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The Connection between Gender and Literacy in a First Grade Classroom

By  
Jessica V. Feldman

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Teaching Degree  
Of  
The Graduate School  
At  
Rowan University  
June 30, 2005

Approved by

Date Approved June 30, 2005

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## ABSTRACT

Jessica Feldman

### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GENDER AND LITERACY IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

2005

Dr. Marjorie E. Madden, thesis advisor  
Master of Science in Teaching

This study is a qualitative case study that explores the connection between literacy and gender in a first grade classroom environment. The subjects for this study are twenty first grade students in a regular education classroom located in a southern New Jersey elementary school. For this study, students were observed with the attempt to answer three questions: 1) What gender stereotypes have these first graders internalized coming into the classroom? 2) How are these gender beliefs expressed in the language arts classroom? 3) What are teachers are doing to foster these biases in their students? Data collected includes student writings, discussions, and everyday recorded events. This data is analyzed utilizing the qualitative approach, where themes are identified and linked back to the initial question. Findings reveal a strong link between gender and literacy. This is evident particularly through the ways students voice gender understandings in various literacy activities. This study also suggests the power of the teacher, either positive or negative, in shaping the gender identities of students. Understanding this power becomes an implication of this study for teachers who wish to create unbiased classroom environments.

## Acknowledgements

My father, mother, and sister:

Finally, this long haul has come to an end. Thank you so much for your continued support, encouragement and love during this time as well as the last five years. I couldn't have done it without you guys!

Tony

I bet you're just as happy as I am that this is all over. Thanks for putting up with my moodiness and continuously telling me it will be okay!

Friends

Thank you for being there when I needed to vent. No matter how stressed we were, we could always get together and make each other feel better (at least some times). You all always understood! Thanks for making the last five years bearable and memorable.

Dr. Madden

You really pushed me to do my best work. No matter how much money I offered, you would not sign this until it was perfect. Thanks for making this experience as humorous as possible and putting up with me through the good and the bad.

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## Chapter I:

### Scope of Study

#### Introduction

Crayons scratching color into paper. Feet shuffling. Hands drawing. Muffled chatter. Twenty students listening to an assignment being explained by the teacher.

“Completing this unit for Social Studies, I want to see that you understand wants versus needs,” I stated. “Fold your paper in half, please. On the right side, write the word ‘wants.’ On the left side, write the word ‘needs.’ I want you to draw three things that you each want on the right and three things that you each need to survive on the left side.”

“Anything we want?” a student questioned.

“Anything at all,” I replied.

One little girl raised her hand. She looked puzzled and asked: “I really want to write video games as a want but I am not a boy. Should I put red lipstick instead?” I was taken aback. I told her to think about what she really wanted, not what people thought she should want. The next day, I was grading the papers and came upon this little girl’s response. There it was! On the wants side, she had written “red lipstick.”

(Teacher Journal, January 28, 2005)

#### My Question

This story prompted me to really step back and think about what I had experienced. I realized, at that moment, that this little girl had given up what she truly

wanted because she believed that was what little girls were supposed to want. It was as if she thought it was wrong for a girl to want a video game. Analyzing just this small episode in the classroom, I was pushed to look more closely at how gender emerges in the classroom, especially during literacy instruction. Since literacy is embedded in much of what students do in school, I wondered how gender emerges in reading and writing as well as in the discussions that students have in response to literature. In the beginning stages of this research, when I had decided upon only the broad topic of gender, I began to observe differences between the ways that boys and girls respond to reading and writing. These differences were evident in the choices the students made, the conversations they had, and the writing they engaged in. For example, during one activity the students were able to pick between two books. One book had a girl on the cover and the other had a photograph of a tornado. Not one boy selected the story with the girl on the cover, while the girls' selections were evenly divided between the two stories (Teacher Journal, September 15, 2004).

In some cases, due to differences such as the one described above, problems emerged. Boys in literature discussion groups often silenced girls when they disagreed, and therefore took on the position of power. During one particular group discussion on the novel Island of the Blue Dolphin by Scott O'Dell, the girls were upset that animals were hunted in the story. They stated it as a main reason that they were not enjoying the book. As soon as this statement was spoken, the boys took control. "That's what makes the book so cool," one boy responded. "How can you not like that?" another boy said. Not a girl responded. For the rest of the discussion, none of the girls said a word (Teacher Journal, October 19, 2004).



Girls often admired stereotypical female characters in a story. In response to the story of Cinderella, a little girl stated that “Cinderella was the best character because she was so pretty” (Teacher Journal, March 2, 2005). Boys were often held into their stereotypical molds as well, taking on the role as the provider. In response to the same story, a boy grunted, “I hate that movie.” When asked why, he responded, “Well, its got princesses and stuff” (Teacher Journal, March 2, 2005). After noticing these behaviors, more questions came to my mind. How do students develop an understanding of gender? How significant is literacy in the development of gender schemas? Does the teacher have any impact on these gendered notions that emerge in the classroom? These inquiries all came together to develop my final question: What is the connection between gender and literacy and how can teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of both genders without perpetuating gender bias?

#### Statement of the Problem

Gender inequities have existed for hundreds of years. In regards to education, women have fought for equal participation in education for three hundred years (Owens, 2003). However, while women have continued to gain more and more freedom, gender continues to be an issue in education (Owens, 2003). Women still argue that men get paid more for the same jobs as well as have more opportunities than women in certain areas (Gollnick, Chinn, 2004). While gender stereotypes have decreased significantly, they still exist in many areas of life. Stemming from this issue, a less-publicized concern relating to gender exists. This concern is how students in a public school setting are treated in regards to their gender. A common perception in America is that boys are more proficient in math and science while girls are more gifted in language arts. Much of

these ideas are being supported by studies of boy versus girl performance in certain subjects. For example, Hulbert (2005) states that “boys perform consistently below girls on most tests of reading and verbal skills and lag in college enrollment and degree attainment.” Is this lag due to some innate difference between boys and girls or are schools to blame for treating students differently in regards to gender? Such a trend deserves to be further explored in order to discover if the public school system is somehow fostering gender stereotypes that affect how students are treated and the opportunities that are given. Female achievement in mathematics has often been a topic that has been explored and should be continued to be studied. However, the male lag in language arts is just beginning to come to the attention of researchers, becoming an issue that needs further exploration (Blair, Sanford, 2004). So far, much of research done has focused on initiatives that foster competition between genders, pushing the girls to catch up with the boys (Hulbert, 2005). Girls have begun to close the gap, becoming involved in more mathematics and science classes in not only high school but in college as well (Hulbert, 2005). Boys, on the other hand, still continue to struggle in language arts, making this an issue that needs further research and discussion.

Literacy is vital in life; reading, writing, and oral communication are all things done each day for survival. One needs to know how to communicate with others in order to be productive members of the society. From students first days of school, literacy is thrust upon them. They learn the alphabet, how to write their names, and how to speak to others through academic instruction as well as in social situations that often push them to conform (Orellana, 1995). From both formal and informal instruction, students begin to develop what society values as appropriate social behaviors (Orellana, 1995). The

socially accepted roles to which males and females are expected by society to conform are evident in resources, such as books, used in literacy instruction (Benjamin, Irwin-DeVitis, 1998). Because literacy is so essential in today's world, it is necessary that school practices be examined with the goal of creating an environment where both boys and girls are given equal opportunities to succeed. The purpose of this study, then, is to explore instructional practices in literacy to discover if teachers are facilitating, and possibly perpetuating, gender bias that could prevent students from succeeding in particular areas, such as certain subjects, which will prevent them from all the opportunities available in the world.

#### Overview of Related Literature

Much of the work being done on literacy and gender revolves around four main areas. The first area is an examination of how literacy is taught in classrooms. As the times change, new trends arise that influence how literacy is presented in the classroom. For example, Gilbert (1989) discusses how there has been a shift in literacy education in the past thirty years, with the focus now on allowing students to understand literature on a personal and individual level. She argues that enabling students to explore literature to search for individual meaning also allows the child to accept stereotypical and even racist ideals that are, in many cases, evident in popular literature (Gilbert, 1989). Without open discussion on the stereotypical nature of text, students may adopt an understanding of gender through these negative perceptions.

A second area discussed in much of the literature is socialization, or how students acquire an understanding of gender through literacy. Many researchers see books as a major instrument in providing students with biased ideals on the roles of males and

females. Chick (2002) argues in her research that as children are beginning to create their identities, they are also learning to read. The books that are most commonly read to children at this time often confirm cultural stereotypes of gender that are present in the society (Chick, 2002). Since children are so enthralled with books at this time, they often accept much of what they read. Therefore, students are learning much of how they should behave as a boy or girl through texts, especially in these early years (Chick, 2002).

While the idea of how students acquire an understanding of gender through texts is often researched, a third area focuses on how students express their understanding of gender through literacy practices. In a study titled, "Morphing Literacy: Boys Reshaping Their School-Based Literacy Practices," the researchers explore how boys in the classroom often adapt the literacy curriculum to meet their needs and interests (Blair et al., 2004). The researchers discover that boys have rich literacy skills which are evident in their outside of school activities (Blair et al., 2004). Boys hold vivid discussions with each other about comic books and other types of print in which they are interested (Blair et al, 2004). However, these skills do not present themselves in school because the types of literature boys are interested in are not traditional school texts.

Blair's study (2004) did focus on boys, however, males were unrepresentative in most of the studies that focused on gender. Rather, many of the studies focus on stereotypical notions of femininity and how teachers can help girls adopt more independent roles in the classroom and society. For example, a study done by Evans, Alvermann, and Anders (1998) explores how girls express their gender through literature discussion groups. They found that girls usually play the role of the stereotypical quiet, non-confrontational female when boys were present in classroom discussion groups

(Evans et al, 1998). In these groups, boys often took on the role of the leader, taking the power away from the girls. The girls accepted this role and were silent and submissive throughout the discussions.

