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The Future of Girls' Education: Classroom, Curriculum and Culture

[The Girls' Day School Trust](#), a unique family of 25 all girls' schools across England and Wales, has recently released the GDST Insights Report and Framework. This report brings together some of the latest knowledge and research on delivering a world class education for girls. This is an important resource as it provides the tools to support girls to achieve their full potential, even when faced by inequalities and personal prejudice. This report was driven by the findings of the GDST's landmark 2022 research that showed girls have amazing ambitions and are engaged and enthusiastic about the world. Yet too many girls still felt unprepared to take on this world, and doubted their own ability to make meaningful change. But this doesn't need to be the case. The GDST identified three core principles that can be used to educate girls to realise their full ambitions: classroom, curriculum, and culture. Three key areas where we can change the outcomes for all girls in education.

The GDST suggests that the first point of call in addressing the inequalities facing girls is to close the gap in confidence levels between boys and girls. Girls need a learning environment where they are empowered to have a voice and are supported to take intellectual risks. This can help build courage and resilience. But how can we achieve this goal? By focussing on discussion and collaboration, and embracing complexity and failure. This helps break free of the expectation that girls are to be an accomplished and driven form of perfection, and instead focusses on failure and mistakes as a normal part of the learning process that can in fact drive progress and help girls learn to approach problems creatively and critically.

There is an ingrained bias in schools and society that disadvantages girls and women. They are more likely to need to prove themselves or have their expertise challenged. Girls regularly adapt their behaviour when in the presence of boys in an educational environment. This shows how important it is that we cultivate a learning environment where girls are encouraged to find their own unique voice and are empowered to speak out with confidence. We can all support these goals by challenging the stereotypes that lead to girls being labelled as confrontational, argumentative or outspoken. It is also important to remember that courage and voice is unique to each girl, and the way each girl expresses these values will be a unique reflection of her needs, personality and experiences.

The process of finding and developing her voice will be different for each girl. This is crucial, and each young woman will use their voice in their own unique way. This allows girls to respect and celebrate their differences while finding their place in the complexities of the world. This can be supported through developing cooperative, collaborative and discussion-led learning environments. Girls can be taught to maximise their contributions to group collaborations, especially in mixed gender scenarios, while learning to understand and negotiate different communication preferences, neurodiversity and backgrounds of their peers. This will allow educators to support all girls to find and nurture their voice, especially those who would otherwise remain unheard.

Girls need a forward-focussed curriculum that breaks down barriers and stereotypes and helps students develop

essential skills. Removing barriers to traditionally gendered subjects such as STEM is a crucial part of this process. In fact, working to remove the stereotype itself can mean that subjects are not perceived nor framed within gendered terms. This is not just limited to STEM, and includes giving girls the freedom of choice and empowerment to explore many avenues including economics, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. These skills will support girls as they challenge leadership inequality in the workplace and society. Providing girls with the opportunity to develop skills in this area will equip them to challenge traditional notions of leadership and form their own path toward change.

School culture needs to empower and value girls. They need to have a space where they feel they belong and are not constrained by gender-based limitations. This will help girls develop their own voice, which will support them to build courage, break down barriers, and develop the confidence to pursue their ambitions. In turn, this can support girls as they become future change-makers, and lead robust, fulfilling lives regardless of how they define leadership and success. We can support this by celebrating female role models in all forms of leadership, even those that do not fit the traditional boundaries of the term. Educators play a critical role in this space themselves as role models for girls. This includes showing students that they can be an expert in any subject of their choice, demonstrating diversity, and nurturing students' aspirations. Older students and successful alumnae can also represent important role models, and girls can be supported to identify role models in the community which can help develop their enthusiasm, inspiration and ambitions for the future.

As educators at girls' schools, we are preparing girls for a complex and changing world where they will face barriers, inequalities and stereotypes. Yet with the right support, girls can be empowered to find their voice and learn how to use it to create meaningful change in society. Their teachers play a significant role in this space, as do families. The important thing to remember is that change starts with us. It can be as small as asking a question to spark curiosity and a desire to explore their ambitions or challenge a social norm. But if it can help girls find their voice and achieve their potential, then it contributes to the development of a truly world class education for girls.

References

Girls' Day School Trust. (2024). Designing the future of girls' education: Classroom, curriculum & culture: A GDST insights report and framework. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.gdst.net/gdst-insights-report/>.

