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RESPONSE TO GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM:  
A LOOK AT A TEACHER'S REACTION TO HER STUDENTS AND ITS EFFECT

by  
Victoria A. Henwood

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Teaching Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
July 1, 2005

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Professor)

Date Approved 06.29.05

## ABSTRACT

Victoria A. Henwood  
RESPONSE TO GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM:  
A LOOK AT A TEACHER'S REACTION TO HER STUDENTS AND ITS EFFECT  
2004/05  
Dr. Browne  
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this investigation was to understand a teacher's response to boys and girls in the classroom and determine whether this has an effect on students' perceptions of gender. Using a qualitative study and analyzing interviews, observations, and a gender activity through a data analysis spiral (Creswell 1998) in a first grade classroom with a female teacher, I discovered a teacher's perception of gender influences her interactions with students. Through the gender activity, I found this interaction can help shape a student's perception of gender.

## Acknowledgements

There are many people whom I would like to thank, for without them, this thesis would not be possible. First, I would like to thank the two professors who guided me through the entire process, Dr. Browne and Dr. Madden. Their support and guidance was at times frustrating, but always needed and of course later appreciated. I would also like to thank Dr. Fitch and Dr. Moss for being such a strong support system the past five years. All of you have pushed me to be the best teacher I can be, and I thank you.

I would also like to thank my family. All of you have provided me with encouragement, support, and inspiration. You have had to deal with a mad woman for the past semester, and I know it has not been easy. Thank you for all that you have done for me. Without your love and reassurance, I would not be where I am today.

Finally, I would like to thank Bryan not only for his support, but for his optimism as well. Whenever I thought I was not going to get through it, he was there telling me I could. Bryan, you have no idea how much I appreciate all that you have done for me. You have been a pillar of strength and a true inspiration. Thank you.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

~

As the student teacher finished grading her class's "math facts" tests, she was taken aback. Her school had just implemented a new testing program that required the students to complete forty math problems in two minutes. The school hoped to motivate the children to do well by giving each a certificate for every five 100s a student achieves. Since it was the end of the marking period, it was time for the student teacher to deliver the certificates. As she analyzed the grades and began writing down the names of the students who would receive certificates, she realized something. All the certificates belonged to girls. She laughed and thought, "*I always thought boys were supposed to be good at math!*" As soon as this thought entered her mind, she realized she had bought into a gender stereotype. She wondered what other stereotypes she had about boys and girls and how this affected her students...

~

This story sheds light on an interesting phenomenon that is present in many classrooms. Everyday, teachers interact with students. Teachers have their ideas and unconscious biases that may impact their students. How do teachers' today respond to gender in the classroom? Do they interact differently with boys than with girls? How does a teacher's perception of gender influence his or her interactions with students? This study examines how a first grade teacher responds to gender in her classroom and if and how this response affects students. This study unfolds in three stages. First, I



explore gender in the classroom by gaining an understanding of how children are socially constructed to have ideas about what it means to be a girl or a boy or how stereotypes develop. Then, I examine the teacher's and student's perception of gender, and finally I delve into an analysis of a teacher's instructional practices.

### The Research Problem

An analysis of academic performance among girls and boys provides insight into the gender gap in schools today. There is a discrepancy among boys' and girls' performance in key academic areas. From a study entitled *Gender Gaps*, it was found that boys continue to take higher level courses in math and receive the highest marks in the areas of math, science and history when tested by the National Assessment of Education Progress. Girls however, received the highest marks in the area of reading. Boys have higher enrollment in advanced science and computer classes when compared to girls. Girls also consider themselves to have lower computer know-how than boys (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1998). This study also shows that the number of boys who are involved in sports is higher than girls, while more girls are involved in school politics, performing arts, and literacy activities.

These discrepancies show an obvious problem with girls and boys and their academic achievement. A gender gap exists when it comes to both academic achievement and social involvement in today's schools. This leads me to question how teachers are responding to boys and girls in the classroom. Are instructional practices fostering inequality? Do children and teachers have perceptions of themselves that are swayed by social stereotypes? Through this study, I hope to learn more about this gender gap and the social differences among boys and girls. By examining students' and a

female teacher's gender perceptions and instructional practices in a first grade classroom, I hope to discover why there is a gender gap in academic areas and how social differences among boys and girls influence their educational experience.

Through socialization children are presented with many gender stereotypes. Because of this, children have perceptions of themselves that mirror infamous gender beliefs: Boys are better at math and sports when compared to girls. As early as the age of five, boys and girls have distinct perceptions of what areas they feel they are most capable. Boys have confidence in themselves in the areas of math and physical activity while girls perceive their strongest area to be instrumental music (Eccles, 1993). Do these perceptions coincide with their performance levels in these areas? Are boys just better at math and sports than girls? Female students perceive literacy as valuable while male students value sports and physical activities (Eccles, 1993). These perceptions can greatly impact the way students perform in academic areas.

Children are not alone in their swayed perceptions of what gender means. Teachers have predetermined notions of how boys and girls should act and how they should perform in academic areas (Owens, 2003). Teachers often hold different expectations for boys and girls. These expectations can lead to distinct differences in a teacher's response to boy students and girl students. For example, if a teacher feels that boys are better at math than the teacher may unconsciously direct most of his or her attention and assistance to female students. This study has been designed to learn more about a teacher's and students' perception of gender and how this can affect a student's performance and a teacher's instructional practices. Teachers have a significant impact on their students due to the fact that they spend a large amount of time interacting with

one another. Teachers have the ability to influence a student and change the way he or she thinks about the world. For example, teachers who tend to classify students according to gender alter children's classifying capabilities. Teachers often address the class as "boys and girls", organize seating arrangements according to gender and split the class into groups by gender. These are simple yet significant ways teachers use gender classification in the classroom and these affect the way students perceive men and women (Bigler, 1995). How teachers respond to boys and girls in the classroom can also significantly impact students. Teachers often unconsciously treat boys and girls differently. Many times girls are acknowledged and rewarded for minding the rules that teachers have set forth. Boys are looked to for answers to the tough, abstract questions (Owens, 2003). Does this type of interaction stem from a teacher's idea of how boys and girls should act? Boys often receive much of the teacher's attention in classrooms (Duffy, 2001). Does this negatively affect students' perception of themselves and gender?

Because teachers have a large influence among students, it is important to analyze teaching practices that help create an equitable teaching environment. Teachers who are made aware of their ability to facilitate gender gaps may be more likely to eliminate these behaviors (Jones, 2000). This can be done through workshops or a teacher's simple analysis of his or her own teaching practices. Teachers who choose a wide variety of material that appeals to both genders are also more likely to have a classroom with children that perform on more equitable levels (Blair and Sanford, 2004). There are many things that teachers are capable of that will help students have truer perceptions of

themselves and of gender that can help eliminate the gender gap that continues to exist today.

### Background Information

In this study, I use the phrases gender equity and gender equitable classrooms. It is important to fully understand these terms and what they mean to teachers and students. These terms refer to the idea that both boys and girls will be provided with equal opportunity by today's teachers. A gender equity classroom is one in which boys and girls are given the chances to succeed no matter what the academic area. It is a classroom in which boys and girls do not fall victim to gender stereotypes, and their self perceptions are not skewed to fit certain labels.

### Research Questions

This study will be guided by two main questions:

1. How do teachers respond to gender in their classrooms?
2. How are students affected by these responses?

While researching my question of gender, several subtopics and smaller questions arose.

1. Are teachers unintentionally gearing teaching strategies toward boys and/or girls?
2. Do boys and girls receive different privileges in schools?
3. Do teachers have unconscious presumptions of gender and different expectations for boy and girls?

This study addresses issues related to the gender gap. What can teachers, parents, and school administrators do to break gender barriers and create a gender

equitable classroom? If teachers became conscious of their interactions with students, would gender stereotypes begin to collapse? I hope this study provides further insight into these questions and could possibly offer answers to some.

### Purpose Statement

The overall purpose of this study is to understand teachers' response to gender in the classroom. Everyday, elementary teachers are faced with a classroom full of young boys and girls. These children are in the process of developing perceptions of themselves and of the world around them. Teachers play an important role in this development. How teachers respond to gender can greatly impact a student, male or female, and his or her self esteem. An examination of instructional practices and an analysis of a teacher's perceptions provide clear insight into the intent of this study: an understanding of how teachers respond to gender and the implications of these responses on students.

