

English-Language Textbooks and Gender Equality*

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In 1996 the Japanese government drew up the Basic Plan for Gender Equality, and in 1999 enacted the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) includes the “enrichment of education to enhance consciousness of gender equality” in its 1997 revision of the Program for Education Reform. MEXT also tries “to correct a gender-fixed consciousness of sexual division of labor and to nurture a view of gender equality based on consciousness of human rights” and “plans to enrich education and learning that promote gender equality, in school and social education, by enriching training for teachers and persons concerned with education and by developing teaching materials.”

Past English-Language Textbooks

English-language textbooks change with and mirror the times. In the 1980s, for example, civil rights movements and African and Asian issues began to appear as topics in textbooks. In the 1990s environmental issues such as global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer became standard textbook topics. Other themes have appeared, such as cross-cultural understanding, international understanding, racial discrimination, art, history, outer space, peace, language, and culture. However, promotion of gender equality was and continues to be rare. The textbooks did not reflect the goals and achievements of women’s movements, and only three women—Marie Curie, Mother Teresa, and Helen Keller—appeared frequently.

English-Language Textbooks Today

Objects of analysis

English I is compulsory for first-year students of upper secondary schools. Twenty-one publishers issue 48 textbooks, each containing an average of 10 lessons, which each have one topic or theme. The textbooks have 567 lessons in all, which I analyze from the perspective of promoting gender equality.

Textbook editorial policy

How do publishers choose textbook content? Is there room for promoting gender equality? The following keywords are found in the publishers’ editorial policies:

- international understanding,
- global issues,
- humanity,

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- human nature,
- intellectual interests of upper secondary-school students,
- contemporary issues, and
- diverse points of view, among others.

Promoting gender equality is a contemporary issue, and themes such as love, gender, work, and life are suitable topics for upper secondary-school students. Protection of women's human rights is also a global issue.

Definition of promoting gender equality

Some of the literature on promoting gender equality criticizes sexual discrimination in textbooks. Based on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Beijing Platform for Action, textbooks promote gender equality if the following can be said of their content:

- Women are protagonists.
- Women and men are not described according to a stereotypical sexual division of labor.
- Ways of living free of conventional ideas of femininity and masculinity are described positively.
- Topics encourage students to think about sexual discrimination and gender equality.
- Topics encourage students to reconsider various issues close to them from a gender perspective.
- Topics encourage students to think about women's human rights as a global issue.

Result of Analysis

Out of 567 topics in the 48 textbooks, a substantial 75 (about 13%) may be said to promote gender equality. I classify the topics as follows:

- *Women as protagonists*: Ryoko Tamura, Ruiko Yoshida, Chiaki Mukai, Chihiro Iwasaki, Sadako Sasaki, Tomiko Higa, Audrey Hepburn, Shirley Maclean, Mary Martin, Mother Teresa, Helen Keller,

Zlata Filipovic, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Beatrix Potter, Iliana Pavlova, Jeannette Rankin, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Mother Teresa and Helen Keller are "standard material." Ryoko Tamura, a judo champion; Ruiko Yoshida, a photojournalist; and Chiaki Mukai, an astronaut, are new role models for having been trailblazers. Beatrix Potter appears in five textbooks, probably because Peter Rabbit is popular in Japan, and Potter was involved with the National Trust Movement in England, which aims to protect the country's natural, historical and cultural heritage. *Zlata's Diary*, written during the civil war in Sarajevo, replaced *Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl*. Textbooks describe Audrey Hepburn as "not just a beautiful movie star but also a brave and strong person," and narrate how she became a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador.

Students should be introduced to women ignored in conventional history, such as Jeannette Rankin, who fought for and won women's suffrage in Montana, US. She was the first woman member of Congress and alone voted against declaring war on Japan.

However, female protagonists that upper secondary-school students can feel close to are few and far between. Perhaps it would be better to concentrate on less-known personalities but who do what they want, such as young women who work in new occupational fields; people outside the gender framework, such as a male kindergarten teacher or nurse; a young couple that share the housework and child care; or a woman starting a new business.

- *Women in adventure stories*: the first woman to sail nonstop around the world, a high-school girl who climbs mountains abroad, and a woman who trekked across four continents on foot. Adventure stories remind me of Naomi Uemura, a male explorer. The stories should be welcomed as a new trend.

- *Women in war and peace*: Zlata Filipovic of Sarajevo; Sadako Sasaki of Hiroshima, and Tomiko Higa of Okinawa, peace advocates.
- *Women who live with difficulty or disease*: an African-American woman who overcame physical difficulties to become an Olympic runner, a deaf woman who became Miss America, a tennis player with cancer, and Helen Keller.

Men facing various challenges used to be featured more in textbooks, including US professional baseball player Jim Abbott, who has a physical disability, and blind singer Stevie Wonder. Only Helen Keller used to appear frequently in textbooks, and I welcome the fact that she is joined by four more women.