A common theme runs throughout many of these studies that demonstrate the need for more comprehensive research on gender disparity. Many researchers argue that language is often considered what Gilbert (1989) calls a “neutral message system: an almost transparent medium through which teachers and students communicate...” This poses a problem because language is not neutral; instead, it is a gendered social creation that reflects the values of society (Gilbert, 1989). Language is different for boys and girl based on the expectations of society. Language is not only spoken differently based on gender, but also used in different manners to fit the needs of the gender. Therefore, more study on this topic is required to prove to teachers that language is gendered and must be considered this way in order to create an equitable classroom.

The fourth and final theme present in current research on this topic of gender and literacy revolves around the relevance of this study to classroom practice. Many researchers offer suggestions on how teachers can alleviate the effects of gender bias in the classroom. Beth Benjamin and Linda Irwin-DeVitis (1998), authors of “Censoring Girls’ Choices: Continued Gender Bias in English Language Arts Classrooms,” suggest that teachers provide students with choices and inspiration. Strong female characters must be presented to students as well as strong male characters (Benjamin et al., 1998). Benjamin et al. believes that the best practice to successfully stop gender bias is to have open discussion on the topic and have students explore gender bias in their society.

### Purpose Statement/Importance of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of literacy on the development of gender bias in students in the public school setting. For the purpose of this study, literacy can be defined as “a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development” (Blair et al., 2004). It is also necessary that a distinction be made between the concepts of sex as opposed to the concept of gender. Orellana (1995) defines sex as “biological features that differentiate males from females” while gender is defined as “the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed, shaped, and expressed in society.” This differentiation is vital in that it defines gender acquisition as a socially constructed concept. In regards to literacy, it is important to look at how literacy shapes gender schemas as well as how gender shapes literacy in the classroom. The hope of this study is to discover to what extent students acquire an understanding of gender through literacy and how teachers can differentiate instruction to create a literacy curriculum that meets the needs of both genders in a nonbiased manner. Ultimately, the goal of the study is to uncover methods that will succeed in breaking the gender barriers in schools, allowing for each child, regardless of sex, the chance and opportunity to succeed in all subjects.

### Potential Audiences

This topic is relevant to all teachers and thus this research has a wide-ranging audience. With the increasing diversity in the classrooms today, teachers must confront more and more distinct belief systems, many of which deal directly with the issue of gender. Since different cultures have different understandings of gender and gender roles, teachers need to be aware of potential practices that may foster gender stereotypes.

Because stereotypes are so ingrained in our culture, teachers must recognize their own gender biases in an attempt to create unbiased instruction in their classrooms. Many teachers may be fostering gender stereotypes in their classrooms unconsciously, potentially creating unequal learning opportunities for boys and girls. Giving teachers the tools to analyze their own teaching practices is vital in creating an equitable classroom environment where all students, regardless of gender, are given the means to succeed in all areas (Owens, 2003).

Because literacy is so crucial in the school environment, administrators would also benefit from this study. In stressing the importance of this topic, administrators can create a forum for teachers to discuss literacy in terms of a gendered practice. Collaboratively, teachers and administrators can work together and reflect on ways in which gender affects literacy instruction as well as how literacy instruction affects gender. Dialogue focusing on literacy curriculum that addresses the needs of the students while also exposing current gender stereotypes is an important step in creating equitable classrooms. Administrators could provide opportunities for teachers to explore the ways in which gender stereotypes are being fostered in their classrooms and the effects that these practices may have on not only the students, but also the society as a whole (Zhumkhawaka, 1997). In doing this, schools can create a differentiated literacy curriculum in which students are free to explore language in an unbiased and accepting manner.

#### Research Question(s)

The main question guiding this study is, “What is the connection between gender and literacy and in what ways do teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of

both genders without perpetuating gender bias?” Before this question can be answered, I will first research the types of activities used to teach literacy in the classroom. After finding the most common methods of literacy instruction, the focus of the study will shift to how students acquire an understanding of gender through literacy instruction in the classroom. How do students internalize a construct of gender through literacy curriculums? While an understanding of gender acquisition through literacy is necessary, it is also important to explore the ways in which gender affects literacy. How do students express gender through literacy? The ultimate goal, as mentioned previously, is to discover methods in which teachers can differentiate literacy instruction in an unbiased approach that appeals to both genders. The guiding question for this portion of the study is: What are teachers currently doing to close gender gaps and what more can be done to alleviate this problem?

#### Story of the Question

Boys are often labeled as mathematically and scientifically talented in school, however, lacking in language arts skills. Where does this label come from? In my youth, I often wondered about this classification because I did not fit that stereotype; I consistently struggle in math. Throughout my school career, I found it hard to acquire the help I needed to succeed. In my junior year of high school, I was getting a C in my math class. I often stayed after school for extra help and one day, I was struck by his remark, “It’s always the girls!” I was furious. Did he mean that only girls were struggling in his class? Was he irritated that he had to help me? I remember feeling discouraged, not wanting to come back to him for help. I also remember being confused, since I knew for a fact that there were boys who were also having trouble. How did this teacher come to



these conclusions? What made him ignore the struggles that the boys were having and decide that only girls in his class were having trouble?

This experience was often in my mind when observing student and teacher interaction in the classroom. Because literacy is such an important aspect of education, I began to wonder to what extent students acquire an understanding of gender through reading, writing, and discussion in school. After observing literacy practices in classrooms, I began to notice trends in the behaviors of boys and girls. Boys seemed to be interested in more non-traditional forms of print, such as comic books and magazines. Girls, however, seemed content with the forms of books that teachers provided in the classroom. How do these interests develop? Observation of student reaction in regards to literacy also revealed behaviors that seemed to be in response to the social expectations of girls versus boys. As described in a vignette provided earlier in the chapter, boys seemed to react more to violence and tragedy. They became excited by these themes and expressed this when questioned on their opinions of the book. Girls, however, were saddened by these topics and responded more to themes of love and friendship. Where does this come from?

Given these experiences and my strong belief that gender biases continue to hinder both boys and girls in academic fields, I chose to research this question to better understand how students acquire an understanding of gender. Stereotypes are embedded in our culture, and I believe it is necessary to provide teachers with the tools and forums to reflect on their own practices in an attempt to prevent the unintentional fostering of such biased beliefs. It is important for educators to create meaningful activities to help both genders acquire the skills of reading, writing, and discussion. Because I believe

strongly that stereotypes do generate unequal learning environments, I consider this study vital in creating equitable classroom settings, where all students can feel free to explore literacy in a nonrestrictive environment.

## Chapter II:

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

Gender in the field of education is a considerably large topic that encompasses many different views and methods of study. This chapter, however, looks specifically at gender and literacy instruction. Further, several major trends seem to be evident in much of the work done: socialization, expression, and relevance. Socialization refers to the ways that students come to understand gender and the different roles of males and females. Expression considers how students articulate their understanding of gender through literature discussions, writings, and other assignments. Lastly, relevance relates to teacher actions in the classroom. Studies that focus on relevance attempt to offer suggestions for creating an unbiased classroom as well as providing equal learning opportunities for both sexes. The following discussion helps to provide a contextual framework for the study as well as increase the understanding of related research in the field of gender and literacy.

#### Socialization

How do students create an understanding of gender through literacy? Many studies have focused on this question in an attempt to discover the role of books in the creation of gender stereotypes. In a study of girls' decision making in the language arts classroom, Benjamin and Irwin-DeVitis (1998) explore the connection between gender stereotypes and books. They found that "among 27 titles listed as required reading in

30% or more of the nation's public schools, only two...had been written by women” (p.66). In looking at young children, these researchers asked their audiences to consider the story of Jack and Jill, a nursery rhyme that is very popular in today's culture. As Jack falls down the hill, Jill is depicted as “tumbling after” him (p.69). In stories such as these, children are first exposed to gender bias. Benjamin et al. (1998) argue that these books for children depict characters that are often gendered, portraying the female as weak and the male as the strong provider. Women, they claim, often “attain their goals through the assistance of other, but males achieve as a result of their own efforts” (p.69). Even in books for older children, stereotypical notions of females are portrayed. For example, in Tuck Everlasting, a middle school student pointed out that Winnie Foster, a main character in the story, depicted gender bias: “She wanted to make a difference in the world...but she followed her heart and married, had children, and passed away happily” (p.71). This statement reveals the recognition of such bias by students.

Students often recognize these genderized characterizations, evident in their choices of the characters they admire and why they admire them. Female characters are often admired for being pretty while male characters were picked for “bravery, independence, and strength” (Benjamin et al., p.65). Female characters were also admired for being nurturers and were “more likely to be discussed in relationship to others (usually males)” (p.65). These traits parallel the cultural expectations that exist for the female population. Therefore, Benjamin et al. found that girls admired women for the same stereotypes that they were being pressured to adopt. In other words, they are continuously being pressured by society to fit the role of a woman, to be pretty, nurturing and dependent. Despite this fact and maybe because these students are feeling this

cultural pressure, they admire these stereotypical traits in the female characters they read about.

DeBlase's study (2003) furthers the argument that books and reading texts for middle school and high school age students perpetuate the gender bias found in books for young children. In her study, DeBlase looked at texts in school as well as out of school that are aimed at young women. She also found that characters' actions are gendered and portray cultured gender stereotypes. Looking at popular reading materials for girls such as *Teen Magazine* and romance novels, DeBlase found that women were characterized in stereotypical ways. However, she also discovered in her study that while girls are presented with stereotypical images of women, they are also exposed in text to women who are strong and independent, which goes against what girls are used to reading. This, DeBlase argues, creates a sense of "dualism" for young girls. Girls are bombarded with images of women as passive, silent creatures who are caring and consistently defined by their relationships with others. Thus, when presented with images of women in literature that go against this ideal, girls "struggle with the different and contradictory discourses available to them..." (p.630). This dualistic battle occurs in girls especially- "as young girls explore and negotiate their identities as women, they must reconcile the conflict between their own individuality and the 'female' role of nurturer and caretaker that society values" (Benjamin, et al. p.64). Further, girls will even go as far as to hide their own wants and dreams in order to conform to stereotypical notions of femininity (Benjamin, et al, 1998).

