

# Gender Roles in Textbooks

<b>THEME:</b>	<b>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (GENDER ROLES)</b>			
<b>LANGUAGE:</b>	<b>ANY (SPANISH)</b>			
<b>STANDARD(S):</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>CULTURES</b>	<b>CONNECTIONS</b>	<b>COMPARISONS</b>
	<b>1.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>4.2</b>

## Time Frame:

Two or three 50-minute class periods

## Materials Needed:

- Language textbooks
- Photos of well-known individuals reflecting a variety of professions
- Overhead transparencies and overhead markers
- Butcher block paper and markers of different colors
- Sample handout to facilitate cross-cultural comparison (provided)

## Description of Task:

*One day in advance:* The teacher asks students to bring in a photo of a person of the same gender whom they admire. This photo can be from a newspaper, magazine or from a personal photo album.

### **Pre-task:**

The teacher activates familiar adjective/profession vocabulary by showing 10-15 large magazine photos of well-known individuals and asking students to individually jot down on a sheet of paper one adjective or noun to describe each person. Next, the teacher displays each photo a second time and students can offer their words in a whole class forum. Two student volunteers (one male, one female) will record the words on two separate, large pieces of butcher block paper hanging on the wall, one listing vocabulary associated with males, the other listing vocabulary associated with females. Different student volunteers will come forward and circle all the nouns in one color and underline the adjectives in another.

### **Level:**

Intermediate-Low

### **Purpose:**

To explore gender roles in society as reflected in language textbooks; to facilitate cross-cultural comparison of gender roles

### **Communicative Function(s):**

Referential: Identifying items or people in the classroom, the school, the home, the community; comparing or contrasting things

### **Language Structure(s):**

Adjectives and comparatives

### **Cultural Aspects:**

Perception about and significance of gender as reflected in textbook images of the target culture

### **Modalities:**

Writing

Speaking

Listening

## NOTES

Then students are invited to reference the photo they chose to bring to class and individually list on a sheet of paper any descriptive adjectives and roles/titles/labels they might use to introduce themselves and this person they admire. Students form small groups of 3-4 persons with females/males evenly distributed in each group and orally share their photos and lists with group members. Students choose group roles (Recorder, Time Keeper, Group Facilitator, Reporter) and the recorder lists the adjectives and roles/occupations generated by each individual group member on an overhead. The overhead should be divided into two columns, one for males and one for females and students should again circle all nouns and underline all adjectives.

The group reporters present these lists to the whole class, as the group time keepers add any new words to the original, gender-specific lists displayed on butcher block paper. Any time a particular word resurfaces, the time keeper stars the word to indicate that their group also generated that word. The reporter hands the teacher their group's overhead. After all reporters present their group findings, the teacher places a triangle around the most frequently generated words. The class now has posted a student-generated list of adjectives and occupations associated in their home culture with each gender and has marked the words for frequency of use.

### ***The Task: Textbook Examination***

Once again in small groups, students scan their textbooks for photos depicting males and females. They need to choose six photos (three females and three males) and describe each one in detail answering the following questions (Note: students will need to individually record these answers for sharing with future groups):

- Describe physical attributes (gender, age, size, hair, eyes, etc.)
- Describe clothing
- Note possible role in the picture
- With whom is this person interacting?
- What is this person doing?

Now the teacher creates new small groups according to each student's group role, i.e. all recorders form one group, all facilitators another, etc. In these groups, students are invited to act as spokespersons for their small group and compare their group's findings with those of the other student groups. Together they create a new list of adjectives and roles/occupations for males and females as portrayed in their language textbook. They can use the same format as before noting roles and descriptors for females and males.

The teacher asks the students how they determine whether a word is an adjective or a noun. For example, what clues exist in word endings?

The teacher leads a whole class debriefing with two student volunteers listing roles/occupations and descriptors on two new large sheets of butcher block paper (one for females and one for males). These new sheets are hung next to the first ones reflecting U.S. culture and represent textbook images of gender from the target culture. Using the same process as before, students mark words as adjectives or nouns and note frequency of use. In pairs, students create a summary list (sample handout provided) of the most commonly found roles/occupations/descriptors for males and females in the U.S. culture, and again based on the textbook images of the target culture.

