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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects of teachers of different genders instructing students of different genders. Data was collected through concept maps of classroom physical space, teacher interviews, student attitude surveys and classroom observational notes of sixth and seventh grade students and teachers. The study reveals that male and female teachers privilege students of the opposite sex, female students have more negative attitudes towards reading and physical space plays a role in student engagement and participation among male and female students. Teachers need to be conscious of their decisions and how assumptions and bias expectations can hinder student learning.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

MS in Literacy Education

Department

Education

Subject Categories

Education

The Impact of Teachers of Different Genders
Instructing Students of Different Genders

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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School of Arts and Sciences

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May 2012

Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects of teachers of different genders instructing students of different genders. Data was collected through concept maps of classroom physical space, teacher interviews, student attitude surveys and classroom observational notes of sixth and seventh grade students and teachers. The study reveals that male and female teachers privilege students of the opposite sex, female students have more negative attitudes towards reading and physical space plays a role in student engagement and participation among male and female students. Teachers need to be conscious of their decisions and how assumptions and bias expectations can hinder student learning.

The Impact of Teachers of Different Genders Instructing Students of Different Genders

In the classroom, students expect to be part of a safe and opportunistic environment and most teachers look to provide this type of environment for their students. All teachers differ in the practices they display in the classroom based on influence of their literacy practices.

Throughout the years, many researchers, such as Young (2001), Rowan et al. (2002), and West and Zimmerman (1987), have developed ideas, trying to correlate the relationship between gender identities and literacies. In short, research has uncovered that “gender is something we do” (Young, 2001, p. 4). Young (2001) has also stressed that boys and girls learn to “do” gender from social interactions and contexts that influence a child’s daily experiences, such as home, school, sports, and society/media. Another explanation for the formation of gender identities is from Rowan et al. (2002), in which the study acknowledged “that gendered identities are multiple and socially constructed” (p. 61). In other words, these identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed from the many social institutions a person has in their lifetime. Teachers build their environments based on familiar literacy practices and gender identities, which may be bias towards a particular group or gender of students. When a teacher creates bias in the classroom, the students will in turn accept or create bias in their own literacy experiences.

Researchers such as Rowan et al. (2002) have completed research concluding that the mindset of gender identities affects the mindset of literacies. When mindsets no longer follow the dominant perspectives, teachers are supportive and unobtrusive with forming particular forms of masculinity and femininity. Young (2001) and Blackburn (2003) both completed supporting studies that encourage facilitated learning to be incorporated in classrooms in order to reach all students. Facilitated learning allows for students to break free of bias or power struggles that may exist between genders of students and teachers. If gender differences in the classroom are not

explored than there is a possibility of gender bias existing and effecting the classroom environment, curriculum, and discourse. These aspects need to be closely examined to ensure students are equally instructed and provided with unbiased experiences. The issues that have been raised are going to be addressed in this action-based research to determine if the differences that exist in teacher instruction and interaction play a role among students of different genders.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of teachers of different genders instructing students of different genders. I collected various forms of data, which included interviews, observational notes, concept maps, and surveys to determine key aspects of how teachers of different genders instruct students of different genders. Research in the past has shown females to have more positive attitudes and favored to have higher performance in literacy activities than males. Research also showed that preferential treatment existed in male and female classrooms and essentially boys receive more positive and negative and nonverbal and verbal teacher communication than females. However, I have found that preferential treatment and biases exist for genders of the opposite sex of the teacher. Also, though females are typically seen in research as more likely to have positive attitudes towards literacy, more males had positive attitudes than females in this research study. Lastly, physical space plays a role in student engagement and participation among male and female students.

Theoretical Framework

Many theorists of literacy such as Gee (1996, 2001), Freebody and Luke (1990), and Heath (1982) have suggested that literacy experiences form individual identities and are constantly evolving with new social experiences. According to Gee, literacy is defined as control of “secondary uses of language”, (i.e. uses in secondary discourses) (p. 23). Discourses are a socially acceptable association among ways of using language; thinking and acting that can be

used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network” (Gee, 2001, p. 18). According to Gee, primary discourses are acquired in the home through interaction and socialization within the family, in mostly oral manner. Secondary discourses are acquired and formed in professional, school or any other environment that is not a part of the home community. Therefore, literacy is the ability to function linguistically appropriate based on the social setting one encounters. Larson and Marsh (2005) state that our literacies develop across “multiple discourse communities and are apart of our everyday lived practices” (p. 102). In other words, we all draw our oral, written, technological, cultural, and gender knowledge from our home environments and experiences to help shape our new interactions and literacies that will continue to engage with throughout our lives. When gender knowledge is created it is carried with us into educational settings, and therefore begins the variation in social practices that affect interactions with others. Literacy is ever changing and never static because of the continuous change in expectations and demands from our society, which holds true to the similar ideas described by Freebody and Luke (1990). In which, Freebody and Luke (1990) state that literacy evolves from cultural and social interactions that occur on a daily basis and are based on the current demands and expectations of today’s society. Over the years, we have witnessed the development of literacy in classrooms that is constantly changing with adaptations to our societal needs and advancements from newer generations. The importance of teachers keeping current on the development of literacy instruction will help shape the instructional practices of male and female teachers to male and female students. Based on our current understanding of literacy, children learn literacy by participating in socio-cultural activity in both formal and informal contexts of culturally relevant situations. However, literacy is not translated to be taught or expressed the same across the board; instead it varies across different environments. The

variance of diversity in secondary discourse or multiple literacies in an educator ensures multitudinous groups of students are being reached. In accordance with Heath (1982), she states “the culture children learn as they grow up is ways of taking meaning from the environment around them” (p. 73). Essentially, children make sense of books and relate the contents of their knowledge to the real world, through literacy events, which follow in accordance with the socially established rules of a community. In turn, children can also challenge their understandings of the socially constructed practices in order to form a critical standpoint. Therefore, the choice of literature that is being exposed to students plays an essential role in a student’s understanding of the world and should be represented with multiple perspectives and genres. Heath (1982) claims that children from all communities are taught to follow the continuous practices that coincide with the ways of the community. As a result, there are many factors that shape our social, cultural and gendered identities, such as the numerous social networks an individual belongs to and the performance of literacy events and practices that have been formed. Once children enter school they bring with them funds of knowledge or a wealth of knowledge that have helped shape their identities. These identities have evolved students and teachers to have a wide range of knowledge that should be valued and appreciated among each other.

Oral and written language plays a key role in a child’s development of literacy acquisition. In order to effectively participate in society children need to develop language competencies in oral and written language to support their participation in a variety of settings throughout their lives. Otto (2008) suggests that as a child continues to grow and develop their oral and written skills they continue to reach language competencies in communication that enable students to have meaningful interactions in literary environments of both home and

school settings. The kinds of interactions that occur in school settings within the classroom can have a great affect on student performance. The development of semantic knowledge will also support a child's literacy development when a child begins making connections to their schemas. When students begin to acquire knowledge that can be connected back to their schemas, and used to educate or be shared among others for new learning opportunities students are able to evoke facilitated learning.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) claim that the social cognitive theory of gender-role development entail when gender perceptions are constructed from multiple experiences and they operate to develop particular "gender-linked conduct" or mechanisms throughout people's lives (p. 675). Under this theory, students are encouraged to engage in social interactions and develop their identities. However, the typical norm that is generated as the perception of that gender proves classroom literacies identify that "language and graphic representations" implicitly and explicitly produce certain meanings of gender that privilege some and stigmatize others (Young, 2001). In today's classrooms, students need to feel comfortable and appreciated in order to thrive in the environment. If teachers create gaps in their relationship between certain groups of students based on sex, social and cultural backgrounds, it can negatively affect student performance or behaviors. To avoid such outcomes, teacher development of curriculum, classroom environment and discourse need to be closely examined to ensure students are equally instructed and provided with experiences that are unbiased and supportive of educational growth.

To reinforce effective classroom equality, there should be no variation between how students receive their instruction. Rex and Shiller (2009) claim that in order to break power struggles between teacher and student there should be a "circulation of power", in which the movement of energy is evolving between both the teacher and the students, resulting in a

facilitated, ongoing, learning environment. Social justice is a key element to have in place in the classroom environment in order to ensure students are provided with a multitude of opportunities and are treated as equals, which Rex and Shiller (2009) refer to as social constructivism.

Teachers that find ways to create a democracy of shared power in class engagements allows for students to feel heard and represented in the school community. This also leads to not allowing for any group to feel more or less superior to another in the class; shared power creates a balanced energy among all. When building teacher and student relationships that have a shared power, it will lead to creating a socially just environment and break down bias and differences in instruction.

Research Question

Given that equal opportunities promotes greater educational growth and builds positive, neutral powered relationships among teacher and student in a socially constructed environment, this action research project asks, how do teachers of different genders instruct students of different genders?