Similarly, Ricker-Wilson (1999) found in her research that girls wage a dualistic battle, or struggle, between the two notions of feminism. Her study describes this

struggle as a social construction, stating that girls are “caught in a struggle between two antithetical ideologies as they are popularly understood” (p.62). She names these two contradicting images as the ideals of “patriarchy” versus the ideology of “liberal feminism” (62). Like DeBlase (2003), Ricker-Wilson looked at texts available to young women, especially romance novels. Girls in the class saw these books as an “escapist,” a tool to take them away from the problems in their lives. When looked at more closely, many of these novels perpetuated gender bias. However, the girls loved reading about the romantic gestures and the depiction of the man sweeping the woman off her feet. While these books depicted women as being rescued by men, girls still love to read them. These books continue to illustrate women as dependent on men, thus reinforcing stereotypical attitudes in women (DeBlase, 2003).

While research argues that books are major contributors to the creation of gender bias in both women and men (DeBlase, 2003). Studies also indicate that literacy itself is a socially constructed phenomenon that reflects the values of society (DeBlase 2003). Chick (2002), author of “Challenging Gender Stereotypes through Literature: Picture Books with Strong Female Characters,” relies on the social learning theory to explain the creation of gender stereotypes. This theory argues that children strive to be like those who are like them. Thus, as children are learning to read, they are also learning through books how to act as a boy or a girl. Many books that children are exposed to at a young age operate to “confirm, modify, or broaden their gender identity” (Chick, 2002, p.19). Further, Chick (2002) asserts that “it is disturbing that so many books for the very young are conforming rather than transforming” (p.19). Defining language and literacy as a social creation, research argues that children begin to form their identities “through social

structure and institutions” (DeBlase, 2003, p.624). Language is one of the biggest social structures and because children are learning to read at the same time that they are forming these identities, the impact is immense.

In response to the question posed at the beginning of this section, researchers have found that children solidify gender identities before and as they are learning to read (Chick, 2002). In studying the types of texts to which young students are exposed, researchers have found that males and females are often depicted in stereotypical fashions. These biases are transferred to children at a very young age and are consistently reinforced over time. Even when students are exposed to representations of males and females that counter stereotypical images, they struggle to fully internalize these new ideals, creating a constant dualistic battle in the genders.

In much of the research existing on the socialization of gender biases, two themes show a strong presence. Many researchers recognize the dualism that occurs, especially with young girls because they are presented with contradicting images of women. Additionally, most research sees literacy as a social structure that is created by the society and reflects the current values in the culture (DeBlase, 2003); however, research in this area has often ignored the effect of literature on the male population. While girls are extensively discussed, it is often assumed that readers are aware of how literacy creates an understanding of gender for boys. This area needs to be explored in order to better understand the creation of gender identity in children.

#### Expression of Gender through Literacy

How do students express gender through literacy? Much of the research found in regards to this question focuses on girls and how they convey their understanding of their

gender through literacy practices. Many themes are presented that help create a more comprehensive understanding of the effect of gender on literacy. Power, one of these themes, is often discussed in terms of male power over female members of the classroom. Evans, Alvermann, and Anders (1998) found in their study that girls usually take on a passive role in the classroom and that boys, on the other hand, work to remove power from females. Their study looked at classroom interactions during literature discussion groups, particularly at ways the boys and girls interacted. In one group, there were three boys and two girls. In the first few minutes of the discussion group, the girls attempted to take leadership roles and strove to keep the boys on task. However, this role was soon diminished as the boys took over the group, labeling the girls as “bossy” (p.111). Evans et al. categorized this power as “property” (p.112). Power as property was seen in this case because “the only way boys perceived they could ‘empower themselves’ was to ‘disempower’ whomever they thought currently had the power” (p.112). While the girls were attempting to break the stereotypical norm of women as silent and submissive, they were automatically labeled as bossy, causing them to revert to these stereotypical ideals.

Like notions of power, self-censorship is also discussed in regards to females. Benjamin, et al interviewed girls in the classroom they were studying to better understand the girls’ feelings about the characters in particular stories they were reading in class. After reading The Diary of Anne Frank, the interviewers asked a female class member “Why do you say it is important for Anne (Frank) or other girls to be nicer or quieter?” (Benjamin, et al.,65). The female answered, “It isn’t-well, ‘cause most people like (girls) better that way-I like being loud!” (p.65). However, further into the study, this same female was unwilling to speak up in class for fear of being criticized by the boys in the



class. Another girl in the class described the perfect girl as being “one who doesn’t argue, one who is smart but doesn’t voice her opinion” (p.65). This theme of self-censorship was also evident in research on literature discussion groups (Evans et al.,1998). Girls often silenced themselves in literacy discussion groups for fear of criticism from males.

In looking at how gender is expressed through literacy, many researchers also focus on the theme of self-selection, looking at the types of books students choose and finding patterns between female choices as opposed to male choices. Blair and Sanford (2004) found significant patterns of choice in regards to gender. Boys often choose books that are non-traditional and not often included in the school curriculum. Blair et al. (2004) found that boys tend to “morph” classroom literacy instruction to fit their own “interests, strengths, and preferences” (p.452). Morphing is defined by the article as “the term we use to describe the distinct characteristics of boys’ practices and behaviors with respect to literacy” (p.452). Boys tend to hold rich, literate conversations about comic book characters or Yu-Gi-Og cards, both non-traditional texts not often used in school. These researchers found that teachers often ignore this type of conversation. In listening to the boys, though, the researchers found that they were applying a variety of literacy skills; however, teachers usually do not recognize the complexity of these discussions nor do they explicitly incorporate them into literacy instruction.

Other research furthers these ideas of self-selection by questioning the flexibility of gender stereotypes (Chick, 2002). A type of “gender tension” is described with regards to this topic (Chick, 2002, p.20). Girls will often cross gender lines when selecting books. Boys, on the other hand, will almost never cross these invisible gender

lines and select a book with a female protagonist. This phenomenon becomes a major concern for the fight to erase gender boundaries (Benjamin, et al., 1998). This research asserts that a huge amount of males admit that they “had not read, or would not read, a book with a female main character” (p.66). Further, while conducting interviews with students on favorite book choices, a young boy states, “I never admired a female character. They (female characters) are all pretty much the same” (p.66). Therefore, another theme emerges in research on this topic. Some stereotypes for girls are more flexible than stereotypes for boys, allowing girls to at times cross gender boundaries in practices such as choosing a book.

Classroom Relevance: What can teachers do to create equitable classrooms?

How can teachers meet the different needs of both genders without perpetuating gender bias in the literacy classroom? Much of the research offers suggestions for creating equitable classrooms that provide both males and females with equal opportunities. One common suggestion offered by research is to introduce books with strong female characters. Students need to be motivated by women in literature (Benjamin, et al., 1998). Girls “need the inspiration of witnessing women’s and even young girls’ accomplishments through reading books...and having the portraits of women writers as well as men peer down at them from classroom walls” (p.70). Chick (2002) agrees with this, stating that teachers must integrate books that portray women as strong and independent. DeBlase (2003) takes these suggestions a step further and proposes that teachers also include women of current times accomplishing great things. She states, “Include stories whenever possible (from local newspapers and magazines)

that depict neighborhood and community women in important roles in society and in roles that break free of stereotypes” (DeBlase, 2003, p.635).

However, as shown in the dualism girls often feel referenced previously, introducing strong female characters is often not enough. Research suggests the creation of a classroom community with an open forum to discuss gender issues explicitly (DeBlase, 2003). Teachers should “use literature and composition to explore historical analysis of gender roles and stereotypes, current conditions, media, and literary depictions” (Benjamin et al., 1998, p.70). DeBlase (2003) agrees with open discussion of gender issues. She suggests that students be encouraged to “talk back” to text in order to make inquiries into how male and female characters are represented. Students should discuss roles of the characters and question their reality as well as their connection to stereotypical norms in society (DeBlase, 2003). In Ricker-Wilson’s (1999) study using popular romance novels, she too finds that open discussion is critical for students in breaking through gender boundaries. Romance novels, she argues, provides “one of the richest imaginable repositories for exploring conflicting understandings of gender and sexuality” (p.63).

In order to create an environment where students feel comfortable enough to discuss these issues, teachers need to create a classroom community. Evans et al. (1998) conclude that teachers need to promote teamwork in the classroom: “Instruction needs to be designed that teaches and promotes collaboration” (p.120). They push teachers to create environments where all students are accepted, regardless of whether everyone agrees with their opinions. All students should be able to “bring their strengths and

experiences to the discussion” and no student should be persecuted for these beliefs (p.121).

The last theme that is evident in much of this research dwells on the teachers themselves. Benjamin et al. (1998) suggest that teachers need to look deep within their own practices to uncover possible classroom procedures that may be facilitating gender bias. Specifically, this study advises that teachers “examine classroom practices...particularly in frequency of participation, interruptions, types of recognition, and feedback” (p.70). Further, this research advocates the use of videotaping to help teachers recognize possible biased behavior (Benjamin et al.,1998). In regards to boys, one study by Blair and Sanford (2004) suggests that teachers recognize and rethink their own perceptions. As educators, “we need to continually challenge our own existing perceptions of boys’ interests and abilities and prepare teachers to read their classrooms with gendered lenses” (p.459). This study is quite different in that the researchers believe that boys and girls should be given assignments based on interests that may reflect the stereotypical norms of society.

#### Overall Conclusions

Much of the literature presented here stresses the importance of understanding the stereotypes that do exist in United States culture in order to alleviate their effects in the classroom environment. The first two themes, socialization and expression, are connected to one another. How a child is socialized frequently determines how that child responds to everyday life, and in this research, to literacy. Many of the researchers provide suggestions for teachers on how to create environments that present equal opportunities for both male and females, making their studies relevant to the classroom.

In my study, research becomes crucial as a tool for furthering understanding and as a means for comparison, linking my findings to past research on the topic of literacy and gender.

