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Male Authority: Assumption-Busting

By Kim Genie

I invite you to ponder two questions: How would you describe the appearance of a person with 'authority'? Based on your criteria, would people look at you and presume 'authority'? It can easily be argued that most individuals ascribe power to those who possess a physically commanding presence, coupled with a deep, strong voice. In a nutshell, there is an assumed correlation between one's 'masculinity quotient' and one's measure of power. Rarely, if ever, would someone who is described as slight in build and soft in volume, be imagined to wield real 'authority'. Yet, let us take a look at two historical giants: Mother Teresa and Gandhi. Notwithstanding their being diminutive in size and soft-spoken, they were thunderous, dominant and far-reaching in their global influence and legacy. The immense 'authority' they exerted contradicts their physical qualities. Both figures remarkably endure in their ability to mesmerize, confound and subdue. How? Mother Teresa and Gandhi, seemingly effeminate and frail, are reminders to all educators that authority and impact do not derive from one's 'masculinity quotient', but instead from one's character and conduct.

Setting the Stage

To begin this chapter, I would like to engage you, once again, in an exercise of reflection: Why is it that male teachers have greater authority in the classroom than female teachers? Some of you may have grasped that I presented a misleading question. Regardless, it would be unsurprising to know that the wider population holds this very assumption that male teachers inherently possess greater classroom 'control' than their female counterparts.

In this chapter, I hope to dismantle the pervasive belief that a direct relationship exists between the gender of a person and one's ability to 'manage' one's class. Appreciating that 'gender' is a nuanced, convoluted and contested social construct, for the purposes of this chapter, I will make reference to the male/female gender dichotomy, as it relates to the perception of unequal power relations.

This chapter seeks to dispel the ubiquitous misconception that male teachers are more apt to secure 'authority' and respect from their students in comparison to female teachers. I hope to debunk the foregoing misapprehension, which sadly results in many female teachers adopting a self-defeating and injurious mindset. My purpose in this chapter is twofold: 1) To offer 4 vignettes, which will serve as empirical illustrations; these portrayals were culled to reassure teachers who do not fit the 'masculine' bill that credible "authority" can be achieved, irrespective of one's size, vocal range, and 'masculinity quotient' and 2) To provide some gleaned tips and strategies one can utilize to exercise constructive 'authority' in one's classroom.

I have chosen to employ factual vignettes of four female educators, all vastly dissimilar, to demonstrate that it is not one's 'gender', but rather the individual who determines the scope of one's classroom authority. Rather than appeal to scholarly research conducted in this area, I believe my vignettes should compellingly turn on its head the notion of 'male' preeminence as it relates to classroom authority. My own personal story of navigating 'classroom management' is interwoven throughout and figures prominently; I go into depth foregrounding my vignette, with one express purpose: to illustrate that anyone, notwithstanding gender and seeming physical liabilities, can become triumphant with classroom management. Key strategies, which I have distilled and adopted over the years, will be addressed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Genie's Story (Part 1)

Cautionary words, expressed by many well-intentioned teachers, contain this conventional message, "You can't teach, unless you master 'classroom management'". No doubt, such words provoke anxiety for aspiring teachers. They forcibly conjure up images of pandemonium, often exaggerated and mockingly portrayed in the media. This happened to be what nearly foreclosed my chance of becoming a teacher. To explain, despite being encouraged by many of my trusted friends and family members to enter the teaching profession, I stubbornly and emphatically refused. My reluctance stemmed from what I privately feared would become a reality: Losing utter control of my class. These fears were not without merit.