Literature Review

The following literature review investigates many viewpoints on the issues with gender and teaching. Initially, I will explore the formation of gender identities and how this development is impacted by a lack of gender variety in classroom teaching. Secondly, there is a considerable amount of research on the impact of differential treatment based on male and female teacher behaviors towards male and female students. Additional research investigates verbal and nonverbal communication between male and female students with same sex and opposite sex interactions. Next, the implications of male and female student achievement taught by male and female teachers are thoroughly explored and also implications for closing the

significant issue surrounding the gender gap. Finally, I will focus on research findings of the selective tradition of teachers' choice of childrens literature in the classroom based on teacher criteria.

Male and Female Models in the Classroom

The scarcity of male teachers in the field of education, especially in the elementary schools, has been noted, and the lack of their presence has been a debatable factor in the field of education. Martin (2005) indicated that statistics for male teachers in elementary schools in the United States have dropped between 1981 and 2005 from 18 percent to 14 percent. These statistics have caused concern that male students, in particular, do not have enough exposure of male models in the classroom (Katz & Sokal, 2008; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Shapiro, 1980, Lam et al., 2009). In addition, theories of gender development have indicated that the development of gender identity occurs from children's observations of same-sex role models (Golombok & Fivush 1994).

Young (2001) has also stressed that boys and girls learn to "do" gender from social interactions and contexts that influence a child's daily experiences such as home, school, sports, and society/media (p. 4). Another explanation for the formation of gender identities is from Rowan et al. (2002) explaining that individuals develop multiple, socially constructed gender identities, and are persistently formed. These identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed based on the many social institutions a person has in one's lifetime. The reoccurring mindset that exists with gender allowed for the dominant gendered patterns of behavior towards masculinity or femininity to become so powerful that others have been marginalized. However, Rowan et al. (2002) seek to understand how and why this gendered pattern occurs, which they refer to as "transformative mindset" (p. 46). The transformative

mindset that was defined by Rowan et al. (2002) applied this mindset to literacy education in order to support gender identities with three related concepts. The first concept is “multiple subjectivity”, or essentially the idea that there is a plethora of ways to be a boy or a girl, or any other particular identity (p. 71). The second concept is “counternarratives,” these researchers define this as the need to move beyond the restraints of traditional discourses around masculinity or femininity (p.71). The last concept discussed is referred to as a “rhizomatic notion of gender,” in which associations are found between traditionally labeled masculine and feminine characteristics and interests (p.74). Essentially, all of the following concepts have been constructed to verify that the mindset of gender identities affects the mindset of literacies. When mindsets no longer follow the dominant perspectives, teachers are supportive and subdued from forming particular forms of masculinity and femininity in the classroom. The dichotomies of what it means to be feminine or masculine derive from “hegemonic” perspectives and privileges that have been supported, played out, and rarely challenged in society. Feminine and masculine perspectives that have been formed and reinforced by society have promoted unequal associations between men and women (Blackburn, 2003; Young, 2001).

When gender identities are defined, it then becomes a target for some researchers to place implications on literacy gaps that exist because of gender differences. Mensah and Keirnan (2010) examine the blame that is placed on the gap between males and females. These researchers suggest that because boys’ problems with literacy are understood as more about literacy and less about gender struggles with literacy, reprehension is being placed on the mostly female teachers working in schools. All data points to the fact that this issue continues to grow and educators need to dedicate their efforts to disrupt the gender dichotomy and work to include

all students, especially those that do not adhere to gender norms in order to ease the limitations those norms impose on people.

Research also insinuates that one implication for some of the lack of engagement in males with reading is their perception that it is a feminine activity (Arnold, 1968; Preston, 1979; Brophy, 1985; Sokal & Katz, 2008; Shapiro, 1980). Children that have consistent female modeling of reading in home and school communities also contribute to these perceptions. During this time is also when the gender gap occurs throughout elementary school, in which males are also developing their awareness of gender roles.

However, with much theoretical support that early socialization experiences promotes children's perceptions, on a large-scale male reading models do not play a significant role in improving male performance (Carrington & Skeleton, 2003; Carrington et al., 2005; Martin, 2003; Sokal et al., 2005; Preston, 1979). Also Sokal & Katz's study (2008) argues against the notion that 'masculinizing' reading pedagogy would serve as an intervention to underachieving boys. In addition, they found that a feminine perception of reading may exist in some boys but is not the basis of reading struggles. Furthermore, not all boys who dislike reading view it as feminine and not all boys who view reading as feminine dislike it. With females typically outperforming males in reading and males typically outperforming females in math and science, there continues to be a debate over the extent of school experiences building the learning among boys and girls (Dee, 2006).

All of these findings suggest that gender identities are developed at a young age and may contribute to differentiating perceptions of reading. However, majority of research indicates that the presence of a male model in the classroom does not greatly, if at all, impact or better male student performance. Though the purpose is not to intentionally portray male teachers in a

reduced manner, as they still play an important role in the classroom and make significant contributes to field of education. The variance in data of male teachers influencing male and/or female students makes it inconclusive if male teachers are a factor in student achievement or perceptions of reading.

Teacher Treatment of Students in the Classroom

All teachers develop differences among their verbal and nonverbal communication with students of various race or gender. Teachers play an influential role in students' lives and communicate evaluations, expectations, and performance through verbal and nonverbal behaviors that leave lasting impressions. Before discussing how students are impacted by teacher behaviors, it is important to reveal what research says about protecting students that face discrimination in classrooms.

Before Title IX was created in 1972, the rights to equal opportunities in educational activities were not always maintained. Once Title IX of the Education Amendments was passed equal opportunities were finally being considered and became a priority in the field of education. Under Title IX, people are protected from prejudice acts based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Furthermore, this law entitles that no one be excluded from participation in, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity on the basis of a person's sex (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) shows Title IX has contributed to the climbing number of college graduates of women by providing steps forward towards gender equity. Data shows that from 1998-99 to 2008-09 the percentage of women receiving bachelor's degrees have remained consistent at 57 percent, while master's and doctoral degrees have both increased from 58 percent to 60 percent and from 43 percent to 52 percent.

Even with research that continues to provide evidence of differential treatment in elementary classrooms, both males and females are still able to achieve opportunities of receiving a higher education.

A study by Woolfolk and Woolfolk (1974) revealed that children were able to correctly perceive verbal and nonverbal communications of their teachers. A study completed by Simpson and Erickson (1983) demonstrated that white teachers were found to be more subjective and prejudicial in their behavior and interactions towards male and female students than black teachers. Specifically white teachers gave more verbal praise, verbal criticism, verbal neutral, nonverbal praise, and nonverbal neutral behavior to males than to females. Essentially, boys receive more positive and negative and nonverbal and verbal teacher communication (Arnold, 1968; Simpson & Erickson, 1983; Good et al., 1973; Davis, 1967). More specifically, Good et al. (1973), determined in a study that teachers as a whole treated high-achieving male and female students more favorably than low-achieving male and female students. However, the preferential treatment was much more evident with males than females, placing the high-achieving males as the most favorable and low-achieving receiving the least favorable interaction (Good et al., 1973). Females also had the same contact pattern of high performing females receiving more positive contact than low-achieving students, yet still getting less attention than males. Good (1973) also goes on to say in explanation for females gaining less attention than their male counterparts as having low confrontation behavior, unlike males who have more aggressive behavior, may make it easier to go unnoticed by teachers. Good et al.'s (1973) research also yielded the idea that female teachers' classes were more active with more willingness to begin participation and class interactions by providing students with more "safer" opportunities to guess at answers. Lastly, Good et al. (1973) found that male teachers provided less feedback

after correct responses although constructively worked with the student to generate an accurate response in a “failure situation” (p. 85). While female teachers did not provide much feedback after incorrect responses, they exhibited more favorable behavior towards students in “success situations” by supplementing student responses with teacher praise and constructive feedback (p. 85).

These findings suggest that boys essentially receive more positive and negative and nonverbal and verbal teacher communication. The central focus of teachers is on supporting or improving male performance, in which females are more likely to slip through the cracks because of their passive nature. The research also indicates that male teachers are more likely to be most supportive to students in failed situations to help students constructively better student responses. While female teachers are described as being best at supporting students in success situations, providing favorable comments and praise. However, this research does not conclusively indicate one group of teachers (male or female) to be superior to the other in educating male and female students.

Cornbleth and Korth (1980) found that teachers overall rated white students higher than black students in terms of potential achievement and classroom behavior. Such behavioral characteristics that were rated in favor of white students were described as, “more efficient, organized, reserved, industrious, and pleasant while black students were rated as more outgoing and outspoken” (p. 261). Similar to Gay’s (1974) study, teachers rated black and white students similarly in regards to the extent of interaction, but the quality of interaction was rated more highly in favor of white students over black students. The presence of disparity in the relationship between student behavior and teacher perceptions of black and white students has significant implications for teacher instruction and classroom environment practices (Cornbleth

& Korth, 1980). There were conflicting viewpoints upon teachers' differential treatment for students of different ethnicities. Byalick and Bersoff (1974) found that white teachers provided more positive communication, such as praise, for black, particularly black males, than for elementary students that matched their teacher's ethnicity. Whereas, Saft and Pianta (2001) and Zimmerman et al. (1995) findings implied that interactions were rated more positively if the ethnicity of the child and teacher were the same and believe that ethnicity, along with other attributes, together influence the value of teacher-child connections or interactions.

