

Introduction to challenging gender stereotypes in education

Book or Report Section

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Introduction

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Key words: purpose, content features, chapter outline.

This chapter:

- Sets out the purpose of the book;
- Outlines the content and key features of each chapter;
- Gives tips on how to engage with the content features and apply ideas from the book in practice.

Purpose of the book

Gender stereotypes are prevalent across all spheres of society, not just education, but because the formation of gender stereotypes coincides with a child's progression through education, and education is a key site for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, practitioners at all stages of a child's education can help children develop a positive image of their gender and neutralise negative gender stereotypes and bias.

This book has been written for anyone working with or aspiring to work with children and young people in education. It is particularly suited to trainee teachers and education students, but also fills a gap in knowledge, identified in research, for teachers and education practitioners (e.g. classroom assistants, early years

practitioners). The purpose of the book is to help you develop knowledge of how and when gender stereotypes form and how they can be perpetuated in various ways during a child's education, so that you can help tackle this problem. This book will support you with research informed pragmatic solutions to improve practice and transform the school or learning environment.

Overview of each chapter

Chapter two explores sex-based differences between females and males and looks at how and when gender identity forms and gender stereotypes take root. In **Chapter three** we will build on this by exploring non-binary ideas about gender in more detail. **Chapter four** will examine the intersection between gender with social background and ethnicity. **Chapter five** – examines the impact of gender stereotypes on children's subject and career choice and the longer term economic implications.

Following that we will explore how gender stereotypes manifest and may be perpetuated in specific curriculum and subject areas, beginning with **Chapter six**, which looks at early years and children play, followed by **Chapter seven** - primary and secondary mathematics learning, **Chapter eight** - the national history curriculum for primary and secondary schools and **Chapter nine** - ICT.

Next we will turn to contemporary issues in education, beginning with **Chapter ten** which examines dyslexia and autism from the perspective of gender stereotypes.

Chapter twelve examines sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

Chapter twelve advocates good practice working with parents, communities, colleagues and school leaders. **Chapter thirteen** focuses on how to work with mums and disadvantaged communities. Finally, **Chapter fourteen** will consider a future without gender stereotypes and it will suggest further activities to prompt reflection and action planning.

Content features

Embedded within each chapter of this book are prompts for self-reflection, practical exercises and activities. You will be given tips on how you can engage with different types of material embedded in those chapters to help your reflections and action planning. The reflection questions and activities in this book have been developed to help link theoretical ideas and learning with classroom practice. Each chapter in the book includes activities that you can do to evaluate your practice or activities that you can do with children in class. There are also suggestions for curriculum and lesson planning, topic selection and task selection. We hope these activities provide practical ways to transform the learning environment. Some involve working with parents, colleagues and school leaders.

Activity [boxed feature]

Jot down some bullet pointed notes on what you would like to learn from this book and how you hope to use this in practice. You might like to use Table 1. below for this. We suggest you yourself some achievable goals to test out ideas from the book in your practice. For example, you might want to introduce children to more counter-stereotype role models in storybooks or do more to encourage children to consider a broader range of careers. This might involve planning a time when you can explore why girls and boys are steered towards certain careers. This could include reading chapter nine on subject and career choice and setting yourself the goal to complete an activity with children in class. This might include initiating a discussion to deconstruct what makes a good nurse, doctor, electrician, bus driver, care worker, and so forth. This could be followed with a discussion to deconstruct why these roles have traditionally been dominated by women or men – for example, why there are more female nurses than male, or more male electricians than female, and so forth.

There are many more ideas for class-based activities to follow in this book. As you read each chapter you can use the table below to plan ways you can challenge gender stereotypes in education. This will help you to make the best use of this book to transform practice.

Table 1. What future action will you take?

Examples of action you could take:	How?	When will you begin?
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Neutralise children's gender stereotypes by making more counter-stereotypes visibility.	Read stories with women who are hero's or men who are caring for children. Use examples of female historical figures or scientists in class.	
Expose learners to counter stereotypical career role models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read chapter 9. • Conduct class activity - children to draw pictures of people in different professions. • Initiate discussion on gender stereotypes, relating to careers. • Invite a female scientist or firefighter or a male nurse to give a talk to children about the work they do. 	
Use more positive exemplars of the counter stereotype in class/school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the messages conveyed about gender in the pictures/posters displayed. • Ensure gender balance of scientists, historical figures, ICT specialists, etc. 	
Campaign to challenge gender stereotypes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Chapter eleven • Speak to colleagues about ideas. • Involve children and their families in actions to counter gender stereotyping. 	

Chapter summary

This book will address a serious issue that is currently highly topical that has to date received little attention in education courses, Initial Teacher Training courses or in published literature. We hope that you find this book a unique resource for understanding gender stereotypes in education whether you are currently those working with or aspiring to work with children and young people. This introductory chapter provided tips on how to engage with the content features to transform your practice.