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Tips for Teaching Girls

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Boys and girls are different – that we know.

The function of their brains can be so different it is amazing they can communicate at all. It is important to note, however, that there are many variations within the genders with quite some overlap in ability, interest, and drives for competitiveness or nurturing.

In discussing gendered learning characteristics, we need to state clearly that we are making generalisations that can help us better understand how we can be sensitive to children as being influenced in their learning by their gender and all the hormones and different functions involved.

Right from birth, female sensory systems are developing differently to boys. From birth, girls are far more sensitive to touch than boys. They are also more sensitive to sound and are more easily soothed and comforted by words and sounds. Even before they learn words, girls are more able to identify the emotional content of communication.

Girls show greater interest in communication from an early age. Baby girls will hold eye contact much longer than baby boys. Baby girls study faces within weeks of being born and seek to make eye contact and gaze at faces which increases over 400% over the first 3 months of life. (while boys don't have the same motivation). At just 4 months old, most baby girls can identify photographs of people they know from strangers.

Girls tend to receive information from a wider range of sensory input with more sensual detail memory (smell, taste, touch, sound). Girls tend to hear better than boys. They are sensitive to 'tone of voice' used in conversation (heightened hearing ability) and have more sensitive skin - for touch and pain than boys. Because there is a primacy on relationships, communication is important/better.

In teaching girls, some key questions are:

- How do girls learn?
- What do they want to learn?
- What do they need to learn as a step in their development?
- How can the curriculum be presented in such a way to be appealing to girls?
- What are the hindrances to learning for girls?

In learning, girls tend to use more cortical areas of the brain for emotive and verbal functioning. Girls make fewer impulsive decisions and will like to plan out their work and be assured that they are doing the right thing. Girls learn primarily through the use of the eyes and ears and will remember detail of relationships and emotions in stories. Girls will also use greater use of detail in writing assignments. In class, the girls, in general like working in groups and using colour and presenting neat and tidy work. They tend to read earlier than boys and enjoy language development exercises such as reading, writing and word games.

Girls tend to like:

- Working together
- Detail and colour
- Neatness
- Stories about relationships, nurturing and love

However, girls can be sensitive to criticism about appearance and being isolated or ostracised from the group

The Pleasure Principle

Because the brain will find pleasure in stimulus and tasks that suit its particular 'nature' (character) the child will want to learn things that seem like fun and give reward for success. Those stimuli that interest a boy, and are fun, may very well be different for a girl. Teaching boys and girls requires consideration of the gender-learning differences and strategies to help the children successfully learn.

The Just-Right Challenge Principle

Providing children with the 'Just-Right' challenge is the basis of learning. Providing the Just-Right challenge requires:

- An appreciation of a child's level of development and capabilities
- An appreciation of their gender-determined learning interest

A Just-Right learning challenge will be successful when the child sees the learning to be enjoyable (fun)