




Welcome To Gender Issues in the ECE Classroom



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Nature versus Nurture Debate


Gender is inborn & then it becomes socialized by cultures (30%-70%)

Boys In School

- ECE &K-6 teachers are 90% women
- Most teachers have not received training in male brain development
- Most schools use educational strategies poorly suited to male brains
- Much of the attention boys get in school is punitive, not rewarding

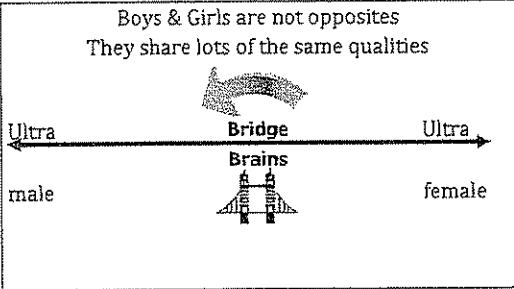
Pre-Natal Gender Differences



- XX chromosomes-female
- XY chromosomes-male
- Hormones bombard brain at 2-5 months
- Changes brain & body

The Male-Female Continuum

Boys & Girls are not opposites
They share lots of the same qualities



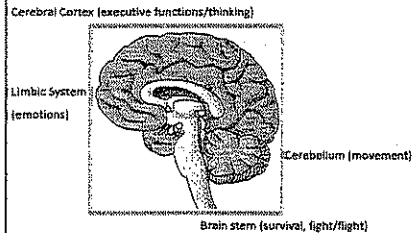
Brain Specialization For Survival

- Male Brain: physicality & spatial
 - Mastery of hunting
 - Mastery of tracking
 - Trading
 - Achieving & maintaining power
 - Tolerating solitude
 - Quick bursts of energy
 - Less verbal input & output
- Female Brain: connect & communicate
 - ⊙ Nurturing, comfort, love
 - ⊙ Providers of basic needs
 - ⊙ Emotionally acute
 - ⊙ High language skills
 - ⊙ High sensory skills
 - ⊙ Fine-motor skills
 - ⊙ Seeking help

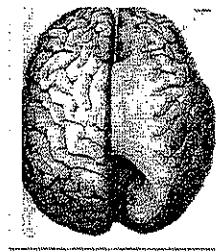
• Neither is superior or inferior, but specialized

Brain Basics & Structure

4 Main Parts—2 Hemispheres



Female Brains



- A girl's *corpus callosum* is 20%-25% larger than a boy's
- This enables more "cross-talk" between hemispheres

Multi-Tasking vs. Focus

Females use more parts of their brains for tasks

Males select a side of the brain to respond, depending on the task at hand (compartmentalize & volley)

Can Take up to 3 Minutes to Volley

- Carrying, throwing, challenge, games help with transitions
- Boys do better focusing on one task
- They concentrate best, in general, when they follow steps A to Z without distraction
- They tend to become more irritable (and to underperform in learning and classroom behavior) when teachers move them continually between tasks

Use Your Presence

- As an example, don't shout across the room for a boy to behave & then go on to something else
- Walk over, establish your presence, interact
- Remember boys may not hear you if focused on something else

Verbal/Spatial Differences

- Boys' brains generally have more cortical areas dedicated to spatial-mechanical functioning
- Girls' brains generally have greater cortical emphasis on verbal-emotive processing
- Girls use more words on average than boys do, & they tend to think more verbally

P Cells & M Cells

- The male visual system relies more heavily on type M ganglion cells, which detect movement
- Girls generally have more type P ganglion cells, which are sensitive to color variety & other fine sensory activity
- As a result, boys tend to rely more on pictures & moving objects
- Girls tend to excel in using words that reference color & other fine sensory information
- Girls generally have heightened senses

Learning Strategies that Consider Boys' Visual Abilities

- Create experiences with less talk (especially by teachers) & more visuals



The Eye's Have It

Since boys' brains & eyes are 'programmed' to be more attentive to moving objects
Use movement to get & keep boy's attention

