GENDER AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

by:
Gloria P. Matic
Head Teacher II, Mariveles National High School - Cabcben

Every teacher of English as a second language aims to optimize the teaching and learning process for students to develop their full potentials, it is assured then that learning experiences are geared towards the attainment of this goal. But, it must be noted that several factors affect learners’ achievement and performance in school.

Success in the acquisition of a second language is achieved through the learners’ reading ability as such is the key to understanding and learning facets of learning the language (Mikulecky, 2008). Fully understanding the nature of reading and readers themselves, teachers should be capable of creating an environment that will help readers learn better. Educators must then keep an open mind in understanding the complexities of the reading process.

With the changes in the learners’ reading abilities, teachers are challenged to deal with diverse students in class (Pavlenko & Piller, 2008). Considering these challenges, devising ways to address all these changes is necessary in the success of every reading activity or task in class. Among them is the recognition of gender issues which impact the learners’ reading comprehension. Readings talk about how one gender seems to be superior over the other and vice versa.

Some researches between gender and English language favor girls over boys. This signifies teachers to determine factors creating the gap and determining where the gaps meet and what to do with these gaps as well.
Causing the gap

1. Mori & Gobel (2006) confirmed in their study that the difference lies on the reading motivation brought by males in the classroom.

2. In a study (Dee, 2005), it was indicated that having a female teacher improves the achievements of girls but lowers those of the boys. It is believed that due to the presence of more female teachers, male readers are disadvantaged. This also showed the females on the advantageous side when reading materials are geared towards the feminine taste.

3. The Boys’ Reading Commission connected the boys’ underachievement in some factors. At home, full time mothers influence their daughters in their reading habits. Because of their interest in reading, they are provided with more reading materials and visits to libraries.

4. Peer pressure on the other hand influences boys to disregard reading and do other activities instead which the rest of their friends do. In the article Closing the gap between boys’ and girls’ attainment in schools (2008), boys are torn between excelling in school and creating an identity within their peer groups.

5. In “Why boys don’t like to Read”, girls outperformed boys due to bias placed on reading texts used favourable to girls. McBride consequently believes that boys lack interest in reading because texts given to them do not cater to their active minds. As imaginative as they are, boys want to see and read fictional stories that show action packed reading materials. Thus, boys are less motivated to read and do not consider reading as a valuable task.

6. Environmental and biological factors are also considered in males reading underachievement. In the article Are there differences in achievement between boys and
there is a difference between the brain structures of boys and girls where boys engage in active activities and not so good in processing language.

8. McDonald, Saunders, & Benefield (1995) attributed the gap in reading achievement between males and females in the process reading tests are done: girls excel in essays and course works while boys prefer multiple choice types of examinations.

Bridging the gap

In the Executive summary presented through the report collected and compiled by the National Literacy Trust, the Commission recommended that schools must provide solid support to the underachieved readers specifically the boys.

1. Assisting the readers in developing the love for reading by teaching them how to enjoy the reading process. Institutions must be knowledgeable in strategies that will upgrade readers’ interests. Teachers who are in greater control of the classroom situation should be aware of the latest reading trends that will cater to the needs of the learners.

2. Providing a program inviting and encouraging parents and families to participate in school efforts to develop better readers. At home, there should be a male role model showing interest and love for reading. In both community and school, there should also be a functional library offering materials that are interesting to both males and females.

3. McDonald et al. (1995) suggest that school teachers and authorities must give readers specifically boys a voice to tell how they wanted to be taught. This can be done through interviews and observation. This will allow teachers to understand boys more hence creating a learning space for them.
Reading is one skill leading to other skills. It allows students to go beyond prints and imagination. It helps them to widen their horizon and go beyond their limits. To fully succeed and benefit from reading, learners are expected to comprehend every text. This means reading between lines, more than words, phrases, and sentences. What students bring in to the reading experience is as much important as what the texts suggest.

Studies have shown that apart from these factors, gender plays an important role in the acquisition of knowledge through reading. Through studies, it has been found out that gender brings gap between how males and females learn and the extent of this learning.

Educating children is preparing them for the greater challenges ahead. With the studies constantly showing the difference between genders in terms of their reading achievement, something has to be done and considered.

Being a reading teacher is not easy as one is tasked to unravel the mystery of a reader. As a teacher, one has to understand what a good reader is: what makes up a reader, what affects the reading process and how to ensure success in reading.

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