### Story of the Question

As a teacher-in-training, I have had much opportunity to reflect on my own education. When looking back, it is easy for me to ignore events in my education that may have been influenced by my gender. It is simple for anyone to miss how being a girl or a boy changed the way he or she acted in school and felt towards academic issues. As I began to become interested in the idea of gender in the classroom, I began to examine my own education more deeply and have discovered that much of my schooling years were influenced by my ideas of what being a girl meant.

When I was in fourth grade I received the much coveted long division award. This was the first time in my life that I thought I might be good at something that had to do with math. I was completely shocked that I had received this award because I had

greatly disliked all of my prior experiences with the subject. It was not that I was “bad” at math or received poor marks; it was just that I thought I was not good in the subject. I wondered why I had this idea in my head. In sixth grade I won my school’s annual science fair. This was the big time. My school sent me to the Franklin Institute Science Camp, where all the winners from different schools got to go. Out of almost 30 students, there were two girls. I can remember becoming good friends with the other female camper and wondering why there were so few girls. I also remember all the councilors being men.

Even though these incidences were small and not very dramatic, I look back and wonder how they affected my feelings about being a girl and later perceptions of what I, as a girl, could accomplish. These questions have developed into a research journey in which I hope to discover if teachers can in fact alter students’ perceptions about gender and how a teacher’s behavior might be altered.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The role that gender plays in classrooms is an important topic that has intrigued many researchers. Existing research covers a variety of gender issues, but it fails to link and unify what I feel represents the heart of the gender issue in the classroom: A teacher's perception of gender and its influence on students. The present study examines the effect of a first grade teacher's perception of gender on students both socially and academically. This is done through an analysis of a teacher's instructional practices which may foster or inhibit the development of social gender stereotypes.

The following chapter explores research that has already examined the creation of gender stereotypes, children's perception of gender, and instructional practices influenced by gender generalizations. By examining existing research I gained understanding as to where boys, girls and students stand in today's educational world, yet we also see a vital piece that is missing: The teachers' perception of gender. It is the area of teacher's perceptions that I feel is lacking in strong research. An analysis of a teacher's perception offers great understanding of the influence perception has over a teacher's instructional practices which may adversely affect today's students.

#### Social Construction of a Child's Perception of Gender

How do children develop ideas about gender roles? It is important that we understand the answer to this question because it provides us with the realization that teachers have an enormous influence over students and their perceptions of gender.

The influence of a child's environment is great and is important in determining his or her development of beliefs about gender. Along with environmental factors playing a large role in a child's development of gender stereotypes, cognitive capabilities are also influential (Bigler, 1995). If a child has difficulty understanding that people and things can belong to a wide variety of categories, the child is going to be more likely to believe gender stereotyping when exposed to it (Bigler, 1995). Rebecca S. Bigler (1995) studies three very different types of classrooms in order to determine the role of both environment and cognitive capabilities in the creation of gender stereotyping.

Findings show that children in gender classrooms, or classrooms where teachers make it a point to use gender categorization, display more gender stereotypes when compared to children in a class where teachers make no references to gender (Bigler, 1995). "If the child has difficulty understanding that the same person can belong to more than one category simultaneously, the child may be particularly likely to develop rigid and extensive sex-stereotypic beliefs" (Bigler, 1995 1073), especially when exposed to classification through gender in the classroom. Whereas children who are exposed to various types of categorizing and grouping are more likely to be able to believe that people and things can belong to various groups and categorization skills would become more advanced.

Rebecca Bigler (1995) warns that teachers should avoid strictly grouping and categorizing students solely on gender because this weakens students' ability to categorize in multiple ways. Through Bigler (1995), we recognize that exposing children to gender labels enhances their belief in gender stereotypes. Children are primarily



socialized by their teachers in the classroom environment and may fall victim to believing gender stereotypes.

The research collected illustrates how influential environmental factors are in the socializing of young adults. But just how young do children become socialized through their environment? Jacquelynne Eccles, Allan Wigfield, Rena D. Harold, Phyllis Blumenfeld (1993) find that children develop perceptions of themselves at a very early age. These perceptions mirror gender stereotypes that society fosters. Kindergarten aged children are in the process of or have been socialized, and as a result have learned and unconsciously internalized gender stereotypes that are prominent in our society (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold & Blumenfeld 1993).

The research presented confirms that children experience socialization through their classrooms and teachers. Today young children gain understanding of what gender is and are unintentionally exposed to social stereotypes through their environment and by their teachers. Through socialization by teachers, the classroom environment, and cognitive capabilities, students develop gender stereotypes. The classroom environment guides children in their development of ideas about gender and what it means to be a girl or boy. Because the classroom is influential and helps to socialize children, I feel that it is important to further explore this environment and understand the role that teachers have in the development of gender perceptions among children.

#### Student Perceptions

Since classrooms and teachers have a great impact on influencing a child's idea about gender, it is crucial to familiarize ourselves with what these perceptions of gender are. Every day children perceive different things in the world around them as feminine

and masculine. Socialization has resulted in a perception of themselves that is possibly flawed due to social stereotypes. What children perceive as masculine or feminine can lead to children having misguided perceptions of their own ability in different areas. Due to early socialization, children develop self perceptions at very young ages. Eccelles, Wigfield, Harold and Blumenfeld (1993) finds children as young as five develop perceptions of tasks and have beliefs in their ability to complete these tasks. Former research found that task perceptions become distinct as children mature; however, Eccelles, Wigfield, Harold and Blumenfeld (1993) prove that young children have clear and differentiated perceptions in many different areas. Boys think higher of themselves in math and sports when compared to girls, while girls believe they are accomplished in the areas of music (Eccelles, Wigfield, Harold and Blumenfeld 1993). The boys did not have as high of a self-perception in music as the girls.

Gail D. Heyman (2004) focuses on presenting students' beliefs about gender and students' perceptions of gender capabilities. Heyman (2004) concludes that girls are considered by peers to be successful in spelling. It important to not that students are sexually biased in certain areas, including math because they tend to answer the questions based on and in favor of their own gender (Heyman, 2004). Many students choose positive attributes for one gender, while the opposite gender receives the negative attributes. Again, this could be swayed by personal biases about their own gender that children may have.

Heyman (2004) discovers that boys and girls do have specific beliefs about gender boy and girl capability; however, the research may be swayed by an individual's tendency to favor his or her own gender. Children have distinct perceptions of

themselves and of male and females. In the present study, I further explore the area of student perceptions of gender capability in math, spelling, reading and the arts. I also clarify a student's belief of what being a boy or girl means both academically and socially.

Boys and girls display their perceptions of gender in very different ways through different tasks. Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (1995) explores social stigmas and stereotypes that girls and boys often face. She discovers from observations and discussions in primary classrooms that girls perceive happiness as getting married and having babies. Through work written by students when given the freedom to choose their topics, Orellana (1995) finds major discrepancies between boys and girls in topic selection. Thirteen of the girls and none of the boys in the class chose to write about butterflies, rainbows, hearts and flowers. Ten girls choose to write about family while only one of the boys wrote about family and the home. Nine boys and one girl wrote on the topic of sports and games. War and peace was a topic chosen by six of the boys and none of the girls. These examples show that children perceive certain topics, tasks and ideas to be feminine and masculine. These children are geared, through socialization to believe certain topics are masculine and feminine.

The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation finds that when compared to the number of boys enrolled in higher level math classes, girls' enrollment is low. Also when compared to boys, girls rate themselves lower in computer competency (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation 1998). This gap represents the significance that socialization has in establishing both girls' and boys' self-perceptions. If children believe society's gender stereotypes, they risk

internalizing the labels which in turn affects the way children perceive both themselves and women and men in general.

These studies illustrate that boys and girls have different perceptions of what men and women are capable of both academically and socially. Societal stereotypes are learned by students at a young age. These stereotypes are just one way that children are led to believe that boys and girls each can do and should do certain things. The studies presented show that students are at risk of limiting themselves because of the belief that gender stereotypes are true. This study further explores students' perceptions both academically and socially and attempts to discover the relationship between these perceptions and teachers' beliefs and instructional practices.

#### Teacher Perceptions

Along with students, teachers may also be at risk of being affected by gender stereotypes and as a result have different perceptions of boys' and girls' academic ability. This perception can shortchange students in the academic world. Jim Duffy (2001) finds that teachers hold different expectations for boys and girls in their classes: Teachers expect that females will succeed in language, while males are supposedly better achieved in science. Duffy (2001) also presents the idea that teachers try to hide when male students fail in math, while at the same time "downplay the successes of female students" (p. 2).