Hunsader (2002) bases her research on ensuring one gender is not being privileged over another. Rather, students are immersed in enriched classroom environments; freedom of choice is expanded, and overall improvement in opportunities for all (Hunsader, 2002). Some of the most important strategies that are suggested are simple fixes that hold more accountability to the educator rather than the curriculum. Gender equity can be obtained by providing positive feedback, holding both males and females to high standards/expectations, and being committed to incorporating unique needs and learning styles without being subjective to personal beliefs about students.

Student-teacher interactions also affects classroom climate for college students, showing the power of perception to carry beyond the elementary level. As stated in Rosenfeld and Jarrad's (1985) study, when teacher behavior is positive, open, cooperative, trusting and supportive, then students' acknowledge the behavior as being valued as an individual. Whereas in other classroom environments, teachers could be communicating preconceived notions about expected behaviors, abilities, career directions and personal goals, which are based on sex role rather than individual interest and ability (Rosenfeld & Jarrad, 1985; Hall, 1982). The circulation of power theory directly connects to Rosenfeld and Jarrad (1985) findings of classroom climates

that students viewed as favorable, were more involved, interesting, evoked more participation and students “perceive themselves as important and valued, and as coworkers” with the professor (p.210). Rosenfeld and Jarrad’s (1985) research indicates that shared power in the classroom will build strong relationships between teacher and students to support ongoing learning in a socially just environment. An environment with negative perceptions can disrupt the circulation of energy, which ultimately affects building positive relationships and opportunities for personal growth and facilitated learning.

There is much data that discusses the range of elements that are considered to impact teacher-student interactions that can and have affected student development, performance and achievement, and classroom environment. Data continues to fluctuate in differential treatment based on student and teacher gender and ethnicity, and even after the passage of Title IX children face discrimination or judgment based upon these very attributes although all students are entitled to equity.

Student Achievement Differences and Closing the Gender Gap

The gender gap and student achievement differences have and continue to be a prevalent issue pursued and investigated by numerous researchers. Many aspects can attribute to the existing gender student achievement gaps, several which will be explored more closely. Lam et al. (2009), along with many other researchers, have noted, “although there are no genetic differences between the genders, girls’ performance is usually superior to that of boys in terms of early reading attainment” (p. 754).

When exploring the student achievement differences among male and female students, the target of much research is again whether the sex of the teacher makes an impacting difference on this matter. Such as the research done by Lam (2009) and Arnold (1968) yielded similar

results. In Arnold's (1968) study, a sample of 20 male and 20 female teachers from Minnesota were randomly selected to determine whether the sex of the teacher influenced the grades male and female students were assigned. Whereas, Lam et al.'s (2009) research took place in Hong Kong and 34 other countries and regions, results of these studies remained similar over time and space. Arnold (1968) determined that teachers considered student achievement to be the most important aspect in determining children's grades. The results of Arnold's (1968) study showed that there are differences between school grades assigned to male and female students, showing girls receive higher school grades or achievement than boys do. Secondly, grades assigned to boys and girls by men and women teachers are fairly similar, however, male teachers showed a tendency to assign slightly higher grades (Arnold, 1968). Lastly, Arnold's (1968) study yielded the correlation between socioeconomic status of students and school grades to be rather insubstantial. As for Lam et al.'s (2009) study, results showed that both girls and boys taught by female teachers significantly outperformed those taught by male teachers "in terms of overall reading comprehension performance on understanding the literary passage and the informational passage" (p. 756). Other results of the Lam et al. (2009) study showed girls had greater reading performances over boys on all reading tests, regardless of the sex of the teacher. As well as, all students had more positive attitudes towards reading and an understanding that reading abilities are vital to the future when taught by female teachers over those taught by male teachers (Lam et al., 2009). Also, similar to these past studies, Krieg (2005) found that students of female teachers exceed performances of students of male teachers, regardless of gender. Eluding to test score performances, the findings indicated that there was "no considerable differential impact of male teachers on boys versus girls" and both do equally poorly in comparison to students of female teachers (Krieg, 2005, p. 13).

Research conducted by Preston (1979) looked to investigate reading achievement in German classrooms because the same teacher often teaches the same group of children for the first four years of school. With such teacher-student opportunities to build upon, Preston (1979) hypothesized that students with same sex teachers will outperform their counterparts being taught by opposite sex teachers. However, Preston's (1979) findings did not support his initial thoughts that having a male teacher enhances male reading achievement or that female reading achievement is promoted by having a female teacher. Other results from Preston's (1979) study showed that boys' reading test scores were on average higher than girls, however girls reading abilities that were evaluated by teachers surpassed reading abilities of boys. In opposition of Arnold's (1968) study, Preston (1979) found that female teachers assessed both male and female-reading abilities more generously than male teachers did. Lastly, both male and female students scored slightly higher test scores than those of male teachers (Preston, 1979, p. 524). This study again supports that male teachers are vital to have; yet they do not have the power to make school and learning more attractive to males or improve reading performance. Simply put, girls and boys both have higher educational outcomes when taught by women (Krieg, 2005; Lam et al., 2009; Arnold, 1968; Preston, 1979).

A major aspect within many of the research articles dealing with gender differences and the gender gap, is trying to find ways to support males, as in support of the outstanding evidence that girls outperform boys (Lam et al., 2009; Carrington et al., 2008). According to the Department of Educations Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, when males and females begin kindergarten both genders perform similarly until about third grade when females begin to surpass males in reading, creating the gap.

Within Blackburn's (2003) article, she describes three different books that all have different frameworks about gender identities and how to provide male success with literacy activities. The ideas shared are geared towards the male audience because research shows them to be behind in literacy development. Marinak & Gambrell's (2010) study uses the Motivation to Read Profile to show that while males are equally self-confident as females, the gap exists because of the males that typically have low placed value for reading. The correlation of decreased motivation and value for reading is consistent with low achieving males and even those that are of average reading achievement (p.136). Brozo (2002) shares many supportive ideas in increasing the reading achievement and motivational drive for boys to read outside of school more frequently. Brozo's (2002) notions, however, could also be translated for the female population as well. One commonality among much research is the importance of making connections between home and school communities. Implications show that there should be a balance between literacy exposure at home and school to close gender gaps. Home communities also play a large role in the gender identities children form, therefore having parents tap into those social and gendered identities by using hobbies, interests, and lifestyles as "catalysts" for reading (Brozo, 2002).

Similarly found in Newkirk's (2000) article, development in writing involves a capacity to move out of stereotypical gender positions, yet proves to be a more difficult task for boys. Gender gaps exist between males and females in a number of subject matter; however the gap between males and females in writing far exceeds any other. Recent reports from the Educational Testing Service express the gap in writing between females and males at the eighth-grade level is over six times greater than the difference in mathematics (which females are found to be behind males in) (Cole, 1997).

In a research study of Newkirk (2000), he claims “male students often perceive school-defined literacy as excluding their own narratives and conclude early on that proficiency in school-based writing is more natural for girls” (p. 295). Essentially, Newkirk (2000) found that males are discouraged from writing because what they produce is often misunderstood or undervalued. Often teachers project what students should be putting into their work and the role students are to accept for each assignment, yet for some boys they may find it to be un-masculine and a form a resistance of behaviors and language that may be seen as so. In Newkirk’s (2000) article he identifies parody, “a form of calculated resistance that went to the very edge of unacceptability” as a common action males choose to use in their writing (p. 298). Therefore, Newkirk (2000) concludes that in order to generate impartiality in access to literacy, teachers will need to recognize the “cultural materials” (such as parody, interest in video games or cartoons) that boys and many girls bring to the classroom (p. 299). This conclusion draws the notion that the integration of effortless activities such as free writes, without judgment or grade, could improve male and female motivation, ability and achievement in writing.

Teacher Selection of Children’s Literature

There are many curriculum decisions teachers need to make, but one important aspect is children literature selection. The literature selection of an educator will emphatically influence many aspects of a child’s life such as literacy acquisition, child behaviors, and attitudes towards reading. Books help to “reflect and convey certain sets of sociocultural values, beliefs, and attitudes to their readers” (Jipson & Paley, 1991, p. 148).

