Teachers should treat all students in their class as individuals who have different characteristics, motivations, interests and ways of learning. Gender is just one aspect that influences the way a child behaves in school, attitudes to learning and preferred methods of learning. Teachers should, therefore, take gender difference into account when planning learning so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Gender Differences

Gender difference in school is not as straightforward as the differences between male and female. Gender differences when it comes to learning begin in the brain. Male and female brains are different and although more males than females have male type brains and vice versa, a minority of girls have male type brains and a minority of boys have female type brains. It is important, then, not to make assumptions. Professor Simon Baron Cohen states that male type brains are ‘systemizing,’ suited to understanding and building systems, whereas female type brains are “empathizing”; understanding and responding to others’ emotions and thoughts. Some people have a balance of these two brain types. It is important to remember, however, that it is not just brain type that will have an impact on education in regards to gender; expectations and peer pressure will also play a part in attitudes to learning.

Learning Styles- Male Type Brain

Students with male type brains are likely to be kinesthetic learners. These students will learn best through hands on learning and activities and will thrive if given lots of practical tasks to do. Do not expect a student with a male brain to sit and concentrate for long periods of time; allow him the opportunity to move around and get involved. He will get more out of taking something apart to see how it works, for example, rather than being told by a teacher how something works or reading about it. As a student with a male brain is less likely to ask for help if it is needed, make sure that you check that he is not struggling and is sure of what is expected. If your classroom has a positive atmosphere in which asking for help and learning from others is encouraged and praised, this will make it much easier for male type brain students to ask for the help they need.

Learning styles – Female type Brain

Those with female type brains work well in group situations. These students are good at listening, sharing and explaining opinions and discussing aspects of a task with others. Those with a female type brain also work well with a partner and are happy to take others’ ideas and opinions on board, working collaboratively to solve problems. These students are able to concentrate for longer periods of time. They are happy to ask for help if they have a problem, will check work for errors, and are likely to take longer over tasks adding more detail and taking care with presentation.

Incorporating Gender Differences into Teaching

It is important for teachers to see all their pupils as individuals with individual learning styles, not just in terms of gender. If a lesson can incorporate some listening, watching, discussion and a practical activity, then both genders and all learning preferences can be catered for. It is important for children to develop all their learning abilities and not to rely on just one preferred learning style. It will be just as good for the female brains in the classroom to do a practical activity to develop skills in these areas as it will for male brains to take part in a collaborative discussion and develop these skills. Incorporating a variety of learning preferences into lessons will enhance the learning of all students.

References and Resources

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