The research on teachers' perceptions of student ability based on gender has been limited to this point. I feel learning about teacher perceptions helps identify social stereotypes and discrepancies in students' perception of gender. This study works to gain further knowledge of teacher's perceptions, which strongly links the importance of

modifying teacher's instructional practices so they can foster equitable environments. We know that teachers play a large role in the socialization of children and are influential in the development of social stereotypes. An understanding of teachers perceptions contributes to this research by understanding how swayed perceptions help foster gender stereotypes.

### Instructional Practices

Teachers influence their students' lives everyday. Though it may be indirect and unconscious, teachers may have teaching strategies and material that fosters gender stereotypes and lead to an unfair and biased environment. Both Kelly Jones (2000) and Sherry Lynn Owens (2003) find that female students are ignored by teachers because male students are often receiving most of the teacher's attention. Boys often receive positive praise for the quality of the content of their work while girls often receive praise for the appearance of their work (Jones, 2000 & Owens, 2003). Owens (2003) states that during class discussions, teachers call on male students for responses to abstract ideas and females are praised for complying with the rules and the teachers. This is dangerous, because praising compliance can result in passive women who believe their minds and intelligence are not valuable.

Jim Duffy (2001) also finds that teachers direct much of their attention towards male students. Explanation for why includes the idea that teachers present material that is geared to male students in hopes that this will keep them focused on the lesson and reduce the number of times they cause disruption (Duffy, 2001). This presents a problem for female students who may not learn as much because the material is not directed towards them.

As noted before, Rebecca Bigler (1995) finds teachers that use gender as a categorization create children who are weak in categorizing people in multiple ways (1995). Many teachers address the class as “boys and girls” and often times group children according to their gender. Whether it is seating arrangements or project assignments, gender categorization presents a problem for children. It is difficult for children to understand that people can belong to more categories other than being female or male, especially when children’s cognitive capabilities are low (Bigler, 1995). This teaching strategy is very small and often unconscious but is commonly used by many teachers. This is just one small way that teachers are fostering a classroom that enables gender stereotypes.

The way teachers interact with students on a daily basis has an impact on children. Instructional practices both formal and informal could be unconsciously biased and may lead further development of gender inequality and stereotypes. Children are at risk of developing skewed beliefs of men and women and even themselves when exposed to teachers that have certain expectations. Instructional practices may mirror a teacher’s expectations and as a result, it is important to understand a teacher’s perception and analyze instructional practices.

#### A Step toward Gender Equity

The presence of teachers including biased instructional practices leads researchers to determine different ways to eliminate these biases. When teachers are made aware of their own instructional practices that foster gender stereotypes, they are more willing to eliminate these behaviors (Jones, 2000). Jones finds that teachers become more

sensitized to gender equity and practices that can help create this type of environment. If teachers are aware of unfair practices they can work harder to avoid them.

Many suggestions offer ways to close learning gaps for girls. While there are many social stereotypes that negatively affect girls, boys are also at risk for gender inequality. It has been show. Heather Blair and Kathy Sanford (2004) suggest ways to eliminate normal struggles that boys often face in literacy. Providing boys with a wide variety of literacy activities could increase boys' interest and success in literacy (Blair & Sanford, 2004). These activities must range in a variety of texts so that boys can choose material that interests them. The authors suggest that boys *and* girls should be taken into consideration when planning and instructing students in literacy.

There are many different ways that teachers can adjust classrooms to meet the needs of boys and girls. There are also ways to decrease gender stereotypes that certainly give children false perceptions of themselves. The research presented clearly demonstrates that gender stereotypes created in the classroom lead children to have false perceptions of themselves and of men and women in general. The research however, fails to analyze the influence that teachers' perceptions over instructional practices which may adversely affect the creation of gender stereotypes. Teachers play such a large role in children's lives and their perceptions and expectations can lead to children having skewed beliefs of men and women. The next chapter discusses how this study is conducted to further understand teachers' perceptions and the influence this has over students.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The following chapter describes the research design for the current study. This chapter includes a description of the context and setting in which the study takes place. It also describes the various data collection sources and analysis techniques that are used.

#### Context

The present study was executed at an elementary school in Gloucester Township in New Jersey in the Spring of 2005. According to Census 2000 data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, Gloucester Township is comprised of 87.1% white, 9.1% black or African American, 0.2% Native American and Alaska Native, and 1.5% Asian. 0.9% of the people in this township are labeled as “Some Other Race” and 1.3% of the population is a combination of two or more races.

4.3% of the population in this township is below the poverty level. 23.3% earn \$50,000 to \$74,999 a year, 5.6% households earn less than \$10,000 and 1.6% earn over \$200,000. 58.3% of the families in Gloucester Township are labeled as a married couple family. 11.3% of the families are considered female householders with no husband present.

#### Participants

The participants in this study came from a first grade classroom in the elementary school. The classroom contained 21 first grade students and a female teacher. The class had only 5 female students and 16 male students. The twenty-one students included children ranging from six to seven years of age. Nine of these students were white, one



was from India, eight were African American and three were of Middle Eastern descent. Most of the students' native language is English, with the exception of four students. These students' parents speak limited to no English. The participating teacher, of middle age, was experienced, teaching for over 15 years and received a bachelors degree in the education field.

### Research Design

For the exploration of my overall question, "how teacher's respond to gender and the effect this has on students", I used a qualitative study design which was guided by my research question. A qualitative study design was chosen because of its ability to "allow a researcher to test the validity of certain assumptions, claims, theories, or generalizations within real-world contexts" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005 135). Since my goal is to understand a teacher's reaction to gender and its relationship to social stereotypes, I felt qualitative study would best serve this purpose.

The specific type of qualitative study chosen for the present research was guided by the phenomenological design. According to Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, a phenomenological study is one that is implemented for the purpose of understanding different perspectives that occur in specific situations (2005). Many times, researchers have personal feelings on the topic being studied due to first hand experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). As seen in my story of the question, I do have personal dealings with gender perceptions and perspectives. In attempt to further understand these perceptions and the effect on future students and also to understand the perceptions of others, I chose the phenomenological design. The phenomenological design also allowed me to

understand a variety of different perspectives of gender including the teacher I worked with and the various students.

In order for me to fully understand the various perspectives and gain a clear understanding of the data collected, my previous notions and ideas about gender must be “suspended” (Leedy & Ormrod 2005, 139). This will allow me to gain insight into other peoples’ perspectives without influences or biases of my own.

### Data Sources

Because I chose to use a phenomenological research design, much of my data collection was based on interviews and conversations with the teacher and students. These interviews allowed me to gain insight into how girl and boy students are perceived and what expectations are made. It also allowed me to understand different expectations the students have for themselves and others based on their gender. The conversations and interviews guided my exploration of perceptions that both children and adults have of themselves in relation to gender and of their individual perceptions of gender performance and ability in the classroom.

Because this study came from the phenomenological approach, the interviews revolved around the participants themselves. I merely attempted to guide their discussions. The overall goal of the conversation with the teacher was to find out her expectations for boys and girls in both academic and social areas. This was done through discussions about how she felt about herself when she was a student and how being a female shaped her learning.

I also had discussions with the children in the class to determine how they felt about being a girl/boy and if this shapes what they can and can not do. Since the children

are young and may not be capable of lengthy discussions, I guided them through the interviews. I asked them a series of questions including: how do they feel about girls/boys, do they feel there are things they can/can not do because they are a girl/boy, are there certain things boys should do and girls should do, do they feel girls/boys are better at certain things? I wanted to gain an understanding of their perceptions of gender. These interviews were prior to the gender activity. I also analyzed responses about boys and girls made by the students in their journals.

In order to gain an understanding of the relationship between the teacher and the boys and girls, five formal observations were made during the course of the language arts morning block. The observations lasted about an hour. All of the observations were tape recorded. Also throughout the 15 week placement, informal observations were recorded in my research journal. I took the informal observations whenever anything relating to gender occurred inside the classroom. This tape and any notes in my research journal were analyzed at the conclusion of the study. There were a few things in which I wanted to focus on including the differences in interactions among female students and the female teacher and male students and the female teacher. I wanted to make sure that the way the teacher physically and verbally reacted to the female and male students was recorded. Other observations were made including the teacher's instructional practices and activities used during the lessons.

