

Boys vs. Girls Maximizing your child's potential

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That geology class your son raved about two years ago is the same one your daughter struggles with the most this year. Meanwhile, your son can't sit still during the lecture on "Moby Dick" even though he loves all things nautical. The fact is, boys and girls learn differently -- but you don't have to resign your kids to intellectual stereotypes. There's actually a lot you can do to help your child absorb those science lessons, classic texts or other material by working with their learning style. And you're not alone: Educators are catching on to the differences between the sexes and working to maximize the learning potential of all their students. Here's how they're doing it and how you can help:

Teaching based on gender

From Alabama to Wisconsin, schools are experimenting with the separation of boys and girls in the classroom. It's in our nature, from preschool to adulthood, to prefer to do some things with members of our own gender. For some kids, particularly in middle school when hormones begin raging, academics can get a little lost in the mixed-classroom shuffle. Researchers have found that on average, girls attending all-girls schools improve in math and science, and boys do better in reading and writing at all-boys schools.

While single-gender schools aren't an option for everyone, teachers in a mixed-gender classroom can apply some of the same principles. For instance, students can work in same-sex groups for activities, or teachers can seat girls on one side of the classroom and boys on the other. Teachers profiled in Michael Gurian's book "[Boys and Girls Learn Differently!](#)" say that doing so helps girls concentrate and cuts down on disciplinary issues in boys.

Stay in the know

To ensure your kids are able to do their best, talk to their teachers about how a typical class is run. According to Gurian, at the elementary school level, for example, boys tend to lag in language arts (history, social studies and reading). Find out if your child's teacher reads to them. Kids love being read to, and storytime can do wonders for those who aren't good readers but soak information up by listening. Letting them draw during the reading can help, too, by focusing their attention, according to Gurian. Many teachers also have caught on to the advantages of letting boys be boys, which means encouraging physical movement. Short of letting them run screaming through the school yard, teachers can assign boys tasks, such as passing out papers or cleaning the chalkboard. If you have an especially active son, ask the teacher if he can play with a softball while working at his desk.

Many teachers have abandoned the stand-before-the-class-and-lecture strategy of teaching and instead incorporate group discussions and hands-on tasks. Girls especially

benefit from the mixing of methods, and teachers can change things up in the classroom, encouraging writing, role-playing and other activities -- even in math classes -- to help girls absorb the material. In fact, the more kids can see, hear and feel something, especially in math and science, the better they connect to it. Gurian says this works for both genders throughout their schooling.

Bring it home

Your kids might not want to hang out with you at the mall, but they still pick up on your cues. So even if there's a school subject you secretly loathe, you can model a good attitude. For example, pick up an extra copy of the book your child is reading, and chat about the characters with him over dinner. If your daughter is studying fractions, you can bake a batch of cupcakes together -- and double the recipe for extra credit. Just like your child's teacher mixes up a school day with group activities or demonstrations, you can break up your child's study time by offering to play a quick game of one-on-one basketball. Or take a diversion from your typical Saturday routine with a family field trip to inspire interest in subjects your kids don't much like to study. A science textbook might not be too exciting for your daughter, but seeing dinosaurs up close and personal can spice things up. If your son isn't too thrilled with his humanities class, watching a video of [Jackson Pollock](#) at work on one of his "drip" paintings can pique his interest (just make sure he doesn't try to make his own in your living room).

Most of all, observe your kids to uncover what grabs their interest in and out of school. Playing up what they know and what they're good at can go a long way toward a lifelong love of learning.