Jipson and Paley’s (1991) article focuses on the “traditional selection” of books and teachers’ choice of literature within the instructional environment. Jipson and Paley (1991) state that “books are not ideologically neutral objects” and that they influence many other decisions or

support the teacher's perceptions of what is important within instruction (p. 148). Essentially, book choice decisions for teachers make them identify or have cognizance for the sociocultural values in their classroom, and ultimately can highlight some and disregard others. Furthermore, Jipson and Paley (1991) and Luke, Cooke, and Luke (1986) found that such choices tend to exclude or reject literary works for educational learning that are about anyone other than males. Jipson and Paley (1991) identify novels' discredited parties, either as authors or characters within the text; include women, people of color and ethnic background, and certain social classes. Research further supports that teachers' choices generally favor the use of books that feature predominately white, "Euro-American, male authors and subjects," marginalizing student's cultural insight to the world (Jipson & Paley, 1991, p. 148). Ultimately, classrooms that resemble such representation are poorly providing students with a bias; culturally exclusive and false view of society that will blind and prohibit children from exploring the true depths literature has to offer about the world.

Luke, Cooke, and Luke (1986) provided 54 Australian student teachers with two suggested criteria of selecting a single children's book that the student teacher enjoys and one that they believe primary school children would like and benefit from. The results of the survey indicated that student teachers have an unconscious gender and racial partiality about what is considered appropriate for kids to read. Indicating the need for exposure and preparation on the significance of responsibility teachers are entrusted with for designing meaningful literature based reading instruction. The significance of being accountable for balanced literacy exposure is explained by Luke, Cooke and Luke (1986) as that "too often the cultural/curricular selection process entails a naïve, a critical adoption of texts, which risks perpetuating the minimization, distortion, and outright exclusion of the experience of women, particular social classes, and

ethnic minorities” (p. 216). In all, Luke, Cooke and Luke (1986) stress that student teachers must become aware that curricular selection must be consciously decided with explicit criteria, consideration, and strategies of teaching that convey values and defy fundamental societal inequalities.

Research completed by Jipson and Paley (1991) can confirm that of Luke, Cooke, and Luke (1986). The recent study was conducted on in-service teachers, rather than student teachers, to explore if the same attitudes and values of book selection existed or if lack of classroom experience and practice was a major factor in the curricular selection. Teachers were asked to select three children’s books they used in the past year and provide the titles, authors, main characters, and reasons for selecting the text. Some of the statistic findings were a little over half of the authors were male (55%), also 95 percent of the authors named were of Euro-American heritage, and only five of the chosen authors were ethnic minorities. As for main characters in the stories, males were featured as the main characters 65 percent of the time. Of the 123 books with identifiable main characters, only a total of eight included main characters of African American, Native American, and Japanese-American decent. Of the 170 responses for selecting a text, only 15 recognized the significance of considering gender, race, and ethnicity as a factor. This study further solidified the existence of selective tradition in elementary teachers’ choice of children’s literature.

One key aspect to consider with text selection is to stress that understanding the social and cultural practices of the classroom is one of many criteria that should be consider with book selection. Social practices branch beyond the typical forms of discourse and ways of communicating. It also should be seen through the lens that it represents student lived experiences, in which involves culture, race, class, and gender. Additionally, selected text should

provide students a connection with text, allowing children to see ways it associates to their lives and improve their knowledge of the world around them.

Therefore, we need to ensure that the use of multiple literacies is being modeled and also encouraged for all students, both males and females, to feel comfortable in exploring the roles and media experiences that encourage literacy growth. In order to build onto both males' and females' experiences, experimenting with texts that require problem-solving strategies and skills to resonate with literacy learning should be taking place (Young, 2001). Essentially, with the continuous growth our society is experiencing with advancements, it is important to ensure that school experiences pursue trying to eliminate gender gaps that continue to be a target of literacy underachievement.

Not only does text selection matter, but also the framework of how students learn or gain understandings of the world is crucial to student development. Young (2001) claims critical literacies can allow for children to become aware of the inequalities and multiple perspectives within literature and analyze, explore, and interpret these multimodal features to better understand how gender identities and inequities in our society.

In order for teachers to be prepared to make appropriate book selection choices that provide students with such opportunities to learn and challenge the inequalities that exist, Jipson and Paley (1991) suggest becoming more reflective in the book selection process. Further, in order to accomplish becoming experts in selecting text, Jipson and Paley (1991) propose required professional development opportunities to support the "exploration of the ideological aspects" of teachers' book choice (p. 157). These workshops could promote staff development with openings to focus on and improve issues in curriculum and instruction. For example, Jipson and Paley (1991) discuss the nature of the mandatory course entitled *Ethnic Groups in American*

Society that teachers of Montgomery County Public School system in Maryland must participate in. The course focuses on topics that are designed to enhance teacher awareness of diverse American minority groups and to accommodate teachers with skills and strategies for representing or including these groups' experiences across the curriculum (Jipson & Paley, 1991). With more required staff development programs such as these, selective tradition in elementary environments will diminish, along with curricular and conceptual crisis that teachers struggle with when trying to determine how to incorporate literature in educational material (Jipson & Paley, 1991).

Method

Context

Brookdale (pseudonym) is a small suburban city situated outside a larger city in Western New York. There are approximately 25,000 residents within this community, and thirty-eight percent of the population has college degrees, as opposed to the New York State average of thirty-two percent (Public School Review, 2012). There are four schools in the community, which consist of the high school, middle school, elementary and primary school, with approximately 4,000 students and 300 teachers (Public School Review, 2012). Specifically, Brookdale Middle School contains 904 of those students (Public School Review, 2012). The student to teacher ratio is 13:1 and the school population consists of 51.2 percent males and 48.8 percent females (Public School Review, 2012). The ethnic makeup of the student body is primarily white, non-Hispanic, accounting for ninety-five percent (3,869 students) of the population (Public School Review, 2012). Just over two percent are African-American (95 students), about one percent of students each identified as Asian (47 students) or Hispanic (52 students), and American-Indian students represent less than one percent (14 students) (Public

School Review, 2012). The demographics of students that receive free or reduced lunch are approximately twenty percent, and the student stability rate has increased from the 2007-2008 year of 91 percent to 98 percent in 2009-2010 (School Report Card, 2010).

There are 542 students classified who receive special education services in the community of Brookdale according to the New York State Special Education profile. Of these students nearly fifty percent (49.3) attend the general education program for 80 percent or more of the day. Five percent of students are in the most restrictive settings, consisting of either separate schools/facilities or other settings (Special Education, 2010).

The Brookdale Middle School average class size is fifteen in the eighth grade setting (School Report Card, 2010). There are a total of 69 teachers in the population, with a teacher to student ratio of 1:12 (School Report Card, 2012). There is also one principal, two assistant principals and five other professional staff employed (School Report Card, 2012).

There are three classrooms, one male lead and two female lead classrooms, taking part of this action research in Brookdale Middle School. The classroom lead by the male Social Studies teacher includes a group of twenty students in the sixth grade. The other two classrooms being observed are lead by female teachers. One of the classrooms is an inclusive setting with a female English teacher, and female Special Education teacher. This classroom consists of one Asian female and thirteen white male and female students. The third classroom is in a restrictive educational program at an alternative school that is in conjunction with Brookdale Middle School, which includes all male students. The ethnic makeup of these boys consists of one African American and four Caucasian.

Participants

The inclusive classroom lead by the male Social Studies teacher, Mr. Patterson (pseudonym) is middle-aged and Caucasian. Mr. Patterson has been an educator in the Brookdale Middle School for nearly fifteen years. Within this classroom, 11 students are participating. The makeup up is a class of 11-year-old and 12 year-old Caucasian sixth grade students. There are 21 total students, with nine males and twelve females. One male and 10 females agreed to participate in this study and were excited to create their own pseudonyms and aide their teacher in creating one as well.

The second classroom being observed is a seventh grade inclusive English classroom, lead by a female English teacher, and female Special Education teacher. Both female co-teachers are white, one middle-aged and the other is in her early 20s. There is also a teaching assistant that services two students in the classroom, one autistic student and one with hearing impairment. The teaching assistant is a middle-aged, white female. The English teacher, Ms. Adele (pseudonym) is in her second year teaching, and first year in the position of seventh grade English teacher. The Special Education teacher, Mrs. Blakely (pseudonym) has been teaching in the field for twenty-two years and has no plans of retiring soon. There are fourteen students, seven females and seven males, thirteen of which receive special services. Some of these students will be target participants in this study. All of the students are Caucasian but one female whom is Asian American.

One other classroom involved in the action research is lead by a white female in her late 20s. Ms. Brown (pseudonym) has been teaching for six years, two have been associated with Brookdale Middle School. The students participating from the alternative school are two seventh grade males and two eighth grade males. In the eighth grade class of six males, two fourteen-year-old white males were given consent and willing to participate in this study. The seventh

grade males, also from a class of six students are thirteen-years-old, one Caucasian boy and one African American boy. There are a total of four males from the alternative school participating in this study.

