

"Fashion for Girls" and "Fashion for Boys"

Fashion shows, to our liking!

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and Keywords:

Boys as well as girls are more than ever before exposed to consumer advertising messages coming from a variety of mass media sources. Businesses are well aware of the active involvement of children, at increasingly younger ages, in the consumer society, and therefore they take their preferences seriously when it comes to fashion and trademarks, *brands and labels*.

In this respect children and adolescents are re-enacting everything that adults consider to be important. Not only consumption-related issues, but also education has an impact on "children's decisions about how they dress and how they want to appear.

From a certain age onwards, decisions about the clothes they wear are left to them in the same way that adults make decisions about the clothes that they wear. (Oelkers 2005/a). Moreover, MESSNER (2000) stresses gender discrepancy in terms of the consumption patterns of children and youth, like in the case of adults: Barbie dolls and Lego transformers do not interest girls and boys in the same way at all, quite to the contrary.

Keywords:

Fashion for boys; fashion for girls; gender-related criteria in the choice of clothing articles; fashion clothing; trademarks, brands, labels; the consumption behaviour of children.

Similar topics:

Media influence; reflection on personal buying decisions; self-assessment.

Materials:

- Worksheet 1, Worksheet 2: Prepare a collage about "Fashions for girls" and "Fashions for boys";
- Chart for worksheets 1 and 2;
- Pictures for worksheet 2;
- Paper dolls for worksheets 1 and 2;
- Internet access with printing possibilities (one computer per group);
- Large brown or cardboard paper for the collages;
- Felt-tip pens;
- Scissors, glue, BlueTack.

Duration:

1 to 2 hours

Number of participants:

- Can be used with any classroom size (divided into small, homogeneous groups of three to four pupils)

Age:

- As of about 8 years of age (2nd academic grade)
- Well suited for classes such as mother tongue instruction, foreign language instruction, natural and social science studies and manual training, art class, media instruction, etc.), afternoon supervision, youth activities and project work.

Aims:

- Encourage communication (expression of feedback);
- Promotion of oral expression (free and personal expression of opinion);
- Promotion of self-assurance;
- Formulating hypotheses and expectations (typical "fashion for girls", typical "fashion for boys", what is typical?);
- Promotion of social skills (group work, reaching a consensus);
- Reducing clichés (typical for girls, typical for boys);
- Working on stereotypes (reducing stereotypes).

(Short) explanation:

Working in small, homogenous groups, the children should collect pictures of clothing articles in fashion for children, from various Internet pages. Then they should make a collage out of them. Lastly, they should compare their findings recorded on a chart.

Procedure: (important: Internet access and printing possibilities is required!):

1. The children should be broken down into homogenous groups of three to four participants of their choice.
2. They search the Internet for pages containing illustrations and pictures of various fashionable clothing articles for girls and boys (e.g. the OTTO-Catalogue <http://www.otto.de>, → CHILDREN → GIRLS sizes 92-188 or BOYS sizes 92-188).
3. They look through the pictures and discuss within their group about those they like best. Finally they choose about 10 to 12 articles of clothing and accessories for girls and boys respectively. They should have put together a complete "wardrobe" including the following: **accessories, dress-up fashion, trousers, jackets & Co., pullover & cardigans, skirts & dresses, shoes, shirts & sweatshirts.**
4. The illustrations should be printed out, cut out and pasted onto two collages entitled: "Fashion for girls" and "Fashion for boys". The children can use both of the paper dolls (the boy and girl) and decorate the collages in any way they like. **(Exercise 1)**
5. The collages made by the groups are affixed to the wall for comparison. Using the chart, the children clearly describe what the clothing articles for boys/girls look like and what colour is typical. **(Exercise 2)**

6. In the plenary session, the children should discuss the findings (differences and similarities between girls' and boys' fashion), with the teacher on hand to stimulate discussion (see reflection).