A brief self-description is necessary to help capture and justify the reasons behind my deep-rooted angst. As a short and small-framed Korean female, with an even smaller voice that often squeaks and croaks without warning, I questioned the following: "If my friends have difficulty hearing me, what chance would I have of surviving a class of 25+ students? Despite my profound insecurities, through a series of unanticipated events, I awoke one day newly minted as a high school English teacher at a private school. Given this school's small class sizes, my overwhelming apprehensions of 'losing control' completely vanished. In fact, in short order, I developed a strong sense that I was in my element and in full control; that is, until a jarring afternoon shook me to the core and left me stupefied. Herein, Vanessa's vignette begins:

Vignette One: An Uncommon Encounter and Paradigm Shift

At first I was indifferent, and then I was intrigued. Finally I became awed and mystified by a very thin, 5'3 bookish teacher in her late 20s, who always had her hair pulled back in a ponytail. Vanessa was her name, and I don't quite remember whether we had been formally introduced. She appeared solitary, unassuming and did not capture my attention, at least, not until our first staff meeting. Vanessa sat diagonally to my left,

such that I was able to clearly see her profile. I remember, she sat with a bowl of fruit. It was with interest that I watched her as she casually picked at her grapes. I was fascinated merely by the fact that in my twenties, the idea of indulging in fruit for one's snack was, in my mind, bizarre and unnatural. But, soon, Vanessa was to capture my attention and astound me for a reason I would never have imagined. Slouched and sitting quietly, Vanessa slowly raised her arm. I will never forget what followed when she began speaking. Everyone turned to look at her. And to my astonishment, the teachers appeared to hang onto every word Vanessa uttered. Without anyone having to tell me, on an intuitive level, I knew that this nondescript teacher had somehow earned the respect of everyone in the room. Vanessa spoke with calm and clarity. There was nothing special about her speech or its delivery. Yet, there was an unequivocal command she possessed, an inscrutable 'authority' she somehow seized. Each individual willingly gave Vanessa his/her full attention, which, conspicuously, was not offered to any other speaker. It must be noted here that there was a disproportionate number of male teachers in this high school. Bearing witness to Vanessa's mysterious impact on the entire teaching staff caused me to feel intimidated, which sadly hindered me from getting to know her and the secret behind her noteworthy power. Yet, little was I aware that greater intimidation was awaiting me.

A Suckerpunch with Some Humble Pie

On a fateful day, it turned out that I would need to cover one of Vanessa's English classes. It was in her class that two unforgettable things were to occur: 1) I would become better acquainted with Vanessa's mysterious authority and 2) My deepest fear was to become realized. Not knowing what would soon transpire, I blithely stepped into Vanessa's English class.

Vanessa's students sat silently, unmistakably focused on each word emerging from her lips. The tranquility in her room didn't stand out as being anything exceptional, that is, until Vanessa left the room. I introduced myself and reiterated Vanessa's instructions. I quickly noticed that the more I spoke, the apparent tranquility I had earlier experienced, was fast evaporating. First, it started with quiet sidebar murmurs, then, in no time, it escalated to full-blown conversations, with students hollering across the room to one another. A number of Vanessa's male students, who towered over me, gave me looks as they sauntered by me, which overtly signalled that I shouldn't "bother" with them. Exasperated, bewildered and fearful, I stopped talking and allowed the students to do whatever they wanted...essentially run the class. It painfully struck me that I had lost complete control over Vanessa's students. Something within my gut knew that if I attempted to reclaim Vanessa's authority, I would risk making an even bigger fool of myself. If Vanessa's students had any doubts about letting me know of their complete disregard for my presence, they were to soon punctuate this for me.

Upon Vanessa's re-entry, the entire room became hushed and everyone instantaneously transformed into virtuous saints. In a short space of time, I had the proverbial 'rubbing salt into one's wound' feeling. Oblivious to all of this, Vanessa kindly offered me her thanks. Being mortified by this comedic sequence of events, I hastily exited, with my pride battered and emotions crushed. Yet, I also walked out experiencing a heightened sense of curiosity about this waif and ordinary-looking teacher. I wanted to understand the quiet 'authority' Vanessa effortlessly exercised, over what I believed were her devious and diabolical students. That one-period nightmare was horrifying, and I chose to repress it from my conscious memory - until it resurfaced through a trigger: the writing of this chapter.