Visual Memory

- The hippocampus is stronger in boys
- This favors visual strategies to create memories
- Boys remember better with information in the form of diagrams, pictures, lists, & charts

Use Visuals

- Classroom directional cues can also be portable by placing visuals on a cue card ring
- Make sure you have the child's attention before directing/cueing
- Give the child an opportunity to respond
- Give only one directional cue at a time

Less is More

- Give 60 seconds to process verbal instructions
- Use less words
- Use nouns to help him process & understand
 - "Jacket, Now"
- Use gestures instead of words
- High 5 or pat on the back

Physical Bodies & Brains

- More active cerebellum
 - Learn less when sitting still or sedentary
- More dopamine & testosterone in their bloodstream
 - Require more excitement & activity to engage

Create experiences & environments that promote & allow boys to learn physically

- When trying to encourage boys to learn, consider showing them rather than telling them
- Use non-verbal cueing
- Don't always require them to sit still to learn, Boys can learn standing up & moving
- Don't discipline every infraction of excess activity

Maria's Story

Lots of strategies

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General

- Use fidget toys that involve squeezing and stretching, (e.g. soft foam ball, bendable wire toys, etc.)
- Provide an air cushion to sit on to reduce fidgeting & allow for some extra movement



Country Lane vs. Superhighway

- Females utilize more neural pathways & brain centers to register & make sense of their emotional experience
- More active Limbic System

Girls Verbalize their Emotions

- Females have a larger area in the brain dedicated to speech
- Unable to talk about feelings boys become flooded emotionally

This Happens Because....

- Amygdalae Larger in males
- Amygdala are two almond-shaped structures in the Limbic System: involved in processing strong emotions



This Results in....

- The brain processing strong emotions down to the more primitive brain
- Resulting in fight/flight behaviour
- Fear or sadness often expressed as what looks like anger



Cave Time, Calm Down Time

- Wait for brain to come out of fight or flight before trying to work out the problem
- The cortisol that is flooding his system can be diluted within 5 minutes...simply by drinking water



Stereotype Debunked

- Boys are capable of a full range of emotions
- Boys' feelings are often experienced more strongly than girls'
- The result of strong emotions in boys is less integration between limbic system & neocortex (where verbal abilities reside)

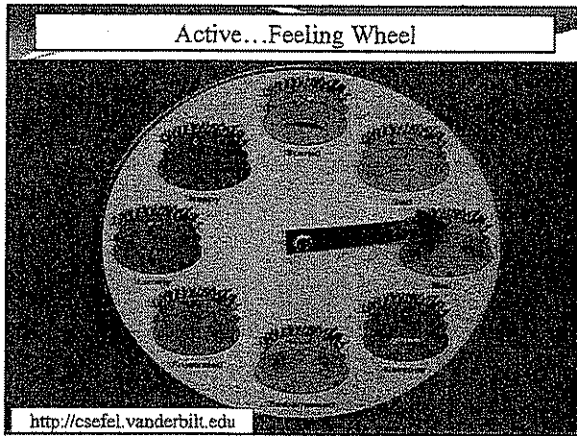
Teach Emotional Literacy

How do you feel today?

This is how I feel today

Key Concepts with Feelings

- Feelings change
- You can feel differently than someone else about the same thing
- All feelings are valid - it is what you do with them that counts



"Action Talk" To Process Feelings

More productive to allow them to fiddle while talking through an emotional issue

Talking & walking, or shoulder to shoulder

Use Teachable Moments

- 1. Be aware of emotions** When a boy is feeling a strong emotion, see it as an opportunity for teaching
- 2. Mirror boy's feeling back to him** Use the words like: I see, I notice, I hear, you feel, you want, it sounds like, etc. *without any intention of getting rid of the feeling*
- 3. Validate boy's feeling** Use words like I understand, it makes sense
- 4. Help boys express the emotion** Give them the words to use

Sample Reflection

- Reflection of feeling: "Joey and Mike seem really happy to be playing together!"

