

Inspiring Role Models to Reflect Classroom Diversity

Representation in mathematics matters. Today's classes contain students from under-represented groups, and we can't expect them to progress in any subject if they never see someone like themselves doing it.

Here's Maths Scholar Lizzie Lomax telling us how addressing under-representation in the classroom inspired her to become a secondary mathematics teacher.

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According to UCAS data from 2017/18, only 35% of higher education STEM students in the UK identified as women. Since research consistently shows little gender divide in GCSE maths results, or even young girls outperforming their male classmates, the lack of women heading into STEM pathways means that encouragement at secondary school could make a huge difference to the number of women who choose STEM careers.

I remember walking into a mathematics classroom after my undergrad for the first time since being a pupil myself, and glancing up at the string of all white, all male mathematicians staring back down at me from the wall. My mum had recently gifted me a fantastic box of Rachel Ignatofsky *Women in Science* postcards, that named and quoted just a handful of inspiring women that had contributed so much to the science and maths that we all use today and see so frequently in our classrooms. Yet not a single

one of their names or faces graced that wall. At least half of the pupils in that classroom could not see themselves up there.

I hear so often 'you don't look like a maths teacher', which is funny to me. Especially as this is 'meant as a compliment'. What do mathematicians look like? For me, being a mathematician and teaching secondary mathematics is about inclusion and inspiration. It's about demonstrating to and reminding pupils that maths is for all genders, all races, all sexualities. It's about opening pathways that pupils may not have previously considered, or believed were meant for them.

One day I'll have my own string of mathematicians and scientists on my classroom wall. It'll have the likes of Hedy Lamarr, Katherine Johnson, and Emmy Noether. It'll champion faces of modern mathematicians such as transgender topologist Autumn Kent alongside Pythagoras and Descartes. It'll reflect the diversity of the classroom, and the past and future of mathematics.

That's what inspired me to become a secondary mathematics teacher: making maths accessible for everyone.

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