Sadly, my sense of inferiority around Vanessa resulted in two negative consequences: 1) it hindered me from getting to know her and 2) I was to never unravel the secret behind her mysterious power, which the male teachers failed to exert.

Genie's Story (Part 2)

Subsequent to teaching at the private school, I restarted my career in the public sector. I entered the elementary panel and was to become a Grade 5 teacher. My re-initiation was to be at an exceedingly challenging inner-city school.

At the conclusion of my first year of teaching Grade 5, I was beside myself with grief and despondency; anxiously, I was reconsidering my career options. When probed as to why I believed I had to leave this noble profession, my response was simple, "How can I teach when I have zero control over my class!" Through great coaxing and intense prayer, I found myself returning to this school the following year.

The Heavens listened - my prayers were decisively answered. My classroom environment went from chaotic to calm. I did not fully comprehend the extent of my transformed 'teacher-stance' until a few years after my first-year-fiasco. An event occurred that would become seared into my memory...

A large proportion of the students were bussed in from what people called 'the housing projects'. One winter afternoon, due to inclement weather, the busses were delayed, thus leaving about 120 Grade 4 and 5 students strewn throughout the hallway, creating what people would call 'ruckus'. A male teacher, well-built, with a booming voice, menacingly charged down the hall, bellowing his demand for silence. The too-cool-for-school students, unfazed, blatantly ignored him. After a few more failed attempts, exasperated, he raised up his hands acknowledging defeat. Crestfallen, he slunk away from the epicenter of the disorder.

Appalled by the disrespect just witnessed, and unnerved by the ongoing inappropriate behaviours and loud noise, I stood up and called for the students' attention. I indignantly uttered some words, and the fracas and aggressive jostling

stopped. The mayhem ceased, and the students compliantly engaged in quiet chatter. Shortly thereafter, the school custodian entered our hallway. Walking past me, these were his words, “Thank goodness ‘Mr. Rambo’ is here. If it weren’t for him, this place would be a zoo right now!” I didn’t respond. I felt numb. I needed to process the custodian’s utterance. Some context needs to be added. When the custodian arrived on ‘scene’, I was standing in the middle of the hall, in front of the students, while Mr. Rambo was disengaged from everyone. When I was able to collect my thoughts, two things rapidly rose to my consciousness: 1) I was incredulous that it was in fact “pint-sized” me who commanded control over the 120 students, many of whom were hyper and unruly, and 2) I was annoyed that the custodian assumed, despite the given context, that Mr. Rambo was responsible for the resulting calm. This left an indelible mark on me.

I was to become consciously aware of the powerful role gender plays in influencing erroneous presumptions and perceptions. Admittedly, I too was equally guilty of this presupposition: I was deeply shocked by the unexpected difference in outcomes between myself and my colleague. Why? It centered solely on one key point: our gender difference. The social construct of gender and its supposed intersection with authority now took on a whole new meaning for me.

Vignette Two: The Curious Case of an Improbable Principal

I am acutely aware that to effectively convince others of the ‘legitimacy’ of female authority, it requires more than scholarly theorizing; it necessitates concrete evidence. Well, this gift was inadvertently offered to me by someone who serves as my professional mentor and has become my beloved and treasured friend. Anne Lee is her name, and her stellar reputation as both a human being and as a Principal of a Middle School are justified. However, it was not until I saw Anne in action that I came to fully comprehend the quiet yet impressive power she wields. As a genuinely humble, graceful and soft-spoken Asian woman, Anne exudes a gentleness and femininity that beguiles and conceals her intrinsic authority and commanding presence. I went to supply teach at Anne’s school and asked her to keep our friendship secret - this way, I could poke around without drawing attention to myself.