Finally, a lesson was taught which was designed to explore the influence of a teacher's perceptions of gender on students. The activity was based on learning about different community members. These members include the police, firefighters, nurses, doctors, trash collectors, firefighters, librarians, veterinarians and teachers.

The 21 children were split into three groups. Since there are only five girls in the room, I wanted to make sure that there was at least one girl in each group. Boys were assigned to the groups randomly. Girls were also assigned to the groups randomly. It was simply made sure that there was at least one girl placed in each group.

The first group, or “gender” group, was constantly addressed with gender specific titles, or boys and girls. I led the lesson by talking about each of the aforementioned members of the community. With the “gender group”, I always said and wrote on the board the “typical” gender associated with the member, for example, mailman. When the name of the member did not have man or woman attached, then I referred to the person as he or she. For example, if the student suggested a teacher as being a member of the community, then I said yes, and went on to explain that a teacher contributes to the community by sharing *her* knowledge to young people. I also always showed an image of the community member with the appropriate stereotypical gender. Whenever I offered a suggestion, I asked the girls when we were talking about a typical female member of the community and I directed the questions to the boys when we were talking about a male member of the community for contributions, however, I accepted suggestions from all students at any time.

The second group or the “gender neutral” group, were never referred to as boys and girls. In a discussion of the community members, the teacher always said and wrote on the board the gender neutral name of the member, for example, mail carrier. When the name was a neutral name, like doctor or nurse, I never referred to the member as a he or she. I showed this group two images of the community member, one female and one male. I made sure to call on both a boy and a girl during the discussions.

The third and final group went against the gender norms. Again, they were not referred to as boys and girls. I always said and wrote on the board the name of the member of the community that went against the norms, for example, mail woman. When the name was a neutral name, like doctor or nurse, I referred to the member as he or she, making sure to go against the typical stereotypes. I also showed this group an image of the community member; however, the community member's gender went against the typical stereotypes. I did not call on any specific student at any time.

### Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data that was collected, I used the data analysis spiral that Creswell (1998) developed and was explained by Leedy and Ormrod (2005). This required me to organize my observations, my interviews and anecdotal notes recorded and students' participation in the activity. After the organization, I became familiar with the raw data and got a sense of what type of information that the data contained. I made sure to record my initial interpretations of the information at this time. Once this was done, I classified my information into 2 parts that include the analysis of the teacher's responses and gender talk, and the students' perceptions of gender. From the analysis of these 2 parts of the research, I will find the connection from the gender activity. Finally from my raw data and initial interpretations, I developed my conclusions and ideas of how teacher perceptions affect students.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis and Findings

My data analysis unfolded to identify three focuses which are: 1) the teacher 2) the students and 3) the gender activity. The first of these categories delves into an analysis of the first grade teacher. This portion of the text reveals the teacher's thoughts and feelings towards her students through interviews, her actual responses to the students, and activities/lessons.

The second focus is an analysis of the students within this classroom. The analysis, which is made possible through interviews and journal entries made by the students, reveals various stereotypes that exist among these children.

Finally, the last portion of this chapter reveals the result of the gender activity. This is the portion that ties the analysis of the teacher and the students together. The results of the activity reveal the strong correlation among a teacher's responses and her affect on students' perceptions.

#### A Look inside a Classroom – The Teacher

1. How does a female first grade teacher respond to gender in her classroom?
2. Does this teacher have presumptions of gender and different expectations for boys and girls?
3. Is this first grade teacher unintentionally gearing teaching strategies toward boys or girls?
4. Do boys and girls receive different privileges in schools?

### Response Reaction & Action Response

While preparing for data analysis, I set out to uncover how teachers respond to children in the classroom and determine if this response differs among female and male students. These are the findings related to research questions one and two. I found that responses occur many times throughout a lesson and can take different forms. I developed two categories of responses: response reaction and action response.

Response reaction refers to the reaction a teacher has to a child's response. This occurs formally during a discussion or question and answer session. When a teacher asks his or her class a question, the response reaction is the verbal and/or physical reaction the teacher has to the answer given by the student(s). The response reaction can be a simple nod, or a verbal prompt such as "good" or "not quite".

An action response refers to the verbal or physical reaction a teacher has when a student produces an unsolicited comment or action. This can occur at any time throughout the course of a school day. Any response a teacher has to a student when not asking questions can be labeled as an action response. When a student is talking out of turn, a teacher's reaction to this student would be labeled as an action response.

From the five observations made during this study, I found that the teacher's response reaction to boys was similar when compared to the response reaction to girls. The words used to respond to the children were similar as well as the tone in her voice. The teacher used a steady tone and was articulate when communicating both wrong and right answers.

In the following example, the teacher is responding to mini presentations given by individual students. The presentations were given in a make-believe news room with a

pretend camera. Out of the five female students in this class, one was absent and one did not finish her assignment.

~

Teacher: <to a female student> Very good, Kristen. You looked up and we could see your face.

Teacher: <to a female student> Nice! Very good clues you gave.

Teacher: <to a female student> Good job, Jen!

Teacher: <to a male student> Very good, I liked how you tried to keep your eyes up. Good job.

Teacher: <to a male student> Thank you. Very nice, you tried really hard to keep your eyes up.

Teacher: <to a male student> Nice job, Josh!

Teacher: <to a male student> Very nice, Mike

Teacher: <to a male student> Thank you, that was a good clue.

Teacher: <to a male student> Oh, you have a nice speaking voice for a news reporter! Your voice was very nice.

Teacher: <to a male student> Good job, Sam. The only thing I would like you to do the next time when you are a reporter is put your head up towards the camera. Watch the next person.

Teacher: <to a male student> Very nice!

Teacher: <to a male student> Awesome! I like your voice and I like how you looking right at the camera. I think you will grow up to be a news reporter.

Teacher: <to a male student> Nice job!



In the response reactions described here, the teacher praised various aspects of the children's presentations. Her response reactions were directed towards presentation quality and content. To both a female and male student, the teacher commented on the clues presented in the presentation. For both of these students, the teacher praised the content of their work.

Her comment on the presentation was directed toward both a female and male students. The teacher praised the female student's ability to look up at the camera. She commented on two male students and their ability to keep their eyes directed at the camera. The teacher also praised two male students for the quality of their speaking voice. No girls were given praises for the tone or quality of their speaking voices.

For each student that participated in the activity, the teacher's response reaction was quite similar. She used a positive comment at the beginning of each response reaction, and for some the teacher followed the positive comment with a specific praise. The positive comments included "good job", "very good", "very nice", and "awesome". The teacher gave all of the students a positive comment after they finished their presentation.

When analyzing the response reactions that were directed towards the students, I found that they were similar among the boys and girls. The content of the responses varied from student to student, but there were no discrepancies among boy students and girl students. From this example, I can say that the teacher's response reactions remained consistent when dealing with male and female students.

Another observation revealed similar results. After students answered a question on a test, the teacher read the students' responses out loud. After each answer, the teacher gave either a nod, or a verbal response.

~

Teacher: <reading female a student's work> The detective can find clues on houses. That was a good one. The picture was really good as well.

Teacher: <reading a male student's work> Another place is a cave. <teacher nods her head> Very good

Teacher: <after reading all of the students' tests> They were all nice ideas!

~

The teacher read all of the students' tests. After each one, there was a verbal and/or physical response reaction. After analyzing the response reactions, I again saw no discrepancies among the response reactions that the teacher had for the boys and girls. They all included a positive praise or a positive physical reaction. The positive physical reactions included a nod or a smile.

In research conducted by Kelly Jones (2000) and Sherry Lynn Owens (2003), it was discovered that many times boys and girls are praised for different things. According to their research, boys receive praise for the quality of the content of the work, while girls receive praise for the appearance. According to the data that I collected on response reaction, the teacher's reaction to boys was similar when compared to the reaction to the girls in the classroom. Both boys and a girl in the class were praised for the content of their work and both boys and a girl were praised for the performance or appearance of their work.

When analyzing the data, I found that the action response among the children varied greatly. In several incidences, the teacher's action response to the girls was much more guided. The teacher assisted the girls and became involved in their particular situation. On the other hand, the teacher's action response to boys was much different. The teacher tended to remove herself from the boys. The teacher seemed to allow the boys more opportunity to come up with solutions on their own.

