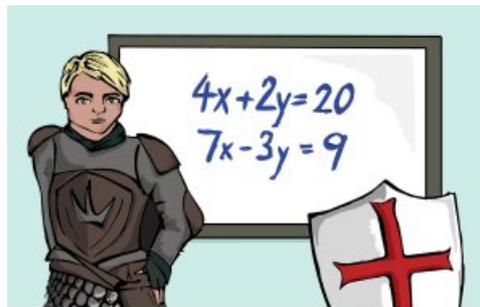


Sir, I think we're missing the point

Fighting to get Sir and Miss out of the classroom should not be a priority



By [Kate Mitchell](#), Graphics Director (2013/14)
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Kate Mitchell

Jennifer Coates, a professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Roehampton has lamented the use of 'Sir', and 'Miss', to address teachers in UK schools, calling the practice "depressing and sexist."

According to Coates, equating male teachers to a knight is unfair when female teachers are addressed by a title that simply means "unmarried".

The most 'liked' comments on a BBC article on the subject are dismissive of her claims, with one married female teacher stating she is "very happy for pupils to call [her] Miss".

It is easy to see how a professor of Linguistics would be more in-tune to, and bothered by, the problematic nature of quirks of language use than most. Someone who has dedicated their professional life to studying language is far more likely to be attuned to its uses in everyday life - to the point of over-analysis. Equally, it is easy to understand the argument that it is a non-issue, considering the children in question would rarely interpret the words they were using to have connotations of inequality.

This issue has interesting arguments on both sides. Ultimately however, it is, as Coates' naysayers have suggested, hard to argue that its use has any direct negative impact. Realistically, fighting a theoretical problem should not be a priority - especially as the teachers themselves do not seem to mind.

There are other issues that should be addressed first. From unequal pay to cat calls and sexual assault, the Everyday sexism Twitter and blog draw our attention to the real problems.

The stories sent in to the project show time and time again examples of women who have been abused, made to feel uncomfortable or vulnerable or felt pressured into conforming into gender stereotypes.

These are the issues which society needs to work towards eradicating. Large or small problems, these examples make far more of an impact on women's lives than the different connotations behind 'Sir' or 'Miss'.

It is hard to endorse Coates' suggestions when it is difficult to see what change forcing children to

completely alter their way of addressing teachers would bring about when the teachers in question have never articulated any problem with the way things currently are. Educating children to respect each other in meaningful and practical ways is far more important.

If teachers collectively rose up to protest against the use of the terms 'Sir', and 'Miss', then I would be convinced that it is a legitimate issue, worthy of our time and effort. However, if no one directly involved is getting hurt and offended, it should not be a primary focus right now.

In an ideal world, I would like to support her. The fact that she is speaking out about an issue which concerns her is to be commended. However, there are too many battles to fight for us to focus on everything, and the ones that promote substantial, practical change need to be prioritised.



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