

***Teaching Gender Differently :
a classroom reality***

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Cet article a pour objet de donner un bref aperçu sur un aspect culturel qui perdure encore aujourd'hui.

“ I agree that consciously or unconsciously, we, students, are treated differently according to gender, but when the treatment is too exaggerated, even if it is unconscious, it becomes conscious”. (Male student).

“I think this kind of injustice actually starts at home. So, we have to accept it in the classroom.” (Female student).

My interest to write about the issue was in fact aroused by an article entitled: “ Do Teachers Treat Male and Female students Differently” ?¹

Unquestionably, it is taken for granted for me, and certainly for most of my colleagues, if not all, that male and female students are treated differently for several reasons. Indeed, consciously or unconsciously, we, teachers find ourselves giving two different treatments in the classroom.

¹ . Janes Sunderland, Lancaster Lines, issue Nber. 5

This is, of course, inevitable, when, for example, we have more than 80% of the class being of the female category, when the females are much more noisier than the males, when they definitely leading the group, or when the males are shy and quiet.

The main purpose of this paper is to find out what our students think about the issue, which, without doubt, remains up-to-date for teachers and students alike.

As an oral expression teacher, I decided to introduce the topic in question for debate in class. As soon as I announced the topic, the whole class showed immediate interest. They all seemed to have a lot to display.

So, it promised an animated discussion, and I was quite satisfied because the activity was certainly far from being a boring exercise. I asked the students to get in groups of five people and to jot down the reasons for the different treatment by gender. Circulating in the classroom, I noticed that the students drew a line in the middle of their sheet of paper and wrote the following headlines: “Conscious treatment” – “Unconscious treatment”.

Now, I, felt I desperately needed to clarify the point again. So, I interrupted the students to say: “Different treatment’ does not mean “special treatment” (i.e., a kind of favoritism). The students used “different treatment” and “special treatment” interchangeably.

I think that I slightly deteriorated their motivation now. I could see them pause for a while. Then, they collected their wits, and started arguing and writing notes again.

When they finished, I asked them to read their proceedings.

Among the answers, I could note the following:

I. Female Teacher (female answers: 50 % ; male answer: 10%).

She treats female students better:

1- Because they work hard and take their studies seriously.

2- Because they take the leadership in class.

3- Because she identifies with them (both females)

4- Because she considers them as her daughters.

5- Because they represent the majority.

6- Because they are well dressed and nice-looking.

7- Because they are less shy than male students.

8- Because they sit in the front and participate better than the males.

9- Because they show their interest in the course.

10- Because they often smile to her.

11- Because they always try to sympathize with her.

12- Because they speak to her about their problems.(As females, they are nearer to the teacher than the males).

II .Male Teacher (female answers: 25%; male answers: 05%).

He treats female students better:

- 1- Because they are of the opposite gender.
 - 2- Because they are attractive, well-dressed, and nice-looking.
 - 3- Because he is single (Therefore, interested in females).
 - 4- Because they are more intelligent than males.
 - 5- Because they sympathize easily with him.
 - 6- Because they represent the majority.
 - 7- Because they always try to attract his attention.(Smile, participation, jokes).
 - 8- Because they are, in general, good students.
 - 9- Because they work hard and are lively in class.
 - 10- Because they always sit in the front.
 - 11- Because the teacher-student interaction is easier.
(He communicates easily with them).
 - 12- Because they always rush to answer questions.
- III . Female Teacher (male answers only: 05%).

She treats male students better:

- 1- Because they represent the majority.
- 2- Because they are neglected.
- 3- Because ‘man’ is supposed to be superior to “woman”
- 4- Because she dislikes the noisy females.
- 5- Because she is influenced by the way she was taught
(Reference to previous educational experience is made her).

6- Because they are all sit in the back. (So, she gives them their share of attention).

IV. Male Teacher (male answers only: 05%)

He treats male students better:

- 1- Because he is more friendly with them.
- 2- Because they are neglected as a minority group.
- 3- Because they are passive in class.
- 4- Because they belong to the same gender.
- 5- Because they st in the back.

On the whole, most of the answers given by males and females are right to a certain extent. Generally, all the students (especially the females) are deeply convinced that the difference of treatment is in fact “dictated” or rather “imposed” by the very nature of the group.

In general, the females seemed to be more conscious about the issue. Besides, they were all motivated since the matter was about them and their male colleagues. As a result, their participation actually took a competitive nature.

Finally, to conclude, let me say that though the students (whose English certainly needs rescuing) encountered a lot of difficulties in formulating their findings, they more or less managed to list a wide variety in findings. Surprisingly, the students (again, especially the females) are very much conscious that the teatment by gender has become part of the methodology of every

teacher. This consciousness is echoed in the following students' remarks:

“I agree that, consciously or unconsciously, we, students, are treated differently according to gender, but when the treatment is too exaggerated, even if it is unconscious, it becomes conscious”. (Male student).

“I think this kind of injustice actually starts at home. So, we have to accept it in the classroom”. (Female student).

Before closing this paper, I would like to mention that the females (who definitely took the leadership) blamed the males for sitting in the back of the classroom and for remaining silent. So, the females' conclusion is that the males (who represent the minority) are neglected and they are responsible because they widely contribute to the second-class-treatment.

References

Janes Sunderland, Lancaster Lines, issue Nber. 5.
Students' Findings.