MIND THE GAP

Step up for gender equality

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A guide to build a **gender-inclusive** educational environment

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1 THE MIND THE GAP PROJECT

Mind the Gap. Step up for gender equality is a project (2021/2022) co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, coordinated by AIDOS – Associazione Italiana Donne per lo Sviluppo (Italy) in partnership with APF - Associaçao para Planeamento Familiar (Portugal), END FGM European Network (based in Belgium, working at EU level) and Medicos del Mundo (Spain).

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to **tackling gender stereotypes in education** in Italy, Spain and Portugal, thus reducing the influence of gender expectations on young people's choices in education, work and life. The project's specific objective is to strengthen the capacity of professionals and other adults in contact with children to identify and address gender stereotypes in education.

The project partially builds on the previous EU funded **GENDER ABC project**, that was implemented by all the project partners from 2018 to 2020 and in the framework of which **21 educational modules on gender-based violence prevention in education**.

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▶**1. The Mind the Gap project**

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1. The Mind the Gap project◀

AIDOS, Italy → www.aidos.it

AIDOS works to build, promote and protect the rights, dignity, well-being, freedom of choice and empowerment of women and girls through programs in four specific areas: sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic empowerment, right to education and capacity building. The association has been implementing education and training projects for decades in Italy, Africa, Asia and Latin America with a participative, gender and culturally sensitive approach that enables to involve all relevant actors (students, families, teachers, institutions).

End FGM EU Network → www.endfgm.eu

The End FGM European Network (End FGM EU) is an umbrella network of 32 national organisations working in 15 European countries and which are expert on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). End FGM EU operates as a meeting ground for communities, civil society organisations, decision-makers and other relevant actors at European level to interact, cooperate and join forces to end all forms of FGM in Europe and beyond. We put at the heart of our work grassroots voices to influence European governments and policymakers to work towards the elimination of FGM. We build our members' capacity, offer spaces to share expertise and develop partnerships.

APF, Portugal → www.apf.pt

APF - Associação para o Planeamento da Família (Family Planning Association) promotes health, choices, gender equality and rights in Portugal since 1967. Its mission is to "help people make free and conscious choices in their sexual and reproductive life". APF is a volunteer organization composed of individual and collective members. APF is a Member of IPPF – International Planned Parenthood Federation, the largest international agency in the field of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

Médicos Del Mundo, Spain → www.medicosdelmundo.org

A national level NGO focusing on the role of health for all which is linked at national and regional level with other organisations and works in close contact with migrant communities in 14 out of 17 regions in Spain with FGM programmes in 6 of these. As a health organisation, MDM is well connected to national and regional health services in Spain and has a lot of experience with migrant communities through its intercultural mediators.

2 FOREWORD

In many EU member states stereotypical gender perceptions influence the education, profession, and lives of young people. Girls studying education, health and humanities subjects are double compared to boys[1] and very often choose teaching and caring professions, usually valued and paid less, thus increasing the EU pay gap (16%)[2]. Women's under-representation in full-time employment (16%) in all EU Countries is also due to the disproportion between women and men in housework and caring responsibilities[3]. Gender stereotypes don't only cause disparities in access to work or education, but also fuel gender-based violence in all its forms, and intersect with other discrimination and violence based on social categories such as religion, race[4], socio-economic background, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, preventing young people from living in an inclusive and safe society.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggest that educational contexts are ideal spaces to break down gender stereotypes at an early stage. Non-gender equitable textbooks and teachers' attitudes have an impact on students' career choices and employment opportunities[5]. However, in many EU countries government commitments, guidelines and recommendations to promote gender equality in education have yet to be fully applied and school personnel lacks training. Teachers and other educators don't have the tools to effectively deconstruct gender stereotypes and counteract harmful gender expectations that are continuously – and sometimes unconsciously – perpetrated by families, peers, educational systems, the media, religions and society in general.

This handbook is addressed to **teachers** of primary and secondary schools, **educators** of non-formal systems and university students of Pedagogical, Educational and Instructional Science. It aims at providing them with a set of useful tools to be used when working with young people in order to promote gender equality, prevent gender-based violence, enhance the capacity of students to explore their full potential, and build an inclusive and equitable educational environment for all. It is not meant as an exhaustive manual to be read once and then left on the shelf, but rather as an agile tool to be kept in one's pocket and consulted whenever necessary. **A guide for change.**

LIVING IN EQUALITY

This handbook is accompanied by the deck of cards "Living in Equality", that is meant to enable educators and adults in general to nurture tangible equality between childen be it in the distribution of everyday household chores, or in the way free time is used.

Children absorb the attitudes and behaviours they see (or don't see) in their family, as well as in teachers and other people they meet. In so doing, they incorporate attitudes and behaviours that can mould their own personality. Often, the examples they see show a fair, egalitarian society where we treat each other with respect and share household chores, jobs and ways of enjoying our free time – a society where people all receive the same opportunities, regardless of sex or any other difference. But sometimes this is not the image they receive.

The card game presented aims to help create a society where everyone share the many actions needed for individuals to grow up to become fulfilled members of today's society. Aimed at children aged three and upwards, the illustrations make it fun and easy for children to identify the actions portrayed on the cards. Instructions to play games with the cards are provided in the box.

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▶ **3. What are gender stereotypes and what is their impact?**

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3 WHAT ARE GENDER STEREOTYPES AND WHAT IS THEIR IMPACT?

