Gender equality in the classroom
– from awareness to conduct and teaching methods

- Wherever possible, use neutral phraseology in classroom discussions and refrain from speaking in the male singular.
- Make sure to formulate announcements and questionnaires in terms that appeal to both girls and boys.
- Help your students to respect themselves (in junior high girls frequently suffer from a sharp drop in self-esteem). Female teachers must set a personal example of healthy self-confidence. And male teachers should treat both their work female colleagues and their female students with respect.
- Encourage girls to take risks. Boys can usually be relied on to take risks without being encouraged to do so by their teachers.
- Create a pleasant and esthetic environment in the classroom. Studies have shown that girls learn better in an environment that is esthetically pleasing.
- Foster an environment of competence – teach your students to take credit for their achievements. Girls tend to attribute their success to luck rather than their abilities, as compared to boys.

Note: some of these suggestions can be applied to teaching in general, not just to create an atmosphere of equality in the classroom.

- Encourage girls to participate in class as much as the boys, and make sure to ask girls questions on a high cognitive level. Studies reveal that both male and female teachers tend to initiate more interaction with boys, at a higher cognitive level.
- Set a high level of expectations for both girls and boys. Avoid over-indulging the girls (this leads to dependency rather than independence).
- Give girls the same feedback and assistance you give boys. As a rule, boys receive more praise and assistance, which help develop their self-esteem.
- Make sure to give substantive feedback to the responses of boys and girls – don’t limit yourself to nodding or giving a laconic answer. Check whether you are relating equally to boys and girls.
- Create a balance between competitive activities and those based on cooperation. Many girls derive more benefit from learning in a situation based on cooperation, and others even avoid competitive activities.
- From time to time divide the class into small groups, boys-only and girls-only. Studies show that girls often function better in girls-only groups.
- Precede each lesson with a general overview of the material to be covered. Girls often derive more benefit from “the whole picture” than from isolated facts.
- Wait 4–5 seconds before calling on a student to answer a question. Girls tend to wait until they have formulated the full answer before raising their hands, whereas boys tend to raise their hands immediately and then formulate the answer. Delaying the answer enables all the students to respond, thus giving both boys and girls an equal opportunity to come up with it.
- Judge the content of what all the students are saying, not just the manner in which they respond. Girls are more likely to hesitate than boys. Don’t take this as a sign that they don’t know the answer.

Gender equality when teaching science and technology

- Encourage all your students to augment their STEM studies. It has been found that the encouragement of teachers plays a significant role in helping students to make decisions.
- Encourage girls to use technological instruments for practical experiments. Without such encouragement girls, more than boys, often turn to more passive subjects.
- Use the human body as a means of encouraging girls to take an interest in subjects such as physics. Many girls find the human body fascinating. They tend to identify with phenomena relating to the body.
- Encourage girls to participate in mathematical and scientific programs as part of after school activities. Girls are more likely to take part in after school activities that are unrelated to science and technology.

Teachers are frequently unaware of the manner in which they relate to boys and girls in the classroom. By filming yourself in class and observing your behavior, you can examine your teaching methods and verify whether you relate equally to boys and girls. Observing your colleagues can also be useful. Since most teachers take a creative approach to teaching in order to engage all their students, we hope you will adopt some new suggestions from the list below. They are aimed at improving the degree of equality in the class in order to encourage girls and boys as well, to pursue the fields of STEM.
Edited and translated on the basis of the following sites and articles:

1. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. The foundation aims to foster and promote the teaching profession, the level of teaching, and the quality of teaching programs, and to encourage outstanding students to opt for the teaching profession. http://www.woodrow.org/teachers/math/gender/11strategies.html


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In conclusion:

The key to change lies not only in awareness on the part of the teacher, his teaching method, and the degree to which he relates to equality in the classroom. When working to reduce gender bias it is extremely important to consider also the influence of the parents, students and counselors in the school environment.

• It is important to draw the students’ attention to the manner in which they relate to the ability of girls to engage in the fields of STEM.

• It is important for school counselors to reinforce the self-esteem of girls in the fields of STEM and encourage them to choose these subjects.

• It is important for parents to expect their daughters, no less than their sons, to succeed in the STEM fields at school and to encourage them to choose to study and work in these fields in the future.

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GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Suggestions for encouraging boys and girls to study the fields of STEM*

• Emphasize preventative security measures instead of pointing out dangers. Girls sometimes refuse to participate in laboratory activities if they appear to be dangerous.

• Allocate partners for various activities. Many girls work better in teams.

• Call attention to the contributions of both men and women in furthering science and technology. Use posters, describe their work and give examples, ask questions, and tell stories where the role models are women as well as men.

• Try to invite to the classroom female scientists who are engaged in fields traditionally considered to be “masculine.” Providing girls with the opportunity to identify with successful women helps them build self-esteem and gives them the sense that they are “not alone” in a masculine environment.

• Give girls the opportunity to develop spatial perception skills. Studies have shown that boys develop these skills from an early age both at home and at school, through the games that society encourages them to play.

• Utilize writing as a tool to help your students clarify their thoughts and feelings (for example, narrative reports on math lessons, lab journals). Girls tend to spur the class as a whole to carry out such assignments, and this is a good opportunity to empower them.

• Reduce the importance of the time factor in exams. Studies have shown that boys answer math problems more quickly. When the time allotted for exams is extended, more girls tend to do well.

• Use various methods to solve science and technology problems. In this way you can accommodate the learning styles of all your students.

* Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics