leadership positions?

Linda Emmett is a head teacher (principal) of a college in Cheshire, England. In an article in *Times Educational Supplement*, she noted that only 36% of head teachers are women (2016: 20-21). Two arguments are put forward to try and justify this situation. The first is that there are the demands of family life for women. (Emmett herself has two children.) Secondly, that women lack the confidence to take on the highly challenging demands of school leadership. This cautious mindset

is problematic whereas, "... men are more prepared to take a risk and back their own instincts."

The point is made by Emmett that a woman doesn't have to be a Superwoman. She can fill the role of being both a mother and a school leader. The balance is achieved through careful planning. She cites the part that her husband plays in their domestic arrangements. Furthermore, women school leaders can be role models for other working mothers on how to ensure a sound work-home balance.

Leadership does have those occasions when assertiveness and toughness are needed. Yet women who've been given leadership roles have shown it abundance. Margaret Thatcher (nicknamed the Iron Lady) displayed it in the Falklands War; Jacinda Ardern showed it in her decisive and immediate implementation of strict gun laws after the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings.

True leadership includes empathy, emotional intelligence and a spirit of caring. Jacinda Ardern was praised across the world for identifying in practical, caring ways with the Christchurch massacre victims. In 2015 Angela Merkel welcomed a million refugees fleeing from Syria and elsewhere. She did this in spite of savage criticism from the politicians in her own country.

Gender inequality is a reality in the school and society. Stereotyping such as 'boys make for better leaders' or 'girls can't do Maths' reinforce such prejudices. In the classroom, the staffroom and around the school governing body decision-making table, there's a need to stop such prejudices.

There's a need for action. We need to encourage and ensure fairness of opportunity for everyone. Kamala Harris and Angela Merkel are pioneers who've smashed political glass ceilings. We need to shatter more gender glass ceilings found today in education.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

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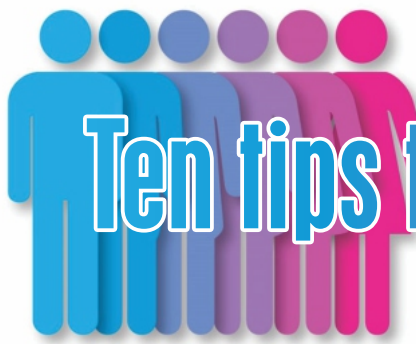
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Ten tips to grow gender equality

A good starting point for getting 'buy in' to gender equality in a school, is to get staff agreement. There's a need for the staffroom to accept that the school believes in gender equality. A child's gender shouldn't be used as a barrier to fairness of opportunity in any aspect of the school. No one should be given an unfair advantage because of their gender. Ten ways to nurture equality are:

1 Avoid stereotyping children

Boys are noisy and loud; girls are calm and sweet; boys hide their emotions better than girls. Well, maybe not! In fact, every teacher is able to think of boys and girls who didn't fit into such convenient stereotypes.

Unconscious bias can affect the way that we deal with children. Teachers might be inclined to give more comfort to girls who are emotionally upset than boys in similar situations. More time is spent discussing emotions and feelings with girls than with boys. It's not that the teachers lack empathy towards boys. They're willing to talk to boys but with certain assumptions. Boys are expected to quickly 'get a grip' on their emotions and should be helped to quickly move on.



2 Don't connect gender to an ability or a career

There's a worldwide shortage of women doing post-school studies in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects. Girls who might be interested could be persuaded that these aren't 'feminine' careers. Even when girls ignore such faulty thinking, there's another barrier that could await them. At technician and university, they're often confronted with a hostile learning environment. Research has shown that more than 50% of all women doing STEM studies ultimately leave for this reason (Waterford 2020: 3).

Starting right in the pre-Grade 1 classroom, there's a need to break down these biases. Jumble together all the children's toys – not one corner for the boys' playthings and another one for the girls. Don't gender-stereotype the play areas. Both play areas should have building blocks and nurses uniforms. Let the children role-play the doctor, the fire-fighter, the police officer or whatever career without regard to traditional views of whether it's more attuned for a boy or a girl.

3 Use assemblies to create whole-school awareness

Daily and weekly assemblies serve as times to get the gender equality message across. They're opportunities to tell the stories of those who've binned the traditional gender roles expected of them. Tell them about people such as Joan of Arc, Angela Merkel and Thuli Madonsela.