Reflection:

In the plenary classroom, the findings from the collages and the charts can be discussed according to the following aspects and impressions. (The teacher can orientate discussions to assist the children spontaneously coming up themselves with gender-specific differences/similarities.)

- Which articles of clothing can be worn by both girls and boys?
- Which can *only* be worn by girls or *only* worn by boys? Why?
- Which articles of clothing/colours/designs are typical for girls or for boys?
- Do some clothes "depend on a person's age"? Which ones are these?
- Which articles of clothing do you like best? Did the other groups make similar decisions?
- What do you think, which clothes would look good on you and which ones would not? Why?
- Is your choice of clothes influenced by what your friends say? If the answer is yes, how exactly?
- What is your favourite article of clothing? What do you feel at your best in?
- What do you find not in fashion? Justify your answer.
- Which brands are especially popular for girls/boys?

Variations (continuation):

Suggestion 1:

If Internet is not available, or for some other reasons the children are not able to work on the computer, then use worksheet 2 onto which different pictures of clothing articles would be included. The children can select from these pictures and prepare both of their collages. (This variation takes less time and can also be used with younger children.)

Suggestion 2a:

The children are asked to wear their favourite outfit including accessories (purse, belt, satchel, key chain, jewellery, sunglasses, sports equipment, etc) on a day decided in advance and to present them in the plenary classroom session. The questions outlined in the reflection can also be used in this case to provide feedback.

Suggestion 2b:

Similar to suggestion 2a, however the presentations will be done in pairs. The children can ask each other questions. This gives the pupils the opportunity of getting to know one of their classmates better or from a new perspective. (They can also give their classmate feedback on his/her clothes: i.e. Do they like them and why? Pair work is ideal for this.)

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

In *every day* usage, the term 'fashion' refers to the use of certain objects and certain ways of doing things that are considered to be in-style amongst a given group of people at a given time in history." (cf. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode>). In general, fashion is constantly changing due to changes in society and as such relates to a short-lived phenomenon. The same holds for *fashion clothing*. Fashion brings new modes of behaviour and ways of thinking as well as values which either emerge as discretionary models or actually become *de rigueur*.

The *sociological* definition emphasizes *standardization*; the desire of an individual to *belong* to a certain social class strived for and to a larger group (cf. Lehnert 1998 and <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode>, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleidermode>). The term 'fashion' also has an aesthetic connotation, as dressing in style is also equated with 'beauty'. The role of clothes goes far beyond its utility function of protecting the body. According to LEHNERT (1998), wearing fashionable clothes expresses much more than aesthetic aspects including:

- a desire to conform i.e. to conform to mainstream society or rather;
- to draw attention because of something new, not yet well-known;
- to express belonging to a (high) social class through labels, brands and trademarks;
- to simply impress;
- to show self-assurance or rather;
- to cover up one's uncertainties, etc. (cf. König 1982).

According to SIMMEL (1973), psychological behaviour with regard to clothes & fashion is related on the one hand to imitating and on the other hand with the desire to set oneself apart from the masses and to distinguish oneself as "someone special".

Historically speaking, fashion in Europe in the 60s experienced its first far-reaching change: the cultural conflict resulted in a break with the traditional functions of fashion and its way of spreading. Trends were no longer uniquely and solely set by French "fashion dictators" and rich Parisian ladies. All of a sudden, diversity and at the same time individuality became important in fashion. The role of *youth* took on an important function: youth became the creator of fashion and at the same time actively participated in societal and political changes (cf. Zsolt 2003). ZSOLT (2003) further stressed that in the 1960s and the 1970s, through their dress and their music, young people wanted to express their freedom, their protest feelings and their revolt against the "ancien régime" (protest against the war in Vietnam, the 1968 student movement, the sexual revolution, etc). At that time, the so-called unisex-clothes became popular and therefore gender differences in clothes became less of an issue.