## Chapter III

### Research Design and Methodology

#### Introduction

This study was completed in the final semester of the completion of my Master in Science of Teaching program at Rowan University. In the chapter, the environment in which the study took place will be discussed. Included in this are descriptions of the community in which the school belonged, the students that participated, and the professionals that were involved. For this study, no action plan was put into place. Instead, this research was an attempt to begin to understand the effects that stereotypical attitudes have on students. The overall purpose of the study is to provide teachers with an understanding of the stereotypes that do exist and more importantly, the methods that can be utilized to create an equitable learning community. As a teacher-researcher, I immersed myself into the culture of the classroom to gain an understanding and become a part of the learning environment. After achieving this goal, I began to watch. I watched the students and I watched the teacher. When it was finally my turn, I engaged my students in the regular literacy curriculum and recorded their reactions. During this time, I wanted to begin to connect with the curriculum used, so I could better understand what the students were being exposed to in regards to literacy. I then changed my teaching styles, instructing students using lessons that exposed gender bias to see the reactions of the students. I taught with this focus on gender to see if students would begin to open their minds and unravel preconceived notions of gender.

## Context and Setting

### Community

Research was carried out in a first grade classroom at Ocean Wave Township in southern New Jersey. This township's total population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is 65,962, with 26.4% of those being of school age ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). This community is somewhat diverse, with 16% of the community being African American, 5% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 76% Caucasian ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). The median income of the community is \$66,546, with 89.9% of the population having received a high school diploma or a higher degree ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).

### School/Classroom

This research was carried in an elementary school through grade five. The school had between four and five classrooms per grade level as well as two resource rooms. The actual research was conducted in a first grade classroom that contained twenty students. These students ranged in both ability levels and cultural and economical background. Culturally, this classroom was extraordinarily diverse, with a mixture of assorted ethnicities and beliefs. While all the students in the classroom were born in America, three spoke a different language at home: Spanish, Chinese, and Italian. Their cultural diversity contributed an interesting perspective on the topic of gender, enabling me to see how students from another culture had, or had not, internalized the dominant stereotypical beliefs in regards to gender. In regards to students with special needs, this classroom continued to model diversity. The students were on a variety of different levels, with many being pulled out for extra help in reading and math as well as English

Language Learner classes for those who spoke a different language at home. The diversity of the class can be seen in the following:

Student Demographics				
Students	Socioeconomic	Ability	Gender	Race
1	A	A	F	C
2	A	A/L	F	A
3	A	L	M	C
4	A	H	F	C
5	A	H	M	C
6	A	A	M	C
7	A	H	M	C
8	A	H	F	C
9	H	L	M	C
10	A	H	F	C
11	A	H	F	C
12	A	H	M	C
13	A	L	M	A
14	A	A	F	C
15*	A	A/L	F	L
16	L	H	M	C
17	H	A	M	A
18*	H	L	F	C
19*	A	H	M	As
20	A	H	M	C

**KEY**

- English Language Learners
- Socioeconomic Levels: H (high), A (Average), L (Low)
- Ability Levels: H (high), A (Average), L (Low)
- Gender: M (male), F (female)
- Race: C (Caucasian), A (African American), L (Latino), As (Asian)

Figure 1



## Research Design

This study is a qualitative case study that strives to understand the relationship between literacy education and gender. A qualitative study is “one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives...or advocacy/participatory perspectives...or both” (Creswell, 2003). In qualitative studies, the researcher often collaborates with those being studied in an attempt to further understand the situation being investigated (Creswell, 2003). In this case, the researcher is entering and participating in a classroom environment to observe the literacy curriculum as well as those involved in the curriculum to understand how literacy is connected to gender. Due to this, this research can be defined as a qualitative case study. A case study examines “a particular individual, program, or event...in depth for a defined period of time” (Leedy, Ormrod, 2001). This study will occur in a defined period of time, approximately three months. During the research, the literacy program was investigated as well as the individuals affected by the curriculum in an attempt to discover possible links between gender and literacy.

## Data Sources

Student documents related to literacy instruction were one type of source used for this study. In all cases, these artifacts were student writings. Some of the student writing came from the following activities, daily journals and poem activities.

### Daily Journal

This activity was already built into the literacy instruction before I came into the classroom. Each morning, the teacher would write a particular word or phrase on the chalk board. As soon as the students came in that morning, they would get out their daily

journals and write on that particular topic. I decided to use this assignment to have the students express their understanding of gender. To do this, on one day I wrote the word boy on the chalk board and the following day, I wrote the word girl. Again, as usual, the students were instructed to respond to the prompt with any ideas that come to their minds. These writings were saved and analyzed as data sources.

### Color Poems

The use of grouping by color was another practice that my teacher often utilized in the classroom. When I was observing, I noticed that the student would often grunt or groan if they were assigned to a color group that they did not like. To gain more insight on color preferences for boys and girls, I decided to create a poetry lesson. In this lesson, the students wrote a poem to describe a color of their choice. After the assignment was completed, I collected these poems and analyzed not only the colors the students chose, but the descriptions they used to explain their colors. To record the color preferences of the students, I used a simple chart and recorded tally marks in the correct boxes:

Color Preferences

Color	Pink	Blue	Purple	Yellow	Orange	Green	Red
Boy							
Girl							

Figure 2

All of the previous data sources focused on the theme of expression, which was evident in the previous research done on this topic. Through student writings, I learned how students expressed themselves based on their understanding of gender and the

cultural expectations of how gender is defined. Using the chart seen above, I was able to easily see the results, thus making it more efficient in my analysis.

#### Teacher Field Notebook

Observation was also a crucial data source and was recorded and dated in a teacher field notebook. In this notebook, I would jot down events that were relevant to my research. For occurrences that I saw as major data sources for the research, I recorded them in my field notebook and later recorded them in more detail in anecdotal records. This field notebook was begun in September when I began thinking about my research and developing my question. During this time, I was not yet in my placement so much of what I wrote down was general observations on the topic of gender. These observations helped me create my question, the basis of this study. In February, after obtaining approval for this research, I began to observe and record specific events that were relevant to my topic. I tried to focus on the three themes evident in the research: socialization, expression, and relevance. This data provided great insight into the everyday occurrences that transpire in literacy instruction and reveal the connection of this instruction to literacy.

#### Logs

As I began to observe the types of interactions that went on between student and teacher, I started to see a trend in the types of topics that were discussed and how they varied depending on gender. While I began recording these observations in my field notebook, I knew I needed an easier way to organize this information so I would be able to easily look for trends. I devised a log to help me organize arrange the comments that

the teacher made to the students as well as the topics students discussed with the teacher.

The log I used looked like the following:

Comment Log

Boy	Girl

Figure 3

As seen earlier, a similar log was used to organize students' color preferences.

#### Audiotaped Book Discussions

As discussed previously, in this study I strove to understand student perspectives in regards to gender during literacy instruction. Besides observations, discussions were conducted and recorded to find out how students felt about particular books and topics in a story. Many of the materials used during these activities were carefully selected in order to ensure the promotion of discussion on gender roles. However, in many cases, discussions arose from unplanned materials that related to gender. In these cases, this data was recorded in my field notebook. They were not audiotaped because they were unplanned. However, when a particular book was chosen, I would tape record the discussion as a data source.

The discussions used as data sources took place during guided reading sessions, whole class sessions, and even individual discussions between the student and myself. Story time was an activity already built into the schedule by the teacher. Each day after lunch, a half and hour was devoted to story time. For my research, I utilized this time to pick book that countered the cultural roles of boys and girls.

### Data Analysis

After collecting the previously described data, I further examined it by looking for recurrent themes or connections that would further my understanding of the link between literacy and gender. Narratives used to describe what I was seeing in the classroom became extraordinarily useful in not only telling the story of this first grade classroom, but also in understanding how these students connected gender to their instruction. The audiotapes used during the readings of discussions of text in the class were transcribed in order to better understand the discussions. After discovering recurrent themes, I looked for similarities in them with the purpose of condensing. After finding commonalities in these themes, I reduced them to five main topics that will be discussed in the next chapter. This data was organized by four themes and coded by color. The related literature was reviewed to look for connections, especially in regards to socialization, expression, and relevance. Literature that did support the themes was also organized for analysis. This process was done to allow for comparison between my research and related literature as well as to uncover any gaps that may require future study.

## Chapter IV

### Data Analysis and Findings

#### Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapters, this study attempts to explore the connection between gender and literacy in an attempt to avoid educational barriers. This chapter is organized by the themes that become evident in the analyzed data: (1) gender bias in first grade students, (2) significance of culture in gender construction, (3) development and flexibility of student beliefs, (4) the ability of genders to cross the cultural bounds, (5) and teacher treatment of boys versus girls. Through these themes, Chapter IV discusses the results of the study.

#### Gender Bias in First Grade Students

“Because he is a boy and boys don’t like to play with dolls.” (Transcription 1: See Appendix A)

Spoken from the mouth of a first grade girl, this comment is just one of many that sheds light into the mind of a child. In this study, I was curious to see to what extent children of such a young age have internalized the gender stereotypes of American society. Through the conversations I had with the children, I have been able to see how they understand gender in regards to four areas: color preferences, likes and dislikes, and occupations that they believe males and females hold. I must first say that the beliefs presented in this section are not those of every child; however, they represent the general trend evident in the first grade classroom used for this study.

Color preferences are a large piece of a first grade classroom. The students are constantly coloring, choosing their favorite colors, and being divided into color teams for grouping methods. Many activities done in this classroom revolved around color. For example, the students completed a one week literacy lesson on poetry, creating their own “color poems” that were shared in a classroom presentation. The students were given the opportunity to choose their own colors, and were urged to pick a color that they felt reflected them and their personalities. The results are as follows:

Data-Color Preferences

Color	Pink	Blue	Purple	Yellow	Orange	Green	Red
Boy	0	5	0	1	1	3	1
Girl	3	1	1	1	3	0	0

Figure 4

The majority of the boys chose the color blue while with the girls, the colors pink and orange were tied. Not one boy chose the color pink, while blue was a color chosen by a girl. So what does this all mean? In our society, the color pink is considered the girl color while blue is considered the boy color. From the moment a child is born, this is evident. Can you imagine the look on a parent’s face if a doctor placed a pink baby cap on a newborn boy’s head? Would that be different if a baby girl were given a blue cap? These trends evident in our society were reflected in the choices the students made for their poems.

