

# Gender in CDT

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I began by offering an opinion as to why CDT is vital to girls. This included the benefits in terms of education for life in a rapidly changing society. This is the process aspect of CDT and relates to the transferable skill of researching, synthesising, etc. The second aspect I stressed was that of vocational relevance, particularly given the background climate where girls are often asked to demonstrate their capability in things scientific and technical. These skills are often assumed in boys . . . but most move away from CDT as soon as they have the choice at 3rd Year Option.

I then proposed that we should interrupt this cycle by taking positive action. This is not to be confused with positive discrimination; but is about adapting our teaching style and content according to weaknesses in pupils or lack of previous experience.

Some consideration was then given to the notion of creating a girl-friendly CDT environment. Suggestions were made as to possible ways in which girls in school may be presented with positive role models. Reference was made to GIST VISTA a scheme whereby women scientists and technologists visited schools to discuss their careers with girls, in addition to requesting women students from training establishments, using older girls already on CDT courses, and film and slide material as available.

Continuing the theme of role models, we discussed preparation of one's own source material, particularly in view of the copyright-free illustrations now available. This theme continued with some comment on individual textbooks.

We then turned to the notion of compensatory activities for girls. It was

agreed that girls have fewer opportunities to develop spatial visualisation and mechanical reason than boys, and we should respond to this deficiency in our teaching. One possibility is the girls-only technology club or activity. This idea may not rest well in the context of Directed Time!

It was suggested that girls should be positively encouraged by informing them of their success. Even when girls do well in CDT they often do not realise or refuse to accept this success. Various strategies are possible. Girls can be seen and praised by Head of Department, or Head of Year, letters may be sent to parents, and girls may be seen in groups for praise and encouragement.

On the matter of CDT formal curriculum, it was suggested that girls must enjoy the work and identify with it. Too much CDT has been for boys and men in the past and we may need a fresh start to interest girls significantly. I then outlined Martin Grant's starting points theory and proposed categories of CDT projects which may be helpful. If you wish to refer to the latter, you will find them in my 'Ways and Means' book.<sup>1</sup>

We moved on to discuss classroom interaction, including language, organisation and distribution of resources to pupils, the ways in which boys dominate practical areas, and the danger of patronising girls when attempting to assist.

In conclusion, it was agreed that we are dealing with a complex set of issues, and we had only touched some of them. However, if each teacher took one aspect which he or she wished to pursue, steady progress would bring about change. Following this introduction, group

members worked in pairs to consider specific initiatives which they would be willing and able to implement in their work situation with a minimum of difficulty. Feedback from this session involved the following points:

CDT departments must work with parents as well as pupils

Girls do not have a problem, boys and men have! — therefore work with boys and male colleagues  
Spend time when equipment is issued to ensure that girls do not go without

Ensure girls do their own work and that boys do not dominate equipment and machinery

Ensure the CDT working environment is attractive; bright displays and copious resource material will help

Experiment with single-sex teaching groups for the first term in the first year

Invite girls from years 4, 5 and 6 to junior classes to work alongside pupils

Obtain a copy of the Sistelle Directory of Women Visitors to schools

Involve girls' form tutors in discussion of CDT work where possible

Use the early weeks of secondary CDT for a range of mechanical and spatial experiences, e.g. Lego and other such quick-build equipment  
Log interactions with pupils for a limited period of time to test oneself.

## References

1. Cattan, John, 1985 'Ways and Means: The CDT Education of Girls', SCDS, York, Longmans.