Since our first days as children, and even before we are born, we are surrounded and affected by gender stereotypes. But what are gender stereotypes? **Gender stereotypes are generalisations on what is expected from men and women in a specific social context.** For instance, girls are usually expected to like dolls, while boys are expected to play with construction games. Boys are expected to be loud, agitated and tough, while girls are pictured as quiet, calm and sensitive. Gender stereotypes are not only oversimplified ideas about tastes, attitudes and behaviors, but also about skills and ambitions and therefore they define our social roles. So, when entering the school system, it is often assumed that girls will do better in – and prefer – humanistic subjects, while boys will have an aptitude for science and math. These ideas don't have any biological basis and are entirely the product of reiterated social expectations and their influence on individuals (see the Gendered Brain at page 20). Gender stereotypes depend on historical periods and cultural backgrounds and therefore may vary from time to time and place to place.

SEX AND GENDER

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality:

Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individuals who possess both, but these characteristics tend to differentiate humans as females or males.

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and to the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as to the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context- and time-specific, and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies, there

are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader sociocultural context. Other important criteria for sociocultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

*European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) - **Glossary & Thesaurus**
(available at **https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1361**)*

These early indications about what we are expected to like, be like and be good at are in fact **constantly reinforced by different spheres of society** (often all of them): family, peers, communities, the media, religious and political leaders. Moreover, they are usually paired with other expectations, such as other stereotypes dictated by our own societies, often linked with conscious and unconscious discriminations based on socio-economic background, religion, race, etc. Judgments based on these generalisations may initially appear to help save time and energy, but they eventually fail to capture the richness of individuals' traits and abilities and limit their rights.

The impact that gender stereotypes have on individuals is very important and can go as far as affecting their health and their lives. This impact can be exacerbated by other forms of discrimination, such as racism.

The gender gap is very evident in higher education. According to Eurostat, "male-dominated fields are 'Information and Communication Technologies' (where men account for 81% of the graduates) and 'Engineering, manufacturing and construction' (73%). On the other hand, four out of five graduates in 'Education' are women (80%). Another field where women are largely over-represented is 'Health and welfare', with 74% female graduates"[6]. **This gap is reflected later in the work market**, also because studying STEM subjects often allows to secure a well-paid job, while it is very common for salaries in social and educational sectors to be low. Everywhere women are paid less, more unemployed, less likely to have jobs with high pay, more frequently only employed part-time. Women also experience barriers in accessing and staying in the labour market.

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▶ **3. What are gender stereotypes and what is their impact?**

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Women throughout the EU earn an average of 86 cents for every euro a man earns

The impact of girls not being encouraged to acquire strong mathematical skills or to play with construction toys does not stop at education and work. People who don't acquire a good level of numeracy in primary school are less likely to be able to negotiate their salary, to be able to access their rights including the right to make informed choices with regards to health, political representation, and **citizenship** in general later on in their lives[7]. Young people who never play with games such as building blocks or tangram are less likely to gain **spatial awareness**, which is an ability typically developed at a young age that consists in being aware of where your body is in space in relation to objects or other people. The perception of space also influences our thinking and how we organize and connect our thoughts and experiences. Lower rates of computer usage also reinforce this lack of spatial abilities and in addition create a gendered **digital divide**[8]. At the same time, boys not being encouraged to play with dolls or other games that help develop storytelling techniques and explore emotions reduces their ability to verbally express how they feel, deal with anger and build relationships based on dialogue and exchange.

As we have seen, gender stereotypes don't just decide which sectors people might be interested in, but also their presumed attitudes and behaviors. These gender expectations also have a severe impact on the future lives of young people. A woman who, growing up, has been repeatedly told that as a girl she should be quiet and not argue might be affected by these ideas in her capacity to assess her rights, while a man who has always heard that "boys will be boys" will probably think that he is entitled to be aggressive, uncaring and even violent. Sexist language, including expressions such as "ladies' man" or "teaser", to which we are accustomed from an early age, brings with it the idea that a man who has many partners is cool, while for a woman this is associated with not being a good person. These stereotypes are the roots of common abuses such as slut-shaming and catcalling and other verbal, physical and sexual aggression. Furthermore, the idea of romantic love (built through cultural elements such as films, books, music and the media) – often not based on equal roles, trust and mutual respect and condoning stalking, control and psychological abuse – justifies and fuels **gender-based violence**. A lot of gender stereotypical expressions also convey the idea that women are irrational, and their behavior needs to be controlled by men, in the sexual, family, social or economic sphere. These stereotypes are linked with several forms of gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and denied access to education, the labor market, resources and property, that are reinforced and perpetuated by patriarchy and racism.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls.

Gender-based violence includes psychological pressure, physical or sexual abuse, socio-economic abuse, gender discrimination and exploitation and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services. That means violence is not necessarily physical.

In the EU, since the age of 15:

1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence
1 in 2 women has experienced sexual harassment
1 in 20 women has been raped
1 in 5 women has experienced stalking[9]

Stereotypical images of men sitting on the sofa reading the newspaper while women are busy cooking, doing household chores and helping children with their homework perpetuate the idea of **unequal gender roles within the couple and the family** and in turn will fuel work disparities in a never-ending cycle: women can't progress in their careers because the burden of domestic care is too heavy and women will keep on taking care of the house and the children because they work (or earn) less. These imbalances are so deeply rooted in our societies that they often continue to exist even when the woman is working the same hours and bringing home the same salary as the man.