This trend was also evident during a school wide event to promote reading. This event, Read Across America, is a time when teachers read books of all different genres to students in the school. The school is divided up by grades and classes of that

grade are further divided to mix up the students. To do this, teachers are given colored tickets to assign students into groups. The tickets are of a variety of colors: red, blue, pink, orange, and yellow. Students then travel from classroom to classroom, listening to different genres of stories, organized by the color of their ticket. During this activity, gender stereotypes became evident as seen here:

As I sat in the classroom, preparing to read, the first group, the blue group, arrived. With an eye on gender, I looked around and noticed that the group was fairly divided between the boys and the girls. Both boys and girls proudly displayed their tickets, as they needed them to enter the classroom. Most of the students wore their tickets around their neck, as each ticket was strung with cord.

After fifteen minutes of reading, another group arrived. I was unaware at first of the color of this group, but realized that only girls were entering the classroom. To myself I thought, I bet the color is pink. In late shuffled two boys, heads down, feet stamping. They sat in the back of the classroom, away from the assembly of girls who had gathered toward the front of the room.

“Come closer,” I said to the boys, “you won’t be able to hear the story.”

“Stupid story,” one boy muttered, “I didn’t even want to be in this group.”

Looking in the hands of several girls seated close to me, I saw pink tickets. However, the two boys, who continued to sit in the back of the room, were not wearing their tickets. One was holding his tightly, slowly ripping the corners while the other boy’s ticket was nowhere to be seen. (Field Notebook, March 24, 2005).



This story demonstrates not only the cultural values of the students in regards to gender, but the biases of the teachers. Only two boys out of the fifty that participated in this activity were given a pink ticket. Either consciously or unconsciously, the teachers had avoided giving the male students a pink ticket (Field Notebook, March 2, 2005). This provides one example of how teachers may foster gender bias, whether involuntarily or deliberately.

While the color choices of these first graders revealed bias, other preferences of boys and girls also fell into biased trends, as seen here:

During a lesson on wants versus needs, students were instructed to fold a piece of paper in half. On one side of the paper, they were to write the word “wants.” On the other side of the paper, they were to write the word, “needs.” The assignment given was to draw three things that they want on one side and three things that they need on the other side. After this, they had to write a sentence on each. One little girl raised her hand and looked very torn about what she wanted to write. When I questioned her, she said: “Miss Feldman, I really want to write video games as a want but I am not a boy. Should I put red lipstick instead?” I was taken aback. I told her to think about what she really wanted, not what people thought she should want. The next day, I was grading the papers and came upon this little girl’s assignment. There it was! On the wants sentence, she had written red lipstick. (Field Notebook, January 28, 2005)

In the above vignette, a little girl revealed her own bias on what she believed boys and girls should like and dislike. This little girl was experiencing the “dualistic battle”

described in Ricker-Wilson's study (1999). She was struggling between what she actually wanted and what she was expected to want. She disclosed to me her real want, which was a video game. However, in her head, she believed that girls were not supposed to like video games and it was more culturally accepted for a girl to want red lipstick. This suggests that girls may feel it necessary to keep their real desires private and accept what their culture tells them to. Even after I stated that I wanted her to write about what she really wanted, cultural expectations were stronger than this. She had adapted and wrote what she was taught and "expected" to write. This form of self-censorship supports Benjamin and Irwin DeVitis (1998) research that girls often censor themselves to conform to society.

"Boys are different then girls. Boys like race cars, girls like makeup" (Daily Student Journal, See Appendix B, #1).

The boys and girls in the classroom also revealed cultural expectations when discussing activities that boys participate in and activities that girls participate in. Revealed in student discussions, predictions, and writings (such as the quote above), the general consensus was that boys liked to engage in activities such as sports, bike riding, and playing with trucks and video games. Both girls and boys participated in offering these responses. Students communicated in similar classroom activities that girls liked to play with Barbies and dolls, play sports, get makeovers, and read books. In a writing sample, the students were instructed to write anything they knew about girls. One boy wrote, "Do girls like to run? (Daily Student Journal: See Appendix B, #2)." This boy was unsure if running was a culturally accepted activity for girls to achieve in. When questioned, he stated that he knew boys were good at running so he was not sure if girls

could achieve in this as well. Socialization plays such a large role in these beliefs.

Gollnick and Chinn (2004) believe that children internalize these ideas through a lifelong socialization process that revolves around television, magazines, books, and the general media. Magazines, for example, are usually segregated by gender. Women's magazines discuss "fashion, food, and social events" while male magazines display "sports and business" (Gollnick, et. al, p.135). Children, even at this young age, learn and accept these ideals and often perpetuate them and live by them.

Sitting in a guided reading lesson, students were busy doing a picture walk through Andy's New House by Sandra Widener. The illustrations depicted men and women building houses. "I think Andy's dad is the construction man and he builds the houses," one child blurted out. After asking him why he thought this, he responded, "Cause girls can't have that job." Another boy countered by saying, "Yes they can. My friend's mom is a construction worker." The first boy replied, "Well, the girls probably build the walls then." Curious to see where he was going with this, I responded, "Why do you say that?" He stated, "Because they are scared to go on the roof." Another boy in the class jumped in and said, "Or the girls can do the painting (pointing to a picture of a woman painting in the story). The girls were silent. (Field Notebook, March 14, 2005).

In the above journal excerpt, students revealed their bias about the types of employment men and women were able to have. Interesting here is the language used by the two boys who expressed differing views. One boy labeled the job a "construction man" while the other a "construction worker." This differing language demonstrates the

contradictory ideas the boys had. One boy had the opportunity to experience a woman doing this job while the other had not and due to this, had each developed different views. Another interesting aspect of this situation is that when the first boy actually accepted that it was a possibility for a woman to be a construction worker, he stated that they “probably build the walls then.” He expressed that women would be scared to be on a roof, while men would not be scared of this. This supports Gollnick and Chinn’s (2004) belief that boys are socialized to be different from girls (p.132). They state, “masculine characteristics that are rewarded in our society are independence, assertiveness, leadership ability, self-reliance, and emotional stability” (p.132). This boy obviously believed that boys were less scared of heights than girls or he was more willing to allow a man to be injured than a woman. Another role that was delegated to a woman was that of the painter, another job that was harmless.

The silence of the girls during this conversation supported findings about the power conflicts that occurred in mixed gender discussion groups (Evans et al., 1998). Boys in the group took control and the silence of the girls suggested their loss of power and voice. Benjamin et al. (1999) also discuss this self-censorship, believing that girls often silence themselves for fear of male disapproval and criticism. Noticing this silence, I asked the girls about their thoughts. I wanted to see what they were thinking and how they would respond to what the boys in the class were saying. “Girls can do that, too. We are strong enough. Girls can do what boys can,” one girl stated. But again, the boys intervened, “Noh uh, girls can’t play football.” A female student in the class responded to this by recounting an experience she had playing football with her brother; however,

power was returned to the boys when one stated, “not real football.” and the girls remained silent.

### Significance of Culture in Gender Construction

In this classroom, three of the students participated in English Language Learner (E.L.L) instruction. These students provided an interesting twist on the issue of gender in United States culture. I wondered if they had internalized bias beliefs in regards to gender and to what extent they revealed them. The class consisted of one male student from China, one female student from Argentine, and another female student from Italy. The Chinese student’s parents spoke only Chinese while parents of the other two girls could speak broken English. All parents, however, spoke their native language in the household. It was obvious that the students kept many aspects of their culture, which was often revealed in the classroom. Their beliefs about gender were also voiced during classroom activities.

~

“Do girl like pink? Do girl like to wear pink dress? Do girl like to go to Disney World? Do girl like to read Cinderella?” (Daily Student Journal, See Appendix B, #3).

~

Every morning, the students had a journal entry to complete based on one word that was written on the chalk board. This particular morning, the word girl was written on the board. Students were instructed to write what they thought girls liked to do, the color they liked, and any other aspects they could think of. The above response was written by the Chinese boy, who we will call John, and its format reveals much about his internalization of American culture in regards to gender. His words reveal that he has

learned many cultural ideals surrounding girls; however, he has not quite accepted them. This is evident in his questioning. John had learned that girls are expected to like the color pink; however, his questioning reveals that he is either unsure of this or unwilling to accept it. On another day, the word of the day was “boy.” When writing about what a boy, John was sure of himself, using no questions.

“Boys like to play soccer, football, basketball and the find you game. Boys like to watch Pokemon. Boys like to read Pokemon” (Daily Student Journal, See Appendix B, #4).

He had internalized the cultural role of being a male and his certainty is evident in his use of statements, not questions.

The other two E.L.L. students in the classroom seemed to have internalized the culture to the same extent as the other students. The vignette described earlier about the red lipstick and the video games described the beliefs of a young girl from Argentina, who we will call Sofia. Sofia had internalized much of the gender bias evident in the dominant culture, as did many other female students in the classroom. For example, when asked about some activities that boys liked to participate in, Sofia stated, “definitely football” (Transcription 2: See Appendix A). Not only did her reply reveal cultural bias, she used the word “definitely,” demonstrating that this was a principal she was extremely sure of. Also, written in her journal on the topic of boys, she wrote the following: “I hope I have a little boy and his favorite color is blue...” (Daily Student Journal, See Appendix B, #5). Not only does she reveal the culturally accepted color for

boys, she also reveals her maternal wants, an expectation that Gollnick and Chinn (2004) describe as part of the socialization process for girls.

### Development and Flexibility of Student Beliefs

“There is something I know about baseball. Girls can play baseball, you know how?

Because I have this movie and it has a baseball team and they are only girls.”