Research Stance

In meeting the criteria of transparency, I will presume the role of passive observer in Brookdale Middle School, in which I will strictly watch, take note, and have little interaction with the students in the classroom (Mills, 2011). My educational background is in Childhood English and Special Education. I am employed as a part-time substitute teacher in another district in a neighboring city. Additionally, I am currently a student in the Saint John Fisher College Childhood Literacy program in the completion of a Master's Degree. My opportunities in the Brookdale setting will consist of passive observation of all three classrooms because I will not be involved in leading or instructing the class in any way. Prior to this study, I have never had any involvement in the Brookdale community; therefore there will be little to no interference with my role as observer to the new group of students and teachers. According to Mills, teachers "no longer assume the responsibilities of the teacher" (p. 75). This position will allow me to strictly focus on the collection of data, rather than a more actively involved role.

Method

This action research project requires a significant amount of data to be collected. I began my research with the observation of three classrooms. In each classroom, I passively observed by taking notes on student and teacher behaviors and interactions among each other and male and female contributions to the given tasks. I observed each classroom separately twice, marking approximately forty-five minutes of observation for each class. Within each classroom, my primary focus of data collection was observation of whole-group instruction.

I also conducted one-on-one interviews with each teacher to discuss their attitudes toward male and female student performance and their personal text selection for the curriculum.

Students received a questionnaire and survey to fill out, which indicated their feelings towards male and female teachers and the reading and writing instruction they receive.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Guba (1981) identifies four characteristics as criteria for measuring trustworthiness that Mills elaborates on to ensure validity of qualitative research. These four characteristics are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. All of these aspects were considered during this action research. According to Mills (2011), credibility is defined as the researcher's ability to consider the complications that may appear in a study and to deal with patterns that will be difficult to explain. I am using several strategies to ensure credibility in my study. One strategy I used was peer debriefing with my critical colleague to help me reflect on the development of my study and analyze with additional perspective. I also practiced triangulation to ensure credibility of this study. The purpose of triangulation is "to compare a variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross-check data" (Mills, 2011, p. 104). My triangulation in this study includes experiencing data through observation in collecting field notes, enquiring data through questionnaires and interviews with teachers and students, and examination data of audio recordings, mapping, artifacts, and some archival documents.

Transferability refers to researchers not generalizing data that has been collected to define "ultimate truths" about larger groups; rather the information is used conclusively within context (Mills, 2011, p. 114). Transferability is ensured through the collection of detailed descriptions, which will permit others opportunities to make comparisons and judgments with other contexts

(Mills, 2011). The detailed descriptions that are collected from each classroom will show the measures of this group only. To ensure that my findings do not appear transferred another graduate colleague that has been closely working and reviewing my research will examine this portion of the data and provide a different perspective.

Dependability refers to the “stability of the data” through overlapping methods that is attained through the triangulation process and establishing an audit trail (Mills, 2011, p. 105). I am using several methods of triangulation to ensure the dependability and credibility of this research. I also intend to depend on my critical colleague to examine the process of my data collection, analysis and interpretation with written substantiation.

Lastly, confirmability is the neutrality of the data (Mills, 2011). To ensure confirmability, I will practice triangulation again to crosscheck data and reflexivity by keeping a journal of my reflections during each occasion of data collection. These methods of confirmability will permit me to “...intentionally reveal underlying assumptions or biases” (Mills, 2011, p. 105). All of the following criteria will be in place during the conduction of this action research project in order to validly present the data of gender and teaching.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants

In order to carry out this research study, I initially received consent from the principal of Brookdale Middle School. I sent online messages to teachers in search of classrooms willing to participate in this study. Once teachers had written back confirming their involvement, I immediately provided the teacher with the permission slips to look over. The teachers first filled out their consent forms and during class periods each child filled out their assent form and handed it back in. The consent form for parents was sent home with the children to explain the study that is taking place. This letter also informed participants their rights, and to ensure them

the information gathered on individuals remains confidential and any distinguishing marks will be removed from all artifacts. Furthermore, pseudonyms are used in place of all participants' names to ensure those would remain anonymous.

Data Collection

I collected data from three separate classrooms in four separate forms including field notes, concept maps, interviews and surveys, and archival sources such as curriculum material. I visited each classroom twice, resulting in a total of six visits. Before the first observations of each class I had an informal discussion with the teachers to further explain my study and purpose for observations. I also gave the teachers the student questionnaires and surveys for them to administer to students at a convenient time. During each visit, I observed the classroom environment and positioned myself in a non-invasive manner, where my presence is least acknowledged during ongoing class time. Once I arrived on the first visit of each class, I informed the students at the start of class that I would be in the classroom twice during their class period to avoid questions or anxiety as to the purpose of my observation for students. As all students arrived, I constructed a concept map of the arrangement of the classroom, paying close attention to male and female student proximity to the front of the room. I also took field notes on the discussions that were occurring by students and the teacher, as well as non-verbal (body language) that is presented by male and female students and the teacher. Also noted, was the teacher's verbal or non-verbal reaction to student responses, as well as the number of times a teacher called on a particular gender. For the female seventh grade English teacher, Ms. Adele, I used a video recorder as another observation to retain verbal interaction such as teacher praise and student responses, and any nonverbal classroom interactions to gather further insight. The video recorder also serves as a measure of credibility to ensure written observations match that

of the recordings. At the end of the second observation of class instruction, I collected the questionnaire and survey samples the students filled out. At the end of each session of observations and data collection, I reflected on my field notes and any biases that I had, as part of practicing reflexivity.

After the second observation of all teachers and students, an audio recorder was used to conduct interviews from a list of generated questions and follow-up questions varied based on teacher responses. The teachers were asked about their perceptions of male and female performance in the classroom, overall male and female attitudes towards class activity and which students are performing the lowest and highest. The teachers were asked to discuss the curriculum and whether they were able to select their own books and materials. I also asked them other materials or texts they would want to implement into instruction and why. Reflexivity will be present again in this study with my reflection on my field notes during the time of the interview.

The students also completed a questionnaire, which was given to the students at the most convenient time for the teacher. Most teachers conducted the survey during a class period between the first and second observation in order to return the surveys to me. The questionnaire involved the students providing information about a preference in male or female teachers if they have had been taught by both genders. Other questions entail data on how they would describe their male and female teachers, the interactions/conversations between themselves and their teacher, and feelings towards the book selection in the class. The survey that was created was adapted from Lam et al. (2009) and Weinstein et al. (1982). From Weinstein et al.'s (1982) Teacher Treatment Inventory Scales nine questions were used, and six questions from Lam et al.'s (2009) Comparison of Reading Attitudes of Girls and of Boys Taught by Female and Male

Teachers in order to generate a 15-question attitude survey that I administered to participating students. Again, a reflection of underlying biases was recorded in my field notes of students' perceptions provided within the questionnaires.

Lastly, once the data was analyzed I reported my findings to the teacher. Once I received feedback from the teachers and my critical colleague. I repeated these methods with my second visit to the classroom. I changed methods with one teacher that offered to have her classroom video recorded to support my data collection and provide an outcome of data that corresponds with teaching and gender differences.

Data Analysis

Numerous forms of data were collected for this action research. Once I collected all my data after my second meeting with Mr. Patterson I realized an audio recorder did not pick up all the audio of the class, therefore had to rely on my observational notes alone. I was able to adjust to a video recorder for Ms. Adele's classroom that was able to pick up much more of the class interactions. After viewing this video, I notated the class interactions that were expressed on the video. Then, I listened to the three teacher interviews that were conducted with the audio recorder, and transcribed them by typing the conversation. I also made copies of my observation notes in order to code these notes. Lastly, I organized the surveys that I received from the students by class and male or female.

I began the process of coding my observational notes, surveys, and teacher interviews once all data was organized in order to develop themes for this research. The first read through I re-read all pieces to familiarize myself again with this data collection. I underlined key words and starred aspects that originally shaped this research question. In the second read through, I began to code to determine themes and categories. I also looked back at some of the literature to

note key aspects of related topics. I also looked for patterns or reappearing aspects in the data by taking notes. In the final coding, I compared my data to some of the related literature to find aspects that coincided or contradicted each other. I solidified my decision on the themes of teacher and student attitudes towards classroom participation, classroom arrangement of physical space and student engagement with literacy activities, and student motivation to learn and teacher expectations of performance.

Findings and Discussion

After looking at all the data in this action research of field notes, teacher and student interviews and surveys, several themes emerged. The following themes for both the teachers and students involved included teacher and student attitudes toward classroom participation, classroom arrangement of physical space and student engagement with literacy activities, and student motivation to learn and teacher expectations of performance.

Teacher and Student Attitudes toward Classroom Participation

Classroom participation is an important aspect to develop in the classroom. It allows for students to engage in social interactions and engage with other students and the teacher. The interactions in the observed classrooms were mainly teacher-facilitated, in which the teacher controls the discussion and activities. These observations presented the opportunity to monitor and record the number of times a teacher calls on a particular gender. Students are also a major aspect of classroom participation. Therefore, this study also looks at the attitudes students surveyed about participating in class.

