School retention and gender stereotypes

A project led by Table de concertation des groupes de femmes de la Gaspésie et des Îles-de-la-Madeleine

Intervention Guidelines for Early Childhood in Mi'gmaq Communities

2020

Gender Stereotypes in Mi'gmaq Infants and Toddlers

Boys or girls: Are there any innate differences?

At birth, the brains of boys and girls differ only in reproductive function. Children aged 1 to 3 years old therefore have the same cognitive (intelligence, reasoning, memory, attention, spatial identification) and physical skills (Vidal, cited in Piraud-Rouet, 2017). The differences that develop between girls and boys are attributable to the plasticity of the brain, that is to say, its ability to specialize in regards to experiences and the environment (Piraud-Rouet, 2017). For example, a child that repeats a piano exercise will develop circuits in his or her nervous system that will ease the performance of this activity in the future. As for the psychological and behavioural differences between sexes, while they tend to increase from childhood to adulthood, they are nearly absent in infants and toddlers (Cossette, 2017). The only differences observed at birth relate to the average size of the brain, larger in baby boys, and motor activity, slighter greater in boys. Other differences, such as verbal expression or preference for some toys, emerge between the ages of six months and one year, the age at which children are already subject to social influences, which vary according to the child's sex (Vidal, 2015). Variability among individual brains outweighs the variability between sexes (Vidal, 2017).

Development of gender identity

Although there are almost no differences between male and female infants at birth, with the exception of the reproductive organs, children nevertheless gradually forge their sexual identities. At birth, children are unaware of their sex. They learn gradually, as their neurons connect and their cognitive functions develop (Vidal, 2015). According to Kohlberg's cognitive-behaviour theory, children acquire the concept of gender in three stages.

During the first three years of life, children experience the **sexual identity** stage: they learn how to distinguish their own sex and that of others by focussing on apparent physical characteristics (Boyd and Bee, 2015). More precisely, by around 2 years of age, children have the mental abilities they need to identify themselves as girls or boys (Vidal, 2015). At this age, they know about gender roles, recognize typical gender-specific occupations, engage in gender-typical activities and behaviours and choose attributes associated with the gender to which they belong: games and toys, clothing, accessories, etc. (Ducret and Le Roy, 2012).

At about 3 to 4 years of age, **gender stability** appears, with children understanding that an individual's sex remains the same over time, that girls will become women and boys, men. However, children of this age do not yet understand that sex also remains the same regardless of the situation. For instance, in the minds of children of this age, a boy wearing a skirt becomes a girl (Ducret and Le Roy, 2012). At this stage, children therefore regard gender role violations as unacceptable and incorrect (Amboulé Abath, 2009). They still group people by their physical attributes (Mieeya and Rouyer, 2013). Ducret and Le Roy (2012) also note that by the age of three, children become aware that adults behave differently towards them depending on the sex of the child. It is at this age that children adopt gender stereotypes to varying degrees, hence the importance of acting from early childhood to deconstruct such stereotypes (Papalia *et al*., 2018).

At 5 to 7 years of age, children reach the age of **gender constancy**, during which they understand that an individual's sex remains the same over time and that it is defined by biology (Boyd and Bee, 2015). Children now realize that identity is not influenced by changes in appearance or gender-related activities although this identity only becomes permanently stable at around 7 years of age. This could link to the teachings of the Mi'gmaq Elder Murdena Marshall: according to her and other Elders, a significant change is happening in one's life every seven years. If Murdena Marshall doesn't

specify the nature of this change, there is reason to believe that the stabilization of gender identity is part of this significant change. Other studies suggest, however, that the construction of sexual identity is dynamic and can be reshaped in children later as they develop (Mieeya and Rouyer, 2013).

What causes gender socialization?

If boys and girls have the same capacities at birth, how is it that just a few years later, very often they have developed behaviours, attitudes and interests strongly associated with their gender? The innate capacities of children, which are invariable according to sex, are in fact modelled by their environment (Piraud-Rouet, 2017). The education they receive within their family units and at educational daycare centres therefore plays a critical role in the break between what is presented in the public space and how these observations are internalized by children or how these stereotypes are reinforced (SCF, 2018).

