

Human rights based school - Topic 4:

Assessing the gender-friendliness of my Human-Rights-Based School:

Awareness

Gender equality is at the very heart of human rights principles and United Nations values. The tenets associated with human rights prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, meaning that its member States are required to promote gender equality. According to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, more prosperous, and sustainable world. According to the World Health Organization, sex and gender are both important determinants of health. Biological sex and socially constructed gender interact to produce differential risks and vulnerability to ill health, and differences in health-seeking behavior and health outcomes for women and men. 'Gender' describes those characteristics of women and men that are largely socially created, while 'sex' encompasses those that are biologically determined. However, these terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably in scientific literature, health policy, and legislation. (<https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/>, August 21, 2020).

*Gender is understood as the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is **not determined biologically**, based on sexual characteristics of either women or men. Gender is **constructed socially**. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption, and distribution. Despite this definition, gender is often misunderstood as being the promotion of women only. However, gender issues focus on women and on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labor, interests and needs. Gender relations affect household security, family well-being, planning, production, and many other aspects of life.*

Gender is an integral aspect of all areas of education to ensure not only that the basic needs of girls and boys are met, but also that they have the opportunity – regardless of their sex - to achieve their full potential and realize their human rights.

Unfortunately, education professionals often equate gender with certain 'anticipated' behaviors (what 'boys are supposed to do' versus what 'girls are supposed to do'). They fail to see the broader picture of socially constructed roles and stereotypes that lead to such behaviors.

Gender roles are created by a society and are learned from one generation to the next as part of a society's culture. Because gender is a socially learned construct (for instance, learned in the family or in school), anything associated with it can be changed to achieve equity and equality for both women and men.

When it comes to school and learning, the attitudes and actions of families and teachers can dramatically affect the cognitive development of girls and boys. Families explicitly or implicitly define the different roles that boys and girls should play, and this process starts early. Cross-cultural research shows that children start to be aware of gender differences and stereotypes at around two to three years of age. By the age of four to five, children are often more rigid and stereotyped than they will be later. Everyone grows up among the influences of their families and the school they attend for many years, many hours a day.

Sex-based differences in institutional educational approaches are a type of [sex discrimination](#) in the education system that may affect both men and women during and after their educational experiences. Men are more likely to be literate on a global average, although higher literacy scores for women are prevalent in many countries. Men and women find themselves having gender differences when attaining their educational goals. Although men and women can have the same level of education, it is more difficult for women to obtain higher management jobs, and future employment and financial worries can intensify. Men tended to receive more education than women in the past, but the gender gap in education has reversed in recent decades in most Western and many non-Western countries.

Is it normal in your school that questions like these are being posed: “Are there alternatives to girls cleaning the classroom?” or “What would happen if boys did the cleaning, while girls moved the desks?” This kind of critical thinking might inspire people to reflect, reconsider, and look more closely at their own assumptions.

Do girls and boys have equal opportunities to enter your school? Do girls and boys interact with each other as equals in your school? Do girls and boys interact differently with their teachers (male and female)? Are gender stereotypes reflected in the curriculum that the students are taught, in the textbooks that they use, as well as in the clubs and extra-curricular activities in your school that are open and available to girls and boys?

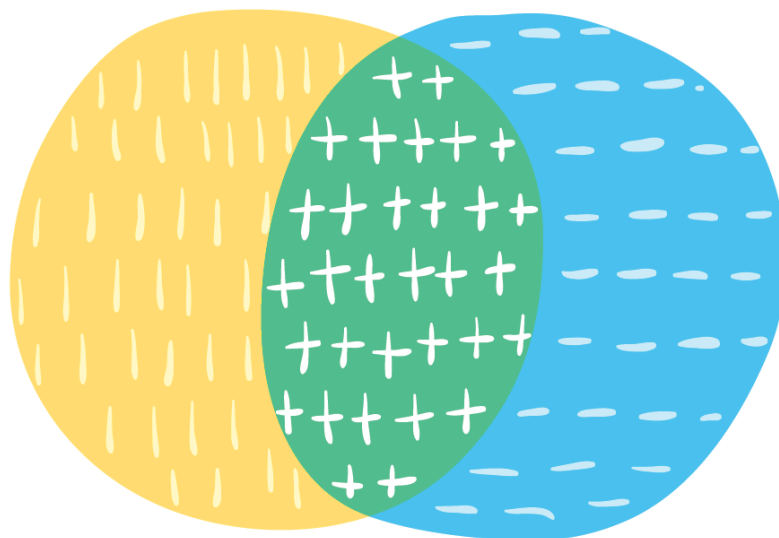
The aim in assessing the gender sensitivity of your school is to promote gender equality. This effort to bridge the gap between girls and boys in terms of the school climate and the teaching and learning processes requires honesty and a step-by-step approach.