In the example that follows, the teacher instructed the students to turn to a specific page in their workbooks. As she monitored the class, she reacted to students who did not have their book open to the correct page.

Teacher: In your practice book you should turn to page 113 < writes the page number on the board >

Most children get the book and open to the page. Several children do not.

Sam (male): <flipping through the book continuing to look for page >

Teacher: Sam lets go! You need to be on this page. <points to the page number >

Sara (female): I can't find it. <she continues to flip through the book and looks to her neighbors for help >

Teacher: Here this is the page. <she turns to the page for her >

Tom (male): <he continues to look for page >

Teacher: Lets go, you should be on page 1-1-3.

Tom (male): <he searches for page >

Teacher: Here this is the page <finds page for him >

Elizabeth (female): <the last student looking for page >

Teacher: <turns to the page for her> here, see the 1-1-3 at the bottom of the page?

During this particular activity, the teacher had a very different action response to the children. While all the students listed had difficulty finding the correct page number, only the male students were verbally prompted. The 2 female students both struggled to turn to the correct page, yet were not verbally prompted by the teacher. Without hesitation, the teacher walked over to the female students and turned to the pages for them. Only after a verbal prompt, the teacher assisted one of the male students.

The reasoning behind variance among action response may have much to do with this teacher's personal belief of boys and girls. In a conversation with this teacher I found she has different expectations for boys and girls. The teacher of this classroom believes that boys tend to be more active and usually need more structure. This does not seem to fit with her action response of allowing them to solve their own problems, or in the preceding example, allowing the boys to find their own page. However, it seems as if the teacher is attempting to instill a sense of self among the boys. For example, if the teacher simply found the page for the boys, perhaps the teacher believed they would not be getting the structure they need. Directly instructing the boys to "lets go" and "find the correct page" seems to be more structured then finding the page for them.

The teacher's tendency to find the correct page for the girls might also have to do with her belief of students' academic ability. During the gender conversation that I had with this teacher, I found that she believes academically, girls catch on quicker when compared to boys of the same age. This might help explain her action response of finding the girls page. She might have felt that the girls did not need the experience of

finding the correct page themselves. She may have believed that these girls know how to utilize page numbers in a book and the process was just taking too long, whereas the boys needed the experience of finding the page themselves because they may need constant repetition to understand.

The teacher's belief of boys being more active than girls and needing more structure was revealed during my observations. One such example was an action response the teacher had towards boys in the classroom during a student directed activity. In the observation, the children were presenting news broadcasts. The teacher had an action response towards children in the class who were talking out of turn. Before the presentation began, the teacher looked around the room and saw that almost all the students in the class were involved in a conversation. It seemed as though the teacher realized that the children in the class would have to be paying attention for quite a long time to listen to all the students' presentations. The following is her action response to this situation:

~

Teacher: We need several helpers in the newsroom. Mike you will be the cameraman. Go stand over there so you can be it. <points the corner of the room> Cameraman, ready? You will be the man who says action. This will work very nicely if Mike does his job and Fred, go over there, <pointing to the front of the room> and do your job so the news reporter knows when to start speaking. You have to cue him. Ok we can begin.

<several students present their work>

Teacher: Ok, hold on one minute. Luke, I have a job for you. You will be the announcer and you are going to say...You know how sometimes they break in and say this is a

special news report? That is your job. You are going to say ‘this is a nature detective news report’ and then step away. John, come up here. You will be the light man. When you here the cue from Fred, you will shut off the lights. Now all of you boys have important jobs. Work together.

~

In this scenario, the teacher observed the class being quite talkative. Her action response was to choose 5 boys in the class to work as a news crew. No girls were chosen to partake as part of the news crew. Later in the activity the teacher switched jobs so that the news crew could present their broadcast. The teacher chose 5 new students to be the news crew. The second news crew consisted of all boys.

The teacher wanted this activity to run smoothly and in order to do that, she felt she had to keep all students labeled as “active” occupied. All of these “active students” just so happened to be male. In the research presented by Jim Duffy (2001), he found that many teachers direct much of their attention towards the male students in the classroom. Duffy found that teachers often do this so that male students are more focused. My findings are similar to that of Duffy. This teacher was trying to avoid disruptions, so she chose ten male volunteers to help with the presentations.

In the observations made throughout the course of the research, it is clear that the teacher’s action response toward the students varies among boys and girls; however, the more immediate and obvious response reaction does not. The discrepancy among the teacher’s action response may have a lot to do with her perceptions of females being “quick” academically and boys being more aggressive and impulsive. The teacher’s

perception of gender was also visible in some of the activities throughout the lessons observed.

### Gender Talk in the Classroom-The Teacher's Perceptions Exposed

While observing the teacher in this classroom, I found that two of the five lessons included activities that involved a large amount of gender talk. I define gender talk as statements made by students and teachers that expose gender perceptions. Gender talk relates to boys and girls and their role in the classroom or in society. Interestingly enough, both activities took place during language. An analysis of this gender talk will help bring an understanding of the effect that it could have on children inside this classroom. This section helps answers the research questions three and four.

The first language lesson involved special titles. The objective of this particular lesson was that students would be able to identify special titles and recognize a capital letter is needed. The examples that were provided in the lesson included Mr., Mrs., Miss., and Dr. To illustrate that special titles need a capital, the teacher placed sentences on the board with special titles in them. One such sentence was "dr. Smith helped the sick baby." The children were instructed to find the special title and then write it correctly. As the teacher went over the sentences, she read them out loud. She read the sentence and then repeatedly referred to the doctor as a he.

Teacher: Who helped the sick baby?

Sara (female): The doctor

Teacher: Right, is this a special title?

Alex (male): Yes, because is a special title and it needs a capital.

Teacher: Very good, yes. And what is he doing? How do we know he is a doctor?

Sam (male): He is helping the sick baby. Maybe he is going to give her medicine.

Teacher: Very good, he is helping the sick baby, and you are right he might prescribe her medicine. He could help her in many different ways.

Teacher: <looks down at the paper, and mumbles under her breath> he or she, I guess he could be a she.

Teacher: Next sentence. Where was the special title?

This activity exposed the teacher's perceptions of a person with the title of doctor. The teacher assumed that the person in the sentence with the title of doctor was a male. The teacher then went on to discuss this male doctor with the students. It was Sam that labeled the "sick baby" as "she", yet the teacher does not correct the student, she reinforces the idea of the female baby by repeating the student's suggestion. It was not until the end of the discussion that the teacher realized she did not know whether the doctor was male. She considered this thought out loud but only for a moment. She questioned herself, but she did not question the children.

The next activity focused on categories. The objective of the lesson was to have children be able to sort objects into categories. The teacher introduced the lesson by sorting the children. In her first example, she made three of the female students come to the front of the room. She asked for volunteers to label this category. She accepted the answer from one of the male students who labeled the category as "a group of girls." This was repeated when the teacher made two male students stand. She asked the class what they could say about this group. Many suggestions were made including that this



was a group of boys, they were wearing pants and they were the same size. Finally, four girls were asked to stand. From this group, the girls wearing pink were a group and the girls wearing skirts was grouped together.

This activity used gender to help children understand the concept of grouping and placing things in categories. As found in Rebecca Bigler's research (1995), categorizing children according to gender can create a problem. Many times, children have difficulty understanding that people and things can belong to more than one category. While in this particular activity the children were grouped into different categories, the main focus was gender. The children were repeatedly grouped according to gender. When the children were not grouped according to gender, much of the grouping was based on the appearance of the children, or what they were wearing. The girls were grouped based on typical female stereotypes-skirts and wearing pink.

The varying responses directed toward the children combined with the teacher's gender talk, which reveals different gender perceptions that she has, contribute to students' perceptions of boys and girls. When students witness a teacher grouping female students who are wearing pink together, it becomes likely that students will label pink as a "girl" color. When a teacher continually refers to a doctor as "he" when there is no mention of the doctor's gender, it will contribute to the students' mental image of what a doctor looks like. The teacher's action response to the students can have an array of affects on the students. Seeing only boys chosen for the news crew might have made the girls feel isolated. The girls might not have been as focused as the boys taking part in the news crew, thus impacting their performance. All the students in the class may now have an image of news crew and it may involve all men.