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▶ **3.** **What are gender stereotypes and what is their impact?**

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3. **What are gender stereotypes and what is their impact?** ◀

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Before the COVID-19 outbreak, women in the EU spent an average of 13 hours more than men on unpaid care and housework every week[10]

Another important aspect of gender stereotypes concerns **gender identity and sexual orientation.** Stereotypical expectations often include expecting people all to be cisgender and heterosexual. Actually, people can be cisgender (their gender identity aligns with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth); or transgender (their gender does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth), or they can be non-binary (their gender is neither rigorously male nor female) and can be lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning their sexuality. For LGBTQI+ people, and especially for children, gender stereotyping can cause additional difficulty, distress, lack of self-worth, and other very severe consequences impacting on mental health and academic success.

On the other hand, deconstructing gender stereotypes, **bridging the gender gap and building a gender-equal society would bring countless benefits.** Not only would it allow each and every person to be free to follow their own personal inclinations, to achieve their full potential and prevent them from experiencing mental distress caused by social pressure, but it would also drastically reduce the figures related to all forms of gender-based violence, which has a huge social cost[11]. In other words, it would bring benefits for individuals and for society as a whole.

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GENDER EQUALITY

It implies that human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

All member states have signed the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the **Istanbul Convention**) – which sets out the binding standards to effectively address gender-based violence – and 21 of them have ratified it. In addition, most member states have official documents, guidelines and plans of actions to address these issues at national level.

The **EU gender equality strategy 2020-2025** lists a set of actions for the next 5 years and commits to ensuring that the Commission will include an equality perspective in all EU policy areas.

💡 **TO LEARN MORE →**

1) European Commission, 2021 report on gender equality in the EU, 2021. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2021_en.pdf

2) European Parliamentary Research Service, Violence against women in the EU: State of play, 2019, p. 2. Available at:

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/630296/EPRS_BRI(2018)630296_EN.pdf

Write some notes

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▶ **4. Deconstructing gender stereotypes**

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4 DECONSTRUCTING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations[12]

⚠️ **Teachers are responsible for choosing what to include in the curriculum and how to deliver it to students. There is growing consensus on the necessity for curriculum negotiation with students. A gender-sensitive school curriculum must include more about the context and topic of gender issues.**

HOW THINGS ARE

Both girls and boys are **negatively affected by gender stereotypes.** They limit young children's freedom to develop their full potential in school, careers and psychosocial life. The damaging effects of stereotypes are experienced by children from a young age. These include girls being overly concerned with body image; bullying of children who do not meet stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl; children who do not conform to gender stereotypes experiencing negative feelings about themselves. Gender-based violence also begins at a much earlier age than was once assumed.

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

Teachers and educators have the power to create a **school open to diversity**. As we will see, gender is learned, therefore can be unlearned; awareness is the first step on this path. Understanding and confronting their own (often unconscious) gender biases is the precondition to challenging them. The more aware teachers are of gender stereotypes, the more they can try to mediate their effects. They must be aware that teaching behavior is also influenced by how teachers themselves were taught.

HOW THINGS ARE

In "The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence", a huge study of 65 countries carried out by OECD in 2015, a team of researchers analyzed the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science according to a gender-oriented point of view. They discovered important outcomes in school results:

➔ Though girls are generally best achievers in all skills and largely outperform boys in reading, boys perform better than girls in mathematics and science in high level performances;

➔ Girls report a lack of confidence in mathematics and don't consider a career in engineering and computing, that are fields with high job demand and that are highly paid (the so-called STEM disciplines: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics);

➔ Families are more likely to expect their sons, rather than their daughters, to enter a STEM career, even when boys and girls perform equally well in school.

On these bases, **boys and girls choose different study fields** - STEM for men, humanities for women - resulting in a real "gender segregation across study fields".

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

Education systems must tackle **gender segregation in study fields.**

★ **Teachers need to support girls in addressing math anxiety and becoming more confident in the STEM area.** ★

Teachers can address this issue by asking pupils to write down or talk about worries concerning math. This attitude can help with math performances and can alleviate math anxiety. It can be helpful to gradually increase the difficulty or complexity of the math tasks, enabling students to feel comfortable with them.

The ability to be good at math is not something we are born with; it can change over time and many factors can influence it. If teachers are more aware of girls' anxiety in this field, they can focus on encouraging them and finding possible strategies.

A revision of male stereotypes and role models for boys can no longer be postponed. Explaining the social implications of statements like 'girls don't fight' or 'boys don't cry' can help to tackle the most common values about male and female. Educators must take responsibility for raising more sensitive and empathetic boys able to express emotions. This is a fundamental basis for preventing gender-based violence.

HOW THINGS ARE

In a large number of other studies, findings show gender differences in **self-estimation of intelligence** among students, with females consistently giving lower ratings of their own intelligence than their male counterparts[13].

On the other hand, many studies reveal that important skills such as emotional ones are better expressed by girls. In "Gender Differences in Emotion Expression in Children"[14] researchers find that girls show more positive emotions and internalizing emotions (sadness, anxiety, sympathy) than boys, and boys show more externalizing emotions (anger) than girls. **Gender differences in positive emotions** were more pronounced with increasing age, with girls showing more positive emotions than boys in middle childhood: "Sayings such as "boys don't cry" and "sugar and spice and everything nice – that's what little girls are made of" reflect cultural expectations that girls show cheerfulness or sadness whereas boys are strong and calm, showing anger if necessary. These beliefs are reflected in studies that ask adults and children about their expectations regarding the emotional expressiveness of females and males and to some extent in studies that ask individuals about themselves".

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

The brain is plastic, so different experiences will change it: if you are better at something, you enjoy doing it more. To consolidate this belief, schools must provide positive examples of women in STEM, from the past to the present.