The **family** is the very first place where children are socialized; there, they learn gender-typical roles, first by watching their parents, grandparents and extended family members who significantly reinforce the difference further during their children's second year of life (Amboulé Abath, 2009). Many studies have shown that the entourage of infants or toddlers does not exhibit the same attitudes towards girls and boys, depending on their sex (Piraud-Rouet, 2017) even before children are born. For instance, boys' and girls' rooms are decorated differently and different toys and clothing are purchased depending on the children's sex. An experiment involving newborns showed that their parents described boys as being big, sturdy and strong whereas girls were described as being small, cute and fragile (aussi.ch, 2019). Several studies have even shown that parents react more positively when their sons play with toys and trucks and their girls, with dolls or jewellery (Boyd and Bee, 2015). According to one study, parents take care of their daughters, keep them close and mother them. Girls are expected to be obedient, docile and tidy, and have less choice when it comes to activities. They learn to depend on adults rather than relying on themselves. They sense the behaviours expected of them by their parents and other adults, internalizing them and acting accordingly. (Duru-Bellat 1990: 97) Moreover, the report points out that these attitudes and behaviours on the part of parents are perpetuated by educators at educational institutions, who in doing so continue the socialization begun by the family (Amboulé Abath, 2009, p. 20).

In heteroparental families, it is the mothers who exert more influence over behaviours; thus, daughters whose mothers have stereotyped behaviours adopt them and, in turn, exhibit the same behaviours while sons of the same mothers, adopting their behaviours, exhibit behaviours that are less stereotypical for their gender (Papalia *et al.*, 2018, p. 207). Some studies have also shown that the children of lesbian mothers feel less pressure to conform to gender stereotypes and adopt less discriminatory behaviour towards the opposite sex. Similar studies of homosexual fathers have not been reported.

As for sibling influence, older children tend to be more influenced by their parents while younger children put greater effort into copying the behaviours and attitudes of their older siblings (McHale *et al.*, 2001). Children who have an older sibling of the same sex tend to adopt more gender-related behaviours than those who have an older brother or sister of the opposite sex (Papalia *et al.*, 2018, p. 209). On the whole, interactions within the family environment will guide tastes, aptitudes and personality traits to bring them more closely into line with the standards for men and women of the society in which the children exist (Vidal, 2015).

Educational childcare centres and kindergartens for 4- and 5-year-olds are other environments where certain standards, attitudes, habits and knowledge are instilled in children and where they learn what is desirable, even reasonable as goals for adult life. Even if these child care environments aren't accessible to a majority of First Nations children under age 6, "experiences of racism and

discrimination within these various systems can undermine Indigenous people's well-being" (Halseth & Greendwood, 2019, p. 18) when they aren't culturally adapted, in addition to reproducing gender stereotypes associated with the dominant culture and not the Mi'gmaq culture. Indeed, gender-differentiated socialization reproduces not only inequalities between women and men, but at the same time limits the possibilities of infants and toddlers (Amboulé Abath, 2009). In a study conducted in France, Murcier (2007) showed that early childhood educators had stereotypical expectations, proposed gender-based activities and did not treat boys and girls in the same way. For instance, educators tolerate unrulier behaviours in boys than in girls and let boys monopolize sound space by allowing them to speak more often (Dafflon Novelle, 2009).

Whether in educational settings or within the community - let's point out that most of First Nations children living on a reserve receive child care at home (Halseth & Greendwood, 2019), **peers** also contribute to the gendered socialization of children. By the age of three, children are already playing in groups of the same sex, which reinforces gender behaviours (Papalia et al., 2018). The influence of peers would seem to be more marked in boys: when barely able to walk, they already pay more attention to the reactions of other boys to their own behaviour than to the educator (Maccoby, 1998). This trend continues and may even increase with age.

Finally, the children's **material environment** (toys, the media, books, etc.) also influences their adherence to sexual stereotypes. Play allows the children to acquire and exercise motor, cognitive and social skills that will have a major impact on their later development. Various studies have shown a link between the practice of visuospatial type games (block games and other construction games) and the results of visuospatial aptitude tests. Play activities could have a greater influence yet on the lives and career choices of girls and boys (Cossette, 2017).