A full day in a school can unearth a lot, especially when one is undercover. My sleuthing began even before the bell rang to signal the start of the school day. I actively sought out teachers with whom I could extract information. I asked a few available teachers about Ms Lee. As expected, the comments were all glowing and replete with exuberant praise - nothing that surprised me. The real test came with my next unsuspecting targets. My radar turned to the ‘difficult’ and rebellious-looking students, whose appearance and body language loudly communicated, “Don’t come near me, especially if you’re a teacher”. Near a shady tree, a group of five males formed a loose

circle, emitting an intimidating vibe. Brazenly, I slipped into their group and without introduction, I simply asked, "So, what's the Principal of your school like?" The coolest looking boy, who was a head taller than me, spoke first. Despite having a menacing appearance, he enthused, "Ms Lee! She's the best! Everyone loves her!" Taken aback, I responded, "You actually like the Principal?" I knew I was being judgemental, but these Grade 8 boys looked like they would frequent the Principal's office, and for all the wrong reasons. The students then gave me a list of why Ms Lee was so highly esteemed. They primarily shared about how she genuinely cares and looks out for them. Following my self-assigned detective work, two other significant events would consolidate my understanding of Anne's deep authority and impact that reverberates throughout her entire middle school.

An Anecdote Worth a Thousand Words

An event that baffled me, was to take place during the lunch hour. I slipped into the school office, mid-lunch, to make a quick inquiry about my afternoon schedule. It was eerily quiet and empty. I casually struck up a conversation with the Office Administrator (OA), remarking on the oddity of the office being so quiet during the lunch hour. I further added that she must be feeling relieved by this auspicious moment of calm. The OA locked eyes with me and soberly stated that the office was always quiet. I physically reacted to this impossible-to-believe statement. My response was a visceral, "You're kidding me!" to which the OA explained how prior to Anne's arrival, the office was pure bedlam...all day. However, with Anne's presence as the school's Principal, everything dramatically changed. The kicker was this statement, "Now, it's strange when students come to the office." This simple interchange with Anne's OA solidified my appreciation of the subtle and quiet power wielded by a petite, female Principal.

Anne's impact felt particularly exaggerated and curious, especially when contrasted with many of my former male Principals. Several male administrators, tall and burly in stature, were frequently found screaming at misbehaved students. Without fail, the crimson-faced hollering was always met with defiance and unrestrained spewing of expletives. Misusing their overbearing size and overbearing personalities, these male Principals erroneously believed misbehaviours could be quashed. Sadly, I have witnessed a number of my male colleagues implement the same counterproductive approach, all with the same humiliating and damaging effect. This approach is what many rightfully call 'bullying'.

Another Telling Anecdote about Anne...

I was instructed to take a Grade 7 class to the cafeteria for an assembly. It was here that Anne demonstrated the extent of her authority. From the outset of the assembly to its conclusion, I witnessed order, respect, and decorum being exhibited by the entire

Grade 6-8 student body. When the noise level rose, it was Anne who stepped in. Using a gentle yet commanding tone, Anne brought the assembly to an immediate hush. Just like Vanessa, Anne spoke with calm, yet with a weighty presence that exuded genuine care. I will take a detour at this moment to shed light on the noteworthiness of what I experienced during the assembly.

Puzzled by the rare sense of 'order' that permeated Anne's cafeteria during the assembly, I was compelled to make a phone call. I needed to be certain I was not misguided in believing that school assemblies are commonly associated with a fair level of disorder. This was my personal experience for over 15 years. Hence, I decided to solicit the insights of a fellow educator-friend, Rona. Rona has been in the education field for well over 20 years, both in the capacity of teacher and Vice-Principal within various K-8 schools. As a no-nonsense, unfiltered and refreshingly forthright leader, I knew I would receive a frank and reliable overview of the state-of-affairs within our schools. Without providing Rona any context, I point-blank asked about her experiences with assemblies and the customary 'office-traffic' occurring during lunch and recess times. As I anticipated, Rona generalized about the ubiquitous din during assemblies and the disorderly tumult inside the office during lunch/recess times. It was at this point I disclosed the purpose behind my random query. I then inquired about Rona's thoughts pertaining to 'gender' and classroom management. Rona, in typical fashion, was unequivocal and raw in her reply, "Regardless of gender, some people have *#!@ classroom management. I've seen it both ways." I then asked if she believed females were at an automatic disadvantage when it came to classroom authority. Rona offered a brusque response, "No, it's all about classroom management." Rona offered me what I knew on a gut level, based on my own experiences: Her many years as a VP doing walk-about throughout her schools, clearly revealed a nonexistent relationship between gender and one's ability to 'manage' one's class. Having access to Rona's trustworthy bird's eye view helped reinforce my intuitive assumption: Gender and classroom authority should not be conflated. With the foregoing points of contrast, let's return back to Anne.