Schools should also propose positive non-aggressive and family-oriented role models for boys, and this can be key to challenge male stereotypes. The **importance of role models** in establishing self-identity and self-esteem at all ages is clear both in social and in cognitive studies.

Adolescence is a period of changes accompanied by strong cultural and social expectations for gender-appropriate behaviors. At this stage, pupils could need guidance, both emotional and psychological, that supports their school career choices. **Integrating gender into counseling and guidance practices** can contribute to promoting gender equality in the process of learning and in education outcomes. It can also guarantee freedom of choice in education for everyone.

WHAT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS CAN DO

☐ **Understand** and **address** their own gender biases.

☐ **Tackle** gender segregation in study fields: don't assume students are better at one subject rather than another because of their gender and encourage them to follow their potential beyond gender stereotypes.

☐ **Address** the social implications of stereotypical statements with students and encourage them to deconstruct negative gender roles fuelling gender-based violence.

☐ **Provide** positive role models beyond gender expectations: e.g. women in STEM, men as primary caregivers, transgender people as workers in various fields, etc.

☐ **Integrate** gender into counselling and guiding practices.

List here other actions you can take:

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SUGGESTED **RESOURCES** AND **ACTIVITIES**

Write some notes

To debunk gender stereotypes and prevent gender-based violence, teachers can implement participatory and interactive activities to foster students' reflection and exchange on these topics. The **Gender ABC educational curriculum** includes a comprehensive set of modules for primary and secondary school, a methodology and a glossary, to help teachers address issues such as gender stereotypes and social norms, empowerment and communication, sexual orientation and gender identity, intimate partner violence and body safety. You can start for instance with the module on **Gender Social Norms and Stereotypes**, available both for **primary school** and **secondary school:**

https://www.endfgm.eu/what-we-do/projects/gender-abc-project/gender-abc-educational-modules/

Primary School	Women in Science is a card game that familiarizes players with remarkable, often unknown, women of science and offers inspiring role models for kids: 📇 **www.luanagames.com/en.pdf** You can show this video to start a conversation about male stereotypes: ▶️ **www.youtube.com/watch?v=kq-IPU-uvIg**

Secondary School	Hypatia is an EU Horizon 2020 project that addresses the challenge of bringing more teenagers, especially girls, into STEM careers. Here is a cooperative card game: 📇 **www.expecteverything.eu/file/2017/03/School_STEM-Women-Cooperative-Card-Game_EN.pdf** Here is a video you can use to discuss what society expects from boys: ▶️ **www.youtube.com/watch?v=kicgMlqBh24&t=1s**

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▶**4. Deconstructing gender stereotypes**

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THE GENDERED BRAIN ▼

Gendered paths, made up of different skills emerging during young people's school years, lead us to some questions:

Why do girls and boys achieve different educational outcomes and develop different social skills?

Do female and male brains work differently?

Do we have innate abilities due to sex?

As neuroscientists largely respond, the brain is generally pro-active. It doesn't just respond to information, it also generates predictions. Brains are plastic and malleable and even in adulthood they continue to be changed by the things we do. "Brains reflect the lives they have lived, not just the sex of their owners"[15]. But, from the moment of birth, girls' and boys' brains may be set on different roads. Brain development is entangled with the environment in which it is developing.

⚠ **Different outcomes in education and different social skills developed during childhood and adolescence are social matters: "A gendered world will produce gendered brains", that's why school and education have a great responsibility in raising each person in the name of the full development of their potential.**

Taking into consideration spatial skills such as map reading, assembling and building and handling three-dimensional objects, the results of much research show that men, on average, outperform women.

This is a strong sex difference that apparently is evidence of an innate, biologically-based aptitude.

But spatial experiences like playing with construction toys, playing high-action video games, having hobbies which involve spatial processing such as building cars or playing darts, are much better predictors of who is going to be a better spatial thinker. When comparing women with high levels of visuospatial experience with men who have the same level, the differences between men and women disappear. What looks like a sex difference has actually arisen from something different: the opportunities that society and education may offer to individuals.

In the past, the responses of baby boys and girls to interaction with adults were considered innate. Even today these beliefs can be powerful. For instance: "baby girls talk and make eye contact earlier, while baby boys tend to move more and walk earlier" can be considered examples of responses given by nature. Instead, these skills are learned by social interactions. Excessive encouragement of mobility play in baby boys could impede time spent in face-to-face contact; on the other hand, in studies across a wide range of language communities, it is shown that mothers verbalize more with their baby girls. It is clear that social and cultural factors are at play. According to the latest neuroscience research, it is correct to say that verbal fluency, spatial cognition and mathematical prowess are not intrinsic aptitudes related to the fact of being boys or girls. When we are born there's no evidence of any kind of sex differences in our brains. Even chemical factors like hormones cannot determine brain or behavior differences between men and women. They exert strong influences on biological processes and determine differences in the physical apparatus associated with mating and reproduction. But they are responsive to the social environment as well. For example, evidence of socially-induced plasticity in the levels of the testosterone hormone shows that the father of a newborn baby who is her/his primary caregiver will have a much lower testosterone level than the father who is not the primary caregiver. And this shows how entangled nature is with nurture.

5 THE OFFICIAL CURRICULUM

OFFICIAL CURRICULUM

The **official curriculum** is the set of objectives, contents, resources and assessment formulated by the government or the educational institution. We often see an omission of diversity in school contents and resources. The official curriculum also includes textbooks and learning materials, which is a significant part of the gender stereotypes reproduction in all aspects: terminology, image selection, historical figures, references, and more.