After discussing boys and girls with the students in this class, it is clear that the majority of the students have perceptions of gender. As found in the research from Ecclees, Wigfield, Harold and Blumenfeld (1993), children develop perceptions of gender from society. Teachers and the classroom make up a large part of a child's society and thus the impact a teacher can have on a student is great. A look at the children's opinions and perceptions of gender reveals how great of an impact society, including the classroom, has on gender perceptions.

#### A Look inside a First Grade Classroom – The Students

##### 5. How are these students affected by the teacher's varying gender responses?

When analyzing my data I discovered that as a result of socialization thus far, many of the boys and the girls are being led to accept various gender stereotypes. These students are buying into certain types of thinking that are aligned with typically accepted gender norms or TAGN. For the purpose of this study, I have determined that these young students have perceptions of gender that are constantly emerging and developing, yet at the point of data collection, many of the perceptions were aligned with TAGN.

TAGN group boys as physically active. Boys play sports which involve running, kicking, and throwing. TAGN also accept the idea of video games as a "boy" activity. Boys also play with action figures and toy cars. Finally, TAGN group boys as violent, using physical force in everyday play.

In today's society, there are also TAGN for young girls. Young girls wear dresses and play with make-up. They do not involve themselves in sports; they stay inside and play with dolls. Finally, TAGN group girls as homemakers. For girls and boys, TAGN

are reinforced everyday by parents, television, and other adults closely connected to children.

When asked to write about boys in their journal, 11 students responded with answers, some responded with multiple answers. There were a total of 17 answers about boys. Within the responses, 11 described boys as doing things that are typically “male”. These 11 responses were aligned with TAGN.

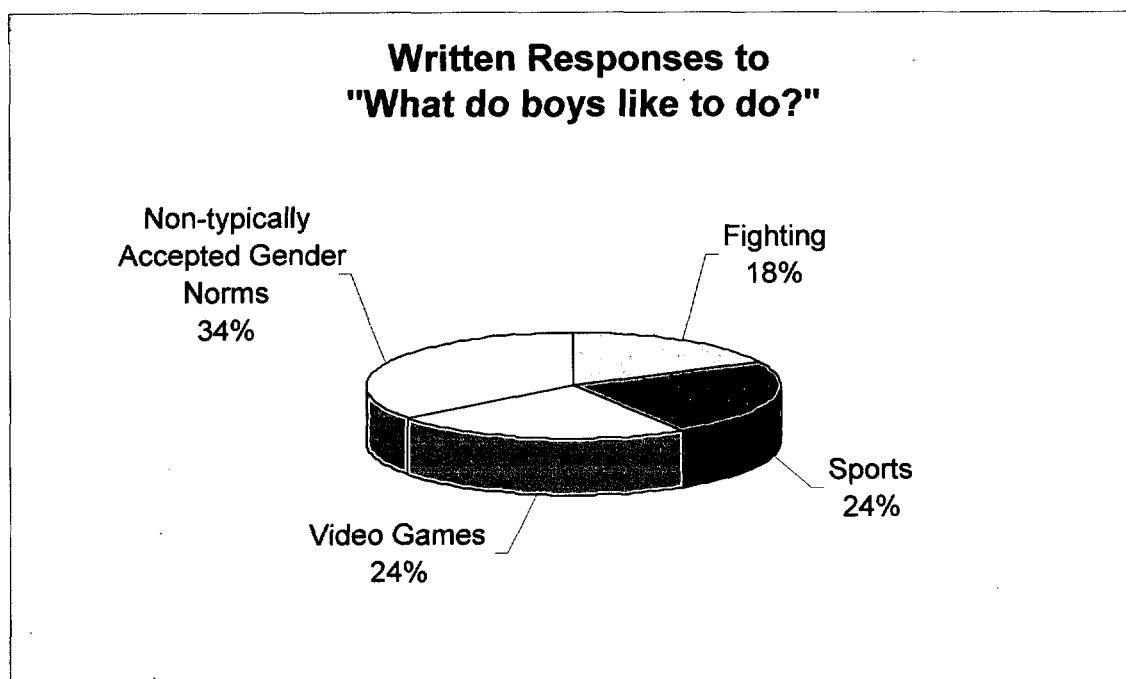


Figure 1 – Responses to “What do boys like to do?”

Out of the 17 responses, there were three that related to violent physical activities. One student stated that boys like to play Kung Fu fighting, while another student stated that boys like to play with toy guns. Finally, a student stated that boys like to fight with other boys.

There were four responses that grouped boys with sports. These sports included basketball, kickball, baseball, and football. Four responses also had male students playing videogames. The specific videogames were not described in their journals. Six

responses described non-TAGN activities as things that boys like to do. These activities included playing board games, playing with their fathers, spin the bottle, and movie watching.

From this data, it is clear that in this classroom, students' perceptions of boys are aligned with TAGN. While it is believed that boys do many different types of activities, 66% of these activities are considered male activities.

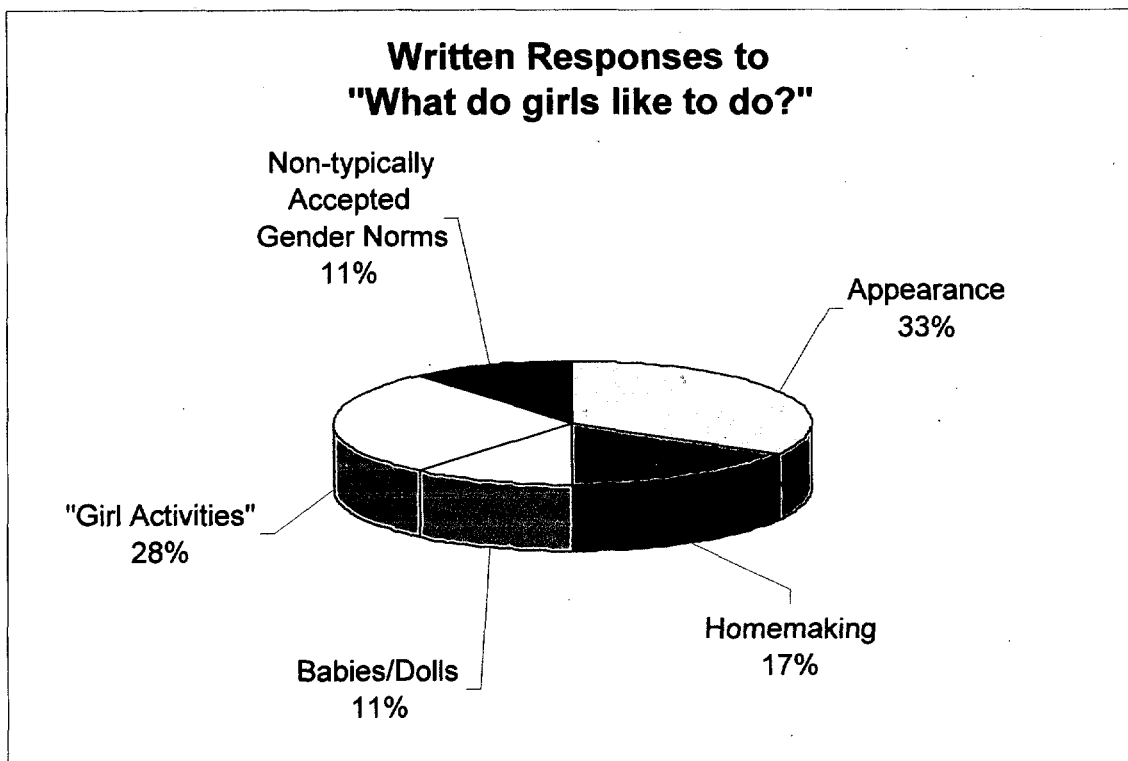


Figure 2 – Responses to “What do girls like to do?”

When asked to discuss girls, there were many different responses. There were 6 responses from students that involved girls and their appearance. Many responses stated that girls wear make-up. There were also several responses that commented on girls clothing, stating that girls wear dresses or skirts.

For the purpose of this study, I categorized specific student responses as “homemaking”. The students did not use this term, but I found this tile fit the responses appropriately. The responses relating to homemaking varied and it is interesting to note that all of these responses came from female students. One female student stated that girls like to clean. Another female student stated that girls “should make him tea and cookies”. Finally another female student stated that girls like to “get chocolate and roses”.

There were only two responses that believed girls play with dolls or babies. Five responses listed activities that are typically labeled as feminine. These activities included jump rope, listening to “girl” music, playing hide-and-seek, and playing with unicorns. There were only 2 responses that were not TAGN. These responses stated that girls color and play with toys.