Having been accustomed to witnessing students and teachers openly chatting during assemblies, of which I too was culpable, I became fascinated watching students and staff give Anne their undivided attention. As earlier described, Anne is a soft-spoken, feminine and mild-mannered Principal, who, during the assembly, carried herself with conviction, composure and serenity. It was evident that the entire school had somehow come under her poised and amiable 'spell'.

When I asked about male vs female teachers' differential, vis-a-vis classroom management, Anne was categorical. She started with, "Male stereotypes are out there...that men have greater authority". Yet, identical to Rona, Anne asserted that as a Principal she has encountered way too many male teachers with "no" (emphasized by

Anne) classroom management. Anne then presented something that all educators must heed: “Students’ behaviour is a way of communicating.” Anne provided a few examples to accentuate her point: “If students act out, it could be that they are communicating that the curriculum is too hard, they don’t feel safe, and/or they are having issues at home or with their peers.” Clearly, Anne “gets” kids.

I then probed about her perspective on what she considers critical for teachers to have strong management in their classrooms. Anne was emphatic in her response. Central for Anne is a deep and appropriate rapport with students. Anne believes, rightly, that students need to know that their teachers care about them and are invested in their lives. According to Anne, “This relationship piece is how difference is made, which is why teachers have been called into the profession”. I unreservedly concur.

Anne’s words, corroborated by the unsuspecting boys, signal that she genuinely ‘cares’ about her students and not about imposing her ‘authority’. Anne’s responses help uncover how she has earned respect and ‘authority’ from her entire school community.

Vignette Three: The “Julia Carter” Effect

In life, you may have the great fortune of encountering someone who is not only inimitable, but also a rare breed. Well, I happened to be blessed and cursed to have such a person become my unlikely mentor. Why unlikely? Julia Carter was a dreadlock-sporting, Jamaican force to be reckoned with. Julia is the diametric opposite of me, in every way possible. Humour is not my strong point, and people seem to have this unrestrained urge to tell me that my voice is barely audible. Conversely, Julia has this belly-aching humour. She is loud and intense, in a way that captivates and enchants. Unrivalled are Julia’s charisma, wit, and energy. Once again, we’re complete opposites.

No doubt, I’ll forever be indebted to Julia for voluntarily offering to mentor me; but, as earlier described, it was also a ‘curse’, or better yet, a liability. I will endeavour to make a very, very long story short. Julia was tremendously effective with students; in fact, the whole school was mesmerized by her. She was the “it” teacher whom all students wanted to have and all teachers wanted to be. This is how Julia unwittingly became my liability: Trying to be like “Julia Carter” became my undoing. Earlier, I shared how I almost left the profession - this was the direct result of my impersonating Julia. I instantly became loud, intense, and then eventually unhinged. My students had no qualms about letting me know I was ineffectual, an imposter, and a bona fide joke. Defeated and desperate, I turned to a damaging approach previously reported: bullying. I quickly degenerated into an unloving and unkind teacher. I succumbed to chastising, dominating, yelling, and bribing, all of which functioned to fuel anarchy within my class. Prepared to leave the profession, a wise woman challenged me to re-start in September

by being 'myself', while invoking various lessons I had learned during my hellish year. With hesitance, I took this Godly woman's advice. Counterintuitively, in being my authentic 'self', with my scratchy, small voice, I experienced 'authority' and exhilarating joy, to the point where I would often close my classroom door at the end of the day, whispering, "I can't believe I get paid to teach!"