The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015.

HOW THINGS ARE

Primary textbooks are full of precise gender norms and roles, through images and texts. Images are often treated as decorations, although they are much more than that[16]. Children's books are an important source of gender stereotypes because they present a model to children on which they organize their behavior.

We may note the existence of a specific **gender symbolism in textbooks**:

➜ female participants are relegated to the private sphere

➜ male participants are predominantly represented in the public sphere

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

Educational systems need to be transformed in order to become equitable systems. Teachers and educators must try to challenge stereotypes to help everyone achieve their potential.

Gender equality is just one facet of the commitment to a diverse and inclusive school environment (and world!). This commitment must be extended to challenge all other biases in schools, such as ones linked to race, religion, class, ableism etc. To become more inclusive, the educational system must discover step by step all the ways in which it reproduces stereotypes and actively act to remove them and change its practices.

HOW THINGS ARE

➜ women are presented as mothers, wives and nurturers, largely confined to the private world of home and garden

➜ males are depicted in a wider range of activities, some indoors but especially those that involve outdoor settings, namely activities in the playground, in the park, at the beach. They take part in active sports such as cycling, football, basketball

➜ a number of images, especially those set in the school environment (classroom), depict girls in marginal roles in contrast to boys who are presented as assertive, intellectual and decision-making individuals capable of taking leadership roles

➜ further studies claim that there are no positive female role models for girls to identify with

➜ gender bias also represents boys in a negative light like bullying and being noisy, in contrast with the politeness and gentleness of girls.

Moreover, multicultural content represents only a small part of schools' literature and textbooks. With a great lack of people with disabilities, textbooks also attest the invisibility of these people in the wider society. When diversity is portrayed, it is often through racist and ableist stereotypes.

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

School staff can have a huge impact on acceptance and inclusion: young people who do not feel supported by school staff are over four times more likely to leave education early than those who feel good support from school[17].

To help reduce gender stereotyping, **teachers can check textbooks and reading books**, by looking closely at images and texts. They can also **choose or produce gender-sensitive learning materials.**

According to the different school levels, all learning material can be checked to see:

➜ if girls are portrayed as strong characters and as brave, smart, adventurous problem solvers

➜ if girls are portrayed as interested in science, technology, math

➜ if boys are portrayed as kind, caring, nurturing, loving, respectful

➜ if boys are encouraged to express their feelings.

Furthermore, teachers can:

➜ check books' stereotypes with students, involving them in a critical assessment that can also be used with other cultural products

➜ create their own gender-sensitive libraries, choosing books that don't reproduce stereotypes

HOW THINGS ARE

In **secondary textbooks**, we can observe the same issues: history is dominated by male narrative, there is a lack of influential women presented as relevant in the different subjects. The point of view is western, male, white and physically and mentally able, but everything is implicit and given as "natural". Everyday characters perform their gender identities according to specific gender norms. Individuals with other characteristics are marginalized or absent.
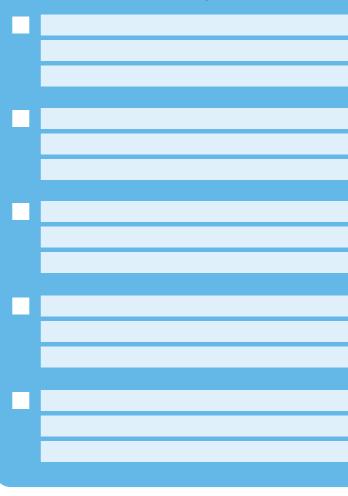
… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

➜ stock the classroom with a variety of toys and activities that are available to all children and allow them to explore their preferences in a free environment.

Gender inequality in history is an issue to discuss in all eras, as a worldwide phenomenon, using proper fact sheets. History is full of examples of gender-diverse people in every culture and religion all over the world. The timeline of **women's activism** and emancipation during the last centuries is a key topic to be aware of in order to understand the consequences and impact of these movements. The school curriculum can include **role models** through books – biographies or fictional – that show a wide range of occupations and achievements for all genders. Even exploring arts, the media and popular culture is a good way to discover gender-related contents and messages. Students can compare, analyze and interpret results discussing them with their peers and as a class. These activities can have a positive impact on the development of many skills.

WHAT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS CAN DO

☐ **Check** textbooks for gender stereotypes

☐ **Build** a gender-inclusive library

☐ **Work** with children on the identification of gender stereotypes in books and cultural products

☐ **Encourage** children to play with a variety of toys

☐ **Include** gender-diverse role models in the school curriculum

List here other actions you can take:

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SUGGESTED **RESOURCES** AND **ACTIVITIES**

There are plenty of publishers in many countries that publish books challenging stereotypes; these books deserve a place in school and class libraries.

In educational activities, it is important that toys are available to everyone, and activities are open to everyone. Blocks, stuffed animals, art supplies, sports equipment, superhero figures, tea sets, cars, dolls, etc. must be available to everyone. Mixing up the choices regularly adds wide variety so that kids have the opportunity to discover and gain experiences.