One piece of data collected for student and teacher participation is the number of times the male and female teachers called on either a male or female student. Each teacher's classroom was visited two times for observation. In Table 1, the meetings during the forty-five minute class

period portray each teacher’s selection of called-on students. This data only calculates each time a student was acknowledged and called on by the instructor. Call outs were not computed in this pool of data.

Table 1

Student Participation: Number of Times Teacher Calls on Particular Sex

Teacher	Meeting 1		Meeting 2	
	COM	COF	COM	COF
Patterson	8	9	14	8
Adele	6	7	11	8

Note. *COM* = called on male; *COF* = called on female.

The two teachers, Ms. Adele (pseudonym) and Mr. Patterson (pseudonym) who have a classroom of both male and female students, discovered a change among the gender that was called on most from meeting one to meeting two. In meeting one, Mr. Patterson and Ms. Adele had little discrepancy in the number of times they called on male or female students; however, males were called on more at this time. While meeting two showed a larger gap in the number of times each sex were called on, with females being the more favorable choice. The information demonstrates that on the first meeting the two teachers were consciously aware of evenly calling on students. These teachers fairly chose students to participate in class discussions, whereas on the second meeting Mr. Patterson constantly referred to females for the initial response to a question and to counter when another student gave an incorrect response. According to my observational notes (2012), male students of Mr. Patterson were mostly only called on for an initial response and rarely to counter if a student responded incorrectly, suggesting Mr. Patterson expects correct responses more often from female students. Whereas with Ms. Adele’s class, the lack of calling on males equal to females during meeting two could be contributed to the fact that

the special education teacher was present during this meeting and also called on students.

Though her numbers were not tallied, it could have altered Ms. Adele's choice of students to call on. This information disproves the research of Good et al. (1973), which states that females receive less attention than males in the classroom because of behaviors that make them go more unnoticed than males.

Essentially, Table 1 suggests that both males and females were engaging in class discussions and making attempts to participate. The two teachers showed attention by calling on both male and female raised hands, showing their acknowledgement for both sexes. Also, the data shows a much less significant gap between males and females in meeting one when males were acknowledged more. In comparison with the first meeting, the second meeting shows females lead in participation with a much larger gap in number of times being called on than when males' participation was favored. The data perhaps indicates that on meeting two females were more engaged with the class discussion therefore more willing to participate than males. Also, Mr. Patterson's classroom is more populated with females than males, which could indicate that he tried to allow for all students to respond creating a greater acknowledgement to the female students.

Along with tallying the number of times male and female teachers called on male and female students, data was also collected based on student and teacher attitudes towards participation. The students were given an attitude survey sheet that measured their comfort level of participating in the observed classroom. Teachers also provided data during recorded interviews with questions inquiring about student participation. There were a total of 11 males and 16 females that filled out the attitude survey from three classrooms on a four-point system, one being the lowest and four being the highest. Of those participants, four males were from Ms.

Brown’s class, six males and six females were from Ms. Adele’s class, and one male and ten females were from Mr. Patterson’s class.

Table 2

Student Comfort Level of Participation from the Attitude Survey

Survey Question	Adele				Patterson				Brown	
	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%
I feel comfortable speaking up in class.	50	50	50	50	70	30	0	100	100	0

Note. *FA%* = female agree percentage; *FD%* = female disagree percentage; *MA%* = male agree percentage; *MD%* = male disagree percentage.

Table 2 exhibits that Ms. Adele’s classroom has no male or female students that disagree a lot of feeling comfortable in class, but half of her male and female population still disagrees with this statement. While the other half of her students agree with feeling comfortable, and all males strongly agree with this statement. Ms. Adele’s classroom of male and female students may be split on feeling comfortable participating in this class because instruction is primarily lecture-based or teacher controlled. Many students may feel restricted and less comfortable speaking out in front of the whole class, and prefer small group discussions. During both observations, small group discussions were not observed and all time was spent with teacher lectures and call and response method of interactions.

Mr. Patterson’s class has a total of seven females that feel comfortable participating in his class, indicated by a score of three or four. Table 2 also shows that two females strongly disagree with feeling comfortable participating in this class and one male and female support these attitudes by responding with disagreeing a little. In observation of Mr. Patterson’s classroom students could feel uncomfortable with the tone and projection of his voice that could seem

intimidating to students (Field Notes, 2012). Also, Mr. Patterson praises students that respond correctly and simply responds “no” to students that respond incorrectly, whereas Ms. Adele provides students with positive praise for and attempt with an incorrect response.

Acknowledgement to a response in this manner, without support or further feedback, can be frightening and unapproachable to students. Good et al.’s (1973) research supports the idea that female teachers provide students with more “safer” opportunities to guess at answers.

Another form of data collected was based on the conducted interviews with the teachers, with some specific questions referring to class participation. The teachers have each expressed different opinions of which sex participates more in the classroom. Ms. Adele states, “I believe the males participate more than the females do” (Teacher Interview, February 2012). According to Table A1 that indicates that in meeting one, males and females closely compared in amount of participation, and by meeting two females reported being called on more frequently than males. Ms. Adele may hold higher expectations for males to participate more than females. The data collected from Table 1 for student participation was computed with call and response only, shout outs by students were not included. During observations of this classroom, call outs occurred frequently from male students, which may constitute as participation to Ms. Adele, but was immeasurable for this research being that it would be uncertain if that student would have been called on by the teacher.

Mr. Patterson comments, “I see males participating almost as evenly as the females. I just don’t see the males getting to that deeper understanding that the females are getting, across the board” (Teacher Interview, February 2012). Mr. Patterson’s response is very accurate to the tallied participation of his students, which shows he is conscious thinking about and taking note of students that are willing to participate and those he is calling on. Furthermore, Mr. Patterson’s

reliance on female responses to indulge into the “deeper understanding” of a lesson leads to note that Mr. Patterson finds female students to perform more highly than male students. An assumption is made that female students are expected to participate and perform highly in the classroom.

Classroom Arrangement of Physical Space and Student Engagement with Literacy

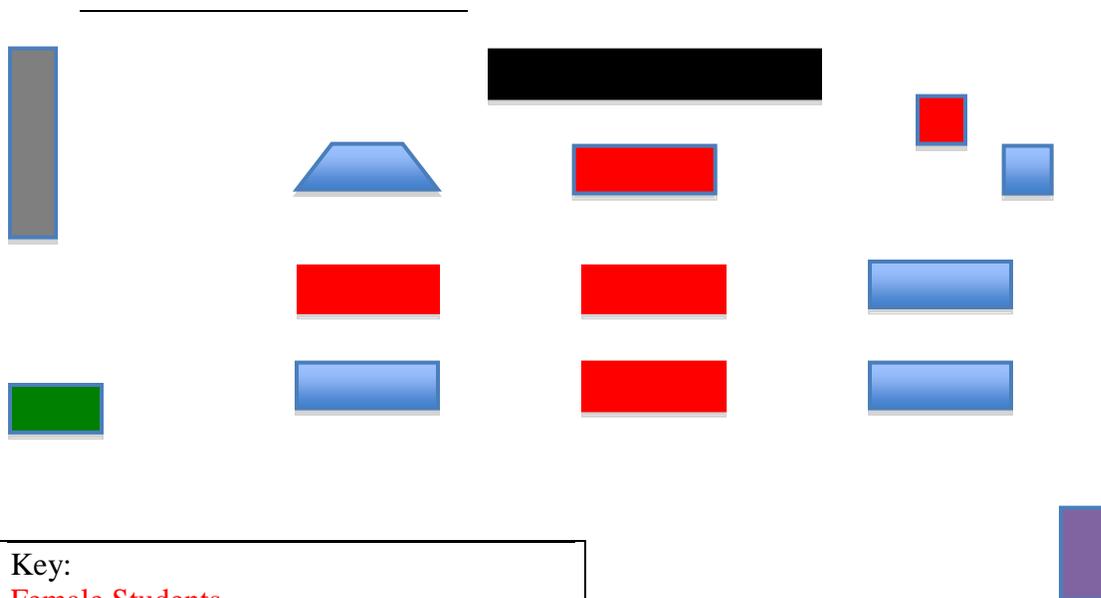
Activities

The arrangement of physical space for teacher and student interaction is an important aspect to consider. A room’s arrangement can affect the learning process, student behaviors, and student engagement. Bonus and Riordan (1998) claim that the main cause of off-task behavior is classroom-seating arrangement. Therefore, it is necessary to thoroughly consider the physical space arrangement for the best environment to be created for teachers and students. Specifically, teachers should consider students to be arranged in individual rows or clusters, gender dynamics among student interaction and proximity to the teacher. This section will closely examine the engagement of students in clusters and rows and teacher interactions with each model.