From birth, children indeed evolve in a gendered environment; rooms, toys and clothes differ for boys and girls (Vidal, 2015). Parents and other adults offer different toys to girls and boys long before they ask for them or clearly display distinct preferences, reinforcing adherence to stereotypes (Cossette, 2017). These socializing agents also help reinforce gender roles. For instance, children are very good at finding their way around a toy store and recognizing **their** space. Indeed, for many toys there is a girl version and a boy version, like pink bikes and blue bikes. This is a sales strategy to encourage parents to buy more. It is not easy for parents to hand down big sister's pink bike to her little brother (Ducret and Le Roy, 2012, p. 10), and this reinforces stereotypes. Toys directed at boys and girls are not only different, but they also tend to reinforce certain abilities or beliefs. For example, a number of toys for girls already strongly encourage them to pay particular attention to their appearance, reinforcing in them these stereotypes: makeup kits, hairdressing and manicure accessories, dress up games, etc. The universe of princesses, where beauty is put forward as something of paramount importance, leads girls to count on their appearance while still very young (SCF, 2018).

Sex and Gender Identity

According to a conceptualization by John Robert Sylliboy (2019, p. 106), a two-spirited Mi'gmaq, the identity of a human being (*L'nu*) has four dimensions (emotional, spiritual, physical and mental) and encompasses both historical traditions and contemporary practices. Therefore, Mi'gmaq children develop their gender identity while balancing its spiritual dimension, rooted in cultural traditions, and its mental dimension that reflects contemporary practices. The physical dimension on its part is associated with sexual identity, for example the child's biological sex, while the emotional dimension is associated with gender identity. Gender identity is described as the intrinsic feeling of being a boy or a girl or somewhere between these two poles. So there is no connection to sexual orientation, which refers to the physical attraction or love felt towards one kind or the other. Research suggests that gender identity is established by the age of three (Table nationale de lutte contre l'homophobie et la transphobie des réseaux de l'éducation, 2017). Young children can therefore feel a gender identity that differs from their biological sex. It is still hard today to explain why some children have a gender identity different from that attributed to them at birth. One thing is certain; the education they receive cannot explain why individual children have a gender identity different from their biological sex (SCF 2018).

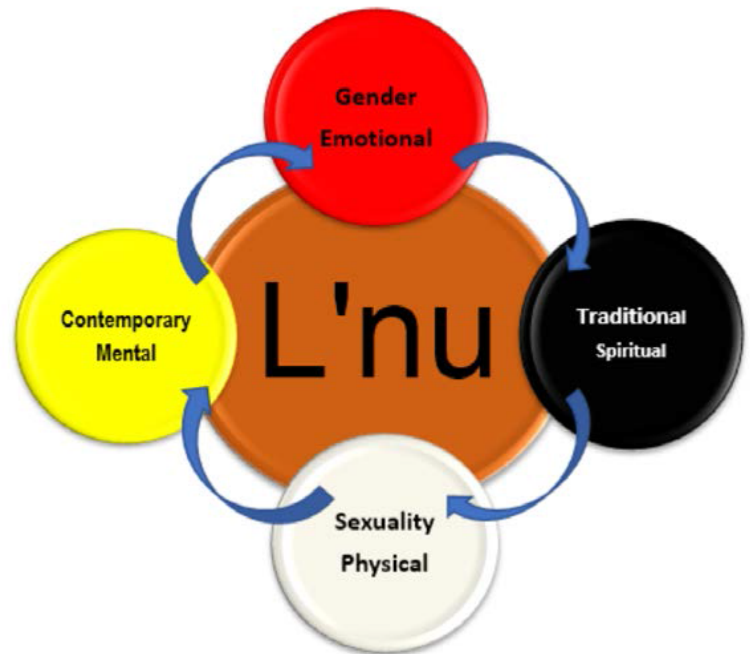

Figure 1. L'nu Model (Sylliboy, 2017).

In many First Nations, people with a gender variant identity are called two-spirits (Sylliboy, 2017). If the definition of the term "two-spirits" changes from one Nation to another, "Albert McLeod defines it as 'a term used to describe aboriginal people who assume cross- or multiple-gender roles, attributes, dress and attitudes for personal, spiritual, cultural, ceremonial or social reasons.'" (Monkman, 2016). There is no specific word in Mi'gMaq to adequately represent this concept, although undergoing studies might determine which Mi'gmaq expression would represent it best (Sylliboy, 2019).