Write some notes

Primary School

Let Toys Be Toys is asking the toy and publishing industries to stop limiting children's interests by promoting some toys and books as only suitable for girls, and others only for boys:

https://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/

An extended list of Diverse Picture Books and children's books with Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender-Expansive Characters:

https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Diverse_Picture_Books_Transgender_Non-Binary.pdf

https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Great_Diverse_Books_Transgender_Non-Binary_Children.pdf

We Need Diverse Books™ is a non-profit organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people: **https://diversebooks.org/**

Secondary School

An extended list of Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender-Expansive Books for youth in Middle Grade

https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Diverse_Middle_Grade_Books_Transgender_Non-Binary.pdf

Diverse and Inclusive Books to Inspire Young Adults:

https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-tools/book-lists/resources/diverse-young-adult-book-list.html

6 THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

HIDDEN CURRICULUM

The **"hidden curriculum"** refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school. While the "formal" curriculum consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities students participate in, as well as the knowledge and skills educators intentionally teach to students, the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school.

The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015.

HOW THINGS ARE

What teachers say or do not say, their body language, what they do and who they call upon form a hidden curriculum that is more powerful than any textbook lesson.

Through the hidden curriculum, teachers and educators unconsciously validate gender norms and stereotypes. For example, girls are more often praised by teachers for their appearance and caring behavior and boys get more compliments for their physical strength.

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

Teaching methodologies can help to build a more inclusive space in schools.

Encouraging a **participatory approach** in the classroom enables young people to take an active role in their own learning. Some of the areas which might benefit from more active approaches are emotional literacy, interpersonal or social skills, critical thinking, citizenship skills.

HOW THINGS ARE

This kind of interaction reinforces one of the most common gender stereotypes, although teachers and educators do not consciously want to do it.

Grace & Gravestock (2009) in their research "Inclusion and diversity: Meeting the needs of all students" observed teachers' interactions in the class, finding that they:

➜ Call on male students more frequently

➜ Wait longer for males to respond to questions

➜ Give male students more eye contact following questions

➜ Remember the names of male students

➜ Use these names when calling on male students

➜ Attribute male students' comments in class discussion

➜ Interrupt female students before the end of their response

➜ Ask males more questions that call for 'higher-order' critical thinking as opposed to 'lower-order' recounting of facts

The hidden curriculum acts precisely because it is unconscious. It is very important to think consciously about interactions in the classroom and to consider the space that girls and boys occupy in it.

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

Different methodologies will focus on the development of different skills: making connections, asking questions and exploring viewpoints are all strategies that develop self-confidence and contribute to building an uncensored environment.

The classroom should be a safe place for sharing ideas and experiences. The discussions with students need to be handled sensitively and with consideration given to **students' backgrounds** and experiences. For instance, gender can be a sensitive issue for some **people who may not identify with any gender**, or can be a 'controversial issue', which evokes strong feelings and views that affect the social, cultural and economic context in which people live. It is important to always adopt an inclusive approach, and especially when addressing sensitive topics as these may be.

In class activities, teachers and educators can choose to **divide students into boys' and girls' groups** or not. This attitude could reinforce a gender-binary vision but, in some cases, the adequacy of this choice could depend on the aim. For example, it makes sense to do it in order to train them for tasks usually associated with the opposite sex (e.g. boys train in massage while girls train in martial arts).

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▶ **6. The hidden curriculum**

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*A guide to build a **gender-inclusive** educational environment*
6. The hidden curriculum ◀

WHAT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS *CAN DO*

☐ **Be sensitive** to students' backgrounds

☐ **Consider** people not identifying with a specific gender

☐ **Question** the appropriateness of dividing students into boys' and girls' groups

☐ **Encourage** a participatory approach

☐ **Ask questions** – instead of using statements – to enhance deeper understanding:
   - Do all boys like the same things?
   - Do all girls like the same things?
   - Can boys and girls like the same things?
   - Who decides what things are for boys and what are for girls?
   - How do you feel if you think that others are talking about you?
   - How do you feel if you like something, but someone says it's not for you?

List here other actions you can take:

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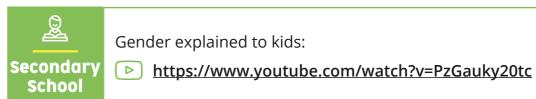# SUGGESTED **RESOURCES** AND **ACTIVITIES**

In order to create a safe space for students to share ideas and experiences, teachers may use some of the activities of the Gender ABC modules. For instance, the activities of the **Group Building** module (developed for secondary schools, but easily adaptable for primary) can be used to enhance communication, get to know each other and build trust within the group:

https://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2020/03/07.pdf

The **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** module (available both for **primary** and **secondary school**) contains activities to address the topic, framing it in a broader discussion around respect, identity, non-discrimination and inclusion. The module also focuses on specific forms of bullying towards people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity:

https://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2020/03/06.pdf
https://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2020/03/10.pdf

Secondary School

Gender explained to kids:
▶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzGauky20tc

Write some notes

*A guide to build a **gender-inclusive** educational environment*
▶**7. Gender stereotypes through language and gender binarism**

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*A guide to build a **gender-inclusive** educational environment*
7. Gender stereotypes through language and gender binarism◀

7 GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH LANGUAGE & GENDER BINARISM

HOW THINGS ARE

Language powerfully reflects and influences attitudes, behavior and perceptions.

The most common linguistic forms have the negative effects of making diversity disappear in mental representations. The lexical choices of everyday communication reproduce the societal asymmetries of status and power in favor of male-white-western-physically and mentally able people.

In languages with grammatical gender, it is common and accepted to use masculine nouns or pronouns to refer to everyone: men, women, transgender and non-binary people. The consequence is that the male plural can hinder the self-esteem and shape the identity of girls, women and of all people without a male identity. Due to gender stereotypes that want women to be pure and family-oriented, there is no male counterpart in current language use for terms such as 'working mother' or 'career women'. Also, in many languages there is no male equivalent for 'Miss', suggesting that being married was (and sometimes is) considered as relevant for the status of women but not of men.

