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Why Gender Matters in the Classroom: The Differences Between Boys and Girls

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With so much talk in education about **differentiation** and closing the achievement gap there has been a topic that has not gotten as much attention as I think it should. That topic is Gender Brain Difference and its impact on instruction in the classroom.

As educators or parents or just as adults, we all acknowledge that there are **differences between boys and girls** as well as differences between women and men.

There is discourse these days about whether or not the **differences between boys and girls** are a result of nature or nurture. I feel that as classroom teachers whether or not it is nature or nurture that creates these differences is not all that relevant to us. What is relevant is that we see gender differences in the students in our classrooms.

Gender Trends in Schools

What we know is that in America:

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- 80% of high school dropouts are boys
- 80% of all classroom **discipline** problems are boys
- 70% of students with learning disabilities are boys
- 80% of students who are behaviorally disordered are boys
- 80% of students on medication for **ADHD** and AD are boys
- 44% of college students are boys

When asked, teachers will often list the differences they see in performance and behavior between their male and female students. Here is what I hear most often:

Male Student Trends

- **Boys are more physical**
- **Boys need more space to learn**
- **Boys are not as good at reading and writing as girls**

Female Student Trends

- **Girls produce more drama**
- **Girls tend to multitask better**
- **Girls will write with more detail**

How Do These Trends Affect Your Teaching?

These are just a few of the differences that teachers talk about when they speak to me about gender differences. Yet, when I ask them how they differentiate instruction in the classroom for those differences they will most likely say, "I don't."

Now therein lay the problem. If we acknowledge that boys and girls have different learning and behavior management needs, then we must also acknowledge that we need to differentiate for those needs.

When I work with teachers as a presenter I point out to them that as elementary education majors we all took a math methods class, a science methods class, an art methods class and though we took a language arts methods class it was mostly about literature for children.

Less than 1% of the elementary school teachers I train have had a gender instruction methods class. I believe that one of the foundational blocks of good teaching is to know as much as you can about your students and to have the skills to meet the needs that knowledge reveals. Because of this, I

spend a number of days a year training teachers on the skills and techniques that will allow them to meet the learning and behavioral needs of the male and female students in their classes. I believe that without deep knowledge and skill in this area, teachers will struggle to meet the needs of their students.

Do you practice differentiated learning for boys and girls in your classroom? Why or why not? Share your approaches and opinions in the comments section below!