Use of Children's Literature

- Well-presented stories about emotions validate children's feelings and give information about emotions in non-threatening ways

Book Nook

- These easy-to-use guides were created especially for teachers/caregivers to provide hands-on ways to embed social emotional skill building activities into everyday routines
- [Scripted Stories for Social Situations](#)
- [Tools for Working on "Building Relationships"](#)
- [Book List](#)
- [Book Nook](#)
- [Teaching Social Emotional Skills](#)

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

Bio-Chemical Differences

- Boys have more testosterone, less serotonin
 - More territoriality & aggression, competitiveness, self-assertion
 - More impulsive & fidgety
 - Less able to relax
- Boys have much less oxytocin
 - Tend to befriend, peacemaking reduced
 - Don't expect apologies
- More Dopamine
 - Impulse control low

Aggression-Nurturance in Males is Normal

- Prodding & pushing each other
- Rough & tumble activities
- Bumping into each other
- Wrestling
- Competitive games
- Aggressive gestures

Wrestling With Rules

- <http://aplaceofourown.org/>



It's About Heroes with Super Powers

Dramatic Play that centers on children's fantasies of: danger, bravery, good & evil

As ECE teachers we need understand boys want to be heroic, to save others, to provide & to protect

Fantasy Play is not Aggression

- Searching for their own power to help others by identifying with those who help
- Searching for their own talents & abilities by projecting them onto those who have developed those things
- Gaining courage by watching those who are tested & challenged

Understand The Superhero Story Line & Adapt It

- Powerful characters that children can identify with
- One or more have to be good & possess superhero powers or props
- Must be a problem or fear to overcome that require bravery, physical skill, magic
- Usually involved defeating a villain
- Recognition of hero at the end

Adapt The Story Line

To play that is more fantasy based:

- Hidden treasures
- Elves and fairies
- Dragons
- Every day heroes
- Powerful weather projects
 - Hot lava
 - Tornados



Providing Props That Inspire Hero Play

Superhero play needs new props:

- Power symbols such as:
 - Magic wands
 - Potions
 - Capes
 - Imaginary weapons
 - Jet packs
 - Treasure maps
 - Masks
 - Wings

More Ideas

- **Make their own**
 - Power bracelets
 - Scarves
 - Capes or headband
 - Wands
 - Badges
- **Magic buttons**
 - Rocks, jewels, old keys, twigs painted gold

Time for Some Changes

- Classrooms are generally a better fit for the verbal- emotive, sit-still, listen-carefully, multitasking girl
- Teachers tended to view the natural assets that boys bring to learning—impulsivity, single-task focus, spatial-kinesthetic learning, and aggression nurturance—as problems

Handout for Planning

Dear

I now realize that you behave the way you do because:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

I will do the following things to adjust to your strengths as a boy:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Website With Resources

- <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

Guidelines for Rough & Tumble Play in Pre-School Settings

Rough and tumble play allows kids to take some risks, as far as physical activity. Adults are sometimes uncomfortable with rough and tumble play because, to them, it symbolizes aggression, whereas to children, it symbolizes competence. Adults have forgotten how to play and instead construe the rough play as aggression and conflict.

Rough and tumble play is different from aggression. Kids aren't always smiling during rough and tumble play – sometimes they're working hard to demonstrate their ability to be competent – but generally, it's in the spirit of play. Aggression has a spirit of dominating and intimidation.

Boys find it especially appealing because rough and tumble play addresses their need for power and motor skills competence. They're imitating what society gives them as male role models. Often, they're imitating how adults play with them at home. For boys, it gives them an opportunity to touch each other. Society doesn't give men and boys the opportunity to touch each other. Rough and tumble play enables men to have contact with each other in a way that society agrees with.

A child care provider should manage rough and tumble play so it doesn't turn into aggression. You should constantly supervise the play and have children help come up with the rules. Make it part of the structured day. Rough and tumble play doesn't have to always involve touching other children or being combative. It can be a noisy center with cans to kick, or plastic bottles to throw against. It can be an obstacle course or even a punching pillow. It could be lifting medicine balls or running with 5 pounds of flour.