At a girls' high school in Gauteng, there's a tradition as to who the guest will be to give the annual Valediction Speech. It's always a woman. That person has excelled in an area that's often seen as the dominant domain of men. Sometimes the speaker will share how much hitting against a gender glass ceiling was done before it was finally shattered. The guest

speaker can be a role model for the girls as to what could be awaiting them.

4 Make parents aware

It's not only the staff and students who need to accept the principle of gender equality. It's the parents too. They need to understand the school viewpoint and what it does daily to make it a reality. Parents should appreciate that the school is preparing their children for a 21st century world where – too often – male superiority is the norm. Young people shouldn't feel that their careers are shackled so as to conform to traditional gender expectations. Gender equality means equality of choice for everyone.

South African society has patriarchal undertones. Think of the number of men as against women who are leaders in business, industry, politics and the professions. Think of the levels of gender-based violence in our society. Much of that violence is directed at those who dare to try and rid themselves from gender discrimination.

5 Provide a range of diverse stories, textbooks as well as displays

It's pleasing to see that book publishers are showing greater awareness around stereotyping. In school readers and textbooks, not every doctor is a man nor is every nurse a woman. In stories, the person who solves the crime mystery doesn't always have to be a type – the detective smoking a cigarette while munching a doughnut and swilling coffee down from a plastic cup. The crime solver could be an intuitive char lady who's simply observant when she cleans the home of the murdered millionaire!

When buying school textbooks, be mindful that both the text and the pictures in the books reflect gender equality. If a range of textbooks are being considered, ask pertinent questions. A subject such as history, for example, could ask: Is there one gender that dominates the narrative? Are certain historical issues downplayed or simply ignored? One instance is the emancipation of women.

Look at the biography and sports sections in the library or media centre. Is one gender likely to dominate the shelves as regards both authors and about whom they write? Maybe new authors need to be put on the shelves. Also, look at the displays in the reception area and on the classroom walls. Unconscious bias might be on prominent display for all to see!



JK Rowling

Before the printing of her first book in the Harry Potter series, JK Rowling was given advice by her publisher. It was suggested that she used the initials JK rather than write out her full name. As the book was originally meant to appeal mainly for young male readers, the publisher felt that they might be put off by a book written by a woman.

6 Have class discussions on bias and gender stereotyping

If you're a language teacher, I personally think that you have an initial advantage. Plays, poems and novels are replete with stories of gender bias to start such discussions. Women authors – in earlier times – used nom de plumes to hide their gender. Mary Anne Evans wrote *Middlemarch* under the name of George Eliot. Originally, *Out of Africa* was written by Isak Dinesen. Only in later years did the literary world find out that the author was a woman, Karen Blixen.

Then there are those 'teachable moments' that give the teacher a chance to get the topic going. In one such lesson, a child spoke about how Rassie Erasmus, the Springbok rugby coach, cried when the team won the 2019 World Cup. Boys aren't meant to cry and especially rugby players. Joe Biden, the USA president, has



wiped away tears when he has spoken on TV about losing his son, Beau to an aggressive brain tumour.

Casual remarks are further examples. There was the boy who remarked that, "Anne can't play with us because it's a boys' game." Classroom discussion proved that the assertion wasn't true. The point was also made that Anne had been made to feel inadequate in some way. These type of discussions help to not only create awareness but also sensitivity to the feelings of others.

7 Avoid giving tasks that traditionally relate to a specific gender

When desks have to be rearranged, who gets asked to do the task? Hopefully, the teacher says something gender-neutral such as, "Children, we need help to rearrange the desks for group work." Unconscious bias comes forward when the teacher tells the boys to move the desks and the girls to dust down the book shelves.

8 Get children to do tasks that cross traditional gender roles

Get children to do tasks that cross the gender expectations. Why should only boys be expected to know how to change a car tyre?! Why should only the girls be expected to visit old age homes or help in the assisted reading programme of a school?

9 Revisit the extramural sport programme

Outside the school gates there's been much progress in breaking down gender barriers. South Africa now has a match-winning Proteas women's cricket team that competes internationally. There are women's soccer teams that take part in international competitions.

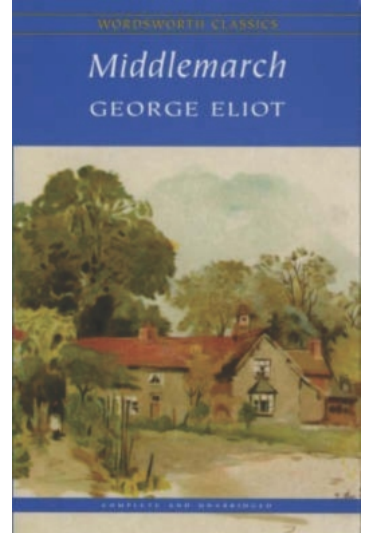
Yet too often schools can lag behind. There's a need to ensure that there's also equal opportunity across the different sporting codes, irrespective of gender.