In comparing these two charts that explore written responses from first grade students, it is evident that this classroom has more TAGN for girls than boys. When asked what girls like, 89% of the responses were aligned with typical “girl” activities. When asked what boys do, 66% of the responses were typical “boy” activities.

This data, as well as the interviews with the students reveal that these students are being led to believe in gender norms. The children’s perceptions of boys and girls are strong. A possible reason for the strong gender perceptions may come from the varying action responses and gender typical activities that children are being unconsciously exposed to. This classroom has many more boys than girls, and as a result much of the attention is on the male students. Much like the action response described above, the teacher attempts to avoid disruptions by keeping male students occupied. Treating boys

and girls differently and categorizing female and male students leads to “rigid and extensive sex stereotypic beliefs” (Bigler, 1995 1073); however, it is important to note that these children are still constantly constructing and developing their perceptions.

As the following gender activity shows, there is a strong correlation among a teacher’s actions and how students perceive boys and girls. This activity shows the strong connection and is a possible explanation for the TAGN that exist in this first grade classroom.

### The Connection

Prior to my data collection, I set out to discover the connection among a teacher’s response to gender and students’ perceptions of gender. During my data analysis, I discovered a variance among the action responses to children and the teacher’s categorization of gender. I also discovered that the students in this classroom believe many of the TAGN that exist in today’s society. The connection among the teacher and the students can be seen in the gender activity that was performed in this classroom.

The gender activity performed in this class shows the impact that teachers can have on his or her students. The graph illustrates the children’s responses to the activity. Within the graph, answers that the children gave are labeled as “TAGN”, “against TAGN”, and “neutral”. “TAGN answers” are answers given by students that fall under the typical “male” and “female” professions. Typical “male” professions include trash collector (trash man), doctor, mail carrier (mail man), firefighter (fireman), and cop (policeman). Typical “female” professions include teacher, nurse, librarian, and veterinarian. If a student placed trash collector under a male profession, the answer

would be considered "TAGN". The same would follow if a student considered a librarian a female profession.

When students' answers went against the typically accepted profession, the answers were labeled as "against TAGN". If a student considered a teacher as a male profession, this answer would be labeled "against TAGN". Answers were labeled as "gender neutral" when students placed the profession under the "female or male" category.

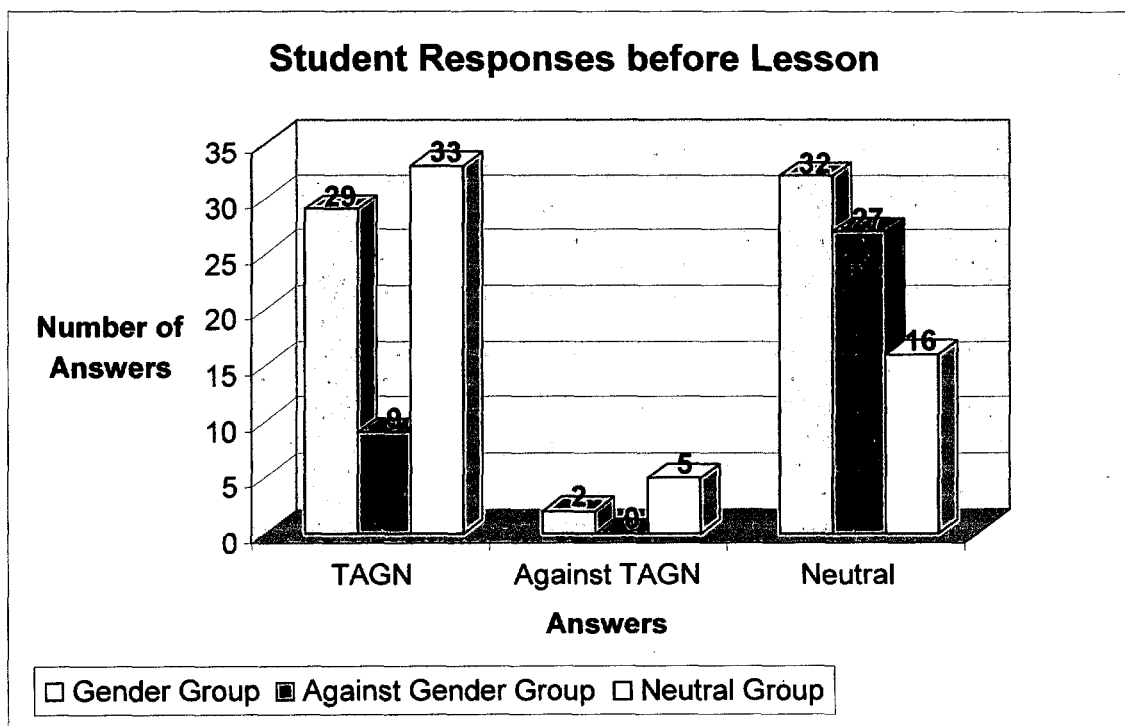


Figure 3-Student Responses Before Lesson

Figure 4 shows the students' responses prior to the lesson. The graph shows that before the lesson 29 of the gender group's responses were "TAGN". The gender group also had two responses that went against TAGN and 32 responses that were neutral.

Students that would partake in the lesson as the group that went against gender norms had nine responses that were for TAGN, zero responses that went against the TAGN and 27 neutral responses.

Students in the neutral group prior to the lesson labeled 33 professions under the TAGN, five as against TAGN and 16 as neutral.

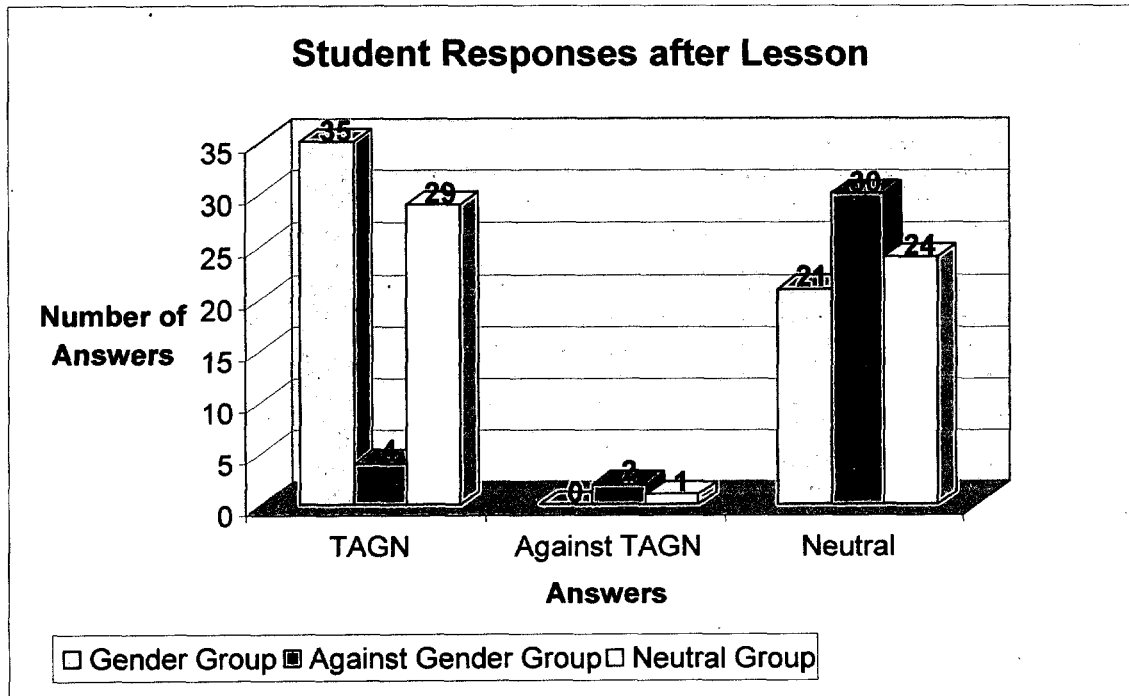


Figure 4-Student Responses after Lesson

After the lesson, the students that were in the gender group had 35 responses that went with TAGN, zero that went against the TAGN, and 21 responses that were neutral.

The students that were in the groups that were taught against the gender norms, had four responses that were considered TAGN, two that were against TAGN, and 30 responses that were neutral.