A child care provider should make sure the play doesn't turn negative by checking in with them regularly. Ask the kids, "Are you playing or are you fighting? Do you both agree with this play?" Give both of the kids the opportunity to opt out of the activity. Children are exposed to too much media violence which could negatively influence their rough play. Our society is moving toward where everything needs to be more and more extreme. It's something society has to reflect upon as far as the images that are presented to children. Kids can wind up getting frustrated, however, if you don't let them have an outlet for their energy. Rough and tumble play can help provide that release.

Read ideas in "Maria's Story"

Watch video on <http://aplacEOFfourOwn.org/> Superhero Play

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Superhero Play

Guide boys to be a hero within acceptable boundaries! Too much acting out of violent behavior seen by heroes on TV or in movies can hurt youngsters' emotional and social development. Yet, playing a hero need not be harmful in itself.

By guiding children's play, caregivers:

- teach children about limits
- encourage socially useful concepts about being a hero
- let youngsters burn off energy in healthy ways!

Talk about real heroes

Discuss that real heroes are strong, brave, thoughtful, and helpful. When your newspaper features a story about a brave person or animal, cut it out, put it up and read it to children. Tell why you think that person or animal is a hero. Also, have discussions about real people, past and present, who have worked to change unfairness and bias.

Encourage boys to act out the part of the hero in the story

If a firefighter saved someone from a burning building, the child could pretend to do that. If a dog pulled a child out of a lake, a child could get down on all fours, pretend to be the dog and pull a stuffed animal out of an imaginary "lake." By role playing different types of heroism, a child is learning important alternatives to the Superhero concept on children's television shows.

Have fun with dress-up

A special cape, a unique hat, or big shoes can signal that a child is now a hero. When a child puts on these clothes, you can play along and find out what caring, kind things the hero is going to do today!

Affirm strength and physical abilities.

Superheroes are strong so they like to work out! Let children move to an aerobic video, learn to jump rope, dance, and do some sort of activity pretending to be a hero, preparing to go out and help people. (Maria's story)

Let children feel their physical energy.

Superheroes are powerful. You can fill small balloons with water. Let children throw them at an outside wall or on the pavement until they explode.

Affirm a child's own power

When he or she makes a decision, accomplishes a task, or learns a new skill, applaud the courage, tenacity, and personal fortitude shown.

Online resources for war and super hero play

www.truceteachers.org

www.lionlamb.org

www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice

www.cyh.com/healthtopics

Www.vivi.com/~artmama/play.htm

Maria's Story

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Ten of the fourteen children in Maria's class of three-, four-, and five-year olds were boys. Five of these boys were making the classroom difficult for the teacher to manage. Sometimes they worked individually. Other times they worked collectively. The boys would dump containers of small Legos, unifix cubes, or small blocks when the teacher was not looking. Other times they would wrestle with each other during story time or during other group activities—sometimes escalating into serious conflicts. When asked about their behavior, they would say "For fun" and then they would giggle. Even though the adults did not think that it was funny, the boys seemed to enjoy their "mischief." There was no question: the overall pattern of "mischief" was becoming persistent and disrupting the flow of the classroom. Maria found herself worrying about the effects of frequent conflicts on the boys themselves, the rest of the class, her assistant and herself.

Maria needed help in figuring out what to do. For this teacher, the solution was not simple because her classroom was well organized with well-defined areas and well-planned activities based on her knowledge of children's developmental levels and interest. This was the first time in her five years of teaching that she had a class that she could not manage. After attending a workshop at a conference titled "Helping Boys In ECE," Maria began to recognize something she only half understood before: that the problem was not the boys themselves, it was the way she was teaching them. Maria realized that she saw the boys in her class as less mature and more "rowdy" versions of the mature children in her class, mainly girls who easily followed directions.

