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# Guidelines for Integrating Nonsexist, Multicultural Education in the University Methods Class

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## Introduction

The education that I propose includes all that is proper for a man [and a woman] and it is one in which all men [people] who are born into this world should share . . . Our first wish is that all people be educated fully to full humanity, not any one individual, not a few, nor even many, but all men [people] together and singly, young and old, rich and poor, of high and lowly birth, men and women, —in a world all whose fate it is to be born human beings, so that at last the whole of the human race become educated men [people] of all ages, all conditions, both sexes, and all nations.

John Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, 1657

A major goal of our schools is to provide educational benefits to ALL students regardless of race, religion or gender. As educators, we profess to value fairness and equal treatment of our students, equal access to information, and equal opportunities, and we have created laws to assure that these values are reflected within our schools. Despite the laws, research suggests that bias continues to exist within schools and classrooms.

Sociolinguistic inquirers maintain that teachers interact differently with male and female pupils (Brophy and Good, 1970; Serbin and O'Leary, 1976; Serbin, 1983). Serbin and O'Leary (1976) found that teachers in mixed school settings tended to interact more with high achieving White males than with any other group of students. Boys tended to receive more attention than girls whether it is positive or negative attention (Brophy and Good, 1970; Serbin and O'Leary, 1976). Boys asked more questions—especially complex and abstract questions (Jones, 1971; Sikes,

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1971)—and are given different classroom jobs and opportunities than females (Bornstein, 1982).

Bornstein (1982) also found that teachers automatically expected boys to do well in math and poorly in reading and girls to do well in reading and poorly in math. She believed that this may create a self-fulfilling prophecy. She maintained that though teachers are upset by the bias it does not change their behaviors.

Various forms of bias have also been reported as prevalent in textbooks (Bordeleon, 1985; Gollnick and Sadker, D. and M., 1982; Hamlin, 1982; McCune and Matthews, 1978). These forms of bias take on many characteristics. For example, often the texts contained linguistic bias: the author uses the generic "he" or such exclusionary words as "forefather" (Gollnick et al., 1982) suggested that linguistic bias denied the participation of women in our societies. Females and minorities also have been completely omitted from texts (Hamlin, 1982) and are underrepresented in historical accounts (McCune and Matthews, 1978) and in basals (Bordeleon, 1985). When females and minorities are represented, it is often in stereotypical fashion (Gollnick et al., 1982). To readers, these types of bias misrepresent the roles of women and minorities in history and in life.

In recent years, publishing companies have attempted to create less biased texts, ones that are more multicultural and nonsexist in nature. While the attempt is recognized, subtle forms of bias continue (Rupley et al., 1981; Smith and Mangano, 1985). For example, basals in one study (Rupley et al., 1981) showed males and females represented equally in protagonistic roles, but the supplementary materials included male protagonists in much greater numbers. Smith and Mangano (1985) reported one reading methods text that had equal numbers of photographs of boys and girls, but the contributions of reading educators highlighted almost all males. Finally, a simple glance through the children's literature section of the library will show that girls are usually depicted wearing dresses, even though girls in schools today are likely to wear pants, shorts, and other active wear outfits. Picture books representing large groups of White children only are still found for primary students despite attempts by publishing companies to become *multicultural*.

Most teachers tend to be unaware of this bias and are upset by it when it is pointed out (Bornstein, 1982), yet they continue to treat males and females differently and use texts that contain biases without giving students opportunities to note them and discuss the misrepresentations. Assuming that teachers are well-meaning and would never differentiate between students intentionally or perpetuate inequality in their classroom, I suggest that this phenomenon occurs because teachers have been acculturated within a biased society. They have not been trained to detect and discuss bias within their classrooms. Such training can be accomplished easily in education methods courses at the university level.

In this article I will suggest ways in which methods instructors can integrate equity information into their respective courses by using an inclusionary approach to information sharing. It will provide an example of how reading professors can adapt their methods courses to this purpose. And finally, suggestions for adapting methods courses will be offered.

## An Inclusionary Approach

Too often, attempts at sharing information about nonsexist, multicultural education are separated from course content. For example, authors usually isolate chapters on this topic at the end of a college text. Educators may wait until Black History month (February) to discuss the contri-

butions of Blacks in society and ignore the material the remainder of the year. Such limited approaches to information-sharing seem inappropriate for any topic but are particularly so in sharing nonsexist, multicultural information, for a variety of reasons.