(Transcription 2, See Appendix A)

The idea that students can modify their biased beliefs based on experiences was an interesting theme that arose throughout the entire study. During discussions, students of both genders were constantly offering views that countered the “norm” due to an experience that they had encountered. In the case of the quote above, the context of the situation was a group discussion of what boys and girls liked to do and succeeded in doing. A male student in the class had mentioned that boys loved to play baseball. The girl who made the above statement made it about five minutes after the boy had declared that boys liked baseball. She made a connection in her mind and decided that girls can play baseball. This was not because she believed that girls were strong enough or that she herself liked baseball, it was because she had seen it on a movie. In this movie, there was a team of female baseball players. Connecting this to reality, she believed that girls could play and enjoy baseball just as much as boys. Not only does this speak of the influence of media on the mind, but also on the flexibility of students’ beliefs. In this study, as this situation exhibits, student beliefs were flexible and easily changed. They could be modified based on experiences the students had or due to the influence of adults and peers. This leads to the notion of the power of not only the media, but parents, teachers, peers, and culture.

“But boys can dance, you know why? My next door neighbor is a boy and he doesn’t tap dance but he dances.” (Transcription 2, See Appendix A)

As evident in this statement made from a boy who we will call Tony, experience also plays a role in forming and developing this male student’s beliefs. Another student in the class, who we will call Nick, had decided that dancing was a “girl thing.” However, Tony had an experience where he knew of a boy who danced. Because of that experience, he was able to form a view that may counter popular belief. Also of interest is that Tony’s experience dealt with a boy who was not a tap dancer, but participated in another form of dancing. However, he was able to cross that boundary and generalize, deciding that if he neighbor could do one type of dancing and he was male, then males could also tap dance. This generalization that Tony was able to make demonstrates that experiences that students have, no matter how small, can be so influential.

In another of our discussions based upon a William’s Doll by Charlotte Zolotow, the students were deciding if it was okay for boys to play with dolls. In the beginning, most of the students found this to be an alien concept: “...boys don’t play with dolls” (Transcription 1, See Appendix A). Both the boys and the girls seemed to agree on this. However, as the discussion moved on and the rest of the story was read, many of the students began to change their minds. One student who stated, “I think a boy can have a doll but it is gross...” changed his mind after discussion and reading the rest of the book and decided that it was okay. Another student who also agreed that it is wrong with boys to play with dolls in the beginning stated at the end “I would play with one.” This



discussion was also interesting because one of the girls brought out a more parental reason that the boys could be playing with dolls: “A boy kissed a doll because dads kiss babies.” A few of the boys bought into this idea and stated that it is okay for boys to play with dolls as long as they are practicing to be fathers. While many of the students’ views changed from the beginning of the story to the end of the story, most of the students could not comprehend that a boy just may like playing with a doll. Instead, they needed to find a valid reason, such as boys practicing to be fathers. However, this sheds some light into the power a teacher may have in shaping the minds of children. With open-mindedness and discussion on a topic, a teacher, or any adult, may enable students to abandon such bias and create an accepting classroom or home environment.

~

“Pink is my favorite color now, Ms. Feldman. I just wanted to let you know.”

(Field Notebook, May 3, 2005)

~

While parents, teachers, and other adults have much power in socializing children, culture also plays a key role. When I first entered the classroom in September, I could never give a boy anything pink. With any activity that involved colors, pink was never an option for any of the boys. As discussed previously, even in the color poems that the students had completed, not one boy chose pink. Toward the end of the April, however, I began to notice a shift. Many of the boys were requesting pink! Boys began to show up wearing pink shirts and pink socks. The culture had shifted; as many were saying, pink was becoming the new black in fashion. It was becoming popular and stylish for boys to wear pink. Volcom, a skateboarding clothing company, was and continues to make pink

t-shirts for boys, which many of the boys in my class were beginning to wear. This huge shift in culture affected this small first grade classroom in such a way that proves the influence of the culture on what is the “norm.” Boys in my class who had completely avoided the color pink were complaining if they did not get that color. Therefore, any change in culture can have a huge impact on what people, even children, perceive as normal behavior, thus also altering the stereotypical views on gender.

The Ability of Genders to Cross Cultural Bound:

Which gender image is more flexible?

“It doesn’t matter if it is a boy or a girl toy as long as you’re having fun.”

(Transcription 1, See Appendix A)

Spoken from the mouth of a first grade girl, this statement reveals much about the flexibility of gender roles. *Imagine a child playing at home. The little toddler is wearing blue slacks and a white shirt. Toys surround the area in which the youngster contentedly plays. A loud “VROOM” sound is heard as the child pretends the trucks are driving around the room.* As you are reading this, what types of preconceptions have you formed about the gender of this child? Can you imagine this child as a boy? Can you imagine this child as a girl? In our society, toy companies market their toys based on gender. This can be seen in any of the commercials seen for toys on the television or in magazines. However, it is more socially accepted for girls to play with “boy” toys than it is for boys to play with “girl” toys. This trend became evident even in the first grade classroom which I studied. Analyzing discussions based on storybooks used during instruction, it became evident that female gender identities are more flexible than male gender identities. In one particular discussion, the class was deciding which types of toys

boys and girls liked to play with. “I play with boy stuff,” one girl said. “I play with boy’s cars and Spiderman” (Transcription 1, See Appendix A). As soon as this statement was spoken, more and more girls began to offer examples of boy’s toys that they play with. “Sometimes I play with Jack’s trucks,” offered another female student. It was interesting to note that although the females in the classroom admitted openly to playing with toys that were considered male, they still understood that these toys were made for boys, not girls. This is evident in their use of wording, “boy stuff” and “Jack’s trucks.” Not one girl has stated that she had her own trucks or Spiderman toy. This suggests either that they did not want to admit they had their own “boy toys” or more possibly that they had never been bought these toys before.

~

“Girls can play sports, too.”

(Transcription 2, See Appendix A)

~

As in toys that children like to play with, this classroom also discussed some of the activities boys preferred and others that girls preferred. When we were discussing activities that boys liked to do, sports almost always came up. Football, basketball, and baseball were all suggestions given by both the male and female students in the classroom. Each time this was mentioned, a girl would call out and make a statement such as the one above. Depending upon the student’s experiences, they had formed different opinions on what girls could participate in. Sports, such as basketball or baseball, are some of the activities in which the students decided that girls can participate in, however, only to an extent. Most of the boys admitted that girls could play sports but

often had more to say about it. For example, when discussing baseball and how girls can play it, one boy stated, "My sister can only play softball" (Transcription 2, See Appendix A). In another discussion, the students decided that girls can play football as well. During this discussion, one boy stated, "Not real football" (Field Notebook, April 22, 2005). Therefore, while in regards to sports, there is flexibility in the perception of the female "norm," nevertheless, limits are still set.

While most of the boys agreed that it is okay for girls to engage in sports, there were a few who refused to accept this concept. During one discussion, I asked the class if there is any activity in which boys participate that girls should not:

Student (boy): "Basketball.  
Teacher: "You don't think girls should play basketball?"  
Cooperating Teacher: "I play basketball."  
Student laughter is heard.  
(Transcription 2, See Appendix A)

During another conversation, the class decided that it was okay for girls to play football. The same student who stated "not real football" also said that girls were "supposed to be the cheerleaders" (Field Notebook, April 22, 2005). This child could not accept that girls could play the "real" sport of football and instead had been socialized that girls are the cheerleaders. This comment also revealed the flexibility in female gender. While some boys can accept girls playing football, the discussion of boys being cheerleaders never came up. Every time a response was offered to what boys like to do, the girls would come back and state that they also could participate in this activity. However, when ideas were offered on activities that girls participated in, it was rare that a boy intervened and stated that he also enjoyed this activity. Chick (2002) discusses the flexibility of the female gender and this study supports her research. Girls have more flexibility in

entering the “male world” while boys, on the other hand, do not have as much flexibility in entering the “female” domain.

### Teacher Treatment of Boys versus Girls

Looking back over the data collected, especially in my field notebook, I became aware of the differing responses my cooperating teacher and even I gave to boys versus girls. In the beginning of the study, I observed the comments teachers gave students when they responded to a question and did not notice much of a difference. Instead, it seemed as if the teacher would always use particular words or phrases to praise the students: “Good job, nice work, good try.” However, as I looked more deeply into student-teacher relationships, I began to notice a more subtle difference. While I did not see much dissimilarity in how the teacher responded to student answers, I did notice a difference in regards to gender when the teacher initiated a discussion with a student. The teacher topics brought up varied greatly depending on the gender of the student. I wanted to see exactly what topics were brought up and record them to look for themes in the comments the teachers made. The following chart depicts the types of comments that the teacher initiated. These comments were recorded on a Friday morning as the students were coming in and completing their morning work. I recorded the first six comments given to a girl and the first six given to a boy on that particular day. I began recording after the typical “good mornings” were given.

Data: Comment Log

Boy	Girl
“What are you going to do at recess, play football?”	“What pretty earring you are wearing.”
“You always come in with such a big smile.”	“What a nice dress you have on. Look, we are wearing the same color! We’re twins!”
“Are you working, (child’s name)?”	“What are you planning on doing this weekend?”
“Did you bring in your math homework today?”	“Mommy told me what you were doing tomorrow. You are so lucky.” (in reference to a sleep over)
“Did you get your haircut?” (boy looks shy) “It looks great!”	“You look so cute today. Is that new?”
“(Child’s name) Do you want to take the lunch count today?”	“I love your stuffed animal. Where did you get it?”

Figure 5

I took a few more of these recordings and compared them to each other. It was amazing to see how similar they were. The teacher tended to focus on fashion with the female students, commenting them on their nice dresses and pretty earrings. On the particular day seen above, two of the first six comments dealt with this topic and these results were comparable on the other days that teacher comments were recorded. The girls began to comment on each others outfits and accessories, especially stuffed animals and dolls that they brought to class. With the boys, however, topics were more scattered and less personal. The teacher often questioned the male students on whether they had their homework or made comments trying to keep them focused on their work. The teacher, from the time I was in the classroom, never commented on a boy’s outfit or anything to do with fashion, besides the occasional haircut. Even when the teacher commented on a haircut the male student had, the student responded differently than the female students did. In the above data, the boy reacted with embarrassment. However, when the teacher commented on a haircut that a female student had, she responded with the following:

“Thanks, I just got it last night and the hairdresser was real nice. She gave me a lollipop and even did my nails. Look!” (Field Notebook, April 20, 2005). These interactions between the teacher and the students show how teachers themselves unintentionally foster gender stereotypes in the classroom. What would have happened if the teacher did comment on a male student’s outfit? In the comments the teacher made when she initiated conversation with the students, she further cultivated the gender norms of the society.