- *Sexual discrimination*: women in the Islamic world, and sexual discrimination in English. Two lessons are on language. Many books, including some textbooks, treat sexual discrimination in language. However, sexual discrimination in English is likely to be missed, so textbooks should focus on it more.
- *Sexual division of labor*: housework around the world, and the transition of the roles of wife and husband in the US home. I did not find a textbook that treats inequality in labor or the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. One book shows a male doing housework, but none shows men engaged in child care or nursing. Textbooks should stress that the sexual division of labor is a product of modern times and was reinforced during the period of high economic growth in Japan, and that people's consciousness is changing.
- *Future way of life*: the absurdity that girls supposedly cannot be happy without magic. This is the only topic that comes under this category and it has appeared in previous textbooks. In the 1960s and 1970s feminists critiqued fairy stories such as Cinderella for their stereotypical ideas

about gender roles, which prevent people from living the way they want and developing their potential. This critique encourages students to view themselves as constrained by gender and to contemplate the story's influence on other people. The source of this topic is Denise DeClue's, "Sex Roles," in *Women Shaping History*, (Milwaukee, WI: Raintree Publishers, 1979). In 1976–1985 (the UN Decade for Women), the women's movement became more active. But the many years it takes to edit and publish textbooks, and the fact that most of the authors are male and lack a gender perspective, account for the delay in publishing critiques of fairy tales in textbooks.

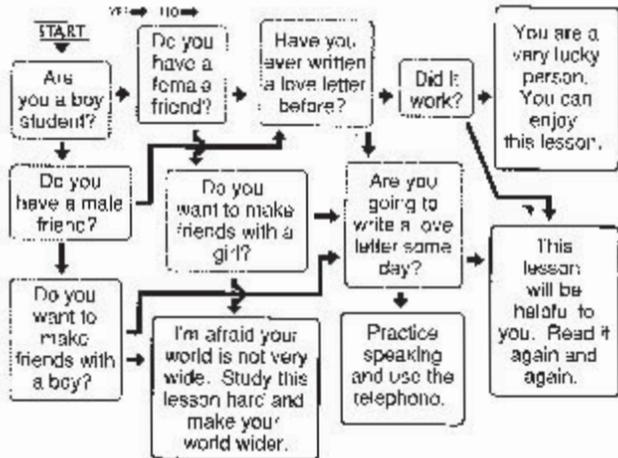
- *Realizing dreams, and self-reflection*: the story of a Vietnamese refugee woman who became a doctor, a home stay, and studying in the US.
- *Literary works*: *Cinderella*; *Princess Kaguya*, a Japanese folk tale about a princess from the moon; *Little Red Riding Hood*; *Anne of Green Gables*; *Little Women*; and *Little House on the Prairie*.

Apart from these categories, topics could include contemporary issues such as the falling birth rate and aging society, a vision of a gender-equal society, violence against women, commercialization of sex, and women's human rights in Asia.

Sexual Discrimination in the Textbooks

I found some "thoughtless" illustrations and expressions in the textbooks. For example, a flowchart begins with the question, "Are you a boy?" Since students proceed to the next question after answering yes or no, male students are treated as the basic model. The next question is, "The women on the left are the successive First Ladies of the US. Who is the husband of each First Lady?"² Under the question, four women are lined up. The following

question—"My husband was...?"—leads students to connect them, all described as "Mrs. _____," to the presidents, including John F. Kennedy, lined up on the right.



 Mary	My husband said, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."	 John F. Kennedy
 Martha	My husband was the first President of the U.S.	 Ronald Reagan
 Jacqueline	When my husband became the youngest President of the U.S., Robert Frost read a poem for him.	 George Washington
 Nancy	My husband was the only movie star to become President of the U.S.	 Abraham Lincoln

Another example is an illustration with the following dialogue: "Do you want some chocolate?" "No, I'm watching my weight." Feature articles on dieting are often found in magazines for women, but why should textbooks include this kind of exchange under a drawing of an embarrassed young woman confronting a bathroom scale and chocolates? This is despite the fact that some students in upper secondary schools suffer physically and psychologically from eating disorders.



To correct sexual discrimination, McGraw-Hill Companies issued editorial guidelines to their employees and authors to show how language promotes inequality between men and women and to ensure fair, accurate, and equal treatment for men and women. Textbook authors should also take note of these guidelines.

Future Issues

English-language textbooks should not only mirror the times, but also guide students to the future. Big social changes include the aging society, which requires women to be an important part of the labor force. The government calls the future the "gender-equal society," where women and men respect each other as equals, cooperate with each other, share responsibilities, choose their way of life freely, express their individuality, and exercise their abilities. If women and men are to become equal members of society, textbooks should not contain too many male protagonists or too many women as their mere adjuncts, and they should not advocate a fixed sexual division of labor. I propose the following categories:

- *Sexual division of labor:* gender in daily life; person doing the housework, child care, and nursing; paid and unpaid work; and child-care leave for men.

- *Women's participation in society*: women's greater competition in the Olympics, how women's work has changed over time, the Revised Equal Employment Opportunity Law, clerical and general management work, and women in politics.
- *Commercialization of sex*: images of women and men in the mass media, media literacy, prostitution, and commercial sexual exploitation of children.
- *Human rights, gender and sex, and violence*: domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- *Femininity and masculinity*: the shackles of femininity and masculinity, freedom from gender, living the way one wants, the dieting boom and the desire to be slim, and nonviolence workshops for men.
- *Global human rights*: the feminization of poverty, World Terakoya (a UNESCO movement to provide out-of-school chil-

dren and illiterate adults, particularly women, in developing countries with an education through community classes (*terakoya*), protection of mother and child from HIV infection, and reproductive health rights.

- *Enriched communication skills*: nurturing self-esteem, assertion training, and living together in a society where everyone is respected.

Some of these categories and topics might be outside the framework of English-language textbooks, but schools will be soon be starting the Integrated Study course, where students can investigate topics for themselves, think about various gender issues, listen to other people's opinions, and form their own. I hope a society will emerge where all are respected and can exercise their abilities, and I hope that textbooks will help create this society.