Consequently, an inclusive educational childcare environment that does not reinforce gender stereotypes will enable children who do not identify with their biological sex to feel accepted and safe. In fact, if educators allow all children to take part in the activities of their choice, regardless of the toys, clothing or activities traditionally associated with one gender or another, two-spirits children will feel more included.

Things to keep in mind when dealing with children

Several elements must thus be taken into account when working in early childhood education, and the goal is to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes. As children develop their gender identity between the ages of 0 and 7, early childhood is a critical time to provide all children with diverse models and opportunities, without confining them to traditional roles or gender stereotypes. There are several tools available in the *Ideas for action* section to make your educational childcare space and teaching practices inclusive and free of gender stereotypes. Finally, we need to be aware that we ourselves are products of gendered socialization and that, unintentionally, we contribute to reinforcing them. Keep your critical eye open and be ever ready to ferret out those stereotypes!

Specificities About Mi'gmaq Infants and Toddlers Learning Styles

The socialization of children is gender-differentiated during early childhood, whether through their environment, the toys offered to them, their families or the staff in educational care settings (Amboulé Abath, 2009). Consequently, children undergo a gender-differentiated educational experience. This section deals with how gendered socialization modulates the characteristics of the children's connection to learning.

First of all, this translates into **differentiated interactions with adults and peers**. Adults, parents, grandparents and educators, although they feel they do not act differently with children, change their behaviour depending on a child's gender. This results in different learning and in different experiences for children. The older the children, the more their peers influence their behaviour.

Nor are the **toys, activities and material** presented to children free of stereotypes, quite to the contrary. Consequently, they create different gender-dependent learning experiences, encouraging girls to build certain competencies and boys, others.

Learning styles and relationship with educational institutions

Before looking at the differentiated connection to school and learning of Mi'gmaq boys and girls, let's look at a few context points related to the connection of First Nations to educational institutions. First of all, it is worth repeating that for hundreds of years, among Indigenous peoples, "teachings have been passed on within the context of the family and the community. School has been implemented just over 50 years ago; First Nations' educational tradition is then quite young and it clashed in many ways with their traditional lifestyle" (Commission de l'éducation, 2007, p. 10). The residential schools, implemented around 1900, as well as all the colonial system, negatively impacted indigenous people's relationship with educational institutions (Santerre, 2015). We can then say that the connection to education of a majority of indigenous students and their parents, in addition to clashing with their culture (Brabant et al., 2015), is tainted with mistrust. Fortunately, Audy and Gauthier (2019) highlight that according to many researchers, young First Nations members' connection to school and education is the theatre of a profound change and is becoming a lot more positive, less reactive and resistant.

When looking at the connection to learning of young mi'gmaq boys and girls, we have to put aside the accounting view of academic success to adopt a holistic approach (St-Amant, 2003). According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2007), learning from an indigenous perspective is holistic and experiential, it is a lifelong process rooted in Aboriginal languages and cultures, it is spiritually oriented, it is a communal activity, involving family, community and Elders and it is the integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge. In that sense, the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model of the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) is a good example of how the connection to learning of many First Nations members isn't limited to the educational institution itself, but has to be rooted in the community, to touch on many dimensions of the individual and the society, and has to be formal at certain moments, such as during the elementary schooling process, and informal at other times, such as during early childhood.