Maria decided that she needed to change her classroom. An overriding thought was whether or not the problems in her class were related to gender differences. In other words, she wondered if she were more responsive to the needs only of the girls; therefore, creating an environment that was less boy-friendly. She decided that she would address her concerns by asking two questions to guide her process of change:

1. How could she create a classroom that was more responsive to the needs of all the children, and especially the boys who were not integrated into the culture of the classroom?
2. How could she more appropriately handle the problem behavior of all children, and specifically individual boys, who were experiencing the greatest difficulty in her classroom? (covered in ppt)

Here is how she tackled question #1 making the Environment Encouraging

Through her observations, the workshop she attended, Maria realized that the boys were off-task because they were unable to find interest in many of the classroom activities. A first step Maria took was to modify the learning environment by considering the needs of specific boys in her classroom. Many boys are not only in need of more physical activity, but they may also be developmentally younger than girls by six to 18 months. The modifications Maria made to the classroom supported the activity levels of boys and their development. The modifications offered more opportunities for:

- indoor and outdoor large motor and whole body experiences;
- sensory exploration and experimentation experiences;
- building and constructing experiences;
- novel dramatic play experiences, games of strategy; and a variety of literacy materials.

Maria focused on these areas of activity because they reflected the interests of boys. These activities also took place in areas of the classroom where Maria tended not to plan. Only through observation did Maria begin to see the importance of giving focused attention to these areas.

Indoor and Outdoor Large Motor and Whole Body Experiences

Physical activity is very important to all children, especially young boys. Most children enjoy using their bodies, running, jumping and physically moving their bodies. Maria's observations guided her to think about ways to enhance opportunities for large muscle and whole body experiences in the indoor and outdoor classroom environment. Some of the strategies that Maria implemented were to:

- *Use the outdoor space as a teaching and learning tool.* Maria planned at least one activity in the morning outside. The outdoor activity was as simple as taking a nature walk or as complex as creating a water system using pipes and joints. She was careful to have the outdoor activities happen in small groups, each with an adult. Sometimes the small groups went outside separately, other times altogether.

- *Plan activities during outdoor play.* Most of the time outdoor play was free time with children running, jumping, playing with balls, riding tricycles, and swinging. Maria decided that she would add one teacher-planned activity each day. Sometimes the activity was an obstacle course or a chasing bubbles or a climbing game. Maria began seeing outdoor play as an extension of her classroom.

(Other ideas for outdoor play, especially boys who are doing superhero strength testing)

Activity: Karate Choppers

Substitutes: Foam pieces, cardboard, rolled up newspapers are good substitutes for necks and other body parts

Activity: High jumpers

Substitutes: Safe places to jump with rules designed by the children. Try jumping backwards, turning in midair, rolling when they hit the mat.

Activity: Target shooters

Substitutes: Protected area with large paper. Sponges or foam balls dipped in Tempera paint. Throw at targets as hard as they can. Older children may want to throw while running.

Activity: Wrestlers

Substitutes: Organized wrestling with chairs around the mat for spectators.

Activity: High kickers

Substitutes: Hang plastic bottles from tree branch or overhead beam. Learn to kick and fall onto mat.

Activity: High-wire artists

Substitutes: Obstacle courses with lots of opportunity for balance. Older children may try while wearing a stack of hats or carrying balanced blocks

Activity: Musclemen/women

Substitutes: Pull tires across the playground with ropes. Rolling pins to flatten play dough as flat as possible. Squeeze clamps and apply to wood.

• Create a large motor environment indoors. Maria decided to work with other staff and her director to transform a large storage area into an inside large muscle activity room. Large mats, balls and climbing equipment were placed in the room. Maria used the room for rough and tumble play, dancing and movement, and climbing activities.

• Create a large motor center in the classroom. Maria added a center in the classroom for large muscle activity. She included beanbags for throwing, carpet squares for jumping, boards for walking and music for dancing. She alternated this equipment with a "physical fitness center" that included a makeshift weight table with "weights." (plastic bottles filled with sand and attached to a sawed off broom handle), a mini-tramp that

the children could use with wrist weights (around their ankles), and a mini-exercise bike one of the parents devised.

- *Integrate whole body movements into activities.* Maria planned activities to include large body movements. In art, children would use feather dusters or actual paintbrushes to paint on large pieces of Plexiglas or cardboard and with water on the walls outside. Large hollow blocks or cardboard blocks were sometimes used in the block area. Daily music activities almost always involved movement.

