

Introduction

Why a book about gender and art education? What does gender have to do with education or art in general and art education in particular? Reflect on your own school experiences. Were the boys and girls in your classes treated equally? Did you learn as much about women's contributions to history and society as men's? How many of your textbooks were authored by women? For most of us, the answers would be: "no," "no," and "very few, if any." Did you learn about women artists? Were images of their artworks displayed on your classroom walls? Did you study media, such as quilting or weaving, that have been primarily associated with women? Did girls and boys receive equal attention and encouragement in their creative activities? Again, for most of us, the answer to all of these questions would be a resounding no.

If you feel that boys and girls were not treated equally in classrooms when you were growing up, your experience has been confirmed by several decades of observation and research. This research clearly demonstrates that girls, who make up about half of most classes, receive less of the teacher's attention, have fewer opportunities to express themselves, and have fewer and less positive role models provided for them through the curriculum than do boys. As Myra and David Sadker have documented, if our goal is a fair and equitable education for girls and boys, the schools are truly "failing at fairness."*

Since the art classroom places a special emphasis on individual expression, requiring the acquisition of a diverse range of skills and dealing with many gender-related images, it can either contribute to inequality or provide a potent site for promoting gender equity.

This book is based on the assumption that most teachers believe all children, regardless of gender, should receive an equitable education. An equitable education has been defined as one that provides equal opportunity for all children to receive the education they need and deserve. What can each person, as an individual in society, as a teacher in general, and as an art educator, in particular, do to ensure an equitable education for all our students, regardless of their gender?

Starting with the most basic questions: What aspects of your own attitudes about gender, as they have been shaped by your background, experiences, and society, do you need to examine? What do teachers need to understand about gender, art, and the complex ways they interact in our classrooms and in society in order to foster gender equity? What specific changes can teachers make in their curricula and pedagogy to make their classrooms more gender equitable? Finally, what are the potential benefits to teachers, students, and to society in promoting gender equity?

No single book can treat every aspect of such a complex topic. We do hope, however, that this book will deepen your understanding of critical educational and societal issues relating to gender and art education, while it explores key questions and suggests strategies with which teachers can make their art classrooms more truly equitable for girls and boys. Change is never easy. Moving toward a more gender-equitable art classroom will probably require changes in both what and how we teach. Every step the teacher takes, whether expanding the curriculum to include women or monitoring the language used in class for gender bias, is a step in the right direction. The authors hope this book will inspire you to embark on or continue your own voyage of exploration and change as we all work toward the

ultimate goal—an equitable art education for all students.

As authors, we are certainly not the first to raise these issues and concerns. Over the last thirty years in particular, women's studies, feminism, and other gender-related studies have had a major impact on most areas of the arts and sciences, from psychology to biology, art history, and art education. Unfortunately, the fruits of much of this research have not been made accessible to the K–12 teachers of art. This book is one attempt to fill this need by providing an up-to-date account of key issues in art, education, and art education, and by drawing on recent research that has significantly altered our understanding of all issues of diversity that are of concern to teachers. The book also provides ways of moving issues of gender equity from theory into practice in the art education classroom.

The goal, then, of this book is to provide students, teachers of art and related subjects, university art educators, and interested laypersons involved in art education with an up-to-date conceptual, yet practical understanding of gender and the role it plays in culture and art education. We provide general discussion of key issues relating to gender and art education, ideas about content selection, sample strategies for implementation of curricula, examples of curricula, worksheets, and a list of resources that will assist the reader in teaching art in a more gender-equitable fashion.

The first chapter provides a brief but necessary overview of the contemporary concept of gender, not as a biological fact, but as an entity “constructed” by society. We explore common assumptions about gender differences. What does research reveal about differences between males and females in general, and in the art classroom? We discuss

common assumptions about gender differences and examine them critically.

Chapter 2 examines considerations of, and assumptions about, gender in society, in schools, and especially in the art classroom. We also look at how gender affects both the way we teach and what we teach. The discussion includes a review of the special characteristics of art instruction that increase both the importance of issues of gender in the art classroom, and the range of possibilities for dealing with these issues in a substantive way.

Chapter 3 presents key theoretical and conceptual issues in relation to gender and art. We describe important ideas in relation to gender in art instruction and discusses how views about gender and art have evolved, particularly over the last thirty years. We examine how gender shapes our views of art. This includes such issues as: how art is defined, who is considered an artist, what is considered important art, and what perspectives in art and on art are valid.

Chapter 4 considers how images shape our conceptions of gender; what assumptions society makes about male or female subjects and points of view; what we mean by describing certain art or qualities of art as “masculine” or “feminine;” and what effects conceptions of masculinity and femininity, which can be so strongly influenced by art instruction, have on students’ lives and on society as a whole.

Chapter 5 raises a variety of curriculum-related issues teachers need to consider in relation to gender and art education in order to create a gender-equitable art classroom. We also consider how issues of gender relate to other important aspects of personal identity, such as an individual’s ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, or religious beliefs. The chapter offers readers a variety of suggestions for

designing new activities, themes, and approaches, and reframing existing curricula relative to gender and art education. The assumption here is that an enhanced understanding of gender theory is only worthwhile if it is translated by the reader into her or his classroom.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore a variety of behaviors by teachers and students, as well as environmental factors in the classroom, which can promote a gender equitable approach to art education. We then offer an overview of four teachers who worked on the construction of gender-inclusive art lessons. An analysis of how each contributing teacher modified or re-envisioned their art curriculum to explore, more effectively, issues of gender in his or her classroom is provided. Each of these studies focuses on a different developmental level, K–3, 4–6, 7–9 and 10–12. Three of them were developed by art specialists, and a fourth was designed by an elementary classroom teacher who was interested in creating interdisciplinary lessons for her students.

Our last chapter provides concrete definition for the ideal art classroom in which issues of gender are treated in a rich and comprehensive manner, and where both girls and boys receive an equitable education. The authors also explore some of the potential effects of inclusive curriculum on the teacher, on the students, on other subject matter in the school curriculum, and on the community.

Finally, we include resources and appendixes that provide information and assist readers in obtaining books and articles, as well as audiovisual and other resources necessary to deal effectively in the classroom with the gender issues raised in this book. Resources include information about accessing relevant images, reproductions, software, and Web sources. A bibliography keyed to both artists and gender issues including historical, biographical, theo-

retical, curricular, and critical materials is also included, as are worksheets relating to gender and art education.

- * David and Myra Sadker, *Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1994). See also American Institute of Research, *Gender Gaps: Where Schools Fail Our Children* (New York: Marlowe, 1999), and Janice Koch and Beverly J. Irby, eds. *Defining and Redefining Gender Equity in Education* (Greenwich, CT: Information Age, 2002). See also David Sadker, "Gender Equity: Still Knocking at the Classroom Door," *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 2000 (33,1), 80–83.