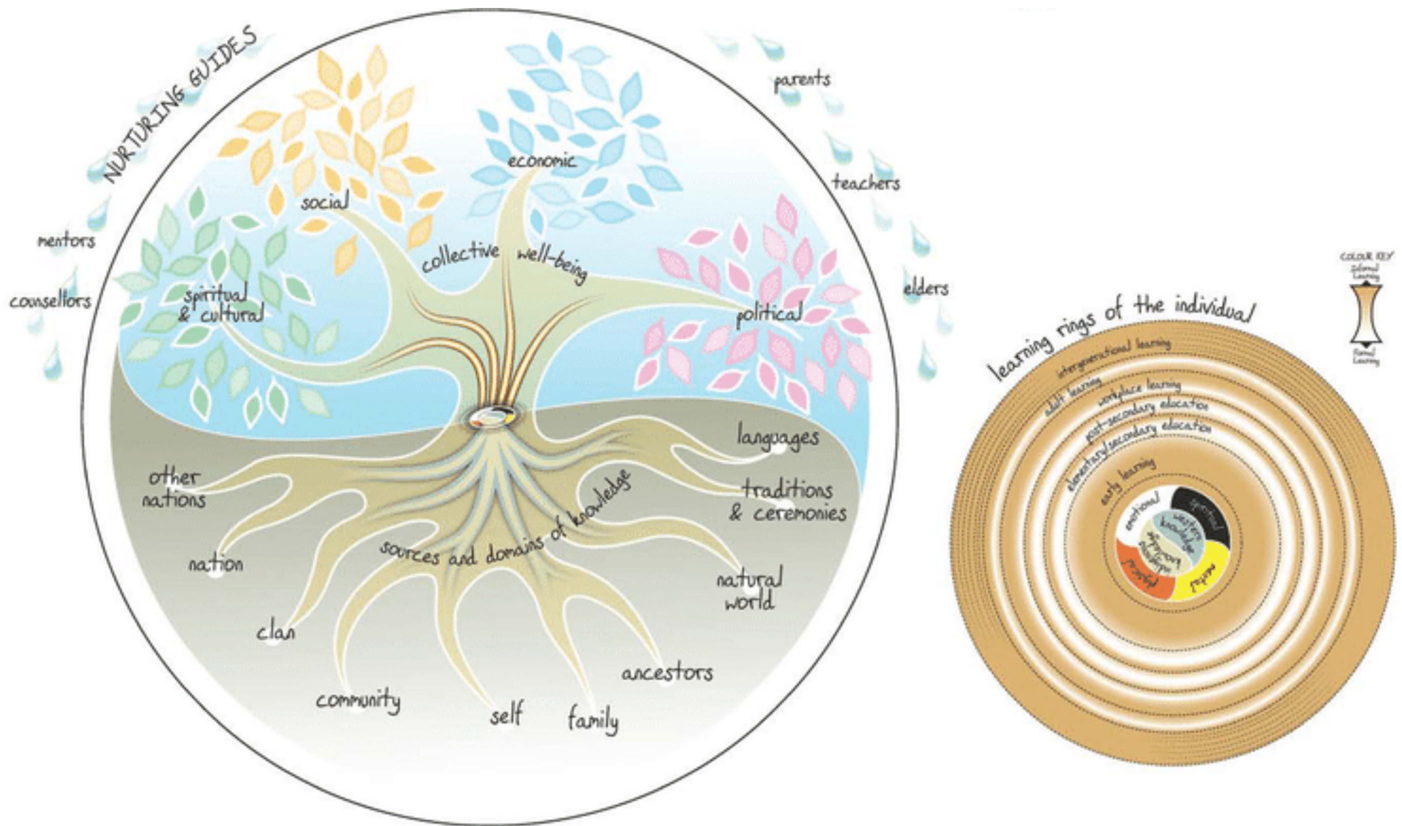

FIGURE 2. FIRST NATIONS HOLISTIC LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL (CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING, 2009)

The following statements were taken primarily from the *Guide d'observation des comportements des professionnel-le-s de la petite enfance envers les filles et les garçons* (Ducret and Le Roy, 2012), from the *Étude qualitative portant sur les rapports égalitaires (garçons et filles) en service de garde* by Anastasia Amboulé Abath (2009) and from Secrétariat à la condition féminine's Portail sans stéréotypes (2018). Unfortunately, no studies conducted on this topic in an aboriginal or mi'gmaq setting has been found. Only the elements that seemed equally relevant in a mi'gmaq context have been selected.

