

Education and Gender Socialisation

Sociology skills

- Reading and understanding sociology writing
- Learning something of the history of education

Key skills

- Communication

Stimulus materials

Read the following passages from a government report.

A boy is usually excited by the prospect of a science course. What is it that appeals to him? He experiences a sense of wonder and a sense of power. The growth of wheat, the birth of a lamb, the movement of clouds put him in awe of nature; the locomotive and telephone he sees as man's response; the switch and throttle are his magic wands. If he cannot produce a sunset he can change the colour in his test tube. He comes readily to his teacher hoping most to learn how to control events ...

A girl may know that when she pedals, her bicycle generator can light the lamps. She may not wish to take a generator to pieces, but by enquiry she can find out that the school or home lighting is probably produced by another generator, driven by a steam turbine... (A discussion follows about questions which relate to science and various lessons which may be learned) ... A train of thought has been followed; experience has been used as a basis for ideas; and as a by-product and, for a moment, something about the nature of scientific enquiry may be appreciated. Like so many by-products, in relation to the less able, this one will run to waste if it is not garnered.

(The Newsom Report 1963)

Understanding the stimulus

1. What was the name of the report?
2. When was the report written?
3. What does the report suggest about how boys feel about science?
4. What does the report suggest about the way girls feel about science?
5. Suggest one way in which gender socialisation of girls is shown in this passage.
6. Suggest one way in which gender socialisation of boys is shown in this passage.
7. Do you think that modern government reports could write about gender in this way?

Development and Revision

1. What is the difference between sex and gender?
2. Explain the phrase 'schools are an agency of socialisation'.
3. Boys tend to do better in science courses than girls do. Can you suggest a number of reasons why this is so?