Preparation

What steps to take?

1. Form a team to work with during the whole process. Start by jointly discussing the approach and review the list of indicators.
 - a. Select the ones you consider important for your school.
 - b. Add indicators you feel are missing.
 - c. Fill in the form with about ten indicators you find important. Be sure to choose some that you do well and some where you need additional development.
2. Prepare a team action plan and a time frame for a first assessment, which will be the starting point for the further development. Include in the assessment:
 - a. Pupils
 - b. Teachers
 - c. Other school staff
 - d. Parents
 - e. School board
 - f. Members of the community you may be cooperating with.
 - g. ...
3. Develop the action plan and the time frame. Make sure, they include
 - a. The school profile after the first assessment.
 - b. Steps you will undertake (in the next 6 months).
 - c. A second assessment to learn about the developments



24 possible indicators for your school to assess gender -balanced education and behavior in your school:

1. A school mission and/or vision statement and policies against gender discrimination in enrollment and teaching / learning practices exist and are being enforced.
2. Girls and boys have equal access to free and compulsory education.
3. Girls and boys participate equally in defining classroom and school rules and regulations and in determining disciplinary measures, especially in terms of preventing discrimination, violence, and abuse.
4. Parents and community leaders value female and male teachers equally.
5. Girls have access to feminine hygiene commodities and facilities in school.
6. Girls have the same access to, and opportunities for, physical play and other extracurricular activities as boys.
7. The curriculum reflects the realities and daily life needs for both girls and boys. If not, remedial curriculum adaptations are advised as much as this is possible.
8. Teaching and learning materials provided by the school portray girls and boys of diverse socio-economic backgrounds with equal prominence, potential, and respect.
9. Learning materials provided by the school are free of gender bias (e.g., terms such as “he” or “she” are used with equal frequency).
10. The roles, responsibilities, and activities of girls and boys reflect a balance of power and decision-making.
11. Gender stereotypes are reversed (e.g., girls can be doctors or scientists, boys can be teachers or nurses).
12. Girls and boys are depicted in photos, graphics, and illustrations with equal frequency and with equal status (without gender stereotyping).
13. Girls and boys are depicted equally in leadership positions and as ‘heroes.’
14. Girls and boys are treated equally in terms of their confidence, intelligence, and problem-solving skills.
15. All teachers expect and encourage girls and boys to contribute to and participate in learning and other activities equally.
16. All teachers value the views of girls and boys equally.
17. All teachers believe that both girls and boys can achieve equal competence in all subjects, including literacy, numeracy, sciences, and life skills.
18. Teachers are trained to actively identify gender bias in teaching materials, the school environment, their own teaching, and they can correct existing bias.
19. School administrators treat male and female teachers in the same way.
20. Community women and men with specialized relevant knowledge or skills are invited and welcomed into the classes as resource persons.
21. Girls and boys feel confident to make subject choices that may not be considered traditional male or female ones.
22. Girls are supported to achieve mastery of mathematics and sciences.
23. Girls and boys are equally assigned major responsibilities, such as being the head of the class or group in certain activities.
24. Equal representation of girls and boys is ensured in school councils or other school activities.

Action

As a team, select 10 indicators from the list.

Chosen indicators for gender friendliness	Status of this indicator in my school from 1 to 10.	Steps to be taken (collected by the discussion teams).
1)	1.....10	
2)	1.....10	
3)	1.....10	
4)	1.....10	
5)	1.....10	
6)	1.....10	
7)	1.....10	
8)	1.....10	
9)	1.....10	
10)	1.....10	

1. Based on the list above, prepare a handout or flip-charts to be given to all stakeholders included in the assessment process.
2. Form roundtables with the different stakeholders (pupils, teachers, staff members, parents, board members, etc). They latter may meet on the occasion of a big school event, or scheduled meetings, according to their availability.
3. Have them discuss their assessment and their comments.
4. Task them come up with proposals for improvement.
5. Collect all comments and proposals in your team.