General observations

Interactions with adults and peers

1. In terms of motor skills, a little boy who is "not very adept" physically generally receives more negative remarks than a little girl whose motor skills have developed to the same degree. A girl deemed "agitated" is scolded more often than a similarly agitated little boy.
2. Adults use girls' first names less often than boys' when speaking to children.
3. Speakers use a "one-size fits all" type of language as if the entire world were masculine (traditionally, "he", "him" and "his" were used to refer to both genders).
4. References are essentially feminine when it comes to the role of parents in the domestic and nurturing spheres.
5. A group of boys is addressed differently from a group of girls (for instance, "hey, big guys" versus "hey, girls").
6. Adults don't allow boys to express their emotions as fully as they do girls.
7. Stereotypes about boys – contending that they are more rational or Cartesian and consequently, more talented than girls in science – and about girls – claiming that they are more emotional, more creative, and therefore superior to boys in art or literature – are highly

persistent. These preconceived ideas about the skills of girls and boys can have important implications for their academic confidence and motivation.
8. Children play less often with objects typically used by the opposite gender in the presence of a peer, especially when that peer is of the opposite gender.
9. The more time girls and boys spend with children of the same gender, the more their behaviour becomes gender-differentiated.

Toys, activities and material

1. The toys and clothing parents choose for a child depends more on their baby's gender than on the child's spontaneous behaviour.
2. By the time they are 20 months old, children have favourite toys typical of their own gender.
3. By 2 to 3 years of age, children already have substantial knowledge about stereotypical gender-specific activities, occupations, behaviours and appearances.
4. When it comes to material (puppet names, group facilitation tools, characters), the references are primarily masculine.
5. Children, especially boys, who engage in activities typical of the opposite gender earn negative feedback from their peers. Activities that receive disapproval are terminated more quickly than those that are positively reinforced.

Observations about girls

Interactions with adults and peers

1. Adults sing songs and talk more often to baby girls.
2. Emotional states and feelings are discussed more often with girls, increasing their sensitivity to others and fostering the emergence of a more cooperative interaction style in girls' groups.
3. Girls are more often asked to help boys than vice versa.
4. They receive more attention from professionals when they are close to the adult (3- to 5-year-olds).
5. Professionals interrupt them more often than boys.
6. They are asked to be quiet when they are too "talkative".
7. Girls are asked more often to put away the games and toys.
8. When there is a conflict between children, adults more frequently ask the girls to be conciliatory.
9. Girls are encouraged for their good behaviour.
10. Girls are primarily complimented for their attractive appearance.
11. They are less often congratulated when they do something well.
12. Adults adopt a much broader range of expressions with girls than with boys.
13. Parents take care of girls, coddle and mother them, which encourages them to rely more on adults than on themselves.
14. When boys interrupt their play, girls react by making proposals for continuing their activity, negotiating, calling for an adult or running away.
15. Girls are often the losers when an adult is not there to handle the conflict.
16. Girls give way more easily, letting the boys take over their space or whatever they were playing with.

Toys, activities and material

1. Toys associated with girls are connected to the fields of care giving, appearance, childcare and sales.
2. At the age of 3, the presence of dolls in the activities of girls systematically leads them to reproduce mothering scenes and to develop role playing.
3. There are more disguises for girls than for boys.

4. The colour pink is particularly for girls.
5. Little girls are more often invited to take part in "quiet" activities sitting at a table.
6. Girls are supposed to be obedient, docile and orderly, and have fewer choices in terms of their activities.
7. Girls mainly engage in activities that are more related to playing pretend and role playing.
8. Girls tidy up or offer to tidy up toys even if they haven't played with them.
9. In children's literature…
    - Women appear in secondary roles slightly more often;
    - Women and girls are more often shown inside;
    - Women are more often depicted in the mother's role;
    - Fewer women hold occupational roles, and there's not much variety in the occupations they do have, traditional ones at that (education, care giving, sales);
    - Women generally have access to only one role, a family role or an occupational role;
    - In the private sphere, the mother is most often depicted doing domestic tasks and activities relating to parenting duties (making sure homework is done, giving a bath);
    - Girls participate in domestic tasks more often;
    - The clothing worn by girls and women is connected to their domestic tasks (apron); and
    - Women and girls wear clothing and other items that are exclusively for women (jewellery, hair accessories).