The 1980s and the 1990s represented a much more peaceful era for the clothes & fashions of young people: dress was no longer used to express "revolt" and "protest"; several, parallel fashion trends coexisted and to a great extent drew their inspiration from fashion orientations of earlier years. Today's sub-culture mainly only reflects a musical preference, which nevertheless is connected to a certain way of dressing.

One of the major changes regarding fashion nowadays, however, is that *children* are increasingly targeted as an important consumption group for fashion clothing. In fact, this target group has become so profitable that the American author Juliet SCHOR (2004) even referred to children as being ("Born to Buy"). In this regard, German studies have shown (cf. Oelkers 2005a), that in 2003, children between the ages of 6 to 13 years of age had, at their disposal, more than 5.6 billion euros every year in pocket money or from money gifts. It is therefore hardly any wonder that children have become an important consumer target group. Almost 70% of those surveyed could decide themselves about how they dressed. "The children learn (...), that consumption makes a person happy and they have a fixation for brands that are connected with prestige. This kind of a learning environment has consequences: 70% of children and young people state that appearance is more important than character and that fashion is almost as important to them as their own family" (cf. Oelkers 2005/a).

In addition to the fact, that children and young people have a fixation for fashion and that the media continues to focus more intensely on them (i.e. in the form of targeted advertising), OELKERS (2005/b) stresses that gender-specific differences are clearly visible in advertising, while in child-rearing and in education they are almost completely ignored. According to the above-mentioned study, child-rearing today is no longer strictly influenced by role models from the family or teachers. OELKERS (2005/a, 2005/b) is however, not painting a gloomy picture either, along the lines of "values are on the decline" or "a total disintegration of prosperity": rather he stresses the importance of children and young people acquiring strategies in order to be able to consistently deal with consumer advertising. Children now need to do nothing *more* than make a distinction between the media and dimensions of experience and learn how to cope with them. Every day consumption and the fashion issue does not therefore simply refer to negative "seduction" that should be avoided, but rather represents a problem area where children must learn to draw the limits. According to OELKERS (2005/b), an additional challenge related to this learning process, is to gain awareness for and to take into consideration gender-specific differences.

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Worksheet 1:**Exercise 1:**

Form a small group with three or four boys or girls. Go onto the computer and search the Internet for pages containing illustrations and pictures of different clothing articles that are in fashion for girls and boys (e.g. the OTTO-catalogue <http://www.otto.de>, → CHILDREN → GIRLS sizes 92-188 or BOYS sizes 92-188)

Choose from among the following articles and try to put together a complete wardrobe:

Accessories, dress-up fashion, trousers, jackets & Co., pullover & cardigans, skirts & dresses, shoes, shirts & sweatshirts.

Look at the pictures carefully. Discuss in your group about those you like best for girls and those you like best for boys. Finally choose about 10 to 12 articles of clothing for girls and boys. Print the pictures, cut them out and paste them onto both of your collages with the title "Fashion for Girls" and "Fashion for Boys". You can use both of the paper dolls and also decorate the collages in any way you like.

Exercise 2:

When you are finished, affix both collages on the wall with BlueTack and compare "Fashion for boys" and "Fashion for girls" using the collages from all the groups. Fill in the following **chart** outlining what clothes for boys/girls look like and what the typical colours are.

Exercise 3:

In the plenary classroom, discuss the findings recorded on the charts with the other groups. What are the differences between clothes for girls and boys? Which clothes are the same? Which clothes do you especially like? Why? What did you find that was not fashionable? Justify your answers.

Are there typical articles of clothes/colours/designs for girls/boys? What are they? Which brands are especially popular among girls/boys?

Worksheet 2:**Exercise 1:**

Look at the following pictures carefully. Discuss in your group about those you like best for girls and those you like best for boys. Finally choose about 10 to 12 fashionable articles of clothing for girls and boys. Cut these pictures out and paste them onto both of your collages entitled "Fashion for girls" and "Fashion for Boys". You can use both of the paper dolls and decorate the collages in any way you like.