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

Language is crucially important and it can influence children's and young people's attitudes.

The use of gender-fair and inclusive language can effectively prevent the negative consequences of gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. Teachers and educators should **use inclusive language by speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, gender, race or religion and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes or racism.** They can avoid the generic use of the masculine gender by combining different linguistic strategies.

Some feminine forms are perceived as negative because they sound awkward and grammatically incorrect in some languages. But **the more feminine or gender-fair words are coined and used, the more usual and neutral they will sound due to mere exposure.** Gender equality is higher in countries that speak neutral-gender or genderless languages than in countries that speak gendered language.

HOW THINGS ARE

Moreover, according to the most common gender stereotypes, men are usually described with agentic words and women with communal words. Agentic language includes words like "ambitious," "direct," "assertive," "intellectual"; communal language includes softer words such as "helpful," "team-player," "friendly," "supportive".

In the media, men are placed more frequently in the role of logical subject and are described as more active, whereas women are placed more frequently in helpless or victim roles and are depicted as more passive and emotional.

Furthermore, the school curriculum often largely assumes a limited perspective and considers that everyone is cisgender or heterosexual. We know instead that reality may differ considerably from this representation and that sexual orientation and gender identity can vary. Society and education systems are based on the idea that two biological sexes and two gender categories - male or female - exist. This binary system dictates standards for many things such as clothing, activities and behaviors. Some researchers suggest that gender would best be thought of as a spectrum rather than two binary categories. However, in schools there are often a series of practices that can result in unfair, less favorable treatment of such pupils.

… AND HOW THEY CAN BE CHANGED

In Sweden, the gender-neutral pronoun 'hen' was added to the existing pronouns for she and he. The pronoun was proposed to refer to people whose gender was unknown or irrelevant and to people who categorize themselves outside the gender binaries. At first, the majority of Swedes had negative attitudes towards the new word, but after two years the use of the word had increased, and the reactions had become more positive.

It is important to give a child or young person the message that if any use of language makes them uncomfortable, they can share this feeling and ask for a solution. **Young people should be given the opportunity to say how they identify or describe themselves according to their gender sensitiveness.**

Examples might include:

➜ An inflexible school uniform rule which offers no "unisex" options;

➜ Failing to provide changing facilities meeting everyone's needs;

➜ A school failing to protect LGBTQI+ students against bullying by classmates.

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▶ **7. Gender stereotypes through language and gender binarism**

*A guide to build a **gender-inclusive** educational environment*
7. Gender stereotypes through language and gender binarism ◀

WHAT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS *CAN DO*

☐ **Refer** to pupils as "students" or "children", using a non-gendered term for the group, rather than "boys and girls"

☐ **Use** the pronoun with which a person wants to be associated with

☐ **Avoid** the generalised use of 'man' and its derivatives as follows:
- Man - person, individual
- Mankind - people, humanity, human beings
- The common man - the average person
- Chairman - coordinator, chairperson
- Mailman - postal worker, mail carrier
- Policeman - police officer or policewoman if relevant
- Steward, stewardess - flight attendant
- Actor, actress

☐ **Use** feminine forms when appropriate even if at first they might sound awkward

☐ In situations where a pronoun needs to refer to a person whose gender is unknown, **use** 'he or she, 'he/she, 's/he', her/him' or use 'they' or 'their'.

☐ **Attention** to titles and names: Professor or Dr is preferable to Mr or Ms (instead of Miss or Mrs).

☐ In situations where you would refer to a man by his full title, you should **do the same** for a woman. If you name a male politician with his full name, you must use the same for a female politician (Ursula Von Der Leyen and not only 'Ursula').

List here other actions you can take:

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SUGGESTED *RESOURCES* AND *ACTIVITIES*

➜ Gender identity and pronouns:

▶ **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3Fh60GEB5E**

➜ Vocabulary and grammar lesson to avoid sounding sexist and to avoid incorrect grammar:

▶ **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrzl4Bmf1fs**

➜ Latest guidelines "Gender Neutral Language in the European Parliament" with recommendations:

📖 **https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/151780/GNL_Guidelines_EN.pdf**

Write some notes

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▶ **7. Gender stereotypes through language and gender binarism**

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REDRAW THE BALANCE ▼

When answering a question like "Who is your favorite musician?" or "Please, name three athletes", people predominantly associate men.

This cultural attitude towards gender in language is also shown in an experiment carried out in schools called 'Redraw the balance'.

In the first version of this short movie, 66 children were asked to draw a picture of a firefighter, a surgeon and a fighter pilot. 61 drew men, 5 drew women. They were then asked if they would like to meet real-life versions of their drawings. Into the classroom, dressed in their uniforms, came a female NHS consultant colorectal surgeon, a female firefighter from the London Fire Brigade and a female active RAF pilot. The film was shot in Kent (UK) with 20 children between the ages of 5 and 7. After this first experiment, another 20,000 children from 20 countries took part in a similar experience. Their responses were used as the basis of the 'Drawing the Future report', published in 2018.

⚠ **Its key findings concluded that:**

➜ Gender stereotyping about jobs is set from a young age and it is a global issue;

➜ The patterns of jobs chosen by seven-year-olds are similar to those selected by seventeen-year-olds;

➜ Family, TV, radio and film have the biggest influence on children's choices;

➜ There is a need for greater access to career role models from a young age;

➜ Children's career aspirations have little in common with projected workforce needs, which could have serious economic implications;

➜ Children in some developing countries often aspire to more professional jobs than those in some affluent countries.