Mr. Patterson’s map of his classroom (Figure 1) indicates students are seated at tables (in clusters) with the exception of a male and female student in desks in the front row. A total of four males and three females are seated in the front of the classroom. According to my observational field notes (2012) in meeting one and two, Mr. Patterson usually circulates in no consistent flow around the room between the middle and outside tables, sometimes stirring outward to individual students. From my observation, all students were fixated on the teacher and his discussion, which was also evident when a student was randomly called on they were on task and ready to respond. It could be predicted again that Mr. Patterson is conscious and considerate of each student’s engagement and progress with class activities. His movement

around the classroom carefully positions himself in a visible and reachable position to each student, along with making eye contact with everyone as well. Also, students were given several minutes to converse about particular questions that were given for homework as part of the following class discussion, his arrangement and how male and female students are dispersed shows he thoughtfully considered the interactions that would occur among his students during these opportunities.

Figure 1. Concept Map of Mr. Patterson’s Classroom

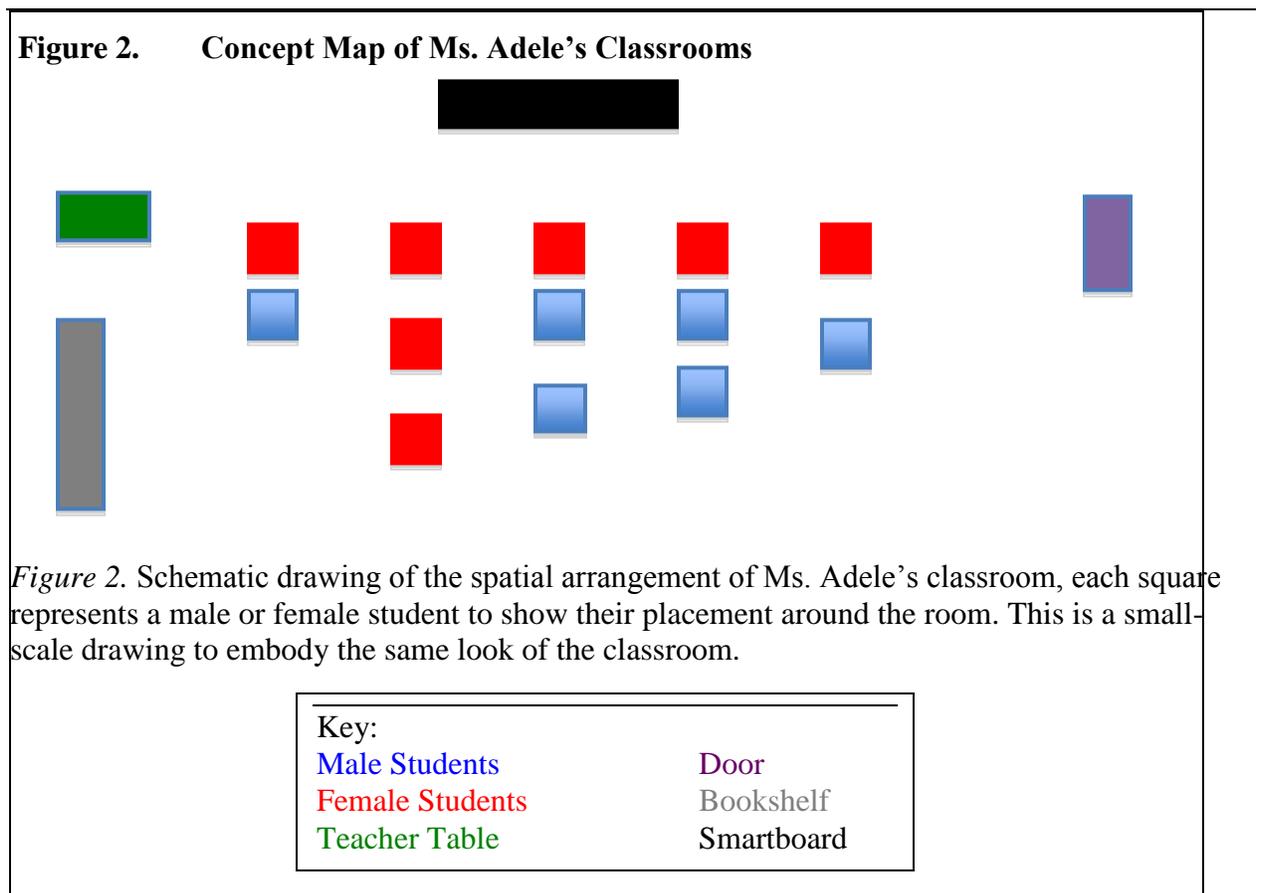


Key:
 Female Students
 Male Students
 Teacher Table
 Door
 Bookshelf
 Whiteboard/Smartboard

Figure 1. Schematic drawing of the spatial arrangement of Mr. Patterson’s classroom, each blue or red graphic represents male or female students at their tables to show their placement around the room. The red table that has a blue border around it represents both males and females sit at this table. This is a small-scale drawing to embody the same look of the classroom.

In another attempt to locate male and female proximity to the teacher, Figure 2 shows the map of Ms. Adele’s classroom. Based on the observational field notes (2012), Ms. Adele typically paces the front of the room, keeping her proximity close to the females in the front row.

The map shows that all females sit in the front of the five rows of desks, implying her proximity of interaction is usually closest to the females of the class. When inquiring about female placement in the front of the room, Ms. Adele responded, “these students have auditory and visual processing impairments that were adapted by placing these students at the front of the room” (Teacher Interview, 2012). However, a factor that needs to be considered is that this arrangement may affect the engagement of the students that were placed in other areas of the room. The possibility exists that these students will perceive this arrangement as not having to be as engaged because they will not be moved to the front of the room or that their learning needs are not as equally important if the group of females will always be placed in the front of the room because of their learning needs. This physical arrangement can be interpreted that the classroom is not set up for equal opportunities among male and female students. The physical space lacks gender variance around the room and an opportunity for flowing movement among all children.



Mr. Patterson’s classroom exhibits a cluster model of the physical space by placing two to three students at each table that is arranged in rows. Ms. Adele designed her classroom with individual desks that are arranged in rows, with no space between each desk in the row (those in front and behind), only space from side to side or rows next to each other. Mr. Patterson constantly circulated the room and engaged with each student presenting a circulation of power. Students appeared engaged in the lesson and able to focus. Setting up this kind of environment can create a sense of balanced power in the room where movement of energy can evolve between both the teacher and the students. Ms. Adele positioned herself mostly in the front of the room, staying in closest contact to the front row of students, which are females. Her approach may affect participation and engagement in activities by not circulating to other students to ensure all students are focused and an understanding is being reached. Students can also perceive this form of physical space and teacher instruction to be bias to the females sitting in the front row and apart of an unequal environment with a lack of balanced power. Being that Ms. Adele is a female and the students that receive the closest proximity to the teacher or power are females, which could lead to making the males feel inferior, less engaged and uncomfortable in such an environment.

Another measurement of student engagement with literacy activities is again based on the student attitude survey, exhibited in Table 3. Students’ attitudes were measured on their interest in the literacy activities completed within their class. A student’s engagement should not only be viewed by their placement and proximity to the teacher in the room, but the content or literacy activities that shape the students’ learning opportunities.

Table 3

Student Interest in Literacy Activities

Adele	Patterson	Brown
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Survey Question	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%
I like the activities my teacher gives me in this class.	66.7	33.3	66.7	33.3	70	30	0	100	50	50

Note. *FA%* = female agree percentage; *FD%* = female disagree percentage; *MA%* = male agree percentage; *MD%* = male disagree percentage.

Table 3 shows there were four out of the 12 males and females from Ms. Adele’s class, two males and two females, who disagree with being engaged or enjoying the literacy activities they take part in. However, this leaves the majority, or more than 60 percent of the class to take interest in her classroom activities. In observation of meeting one and meeting two, the students completed test prep and watched a video while taking notes on Julius Caesar. Students took interested and were excited to watch a video during class and were tuned in to her discussion after the video, as most students volunteered to participate. Student interest in watching a video and interest in a range of activities could suggest the majority of the students’ engagement in Ms. Adele’s activities.

Mr. Patterson had no students strongly disagree with this statement and a total of three students disagree, while more than 70 percent of the students or eight out of the 11 participants agree they are engaged in Mr. Patterson’s class. The student engagement in Mr. Patterson’s class can be accounted for by his ability to interact among all his students based on his circulation or flow around the room. Based on observational notes (2012), students were also able to engage in peer discussions that allowed for social interaction facilitated amongst each other, which seemingly proposes a circulation of power between the students. However, Mr. Patterson’s male participant is not engaged with these activities, which may be accounted for different learning styles that are not being tapped into or disinterest in consistent discussion, which is what took

place in meeting one and two (Observational Notes, 2012). The provided data for male engagement supports the research that suggests male role models do not play a significant role in improving male engagement or performance with literacy (Carrington & Skeleton, 2003; Carrington et al., 2005; Martin, 2003; Sokal et al., 2005; Preston, 1979). As for the boys from the alternative school two males disagree and two males agree with liking the activities their teacher, Ms. Brown provides. In both observations of this classroom, the boys were working on a book report project, which may indicate some boys were disinterested with their novel choice, presenting their project in front of the whole class, or the format of presenting the material, such as writing a summary of the novel or creating a PowerPoint.