First, presenting this information in isolation can be construed as a form of "tokenism" or isolationism at the very least. Gollnick et al. (1982) suggested that the impact of isolation gives the learner the impression that the topic or information is less important than the mainstream information and so need not be attended to as closely.

Second, issues related to multicultural and non-sexist education have become important because as a society we have failed to treat all students equally. By integrating this topic within existing content, we can begin to examine how our attitudes toward equity relate to the topics at hand, e.g., texts, classroom interactions, and historical events. If this approach is taken, students can begin to see that equity issues are attitudinal concerns to which students are to become sensitized, not lists of information to master. Finally, because of time restraints, methods instructors often cannot incorporate the isolated, extraneous content. An inclusionary approach to integrating equity issues in mainstream content of the methods course would improve the course quality.

### **Integrating Equity Issues within the Reading Methods Classroom**

Each methods class has a specific content that can be adapted naturally to include topics related to multicultural, nonsexist issues. For example, students in a social studies methods class are likely to examine how minorities and women are presented throughout history. A math methods professor might have occasion to discuss the impact of math anxiety on girls, a language arts professor would probably discuss linguistic biases.

This article will focus on integrating into equity reading methods classes. The author will discuss topics appropriate to combining multicultural, nonsexist information in reading content; in-class activities that let students analyze and evaluate materials for fairness; and homework assignments that can help students apply their knowledge about equity issues.

### **Direct Instruction of Multicultural, Nonsexist Content**

Within a reading methods course, it would be easy to include information about multicultural and nonsexist issues in the following areas: (1) history of reading, (2) basal reader instruction, (3) children's literature, and (4) teaching reading effectively. The following are suggestions for accomplishing this with minimal changes in course content.

#### **History of Reading**

This topic includes an historical survey of reading instruction. Equity issues can be included as the content evolves. (Hamlin [1982] for historical perspective on equity issues.) The following subtopics can be included in lectures: (a) information on how texts reflect or fail to reflect a multicultural, nonsexist society, (b) information on how men, women and minorities are represented in historical and modern-day texts, (c) the impact of societal change on text content, (d) how affirmative action laws have forced publishers to change texts.

Evaluation and analysis of equity issues can be integrated within this topic in the following ways. Present students with the six forms of bias: (a) invisibility, (b) stereotyping, (c) imbalance and selectivity, (d) unreality,

(e) fragmentation/isolation, and (f) linguistic bias (c.f. McCune and Matthews, 1978). Give passages from historical and modern texts and have students identify the forms of bias that are present. Do these passages reflect the culture of the times?

### **Basal Reader Instruction**

Research suggests that basal readers have changed in the last 15 years due to legislation related to equity being enforced. During a discussion on basal reader instruction, methods professors can explore the impact of this legislation on these materials and how males, females and minorities have been represented across time (Bordeleon, 1985; Rupley et al., 1981).

Reading methods instructors often ask students to evaluate texts for general use according to a pre-established set of criteria about readability, attractiveness, quality, philosophy, content and the like. A section that examines the representation of groups regardless of race, religion and gender can be established. Checklists to determine sexism and racism in texts are available (Sheridan, 1982).

### **Literature**

Children's literature is another topic in which instruction relating to multicultural and sex equity can be adapted. As part of this curriculum, instructors can show the filmstrip, **Identifying Racism and Sexism in Children's Books** (1978), which is available from the Council on Interracial Books for Children, New York. It demonstrates the blatant and subtle ways that racist and sexist messages are communicated through literature. The Council for Interracial Books for Children also supplies guidelines for selecting bias-free text and story books. Finally, direct instruction on how to cope with good literature that is sexist or racist can be discussed (Schulwitz, 1976).

### **Teaching Reading Effectively**

Effective teaching of reading is a final area that can naturally combine reading and equity information. The literature suggested that males and females are treated differentially by teachers in the classrooms. Effective teaching of reading can include classroom management and teacher-pupil interactions.