### General Conclusions

Overall, I found that students, even at such a young age, do come to school equipped with preconceptions on how girls should act and how boys should act. Many students revealed these biases through discussion, writing, and reactions to literature. From the beginning of this research, I realized that the students had already begun the socialization process. They understood what it meant to be a girl or a boy.

Culture became an interesting theme throughout my study due to the mix of students in my classroom. With three students who spoke a language other than English at home, I became interested in their views on gender identity. I was amazed that in most cases, they had already internalized gender stereotypes in United States dominant culture; however, as with the boy who spoke Chinese at home, this was not always consistent. While he was aware of the culture, he still demonstrated uncertainty in his writing as well as his lack of participation

Throughout this research, it was also important to also see how experiences students had could so change their gender identities. Student’s beliefs on the topic of gender are accommodating, that is, they can change. Thus experiences to which students

are exposed to can help them break gender barriers. This finding also reveals the power parents, teachers, peers, other adults, and culture have on a student's sense of identity. In other words, so much goes into how a child is socialized. Parents, toys, television, and books all contribute to a student's understanding of gender. Understanding that power is a necessary tool in appreciating how influential experiences can be to a child's development of self.



## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Implications

#### Introductions

In this chapter, I will discuss what I have found in this study and how the results do or do not answer my original question: What is the connection between gender and literacy and how can teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of both genders without perpetuating gender bias? I will also discuss the limitations of this study and the implications this research has not only in the classroom but also in future studies on the topic of gender and literacy.

#### Results

##### A Strong Connection between Gender and Literacy

This research supports a strong connection between gender and literacy in the classroom. As students enter into the school environment, most of them have already begun the socialization process and as a result, have internalized what it means to be a girl and what it means to be a boy. Even in first grade, the students have been taught the cultural expectation for genders, enabling them to fit in our society. This study suggests that the connection between gender and literacy in the school environment revolves mostly around the idea of expression. Students already have an understanding of cultural expectations when they begin school, as this research suggests, and teachers see the effects of this each day in not only literacy instruction, but in all aspects of the school

environment. In this study, students were seen expressing their understanding of gender in their writing, discussions, and the choices they made.

#### The Positive and Negative Power of the Teacher

While students already come into the classroom with an idea of how they should act based on their gender, teachers, as found in this study, do have the power to open their minds to new perspectives. For example, in this study, stories that countered cultural norms were read and discussed. The students freely shared their beliefs on gender roles during discussions based on these stories. At first, much of what they were saying paralleled the gender bias of the dominant culture; however, after several discussions students began to change or modify their views. For example, a student who could not understand why a boy wanted to play with a doll changed his mind and decided that it was okay because he was practicing to be a father. By giving students the opportunity to discuss these views in a safe environment, they were able to think openly about biased gender roles and decide if they should live by them. Teachers create these tolerant classrooms. Thus, they have the power to break particular gender stereotypes by providing students with experiences that they may never have had before, such as witnessing a boy playing with a doll or a female as a construction worker. By showing students that these stereotypes are not rigid and can be countered, girls as well as boys will be given the opportunity to make their own decisions and not be restricted by culture.

While teachers have the power to counter stereotypical norms, they often use this power instead to reinforce them. Teachers unintentionally foster culturally accepted gender roles each day, without even realizing it. As seen in this study, simple comments that were made to students fostered the expectations society has created in regards to

gender. These comments were easily categorizable, such as the teacher consistently commenting on girls' outfits. As I observed, I noticed that the girls mimicked the voice of the teacher and began to comment other female students in the same manner. Meaning no harm, these comments contributed to how these students viewed themselves and how they judged each other. These comments, as well as other forms of socialization, lead a child to think as Sofia did. She had let go of her real sense of identity in order to fit her assigned role, a role in which wanting red lipstick would make more sense.

### The Value of Experiences

This research also suggests that experiences, as well as the teacher, have significant power over a student's sense of identity in regards to gender. Not only does this research indicate the importance of experiences outside of the school but also teacher-created experiences in the school. Experiences mold the minds of children. In this study, the experiences studied were gender related and helped the students form their gender identities as well as their view of gender roles. This result correlated directly with teacher power, as teachers have the power to introduce as many experiences as are necessary to create equitable classroom settings. In this study, books that countered typical gender roles were a significant tool in the creation of experiences for students. This study implies that using these tools helped the students understand their own bias and see gender outside of society's expectations.

### Implications of this Research

In the classroom, teachers cannot change the world by creating unbiased learning environments; however, they can create a setting where students, regardless of their gender, have accessibility to all sorts of opportunities and feel safe in taking them. Boys

can choose any color they wish to use, even if it is pink. Girls can feel comfortable speaking in the classroom, even if they are opposing the opinion of a male student. Teachers can begin to accomplish this by first, exploring and understanding their own biases. This is essential in analyzing how they treat students and if the treatment is different based on gender.

After understanding their own bias, teachers then can explore their position of power in the classroom. As discussed earlier, this power can be either positive or negative, so teachers need to examine their practices and be cognizant of the comments they make. As this research suggests, literacy and gender are connected. Therefore, teachers should use literature that counters stereotypical norms in order to open the minds of the students and generate open discussion on these topics. Providing students' with experiences that counter bias will help them to think critically about this topic. Further, this study implies that being aware of gender and openly discussing the stereotypes that the students have internalized will support and help to create an equitable classroom, a place where all can succeed.

#### Limitations of this Study

This study is limited in that it was completed in such a short time, three months. If given more time, I would have the opportunity to observe the students for a longer time, engage them in more discussion, and see the changes in their attitudes over time. Another limitation of this study is the fact that the population that was examined was chosen at random through my student teaching placement. Since I was a graduate student at the time the study was conducted, as well as the fact that this was my first time engaging in teacher research, I also became a limitation in my study. As a novice

researcher, this was my first attempt at completing such a project; so I have learned a great deal that will help me if I were to do it again.

The conclusions of this study are also not generalizable to other classroom settings. This teacher research focused solely on the students in this classroom and depended greatly on the upbringing, the culture, and the environment in which they live. However, the results give readers a heightened awareness into possible biases that do exist in young children and possible ways that students react to them.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

My study is unique in that I look solely at a group of first grade students. My intention in studying such young students was to discover if they had yet internalized gender norms and to what extent they expressed them in the literacy classroom. I was surprised to see the degree to which young students had adopted gender stereotypes and the certainty in which they were expressed. Future research may focus on an even younger grade level, such as kindergarten or preschool. Using my study as a comparison, future researchers could evaluate the extent in which students at even lower levels internalize gender stereotypes.

During this research, an aspect of gender arose that was unintentional and not part of my original study. Nevertheless, its appearance into the research brought up some interesting results that were unexpected. The culture of the students in my classroom was diverse, including three students who spoke another language other than English. Curious, I studied the gender perceptions of these students. I did discover that one of the students had not completely adopted the dominant gender bias of this country; however, he was rapidly beginning to internalize them. It would not only be interesting, but also

helpful for future practice, to continue to study how those from another culture view gender. Do they assimilate and accept the culture of the United States? Which cultures more readily accept and which do not? Why? It would be beneficial to study other cultures to see if similarities between United States culture and other cultures enable students to better adapt to the views of the dominant culture in the United States. Finally, the results of this study would have great implications on teacher practice. Teachers could learn how to better understand students from other cultures and help them express their own sense of gender in the classroom. Not only would the teacher be including diversity, but also helping to break down gender barriers in the classroom

#### Closing Thoughts

Culture is ever-changing; thus, what gender is and how one should behave based upon the norm will forever shift. However, as teachers, we have the opportunity to open up children's minds to all possibilities, exposing them to ideas that counter the expected. We have the chance to provide them with experiences they may never encounter anywhere else. We have the perfect setting to take on this challenge-the classroom. In this room, students of all colors, shapes, and genders interact and grow together. Who could ask for a better setting? With such an environment, we can take advantage of diversity and help our students to become more tolerant of not only gender, but race, culture, and all of the other differences that make America beautiful.

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Appendix A

Transcriptions of Student Discussions

Transcription #1

Book Title: William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow

Discussion

Teacher: *Introduces the activity but does not reveal the title or show the cover.* The book we will read today is about a little boy and his favorite thing to do. What do you predict is the main characters, the little boys, favorite thing to do?

Student (girl): Football or soccer.

Student (girl ELL): I think he is gonna play with toys.

Student (boy): Listen to music.

Student (girl): Maybe he likes to do outside sports.

Student (boy): Basketball.

Student (boy): Ride bikes.

Teacher: We are now going to find out what his favorite thing to do it. The title gives it away.  
*Reads title.*

Student (girl): A doll?

*Murmurs heard throughout the class.*

Teacher: Are you shocked?

Student (girl): Yes.

Teacher: Why?

Student (girl): I don't know.

Student (girl): Because he is a boy and boys don't play with dolls.

Student (boy): I play with my sister's Barbies.

*Students laugh.*

Student (girl ELL): I play with boy stuff.

Teacher: Like what?

Student (girl ELL): I play with boy's cars and Spiderman.

Student (girl): My brother, he is ten, and he still sleeps with his bunny rabbit.

Student (girl): I sometimes play with Jack's trucks.

Teacher: *Reads story. William wanted a doll. He wanted to hug it and cradle it in his arms. And give it a bottle and take it to the park and push it on the swings and bring it back home and undress it and put it to bed. And pull down the shades and kiss it goodnight and watch it close its eyes and then, William wanted to wake it up in the morning when the sun came in.*

Student (girl): The boys in the background are hiding their faces because they do not want to see what William is doing.