The "Redraw the balance" experiment shows that even languages with no gendered nouns (such as English) can reinforce the idea of men predominating in all aspects of life.

▶ **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv8VZVP5csA**

8 PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT

HOW THINGS ARE

➜ Girls are not encouraged to be physically active

➜ Girls are considered less suitable to be taught and to engage in fundamental motor skills

➜ Female athletes are constantly sexualized by the media

➜ Boys who are not physically skilled experience ridicule and embarrassment

➜ Male stereotypes include strength, muscularity, athleticism and lack of empathy for other participants

In general, men tend to practise sports or other physical activities more often than women in the European Union. For instance, 44% of men exercise or play sport at least once a week, whereas 36% of women do so. Men are more likely to engage in sport or physical activity to have fun, to be with friends or to improve physical performance; women are concerned with controlling their weight, improving their physical appearance or counteracting the effects of ageing.

... AND HOW THEY CAN **BE CHANGED**

Teachers and educators can make sport an inclusive activity.

Sport and physical education should allow girls and boys to develop essential values such as fair play, respect for others and respect for rules, team spirit, tolerance and responsibility, which all contribute to turning them into responsible citizens.
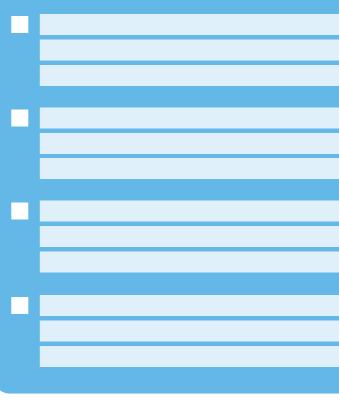
HOW THINGS ARE

These differences may be explained by a need to comply with gender stereotypes: men are expected to be strong and athletic, and women are expected to look pretty, slim and young.

('ALL IN: Towards gender balance in sport', Council of Europe 2019)

WHAT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS *CAN DO*

☐ **Analyze** what kind of environment there is in the classroom

☐ **Ask themselves** what lessons children are learning about what girls and boys are allowed to do

☐ **Talk** about sport with students to identify obstacles to the inclusion process in this area

☐ **Try** to identify barriers for girls' involvement in sport and try to challenge them

☐ **Propose** activities such as games where individuals are not engaging as gender-related individuals the way they are in sports

List here other actions you can take:

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SUGGESTED **RESOURCES** *AND* **ACTIVITIES**

The use of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) has didactic, pedagogic and gender equity potential. TGfU places students in a game situation whereby skills, tactics, decision-making and problem solving are developed in cooperation. These activities allow students to have positive experiences, creating a sense of self-efficacy and involvement. This is due to the flexible structure of this activity and the fact that it can be modified. These strategies help inclusion, satisfaction and self-confidence and can tackle girls' sense of inadequacy when they are compared to boys.

➔ Here is a clear explanation of the TGfU's principles and practices through the website of the AIESEP TGfU SIG. This is a globally representative group of associations and individuals committed to the promotion and dissemination of scholarly inquiry based around ways of knowing, learning and teaching through game-centered approaches:

http://www.tgfu.info/

➔ An article about TGfU as a route to address gender issues in PE:

http://www.tgfu.info/blog/the-use-of-game-based-teaching-as-a-route-to-address-gender-issues-in-physical-education

➔ To every woman and girl who sees their movement as a movement:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eXE1ka4HJs

➔ Like a girl:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs

END NOTES

2. Foreword

1 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s studies on men and gender equality, **https://eige.europa.eu/news/eige-takes-depth-look-gender-equality-classroom**

2 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s studies on gender stereotypes, **https://eige.europa.eu/news/education-key-breaking-gender-stereotypes**

3 **https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-brief-still-far-finish-line**

4 With discrimination based on race, we mean the social process of racialization by which a group of people is defined by attributing racial meaning to their identity and discriminated based on that. The European Network Against Racism states that: "NGOs and social scientists usually define racist violence as "racially motivated criminal acts against the person and/or property, and include public insults and defamation, threats, and incitement to racial violence, hatred or discrimination, etc." In an analysis of whether an incident can be perceived as a racially motivated crime, generally speaking the NGO best practice experience will use the perception of the victim as the guiding indicator".

5 OECD (2015), *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence*, PISA, OECD Publishing **http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264229945-en**

3. What are gender stereotypes and what is their impact?

6 Eurostat, **80% of graduates in the field of education are students**, 2017.

7 National Numeracy, **Why is numeracy important?**

8 Terlecki, M.S., Newcombe, N.S. **How Important Is the Digital Divide? The Relation of Computer and Videogame Usage to Gender Differences in Mental Rotation Ability**. Sex Roles 53, 433–441, 2005.

9 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Violence against women: an EU-wide survey – Results at a glance, 2014.

10 European Institute for Gender Equality, Health: Unpaid care and housework, 2020. Available at: **https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/unpaid-care-and-housework**.

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14 Chaplin, M.T., Aldao, A. (2012) Gender Differences in Emotion Expression in Children: A Meta-Analytic Review.

15 Rippon, G. (2019) The gendered brain: The new neuroscience that shatters the myth of the female brain.

5. The official curriculum

16 Sovič, A., Hus, V. (2015) Gender Stereotype Analysis of the Textbooks for Young Learners.

17 Smith, E. et al. (2014) From Blues to Rainbows: The Mental Health and Well-being of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia.

Write some notes

Write some notes