Then the teacher asks students to practice formulating comparative sentences based on the displayed information. For example, “In the U.S. the word “pretty” is used more often for females than for males.” Still working in pairs, students write ten sentences using comparative structures that demonstrate their understanding of the activity accurately.

### **Post-task:**

Finally, the teacher facilitates a whole class discussion about impressions the textbook offers students about gender roles within the target culture. Possible discussion questions include:

- What were the most commonly found roles and descriptors for females in the U.S.? And in the language textbook?
- What were the most commonly found roles and descriptors for males in the U.S.? And in the language textbook?
- What are the similarities and differences between the commonly-found roles and for females and males in the U.S.? And in the language textbook?
- What are the similarities and differences between the commonly-found descriptors for females and males in the U.S.? And in the language textbook?
- What are the similarities and differences between the textbook portrayal of gender roles and descriptors in the target culture and those we listed for the U.S. culture?
- What image does this textbook provide the reader of females in the target culture? And males?
- Do you think this image is accurate? Why or why not?

**Assessment:**

Teacher informally assesses the group process by circulating and observing student interactions and looking over the group overheads.

Participation in group process will be assessed holistically and may consider participation in group interaction, group list creation, and reporter's presentation. Written work (handout and ten comparative sentences) is handed in to the teacher and assessed for accuracy and completeness.

**Extensions:*****Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:***

*For beginning levels:* The small-group and large-group discussions can take place in English. After the class discussion, students write a summary paragraph contrasting and comparing frequently-mentioned U.S. perceptions about gender roles and ways of being with those of the target culture as portrayed by their language textbook. This paragraph may be written in English.

*For advanced levels:* Students can complete all tasks in the target language. After the class discussion, students write a one-page summary contrasting and comparing frequently-mentioned U.S. perceptions about gender roles and ways of being with those of the target culture as portrayed by their language textbook. This paragraph may be written in the target language.

***Other extensions:***

- Students can do research and present statistical information with breakdowns on levels of education, income earnings, and the professions by gender from the U.S. and target language culture. They can report and discuss the findings.
- Students can be asked to reflect in writing on what they found most interesting or perhaps most telling in these group findings. Students are encouraged to include specific examples from the images the textbook company portrays of gender in society. Students may also include personal descriptions of the way they feel they are expected to be/or roles they are expected to perform at home and at school and contrast

that with the way they would like to be or roles they would like to perform in these places.

- Divide the class up in two groups according to gender. Have each gender group generate their own list describing males and females. Note similarities and differences between the two lists.
- The same activity can be modified to focus on other issues of diversity as portrayed by textbooks (e.g., social class).

### **Cultural extensions:**

- Find well-known magazines from the target culture and compare them with similar types of magazines from the U.S. culture. Explore the images portrayed of males/females in the types of photos used. What might we be able to learn about these cultures' views of gender roles in society? Do our findings reflect what we learned from our textbook search or is this something new and different?
- Explore the gender images portrayed in other forms of media and entertainment, for example, pop culture, music, and short story literature.
- The teacher locates and makes available at least one copy of an English textbook from the target culture used to teach English as a foreign language in the target culture country. The teacher could randomly select ten photos from this textbook and copy these for each of the small groups. The original textbook would be available to consult as necessary. Using the lesson format described above, students analyze the accuracy of these textbook images regarding U.S. culture.

### **References and Resources:**

Teachers may want to refer to articles that discuss exploring gender roles with students. Some examples are:

Christensen, L. (1994). Unlearning the myths that bind us. In B. Bigelow, L. Christensen, S. Karp, B. Miner, & B. Peterson (Eds.), *Rethinking our classrooms: Teaching for equity and justice* (pp. 8-13). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.

## NOTES

Council on Interracial Books for Children. (1994). 10 Quick ways to analyze children's books for racism and sexism. In B. Bigelow, L. Christensen, S. Karp, B. Miner, & B. Peterson (Eds.), *Rethinking our classrooms: Teaching for equity and justice* (pp. 14-15). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.

## Reflections:

## Handout for Cross-Cultural Comparison of Gender Roles

<p>In the column below list adjectives you might use to describe women from the target culture.</p>	<p>In the column below list adjectives you might use to describe women from the U.S. culture.</p>
<p>In the column below list roles/occupations you might use to describe men from the target culture.</p>	<p>In the column below list roles/occupations you might use to describe men from the U.S. culture.</p>

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