Sensory Exploration and Experimentation

Boys enjoy engaging in exploratory and behavior such as digging in sandboxes and taking blocks apart. Like many early childhood classrooms, Maria's classroom had few opportunities for spontaneous and continuous scientific exploration. She made these changes to her program:

- *Sensory materials.* Sand and water as well as play dough, clay, "glurch," and Stayflo with white glue silly putty became an integral part of Maria's classroom. Combining and mixing substances as well as pouring and filling with solids and liquids were a daily occurrence.

- *Cooking.* Cooking is another way to create opportunities for experimentation and exploration. Maria decided that she would plan and implement a simple cooking activity weekly. Preparing fruit salads, vegetable salads, puddings, and pancakes are just a few of the recipes she implemented. In addition, she provided opportunities for children to assist in the making of silly putty, play dough, and goop.

Building and Construction

Maria knew that building and construction was a favorite activity of the boys. They spent a significant amount of time playing with blocks, Legos, and other construction materials. Maria did not do much planning for these activities. For example, she made blocks available every day but only got involved when she needed to remind the children how to use blocks appropriately. A woodworking area was virtually non-existent in her classroom. Maria's art activities were two-dimensional on paper and the boys did not usually actively participate. Maria decided that she needed to enhance the choices available to children by introducing three dimensional construction and carpentry activities. She used a variety of strategies to modify the environment to include activities of building and construction. She included pads and pencils so the children could make plans and notes on their building.

- *Block Building.* Maria enlarged the space in the classroom for block building. She decided that blocks would be integrated into the classroom. She worked with the children who were interested in building by encouraging free play of the blocks as well as thought out planning of what they intended to build. Sometimes children drew the plans. Other times the plans were verbal. Maria also documented children's play in the block

area with digital photographs and video. Maria included both unit blocks and large hollow blocks throughout the year, but regularly changed “accessory items” to fit themes and sustain interest.

•*Woodworking.* Maria introduced woodworking into the classroom. In addition to just having materials available for children to experiment and practice with (enjoyed by both boys and girls), Maria worked with the children to create developmentally appropriate woodworking projects. She invited parents and local carpenters into the classroom to help with the center. She found that several of the fathers and significant guys were interested in helping to provide materials for this activity area.

•*Art and Writing.* Maria added to the construction and building materials to the art area thus allowing more choices for whole hand manipulation of materials as well as fine motor manipulation. She added large writing and drawing utensils so the children could choose between wide and narrow. She provided blank sheets of paper stapled down the left side, and introduced them as Action Picture Books that the boys and girls could make.

•*Table top manipulatives were added.* Maria brought in large manipulatives such as Duplos in addition to Legos. She realized that even though boys liked to build, they did not seem to build easily with Legos. Many of the boys had difficulty putting the Legos together so she decided that Duplos would be better for creative work and Legos would be for developing fine motor skills.

There were other changes that Maria made to the environment that were less dramatic. She decided to change the housekeeping area from time to time introducing different play themes such as camping, gardening, fishing, and restaurant. Maria introduced active but educational computer activities and games of strategy requiring the boys (and girls) to work in cooperative groups.

She reduced time spent in full class, circle times, having the class do stories and focused activities in smaller groups instead. At group story times, informational books on themes of interest to boys were shared into addition to their favorite picture books. Maria introduced a writing center, and the older boys began making “books” of their “adventures” as spy kids and mugwumps.

Question #2 Managing Boys Behavior in More Positive Ways (see power point)

Changing Intervention Strategies

The goal of improving the match between young boys and the program is to reduce classroom conflicts, not to think of eliminating all conflicts. While reducing the kinds of conflicts introduced by the educational

program, the teacher works to make the conflicts children do experience into learning opportunities. She makes these teachable moments useful in guiding children in the use of democratic life skills.

It is important to keep in mind is that the quality of the interaction between the boy and the teacher is more important than the behavior in which the boy is involved. The interaction is very likely to determine how the child will respond in the situation, and feel about himself coming out of the situation.

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