Observations about boys

Interactions with adults and peers

1. Adults have more physical interactions with baby boys.
2. Fathers prohibit their sons from doing things twice as often as they do their daughters because boys are more likely to handle forbidden objects.
3. Boys are punished more often and demonstrate less self-control.
4. Boys are called on more frequently than girls.
5. Boys generally receive more attention.
6. Boys obtain more instructions in response to their questions, which encourages them to become involved in activities (3- to 5-year-olds).
7. They speak out and continue to do so longer than girls and occupy more physical and sound space.
8. Their unruliness is tolerated more and discouraged less.
9. They are encouraged for their good performance.
10. They are congratulated and assisted more often.
11. Boys receive more encouragement to succeed at a task.
12. They receive fewer compliments and, when they do, they are complimented for their physical strength.
13. Anger is a more tolerated emotion in boys. In childhood, they primarily learn to express their anger, which could later hinder their ability to communicate.
14. Questions asked of boys tend to concern objective information about objects and people (24 to 30 months of age).

Toys, activities and material

1. Educators use boys more than girls to test stereotypical toys for boys although no significant difference is observed for neutral and girls' toys.
2. There is a broader range of toys for boys.
3. Toys associated with boys include things used in the construction, transportation, technical and scientific fields, to maintain order or wage war and for occupations associated with high social status, such as a physician.

4. Construction and interlocking games as well as the technical range LEGOs are part and parcel of boys' activities. These games, more focused on the success of the activity, give boys the opportunity to handle objects and explore space.
5. At 3 years of age, only boys distinguish between dolls as objects and dolls as toys that represent babies requiring someone to take care of them. They are not as affected as girls by the symbolism of things.
6. Little boys are more often invited to participate in motor activities.
7. Boys engage more readily in activities involving sand or climbing.
8. Boys sometimes interrupt girls' games by taking over, by destroying their set up or by forcing them to change their scenario.
9. Boys have difficulty putting things away; they prefer to go on playing.
10. In children's literature…
    - Stories about male heroes are twice as numerous as stories about female heroes;
    - Boys are more often illustrated on the cover pages of books;
    - Boys' first names predominate in story titles;
    - Boys appear more often than girls in album illustrations;
    - Boys and men appear more often in central roles than in secondary roles;
    - Boys and men are depicted more often in public places and actively occupied;
    - Men are depicted in a greater variety of occupational roles and in some cases are given greater value;
    - Men are often depicted as holding two roles: a family role and an occupational role;
    - Fathers appear more often in recreational activities involving their children (games, sports, reading) or in quiet moments (reading a newspaper, watching TV).
    - Boys play more sports activities;
    - Boys argue more and do more foolish things than girls;
    - Anger and unruliness are associated more often with boys than with girls;
    - Little boys are frequently depicted in an asexual manner; and
    - Men are more often depicted in professional accoutrements (wearing glasses).

General recommendations

Interactions with children

1. Encourage children to be open-minded about other children's choices. Show them that the gender of individuals doesn't limit them in their choice of toys or activities;
2. Avoid raising doubts in the minds of children when they don't conform to stereotypes (for example, a boy having fun walking a stroller, a girl wearing a fireman's helmet) and correct children who comment on these behaviours or make fun of them;
3. Support and encourage the educational, professional and social aspirations of children, both in the way they perceive those aspirations and in real life. Help them to become convinced that anything is allowed and possible;
4. Openly criticize stereotyped images in the public space and help children develop critical thinking;
5. Teach children to respect others and that mockery should not be tolerated. Teach them how to respond to the mockery and discuss the consequences of bullying;
6. Compliment children about what they are and not about their appearance (for instance, instead of greeting a little girl by telling her that she has a beautiful dress, tell her that her smile is a ray of sunshine sure to put everyone in a good mood);
7. Avoid making children compete (boys against girls) and reinforcing differences;
8. Avoid using words that put people into boxes ("boys", "*lpa'tu'ji'jg*", "girls", "*e'pite'ji'jg*");
9. Encourage cooperative and collaborative behaviours;
10. Pay attention to the number of times you call on girls and boys for answers or assistance and the time you give them, without disadvantaging one or the other;
11. Pay special attention to the gender stereotypes you or the children convey, take advantage of the opportunities they present to deconstruct such stereotypes and start a discussion with the children;
12. Encourage and praise children for all their endeavours and not just for those we might feel they are predisposed to take part in;
13. When speaking, avoid using masculine terms only. Use the feminine form as well as the masculine form (for instance, say "fireman" and "fire-woman") or, even better, use a gender-neutral term (for instance, "firefighter");
14. Be careful not to convey stereotypes about parental or professional roles when speaking by using examples that cross stereotypical gender boundaries (for instance, talk about a dad who cooks or an on-duty policewoman);
15. Give boys the same opportunity as girls to express all their emotions; and
16. When a boy and a girl fight over a coveted object, be careful not to ask the girl to conciliate first.