A 180 Degree Metamorphosis

Licensed to be my 'authentic' self, along with implementing a host of critical 'teacher moves and strategies modelled by Julia, my classroom environment took a dramatic turn, with a surprising twist. To understand the extent of the transformation, let's revisit one of the burly Principals, whose berating style proved ineffective (not dissimilar to my former misguided approach).

This blustering, well-statured Principal, periodically sent Educational Assistants (EA) to my classroom to take over my class. Why? This Principal needed me to de-escalate situations, in which he had himself inflamed. This was the typical scenario: A supply teacher requiring assistance would call for the Principal to help restore order. The Principal would enter the class, only to exacerbate the problem. The unruly students would insolently refuse to listen to the Principal, while further wreaking havoc. Therein, I would arrive on scene to remove the students - without raising my voice. At first, I was privately irritated by these interruptions; I knew this Principal was responsible for precipitating these unnecessary standoffs with students. Then, one day it dawned on me: A little female teacher, with a tremulous voice, was solicited by a well-statured male Principal, to 'rescue' HIM. Ironic? No, it's a reality that must become widespread knowledge: Women are capable of exerting strong authority in schools, with exceeding efficacy. This anecdote was invoked to disabuse everyone about the spurious notion that males have more 'authority' than females. This juxtaposition, hopefully, proves useful in uncovering difficult-to-perceive reality.

Six Plus One Strategies for Garnering Classroom Authority

I shared my mortifying and triumphant experiences, along with three compelling vignettes, to highlight a fundamental truth: Female educators can and do exert powerful authority, without the need for loud, masculine posturing. I would be naive and remiss if I didn't acknowledge the reality that male educators, in general, are afforded greater respect from students at the "outset" than female teachers. However, achieving "lasting" authority in one's class is a different matter, which is not contingent on gender. To earn and "sustain" legitimate 'authority', requires the implementation of key strategies, techniques and mindset.

The principles and practices for obtaining ‘authority’ in one’s class are largely consistent, for which a full-bodied and comprehensive understanding can be found through reading the entirety of this book. There exist general tried-and-true principles that must be adhered to, of which I shall heretofore list 6, “plus 1”. These have been gleaned from my personal experiences and observations:

1. Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

As ‘location’ determines real-estate value, fostering caring and authentic relationships with students determines classroom authority. This begins with treating every student with dignity and respect. The aforementioned male Principal failed to build genuine and positive relationships with students. During his self-defeating standoffs, he defaulted, disingenuously, to using a friendly and good-natured approach. This Principal neglected to spend time authentically cultivating a respectful and humble style of interaction with students. Consequently, when it mattered, this Principal became a toothless sitting duck;

2. Be Consistent and Fair

“Trust”, we all know, is the foundation of any meaningful relationship. Students especially, need to know that they can trust their teachers. Trust is primarily manifested through two tangible experiences: consistency and fairness. When rules and expectations and the treatment of each student demonstrates integrity (consistency) and a sense of what is just (fair), loyalty naturally and powerfully ensues;

3. One-Size Does Not Fit All

Believe it or not, ALL students want to learn. As Anne astutely and compassionately pointed out, students who misbehave, do so for reasons that are innumerable and often heartbreaking. One reason I frequently encounter is that students fear they will be exposed as ‘incapable’. Such students rather be sent to the office for being ‘disruptive’, than be labelled ‘dumb’ by their teacher and peers. Make learning accessible and engaging for all students. Ensure your lessons invite all students into the learning, prioritizing the Culturally Relevant and Responsive pedagogical approach (refer to Gloria Ladson-Billings);

4. Establish Clear Expectations and Appropriate Boundaries

Kids are kids, no matter their size and age. Students need explicit and consistent opportunities to know appropriate boundaries and expectations. You can be fun and friendly with your students; nonetheless, they must recognize that you are their teacher and should be treated respectfully. More often than not, I have seen male teachers endeavour to be cool and chummy with students, only to forthwith experience a

downward spiral. Seemingly out of nowhere, they have allowed the lines to become blurred and obscured...along with their authority;

