

A wooden mannequin is positioned in the center of the frame, set against a solid blue background. The mannequin is a simple, jointed figure, likely used for artistic or educational purposes. The lighting is soft, highlighting the natural wood grain and the smooth curves of the figure. The overall composition is clean and minimalist.

# THE NEED FOR GENDER EQUITY IN TEACHING PRACTICE

BY DEBRA PARKER AND ELLIE SWINDON

Gender equality in the workplace, community and classroom is a human right, but it is one that is often overlooked. The impact of COVID-19 has seen heightened conversations and a plethora of new research has emerged about gender equality.

Research by Flinders University spoke to the additional burden carried by women in times of crisis, highlighting the highly feminised care workforce that shoulders a heavier load in times of need. This group, like educators, is more likely to be called upon to keep working through the crisis, often putting their own health at risk, while simultaneously obliged to bear the brunt of an increase in domestic work.

Even beyond the current reality of COVID-19, there is well-documented evidence of the impact of gender inequality in our community. The national framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children by Our Watch, VicHealth and ANROWS identifies the power imbalances that exist between women and men in society – as well as between groups of men and groups of women – as the core driver of gender-based violence.

The impact of gender-based violence is far reaching. On average, one woman is murdered every week in Australia by her current or former partner. The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence made 227 recommendations to combat gender-based violence. All recommendations were accepted and are currently being implemented. Twelve of these recommendations specifically called for training to be part of the solution to this issue.

### EDUCATION FOR CHANGE

Nelson Mandela said, ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world’. Research by Monash into pedagogical approaches to teaching gender equity (GET research) identified that to achieve the change required for gender equality, ‘the desired behavioural change needs to be both sustained and role modelled’. Educators have a position of authority and influence in the classroom which makes them well placed as change agents and role models, especially when it comes to gender.

However, many educators are unaware of the importance of gender equity education and the need for a gender lens to be applied to educational design and content delivery. As educators you can be a catalyst for change; you can play a part in reducing gender inequality and contributing to a more just and equitable society through applying a gender lens to your educational design and teaching practice.

### GENDER EQUALITY VS GENDER EQUITY

As educators, you are acutely aware of the diversity of your learner cohort, their learning needs and

preferences and how to engage them in learning effectively. Because of this, you can connect with your learners on a level that will enable them to participate fully. This is part of being a strong and inclusive educator. However, gender as an indicator of the diverse needs and experiences of learners is often overlooked.



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So, what is gender equality? Gender equality refers to the desired outcome of reaching equal participation, value, access and opportunities for all people, regardless of their sex, gender or gender identity.

Gender equity is about making sure resources and services are distributed according to people’s specific needs to achieve equal outcomes, regardless of their sex, gender or gender identity. An equity approach defines the suitable process for achieving a social justice goal such as gender equality. It recognises that people have different needs and access to power due to historical oppression and systems of disadvantage – and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalances across and within genders.

### DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

For example, the GET research highlighted the gendered impacts of online learning, noting that online learning platform design should be cognisant of gender and how it can impact interaction in this space, recognising that women and men engage and learn differently in the digital space. Evidence shows that men prefer more assertive language and interaction in online spaces, while female learners opt for more expressive, collegial contributions to online forums, creating connection through

their communication patterns and appearing to value dialogue rather than dominating the digital space. The GET research went on to highlight the evidence that more female learners successfully complete online courses compared to their male counterparts.

Meanwhile, from the experience of the Gender Equity Accredited Training project (GET Project), we have observed specific challenges female learners have had as we moved from classroom to online learning during Covid-19, as they struggled to balance education with other priorities including both paid work and care work.

A gender equity approach would look at how to overcome some of these gendered barriers to learning, such as a mix of live and recorded activities, flexible timelines and asking learners to set the standards for how they interact with one another.

### APPLYING A GENDER LENS TO TEACHING PRACTICE

The application of human-centred design starts with the people for whom the solution is being designed. Likewise, applying a gender lens to your teaching practice starts with the learners. It is about considering how environments are set up to support learners and identifying barriers that may exist for some people or groups on the basis of their gender and other social factors, such as race, age, disability or geographic location.

It is important to recognise that your learners bring their own lived experiences of privilege and discrimination that should be acknowledged and worked with, especially when it comes to defining the learning environment and the teaching practice. An intersectional gender lens applied to your teaching practice will require you to learn and understand the gender-based needs and preferences of your learners and incorporate these considerations into your pedagogical approach.

### DEVELOPING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Start by understanding gender equity and equality theories and the values that underpin these concepts. There are many papers and websites that can help you, as well as formal education. See below for a list to get you started.

#### Course in Gender Equity 22521VIC

<https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/22521VIC>

#### GET Research

<https://whv.org.au/resources/whv-publications/supporting-gender-equity-education-research-project-inform-gender-equity>

#### Our Watch

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>

#### Workplace Gender Equality Agency

<https://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/203>

As mentioned, educators carry a position of power and authority within the classroom. This can be used to dominate and have power over learners. Alternatively, you can guide learners to utilise the power they have to change themselves and their environment. You can also develop self-awareness about the perception and use of your power, to ensure it is used responsibly and ethically as an educator.

### DEBUNK THE STEREOTYPES

It is important for educators to understand the unequal gender norms, practices and structures as the building blocks of inequality that interact and reinforce each other in a range of settings, including education.

For example, it is well recognised that Australia has a gender-segregated workforce. Through advertising, vocational education and training (VET) practices



often reinforce gender stereotypes of trades as male occupations and healthcare roles as female, further perpetuating this workforce segregation throughout the system. The VET sector has a role to play in changing these norms and presenting new models for career choices, especially towards younger cohorts as they leave school. Disrupting this gender bias will see more diversity among workers in all sectors at all levels, working towards improved work-life balance for women and men – and a reduction in the gender pay gap.

Additionally, educators should develop their understanding of the impact of gender inequality and how language and images can influence perceptions of gender. The GET research identified that ‘individuals who are presented with [role] models who articulate gender-neutral language, which then translates into behaviour that eliminates implicit gender biases, are more likely to imitate this language and these behaviours’. Representation of people and groups should be taken into consideration in the selection of language and images in learning materials. Further, be mindful of who is in the room and invite learners to share how they want to be referred to. This is particularly important for gender diverse and gender non-conforming people who choose their preferred pronouns.

### GIVE EVERYONE A VOICE

Finally, educators should reflect on their own positive and negative biases and avoid them interfering with teaching practice and assessment outcomes. The impact of bias can be evidenced in the classroom in the way different learner ‘voices’ are heard and acknowledged.

Often the person with the loudest voice or strongest opinions gets the most opportunities to talk and be visible. Monitor class discussion closely and aim to achieve a balance in contributions from all learners.

### INEQUALITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

One last thing for you to consider, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency reports that the tertiary education sector is made up of 57.9% women, yet only 29.4% of tertiary organisations have female CEOs. Furthermore, there is a gender pay gap of 10.5%, which means women and men doing the same work are not getting the same pay.

You could say that a gender lens needs to be applied to the sector as a whole, to unearth and address the unequal gender norms, practices and structures that reinforce gender inequality within the tertiary education workforce itself.



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