Teacher: Why is it that they do not want to see what he is doing?

Student (girl): Because they think it is silly that he's doing it.

Student (boy): Blah.

Teacher: What does that mean?

Student (boy): Ewww...disgusting.

Teacher: Why?

Student (boy): I don't know.

Student (girl): They are surprised that a boy wants to play with a doll.

Student (girl): They think it is gross because he is kissing a doll.

Teacher: But don't girls kiss their baby dolls.

Students: Yes.

Teacher: So what is wrong with a boy kissing his dolls?

Student (boy): But that's girls.

Teacher: So boys can't kiss baby dolls?

Student (girl): No they can but it is kinda weird.

Student (boy): I just don't think they should.

Teacher: Continues reading. *And then he wanted to start all over again. Just as though he were its father and it were his child. "A doll," said his brother. "Don't be a creep." "Sissy, sissy," said the boy next door.* What were they calling William?

Student (girl): Sissy, sissy.

Teacher: Was that nice?

Student (girl): A boy kissed a doll because dads kiss babies.

Teacher: What about that, boys?

Student (boy): But babies are live things. Dolls are pretend things.

Teacher: Don't you have pretend things.

Student (boy): Yea but I don't kiss them.

Teacher: Continues to read story. In the story, boy continues to get teased by neighbors. Asks class: Would you tease a boy if he were playing with a doll?

Student (boy): Maybe.

Teacher: Why does the dad want him to have a basketball?

Student (boy): The dad doesn't want to see him playing with a doll.

Student (girl): His dad probably thinks it is weird.

Student (girl): I agree that he is playing with a doll and he doesn't want to let it go. And I disagree with them calling him a name.

Teacher: Continues to read story. In the story, the dad buys William things like basketballs.

Student (girl): I thought he was going to forget about the doll.

Teacher: Continues to read. Father buys son a train as well. William enjoys these things but he still wanted a doll. His grandmother comes to visit. Asks class: Oh, what do you predict?

Student (girl): Maybe she will buy him a doll.

Teacher: Is that okay?

Student (boy ELL): I don't know.

Student (boy): No it is not okay.

Student (girl): I agree with \_\_\_\_\_. I think the grandmom will get him a doll but he will forget about it and play with one of his other toys.

Teacher: That is one prediction.

Student (boy): I think a boy can have a doll but it is gross and I think the grandmom will buy him a doll.

Teacher: Continues to read story. Tells grandmom that he wants a doll and she says that it is wonderful.

Student (boy): I wouldn't call him a sissy because I would do the same thing.

Teacher: Continues to read. Grandmom buys him a doll.

Student (girl): Grandmoms are always so nice and they buy you whatever you want.

Teacher: Why do you think William's father does not want him to have a doll?

Student (boy): Because he probably thinks it is weird.

Teacher: Continues to read. In the story, Grandmom bought him a doll.

Student (girl): Oh that is so cute.

Student (boy): When he gets a doll, maybe he will call the others a sissy.

Teacher: Continues to read. In the story, father is upset but grandmom explains that it is good so he can practice being a father.

Student (boy): He practiced basketball and now he practiced being a father.

Teacher: Is that ok?

Student (boy): Yes. *This is that same boy who said in the beginning that it is gross for boys to have dolls.* They can have dolls.

Teacher: Would you have one?

Student (boy): NO.

Student (girl): There is nothing wrong with practicing so he can be a father.

Student (girl): Practicing is good because you can learn by practicing.

Teacher: Repeats this. *But he is a boy.* Why is his father so upset that he wants a doll?

Student (boy ELL): Because he may be embarrassed.

Student (girl): Because boys should not have dolls.

Teacher: Where do we learn that?

Student (boy): I don't know, my father.

Student (boy): From his sister.

Teacher: Why is okay for girls to play with trucks but not okay for boys to play with dolls?

Student (boy): I don't know it is just disgusting.

Student (girl): I think they can do it. Cause Jack plays with my dolls and I play with his trucks.

Student (boy): No, boys don't play with dolls.

Student (boy): It's okay.

Student (boy ELL): I think so.

Student (boy): It doesn't matter if it is a boy or a girl toy as long as you're having fun.

Student (boy): No, boys can't play with dolls.

Student (boy): No and yes. I think it is okay but I don't know any boys who do it.

Student (girl): It's okay because my cousins were playing with them.

Student (boy): No because it, I don't know. I would play with one.

Teacher: Thanks students for being honest.

Transcription #2

Book Title: Oliver Button is a Sissy by Tommie dePaola

Discussion

Teacher: (*reads the title*) What is a sissy? Who uses it as a mean word?

*Students have trouble responding.*

Teacher: I'm thinking of a person whose name begins with a B.

Student (girl): A bully.

Teacher: That's what I was thinking of. Someone who calls someone else a sissy is called a bully. Anyone have any predictions of what this story may be about just by looking at the cover and hearing the title?

Student (girl): Maybe he is afraid of something like the dark and they call him a sissy. And the other kids call him a sissy, but at the end they admit that they are afraid of the dark.

Teacher: What a great prediction. Reads part of the story: *Oliver Button was called a sissy. He didn't like to do things that boys are supposed to do.* Teacher puts books down: Now we are going to stop there. Tell me some things you think Oliver does not like to do.

Student (girl ELL): Definitely play football.

Student (boy): Play Baseball.

Student (girl): Girls can play sports too.

Teacher: They can, you're right. What else.

Student (girl): They can, umm, I think boys play with trucks.

Student (boy): Do chores.

Student (girl): I do chores.

Other students: So do I.

Student (girl): There is something I know about baseball. Girls can play baseball, you know how? Because I have this movie and it has a baseball team and they are only girls.

Teacher: You're right. Girls can play baseball.

Student (boy): My sister can only play softball.

Student (girl): Boys play with dinosaurs.

Student (boy): Play video games.

Student (boy): Robots.

Teacher: Continues to read story. Questions class: What types of things do you think Oliver liked to do?

Student (boy): Pick flowers.

Student (girl): I think he liked to catch fireflies.

Student (girl): Play with barbies.

Student (girl): Maybe he likes to play with cats.

Student (girl): Maybe he likes to say things like, "Oh, that's so cute."

Teacher: Continues to read pages two and three.

Students react (both boys and girls): I like to draw pictures.

Teacher: Reads 4-7. Page seven states: "*Oliver,*" said his papa. "*Don't be such a sissy!*" Go out and play baseball or football or basketball. Any kind of ball at all. Asks students: what are you thinking now?

Student (girl): I'm thinking that his dad doesn't seem that nice because like all other parents don't call them names.

Student (girl): I think it is like our old story because the dad is acting the same way he did in the other story, telling him to do something that boys would do instead of girls.

Teacher: Continues to read page 8

Student (girl): It doesn't matter what you like, it matters who you are.

Teacher: What a great comment. I really agree with you. Continues to read until page 16. On this page, it states: *But the boys, especially the older ones, in the schoolyard teased Oliver Button.* Teacher asks, "Why do you think the boys teased Oliver?"

Student (boy): Because they think only girls can tap dance.



Student (boy): But boys can dance, you know why? My next door neighbor is a boy and he doesn't tap dance but he dances.

Student (boy): Boys dance because my cousin, he went on stage for the nutcracker and he danced.

Teacher: Continues to read story until page 21. Book says, *Almost every day, the boys teased Oliver Button.*

Student (boy): I know why they tease him because they don't like what he is doing.

Teacher: Why don't you think that they like what he is doing?

Student (boy): Because they think that's girls stuff. But it isn't.

Teacher: Continues to read to page 30.

Student (girl): I know how boys can play ballet. Last year there were three boys in my dance class.

Teacher: Really, that's great! Continued to read to page 42. I'm going to stop here because the skill that we are working on is predicting outcomes. What do you think, or predict, may happen next? If you were writing your own story, how would you write the end? Students were put into pairs to predict outcomes.

Students share predictions.

Teacher: Shares the end of the story. Who thinks it is okay for both boys and girls to tap dance? All students raise hands.

Teacher: Is there any activity you think that boys can do but girls should not do?

Student (boy): Basketball.

Teacher: You don't think girls should play basketball.

Cooperating Teacher: I play basketball.

Students: Uh oh! *Laughter.*

Students (girls): I play basketball. I can play basketball.

Teacher: Do you still think that girls shouldn't play basketball.

Student (boy): Ummm....I don't know.

Student (girl: ELL): Some boys like sometimes boys like to like get dirty and stuff. And girls shouldn't do that.

Teacher: Congratulated students on their discussion.

Appendix B

Daily Student Journals

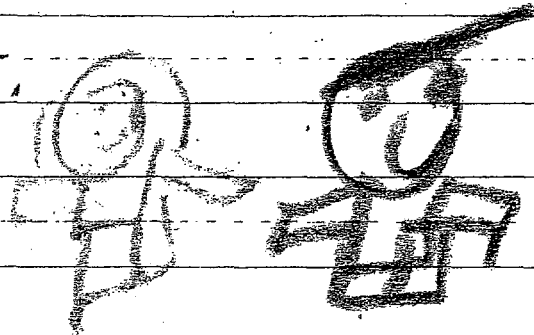
#1

February 17 2005

boys

Boys are diffrint  
then girls. Boys like  
races cars girls like  
makeup. Girls like  
cats boys like dogs.

Girls and boys are  
diffrint.



#2

February

girls

Girls like to do they all

like to and they like

to play makeup.

Do girls like to run?

#3

February 18 2005

girls

Do girl lik pink?

Do girl like to were  
dres? Do girl lik to

were pink dres? Do

girl like to go to

Disney word? Do girl

#3

Cinderella?

like to read Cinderella

0

#4

February 17 2005

Boys

Boys like to play

soccer football basketball

and video game.

Boys like to watch

pokemon. Boys like

to read pokemon.



#5

February 17 2004

boys

I hope I had a

little boy and his

privit colre is blue

and he plays with me

at Gym!