5. Take Off your Mask and Be Authentically “You”

Again, it must be acknowledged that when students first meet a tall, burly, ‘masculine’ teacher, they immediately sit up taller and suppress their inclination to misbehave. Caveat: This does not last long...unless the foregoing strategies, along with other critical teacher moves and attitudes, are effectively enacted. The authority with which many males are instantly endowed, can just as quickly fritter away. Vanessa, Anne, and Julia are all different in nature, style and approach; yet, a common thread observed is they never postured nor sought after ‘power’; yet, ‘authority’ and respect were rightfully earned and retained...to exceptionally high degrees.

Aspiring teachers need to operate according to how they have been uniquely designed and created. As earlier illustrated, the more I tried to mimic Julia’s style and ways, the more I lost control over my class. After a full year of futility and failure, I learned that I needed to adapt many of Julia’s strategies to suit my personality, idiosyncrasies, and strengths. This meant, for example, that I needed to adopt techniques to compensate for my quiet voice. Using sign language, along with some self-made quirky signals, which amused my students, is one example of how I was able to garner my class’s attention, without having to yell or bribe. I know that I am neither an anomaly nor an exception to the rule. I am what teacher candidates can look to and boldly conclude: Gender does not determine one’s impact in the classroom.

6. Seek to Empower and Not Take Power

The case of the burly Principal, in contrast with Anne, is sufficient evidence that one’s motivation and heart matter. The burly Principal sought to wrest power from Gr. 4 & 5 students by imposing his ‘authority’ upon them. In doing so, he forfeited his power. In contrast, Anne, in her selfless and other-centered ways, strives to equip and empower her staff and students to become their best selves. In seeking to empower her staff and students, Anne has inadvertently ended up wearing a superhero cape, especially in the eyes of her Grade 6, 7, and 8 students. We see again the potency of juxtaposition.

“Plus 1”: Mindset Matters

This ‘plus 1’ piece of advice is targeted to female teachers. The preceding 6 offerings apply to all educators, regardless of gender. It may surprise you, but there’s only ‘1’ “strategy” that applies specifically to females.

Ultimately, the legitimation strategy for female teachers begins with one’s mindset. All educators, regardless of gender, race, or physical stature are capable of powerfully and positively creating a classroom environment conducive to learning.

Mindset matters; therefore, a mental pivot is essential. Why? Perception becomes reality. Despite pervasive anecdotes and assumptions that delegitimize female teachers, we must 'believe' we can exert influence and control. The implications of one's belief system will largely determine one's success or failure.

Concluding Words

Establishing credible authority is complex and nuanced. Like all other areas of expertise, there is a complexity of moves, learnings, understandings and practices needed. It must be noted that this chapter merely scratches the surface.

In conclusion, educators will do well to reflect on William Glasser's sage words: "When you study by great teachers... you will learn much more from their caring and hard work, than from their style."

Genie's Bio:

Genie has extensive teaching experience, working with both high school and elementary students. Her time as a teacher was predominantly spent inside inner-city schools, where she experienced immense joy working with marginalized and disadvantaged students. She is currently teaching aspiring educators at Tyndale University's Bachelor of Education program. Her doctoral dissertation focused on effective mathematics pedagogy. Genie's greatest passions are in the areas of social justice, leadership, effective teacher praxes, mentorship, and classroom management. She aims to empower future teachers to become transformational agents of change within education.

Abstract:

It is arguable that most individuals assume a direct correlation exists between one's 'masculinity quotient' and one's measure of authority. Notwithstanding the pervasive assumption that female teachers are less effective in managing their students compared to their male counterparts, this chapter turns this presupposition on its head. Empirical first-hand accounts and anecdotes of four female educators are delineated throughout. These compelling illustrations function to discredit the common misconception of male preeminence and authority in schools. This chapter concludes by offering both male and female teachers some key legitimation strategies; the provision of tips presented should aid in the establishment of positive classroom impact and authority.