Suggested activities and models

1. Diversify the activities in which you ask the children to participate and use nature-inspired activities;
2. Show children different worker role models (for instance, female truck driver, male nurse). Encourage them to see themselves doing a job that takes their own interests into account, without gender stereotyping;
3. Suggest role-playing games to boys to improve their language and socio-emotional skills;
4. Give girls building games so they can build their fine motor skills and relation to space;
5. Encourage girls and boys to improve their strength and physical abilities by taking part in activities such as soccer, dance or martial arts so they learn to control their bodies and develop a sense of body competence;
6. Diversify the division of work in the home or at the educational childcare centre so that children are given non-stereotyped responsibilities;

7. Correct the impression that some activities are for women and others for men;
8. Offer children a variety of tasks and responsibilities and encourage them to switch them from time to time;
9. Invite boys to do tasks that are stereotypically associated with the opposite sex, such as washing dishes, sweeping, tidying and caring for a young child;
10. Invite girls to do tasks that are stereotypically associated with the opposite sex, such as finding a solution for fixing a chair or helping with the yard work;
11. Invite children to enjoy a diversity of experiences. Show them that girls and boys can participate in all tasks. Some believe that non-intervention encourages children to choose freely but on the contrary, it tends to reinforce gender-stereotypical play choices in children;
12. Encourage mixed activities and support children who make choices that are perceived as different;
13. Present or discuss role models of people working in non-traditional areas for their gender; and
14. Ask boys and girls to do their fair share when it comes to putting away their toys so that girls do not feel this is essentially a girl's job;

Early literacy

1. Give preference to reading and activities that feature original representations and a range of characters as well as qualities and behaviours that are different from traditional models; and
2. Keep some books containing gender stereotypes to inspire discussion with the children (4-5 years old) and help them build their critical thinking.

Environment and toys/material

1. Encourage children to choose activities or toys not typically associated with their gender;
2. Encourage children to choose toys they tend to ignore;
3. Be aware that offering an education free of stereotypes does not mean removing all toys considered stereotyped (for instance, a doll, a kitchenette, a fire truck, etc.). On the contrary, encourage children to make their own choices regardless of gender stereotypes;
4. Give children a mixture of books and toys;
5. Find alternatives to commercial materials (for instance, use things you collect outdoors);
6. Organize the play environment in a non-gendered way to encourage diversity in play and the discovery of activities that children would unconsciously tend to ignore;
7. Choose children's games and toys with care, especially in terms of colour; since symbolic games are often pink, boys will hesitate to engage in this type of activity; and
8. Display on the walls images that show boys and girls in non-traditional or non-gender roles.

With your work team

1. Ask your colleagues to let you know when you say or do things that reinforce the children's attachment to gender stereotypes and welcome this criticism with humility and gratitude;
2. Ask one of your colleagues to watch you or film you during a session when you interact with the children;
3. Rethink how the space is organized to create a neutral, non-gendered environment; and
4. Choose neutral themes for your activities and design activities that allow children to develop a range of skills.

Actions with extended family members

1. When you need to ask the parents, grandparents or extended family members something about their child's care, speak with both men (father, grandfather, uncle, etc.) and women (mother, grandmother, aunt, etc.);

2. Inform family members responsible for the child of your goal to provide gender-neutral, stereotype-free education and what this entails;
3. Feel free to ask parents and grandparents to dress children, especially girls, in comfortable clothes that will allow them to move and develop their motor skills without fear of dirtying or tearing their clothing; and
4. Explain to parents and other extended family members that children, especially boys, are free to express their emotions in your environment and that this is necessary for their overall development, especially in terms of emotional maturity.

Self-reflection

1. Ask yourself about your own reactions to certain gender stereotypes (for instance, why do you tell little girls they're pretty and little boys that they're full of beans?);
2. Don't feel guilty: Deconstructing gender stereotypes requires humility and we also have to "unlearn" what we've been taught our whole lives to think of as the established order of things.

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