

18 Ways for Faculty to Promote Equity

in the Classroom

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Career and technical education (CTE) provides an opportunity for students to explore career options, build their academic skills and develop technical skills necessary for employment. For many students interested in a nontraditional career, their first experience will be in a CTE classroom. Making that experience a good one where they feel welcome, valued and respected can be the reason they choose to pursue the career in the future. So often when talking with young people who have chosen a nontraditional career path they cite a teacher who provided them with the encouragement they needed to be successful. In the current environment of global competitiveness, and an increasingly diverse population, we cannot afford to have individuals in any segment of the population consider themselves not eligible for any career field because of their race/ethnicity, gender, disability or other characteristics. Teachers need to have a set of skills that is as diverse as the students they are working with. It is a challenge to reach all the students in their classroom; but there are some simple tips to help ensure that teachers are engaging everyone.

Good teachers obviously want to be fair to all of their students. Many of the recommendations listed below are directly aimed at helping faculty members treat male and female students equitably.

Some could be described as ideas for helping teachers become better teachers; others are aimed specifically at ensuring that females receive encouragement and opportunities to participate. However, many of the recommendations are useful for everyone and can be adapted for use with other diverse groups. My colleague Bernice Sandler¹, senior scholar, Women's Research and Education Institute, has conducted research on the subject and makes these suggestions:

1 Examine your teaching behavior to see which students get the most and best responses from you.

Have someone video your class if possible, or use a tape recorder. Analyze who talks the most, who talks the least, whom you call on to speak, who gets praise, criticism and feedback, who gets called by name, who gets coached, who gets credit for a contribution, and develop a plan to increase participation of those who need to participate more.

Examine how you use the following:

- praise for a specific achievement;
- criticism or evaluation (feedback on performance);
- remediation or correction (help and suggestions for improvement); and
- acceptance (such as "OK" or "uh-huh").

The first three are important in student learning; the last, acceptance, merely acknowledges that a student has spoken, and passively implies that nothing very good or very bad was said.

2 Use praise as a deliberate strategy coupled with feedback about the quality of work and what, if anything, needs to be done. Praise such as "uh-huh" or "OK" does not count, and bears little relationship to learning or intellectual self esteem. Praise good answers for all students. Sometimes males are praised for their talents, "You're really smart," and females for their hard work, "I can see you put a lot of work into this."

3 Give criticism in the form of a question where possible, such as, "What would your answer be if you took into account the environmental impact?" rather than, "Your answer is wrong because you did not mention the impact of the environment." Include praise along with criticism and include specific ways to improve, such as, "I know you can do better. You need to redo the experiment and keep an eye on the fluid levels," or, "This isn't up to your usual standard of very good work. You need to include more descriptions of the problems."

4 Don't always call on the first hand that goes up. Tell everyone to think about the answer and not to raise their hand until you tell them to do so. Alternatively, ask students to write down their answer for themselves (or one element of the answer) and only then ask for their comments. (Males are more likely to raise their hands quickly and organize their answer as they speak, while many females, along with some males, are more likely to organize their answer first and then raise their hand.) Many students are more willing to participate once they have worked out their response.

5 "Coach" females as well as males, especially in mathematics, the sciences and computer usage. Coaching conveys the belief that the student is bright enough to say more. Use questions such as, "Why do you think that is?" or statements such as, "Tell me more about this." Using questions that have no "wrong" answer, such as, "What kinds of questions do you have about today's [yesterday's] lesson?" also encourages students to participate.

6 When you ask the class a question, look at all students, not just males, not just the students you consider bright, not just the white students or those you expect to respond. Be sure to look at females as well. Eye contact indicates to students that you expect them to respond, and often they will.

7 Listen attentively to all students when they speak, even if their answer is wrong, even if they speak slowly or hesitantly, or speak English as a second language. Listening attentively to males, such as nodding and gesturing, but shuffling papers, looking elsewhere



and avoiding eye contact when dealing with female students is a common form of differential treatment.



Intervene when male students show disrespect for female students (or the reverse)

through overt comments or negative body language.



Do not allow students to interrupt each other. (Male students often interrupt female students.)

Examine your own interruptions of students.



Use small groups to foster cooperative, rather than competitive learning.

Tell all students that one of the aims of working in small groups is for everyone to encourage each other to participate, to take turns speaking, and to respect each others' contributions; otherwise, the groups replicate sexual stereotyping, with males as the more active participants. Students need to know why it is important to learn to work in groups. (One teacher tells students that many decisions in the workplace and work itself are often accomplished by groups.) Leadership should be rotated, with group leaders told that part of their responsibility is to encourage everyone to speak.



Avoid stories, jokes and comments that denigrate women and girls.

Most jokes about women demean females. Talking about sex or women in a humorous way makes many females uncomfortable. Comments that lump all females (or males) together can often be harmful. Even positive comments, such as, "The women in this class are much more responsible and they all turn in their assignments on time," can create a chilly climate, especially since

it is likely to be untrue for all females and likely to be true for some males. It is better to single out individuals for praise, feedback and criticism/remediation, and to characterize or group students in ways other than by gender, race or ethnicity.



In giving credit to students' contributions, be sure to give it to females as much as males and to the right person.

Often males get more credit for their contributions, and sometimes they even get credit for something a female said. Giving credit is a very powerful form of praise.



Judge females' (and males') contributions to the class by the content of their ideas rather than by the style of their speech.

Do not assume that an incisive, assured style equals knowledge, or that a hesitant style equals ignorance. Do not assume that females (or males) who preface their remarks with an apology ("I don't know if this makes sense but...") are not bright or do not know the materials.



Use parallel terminology in describing both genders, such as "men and women," or "boys and girls," not "girls and men." Use "he or she" rather than the generic "he" or words such as "mankind." Doing so communicates a concern about gender equity, and shakes up stereotypes about gender behavior. Additionally, research shows that the use of the generic "he" is typically viewed by listeners as pertaining to males only.



Do not group students by gender since such groupings often imply that females are not as qualified as males. Do not group people by gender in order to have each gender compete

with the other. In most instances, grouping students by gender violates Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education.



Do not make seemingly helpful remarks that disparage females' abilities, such as, "I know

that a lot of females have trouble with math so I'll be happy to help anyone who needs extra assistance."



Ask males and females the same kinds of questions; avoid asking males

the critical thinking questions and females the factual and easier questions.



Call male and female students by name.

Teachers are often surprised to learn that they know more names of male students than those of females, and call males by name more often. Be sure to use parallel names, such as all last names or all first names. Calling males by their last name and females by their first name implies that the females are seen as less serious students.

To learn more about ways to promote equity in the classroom, and to find resources regarding gender equity in career and technical education, go to www.napequity.org. ■

Endnotes

1. Bernice R. Sandler, senior scholar, Women's Research and Education Institute, speaks and writes about gender equity and related issues. She can be contacted at sandler@berniceandler.com.

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