Preservice teachers can be made aware of the literature in these areas (Mangano, 1986; Sadker and Sadker, 1982). They can use checklists to observe and evaluate classrooms (Mangano, 1986) on multicultural and nonsexist scales. In addition, students might see videotapes of actual classrooms to observe effective teaching characteristics and determine if the teachers are interacting similarly with males and females.

### **Expectations for Assignments and Classroom Participation**

It is essential to expect students to display a sensitivity to multicultural, nonsexist issues. In a university course that is attempting to reduce bias and instill sensitivity toward multicultural, nonsexist education, these expectations are easily incorporated in two specific areas: (1) oral communication in the classroom and (2) successfully completing class projects, tests, or assignments.

### **Nonsexist Language**

Language is a reflection of how one views the world: If a world discriminates against a particular group or sex, the language would be likely to reflect this. Language that is exclusionary—"congressman," "chairman," "he" for stu-

dent and "she" for teachers—denies the participation of women and men in various roles. Students can be expected to use nonsexist, inclusive language in class discussions and in written assignments, tests, and projects.

Methods instructors who are uncomfortable asking their students to change their language might see its importance by simple asking students to draw or describe *cave-men*. Did any of these draw women? Then have students draw "prehistoric people" and see the number of females depicted.

### Nonsexist, Multicultural Criteria for Projects

Teachers can also encourage students to display sensitivity and awareness for nonsexist, multicultural issues by adopting a statement or guidelines that suggest that learning centers, learning modules, bulletin boards and the like should reflect in pictures and narrative a diverse society. Criteria for evaluating these projects can also include a section related to the education of ALL students.

Reading centers that incorporate literature that is nonsexist and that reflects a diverse society would be including neutral pictures, i.e., animals or cartoon characters, etc., or ones that reflect a multicultural society.

### Lesson Planning

Lesson planning gives a unique opportunity for students to become sensitized to text bias and to plan questions that incorporate critical thinking related to bias. As a part of a larger lesson plan university students can be asked to list several questions that can increase their sensitivity to sexism and racism in texts of their elementary or secondary pupils. These questions could focus on author's stereotypical views of gender and race and on the authors' use of language.

### Term Papers and Panel Discussions

Term papers and panel discussions are often assigned a part of the course requirements in a methods class. Generally, students are given a list of possible areas of research. To encourage investigation on multicultural, nonsexist issues, reading methods instructors can suggest these topic of research: (a) nonsexist literature, (b) literature that reflects a particular ethnic group, (c) classroom climates that reflect cultural diversity, (d) historical perspectives on nonsexist, multicultural education, (e) impact of bias on the socialization of students, (f) the sex-fair, multicultural reading teacher.

### Modeling

In order to be believable to students, it is essential that instructors model the concepts of a nonsexist, multicultural classroom in the methods classroom. Reading methods instructors can accomplish this in the following ways: (a) use of nonsexist language, (b) model nonsexist language when students use language that is linguistically biased, (c) choose children's literature for examples in the methods class that reflect diverse cultures, (d) relate equity issues within topics through a question or two. For example, during reading readiness the instructor might present the research findings that fathers modeling reading in the home is a factor in whether little boys enjoy reading. The instructor might ask *why do you think this creates a difference in the enjoyment of reading?*, (e) provide many examples and lists of literature and activities that can help future teachers create a nonsexist, multicultural classroom. (See Norton [1983] and Rudman [1976] for lists of children's literature that reflect women and men in diverse roles and represent various ethnic groups. See Sadker and Sadker [1982]

for suggested activities to teach sensitivity toward sexism.)

### A Final Word

This article provided numerous suggestions for integrating nonsexist and multicultural topics in the reading methods classroom. As was stated previously, methods instructors must find the most natural places to include this content within their specific courses. The following are suggestions for thinking about an inclusionary approach to equity:

1. Find topics where nonsexist, multicultural issues can be taught directly within the content of the course.
2. Find places within topics where a question or comment related to equity can be infused as part of a discussion.
3. Determine if any existing assignments can be modified so the expectations of diversity are present.
4. Determine if any in-class activities can be created or restructured to increase the sensitivity to equity issues for the class.
5. When an assignment has a choice of topics, include choices that give students an opportunity to do research on equity.

Increasing the university student's sensitivity to equity and diversity issues can ultimately be beneficial to the students they will teach. Ultimately, nonsexist, multicultural education can help create a society that is equal and supportive.

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