Choose from the following articles of clothing and try to put together a complete "wardrobe":

Accessories, dress-up fashion, trousers, jackets & Co., pullover & cardigans, skirt & dresses, shoes, shirts & sweat shirts.

Exercise 2:

When you are finished, affix both collages on the wall with BlueTack and compare "Fashion for boys" and "Fashion for girls" using the collages from all the groups. Fill in the following **chart** outlining what clothes for boys/girls look like and what the typical colours are. You can also record the descriptions of the articles of clothing and the accessories as well as their brands.

Exercise 3:

In the plenary classroom, discuss the findings recorded on the charts with the other groups. What are the differences between clothes for girls and boys? Which clothes are the same? Which clothes do you especially like? Why? What did you find that was not fashionable? Justify your answers.

Are there typical articles of clothes/colours/designs for girls/boys? What are they? Which brands are especially popular among girls/boys?

"Fashion for girls"



"Fashion for boys"

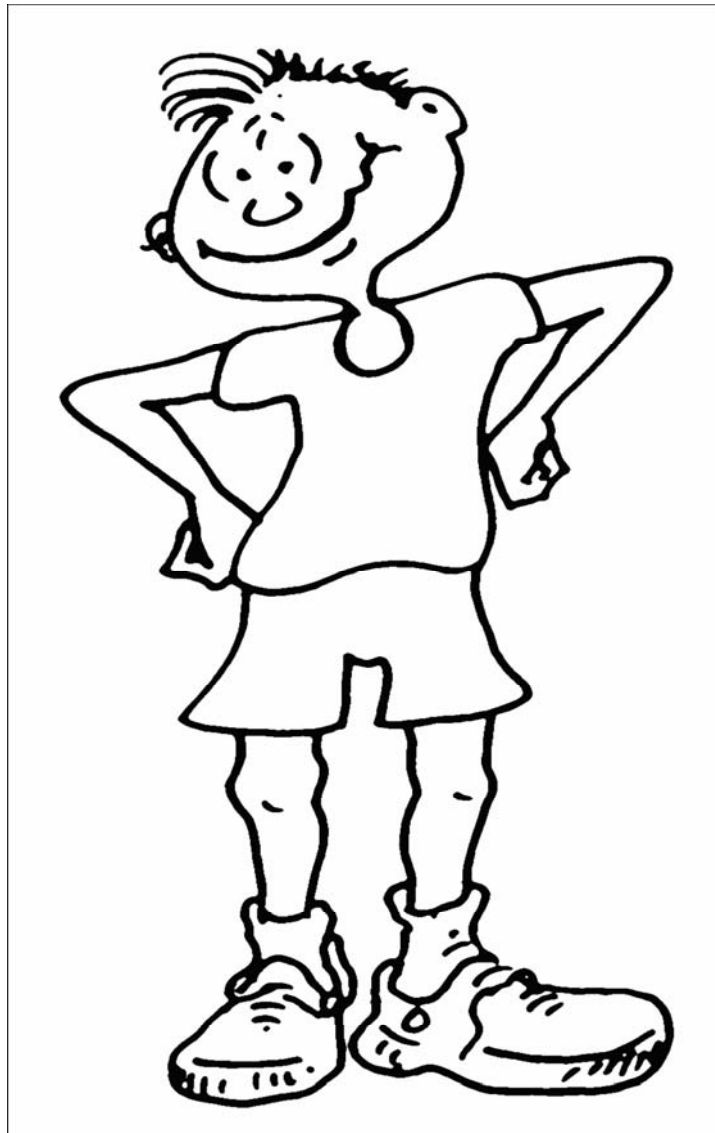


Chart for Worksheets 1 and 2, Exercise 3:

<div> <div>"Fashion for girls"</div> <div>"Fashion for boys"</div> <div>Comparison</div> </div>		
	For girls	For boys
Accessories		
Dress-up fashion		
Trousers		
Jackets & Co.		
Pullover & cardigan		
Skirts & dresses		
Shoes		
Shirts & sweatshirts		