After the lesson, students that were in the neutral group had 29 responses that were considered TAGN, one that went against the TAGN, and 24 that were neutral.



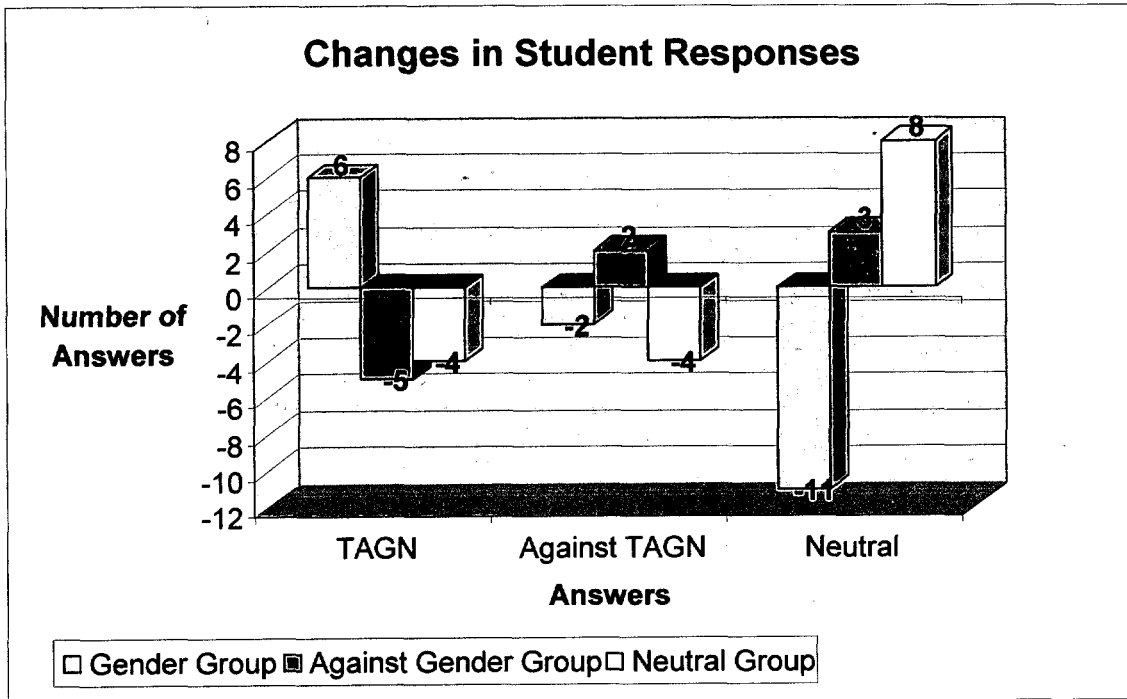


Figure 5-Changes in Student Responses

Figure five illustrates the changes in the students' responses according to the group they were placed in for the lesson. After the lesson, six more responses were placed in the "TAGN" group by the students that were in the gender group. For the students that were addressed as boys and girls and shown images of community members in TAGN, there was an increase of six TAGN professions. The increase of 6 responses, reveal that some students who did not think that a profession was primarily for one gender before the activity, now believe otherwise.

This sway in responses is consistent among the individual groups. Students' responses were swayed based on their group. For the students that were in the against gender group, there was an increase in two answers that went against the TAGN. For the students that were in the neutral group, there was an increase in 8 neutral responses. Students that were shown that gender stereotypes existed moved to that particular

category, and students that were shown neutral community members were more likely to categorize community members as “male or female”. It is important to note that students who thought there was a stereotype and were taught the opposite moved to a neutral group. If a student had a prior notion of a firefighter as a male and then were taught the opposite, the student was more likely to categorize the firefighter as “male or female” after the lesson.

This activity reveals a strong connection among a teacher’s content as well as her response to a student’s perceptions. I was able to sway the children’s perceptions of community members by using verbal prompts and visual imagery. Also, my response to the students during the group lessons also played a part in the students’ ability to sort male and female professions.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

#### Implications

As this study reveals, teachers have a strong influence on boys and girls. Even when teachers are conscious of treating students fairly it seems that TAGN may unintentionally creep into a teacher's interactions with students. This response to students has a strong connection with the students' ability to see beyond TAGN.

Like the research conducted by Kelly Jones (2000) found, teachers who become aware of behaviors that can influence students' gender perceptions will be more open to changing this behavior. This study is another look at the tremendous impact teachers have on their students. After completing my research, I am more understanding of this impact. This will help alter my actions as a teacher and help create a classroom in which TAGN are not reinforced.

The purpose of the research conducted within this study is not to claim that boys and girls are the same and needed to be treated as such. There are many differences between boys and girls, and it is a teacher's job to understand these differences. It is not the goal of education to perpetuate gender stereotypes. We need to make sure we are not denying a student's ability to achieve success.

In chapter 1, I described a gender equity classroom as one in which boys and girls are given chances to succeed and do not fall victim to TAGN. As teachers, we have to understand our learners as individuals. We can not allow gender stereotypes that are not proven in an individual student to affect how we interact with him or her. For example,

research has shown that girls tend to achieve more success with real world connections than boys do (Sax, 2005). If this instructional practice is not proven in a female student in the classroom, do not force this on her. Also, do not deny boys the opportunity to make real world connections. A teacher may find that some of her male students do exceptionally well with this teaching strategy.

The ultimate goal for an educator is to understand students. Because individual student learn differently, this can be a daunting task; however, teachers can not apply one theory or strategy to an entire group of students and expect it to work for each individual. A teacher must understand the differences and discover what works for each child. This will help to eliminate stereotypes and improve academic success for all students.

#### Limitations

This research was conducted throughout a 16 week period during my student teaching. As a result, there were several limitations to my data collection. This classroom was not my own. I did not set the schedule and did not have the ability to change the schedule according to my needs. I had to collect research in the environment that was established long before I arrived. Because of this, I was not able to spend as much time on specific parts of my data collection as I would have preferred. If I were the classroom teacher, I could have altered the schedule. The fact that I was a student teacher, however, did allow me to spend an ample amount of time observing the teacher and the students, which provided a lot of insight into this area of my research. Because my student teacher period was only 16 weeks, this limited the amount of time I could spend on my research. With more time and more flexibility, the research could have been more extensive.

## Summary

At the start of this study, I set out to understand a teacher's response to gender in the classroom. As the research that was utilized in this study reveals, a large part of children's socialization comes from time spent within the classroom; a socialization that can help enforce TAGN. This study was an attempt to further understand the role of the teacher in the socialization of her students through her responses to boys and girls.

To understand the response a teacher has to her students, several items were analyzed. The aspects of a first grade classroom teacher that were studied included the teacher's response reactions, action responses and instructional practices. The results show that when this teacher was consciously reacting to students through response reactions, the reaction given to the students was similar among boys and girls. However, an analysis of the action responses revealed a much different picture. As most action responses are unconscious, the teacher was unintentionally reacting to boys and girls in the classroom differently. After understanding teacher's perceptions of boy and girl students, it was clear why her action responses varied. This teacher expected different things from boys and girls.

The teacher's gender talk that appeared sporadically throughout the actives and instructional practices was strong. The teacher unintentionally revealed gender stereotypes that she had throughout two different lessons. As a result of the gender talk, students were exposed to TAGN that exist for both males and females in today's society.

The research collected prior to this study revealed that there is a strong connection among teachers and students' socialization. The data surrounding the teacher's perceptions prove that the teacher unintentionally portrays various gender stereotypes.

How does this affect the students? Discussions and journal entries reveal that the students in this classroom have perceptions of boys and girls that align with TAGN. According to the students within this class, boys play sports while girls play with dolls. In this classroom, there is a strong correlation among students' gender perceptions and the teacher's gender talk.

The gender activity helps to highlight this correlation. Students exposed to gender stereotypes were affected in their ability to categorize community members. Students seemed to take on whichever gender perception the teacher exposed them to, despite their original preconceived notions. The activity is another revealing look at how teachers can unintentionally reinforce TAGN.

The research collected within this study reveals insight into the perspectives of teachers and students and their relationship with each other. This teacher had strong perspectives of gender capability and unknowingly allowed it to affect her interactions with her students. These students are young and in the process of constructing their own perspectives; however, this study reveals the large impact a teacher can have on the perspectives of her students. Overall, this study suggests that as teachers, we need to be mindful of our interactions with students and not allow our own perspectives to pigeonhole student capability.

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