I remember a girl named Taryn who asked to be considered for the First XI cricket team. There was no doubting her cricketing skills. In her first match there were sniggers from the opposing team. When she was given a chance to bowl, there was a twitter of laughter. With her first ball, the batsman contemptuously smashed the ball over the boundary. With the next ball, the arrogant young batsman was clean-bowled. The game was then carried on in earnest by not only by Taryn's team but definitely by the opponents too.

10 Be a role model

The younger the child, the more likely it will look to the teacher as a role model. The teacher needs be aware of personal biases and prejudices. They aren't usually deliberate but simply the result of how the teacher was socialised as a child. As an adult, society reinforces these negative judgements.

The Waterford organisation (2020: 4) gives this simple sound advice to the teacher, "Empower your students to believe in their potential to achieve their dreams regardless of their gender identity – and that gender their gender is a strength, never a weakness."

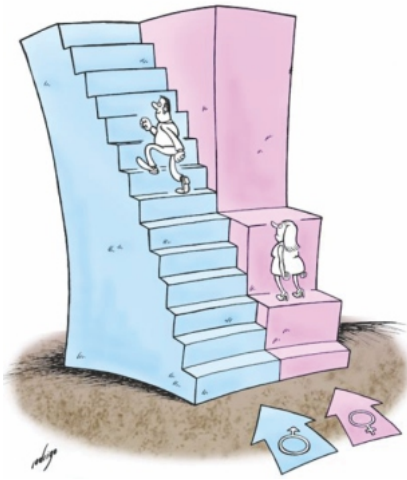


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What's the difference: gender equality vs gender equity?

The two concepts might sound the same but they're distinctly different. Gender equality is an end goal, the intended outcome. That goal is, "...the equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards" (UNFPA :1). Gender equity is the means or processes used to get there.

Gender equality doesn't mean that women and men have to become the same. Rather, their different rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not be discriminated against simply because they were born male or female (Pipeline 2018: 2). Biases and prejudices should not be allowed to give you an unfair

advantage or hold you back. Achievement should be based on merit.

Where does one begin - equality or equity? According to Allyship (2020: 2), start with equity. Give everyone fairness to access of opportunity. Historically, women have been discriminated against. They've been denied or have had to overcome entrenched prejudices to achieve fairness. As mentioned on page 1, women comprise the majority of South African educators but in 2021 they are not in the majority when it comes to education department and school leaders. Men dominate. To right this wrong, some amount of social engineering might be needed.

Gender inequality and violence against women

Research across the world has shown that where there are high levels of gender inequality, there are also high levels of violence against women. In a school where boys see themselves as 'superior' to girls, gender-based violence is likely to occur.

A sense of gender superiority and inferiority starts with children as young as four. As soon as a teacher sees discriminatory behaviour, there's a need to step in. A four-year old who continually slaps someone of the opposite gender in the sandpit

and is never reined in, could become a person who repeatedly smashes a fist into the faces of others as an adult.

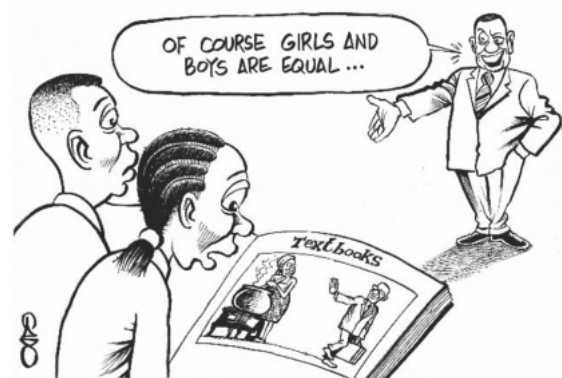
Teaching gender equality and ensuring gender equity for everyone, are core to every quality school.

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Professional Development

SAQI (South African Quality Institute) has programmes that are accredited by SACE and earn CPTD points. The workshops are facilitated by Dr Richard Hayward who has been in education leadership positions for decades. More details are available on either 011 888 3262 or rpdhayward@yahoo.com Poor schools are sponsored.