Based on students’ constant exposure to reading during literacy activities that occur within and as apart of teacher activities, I was curious to see if students’ response of having an interest in reading was similar to their engagement in class activities that were taking place in their teacher’s classrooms. Therefore, Table 4 will be a lens into students’ attitudes towards reading, while comparing previous views on engagement with class activities. Students were asked if they viewed reading as “boring” and if they liked reading to see if students’ answers would vary, which is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Student Beliefs of Reading is Boring & Enjoyment in Reading

Survey Question	Adele				Patterson				Brown	
	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%
I think reading is boring.	33.3	66.7	33.3	66.7	50	50	0	100	25	75

Survey Question	Adele				Patterson				Brown	
	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%

I enjoy reading.	66.7	33.3	100	0	80	20	100	0	75	25
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Note. *FA%* = female agree percentage; *FD%* = female disagree percentage; *MA%* = male agree percentage; *MD%* = male disagree percentage.

Some significant points to note from this data broken down by each class, is that three out of four males in Ms. Brown’s class stated they enjoy reading and disagree with thinking it is boring, all students stayed consistent with their answers when similar questions were posed. These males were split on disagreeing and agreeing of liking their class activities, in which the data supports that for most students reading activities in class would be enjoyable. For those that answered they do not enjoy or are not engaged in class activities could be due to the teacher’s style of teaching or activities that do not involve reading.

In Mr. Patterson’s class, the females are initially split on their attitudes of reading to be boring; however more females change their attitudes when asked if they enjoy reading with only two students still disagreeing. As for the one male participant, his attitudes are consistent with not finding reading boring and enjoying reading. Being that Mr. Patterson is a Social Studies teacher, the male could be very interested in the topics, but does not completely enjoy or feel engaged in the class activities, indicating this male has a disinterest for whole-class discussions and possibly peer discussions since that was the activities that took place the days of observation (Observational Notes, 2012). As for the females, they scored higher in favor of the activities completed in Mr. Patterson’s class, and have more disinterest in reading than the male participant in the class. There were also three females that scored both statements with a three, implying they agree a little that they enjoy reading, and that they think it is boring (shown in Table 4). The mixed responses may be accounted for based on disinterest in class readings, but an overall interest in choice or independent reading or vice versa.

Ms. Adele's class shows that the females are consistent with a 4:2 ratio that believe reading is an enjoyable activity. There was some variance in degree of agreeing or disagreeing but attitudes were consistent. These students may have a majority of positive attitudes towards reading because a female in the classroom models it and they take enjoyment out of class texts or have an overall enjoyment in reading free choice novels. The males answer reading is boring with the same ratio as the females, stating most students disagree that reading is boring. When these males are asked if they enjoy reading all males surveyed in favor of reading, which shows a change and mixed response from two of the students. Again, the males could have altered their response because they find class readings to be boring and independent reading to be enjoyable or vice versa that left them contemplating both choices. Essentially, Ms. Adele's classroom displays that overall males enjoy reading more than females.

When comparing Mr. Patterson and Ms. Adele's classes of male and female engagement with class activities, each have a 2:1 ratio of females to males disagreeing with liking their teacher's lessons. As for the overall student attitudes towards reading of all three classes, the completed survey results do not show much of a gap between male and female value for reading. Out of sixteen females, nine enjoy reading and do not find it to be boring, four do not have a high value for reading and three are neutral with mixed responses. As for the males there are six positive values for reading, no negative or low values for reading and five neutral or mixed responses. Therefore, the attitude survey results show that more females had more negative attitudes towards reading than males did. Beliefs of the students' teacher may be evident to some of these females and puts added pressure to perform on their shoulders. As stated by Mr. Patterson, "I just don't see the males getting to that deeper understanding that the females are getting, across the board", it is apparent that he has higher expectations for females in

participation, making meaning and engagement in lessons (Teacher Interview, February 2012).

Marinak and Gambrell's (2010) study uses the Motivation to Read Profile to show that while males are equally self-confident as females, the gap exists because of the males that typically have low placed value for reading. This statement is disproved by the provided data in Table 4, which confirms that females do not have more positive attitudes towards reading than males.

Student Motivation to Learn and Teacher Expectations of Performance

Student-teacher dynamics are extremely important to ensure students are motivated to learn and are set up for success. Therefore, teachers need to be conscious of the expectations they set for both male and female students and constantly assess their pedagogical practices to ensure teachers are current and unbiased with literacy practices and expectations. The teachers involved in this study were asked to supply the motivation they observe in their students and the expectations of performance they set for students.

Interviews with the three teachers inquired about students' performance with high-stakes tests and daily participation. Mr. Patterson believes, "at this age, I see the females being more serious in their studies across the board. The males, there are certain males that are serious, and will apply themselves but it is really the females that seem to latch on and go deeper with it" (Teacher Interview, February 2012). Mr. Patterson may suggest that overall females are better rounded with success in multiple subjects based on their participation, engagement with activities, and class and state-test achievements. His response also leads to infer that he assumes and expects females to perform better than males. However, Ms. Adele's interview (2012) consistently shows her belief that males are higher performers than females. Adele states, "I feel like I have a lot stronger male readers than I do female readers. In the classroom, I feel like I have accelerated and gifted male readers in the classroom... I think males participate more... and

perform higher in my classes than females do” (Teacher Interviews, February 2012). Ms. Adele perhaps believes that males are overall higher achievers based on prior state tests or graded class activities or tests that were not observed but are tangible measurements of progress she refers to. Observations (2012) also show that the males often participate and voluntarily provided responses without being called on, which Ms. Adele may be constitute as further interaction than females. Even though these two teachers have different views on student performance Lam et al.’s (2009) research indicates that girls had greater reading performances over boys on all reading tests, regardless of the sex of the teacher.

The administered attitude survey considers students feelings towards teacher treatment and expectations of them. Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7 display students’ inventory of support and being provided feedback from their teachers and student attitudes towards reading to be successful. In Table 5, students are asked to evaluate if they feel their teacher is supportive of their success in class, which provides insight to student perceived thoughts of how their teacher projects expectations and achievement.

Table 5

Student Attitudes toward Support from Teacher

Survey Question	Adele				Patterson				Brown	
	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%
I feel my teacher is supportive of my success in this class.	83.3	16.7	83.3	16.7	90	10	100	0	100	0

Note. *FA%* = female agree percentage; *FD%* = female disagree percentage; *MA%* = male agree percentage; *MD%* = male disagree percentage.

Based on the attitude survey (2012) given to the students, the majority of the students feel supported in the classroom. Table 7 shows 10 out of 11 males agree with the statement, “I feel

my teacher is supportive of my success in this class". The one male that disagreed with this statement was from a female teacher's classroom. Based on the interview response provided by Ms. Adele, this male could disagree with this statement because of added pressure to perform because of the high expectations placed on males that may be projected to the students. Two females also disagree with feeling their teacher is supportive of their success, with one from a male led classroom and the other from a female led classroom. This again may be due to added pressure of either not being expected to perform as highly as the boys from Ms. Adele's class, or to perform to the expectations that Mr. Patterson sets on females to perform better than males.

Students were also polled about their attitudes of receiving positive feedback from their teachers. Providing feedback is an essential aspect to both students' and teachers' ability to grow and learn in order to further develop. Development is important to the learning process to ensure an individual can make growth. Therefore, this survey also includes, similar to feeling supported by their teacher, an inventory of whether students receive positive feedback often and given the impression they are doing work well. A valuable measurement of students' thoughts about how teachers are relaying that support or lack of support to their students in the means of providing feedback to their students is truly important to understand about classrooms.

The data in Table 6 shows that two males from Ms. Adele's classroom and one male and one female from Mr. Patterson's classroom do not feel they receive adequate feedback from their teachers. These males and female may feel they are not performing well from a lack of communication with their teacher. Regardless of the beliefs or biases that may be unconsciously set, it is evident communication to all students is not always provided. No frequent feedback could lead to a lack of motivation to perform from students when they believe they are not meeting standards without justification from teachers on individual progress.

Table 6

Student Attitudes toward Receiving Positive Feedback from Teacher

Survey Question	Adele				Patterson				Brown	
	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%
I get frequent and positive feedback from my teacher and my teacher makes me feel I am doing my work well.	100	0	66.7	33.3	90	10	0	100	100	0

Note. *FA%* = female agree percentage; *FD%* = female disagree percentage; *MA%* = male agree percentage; *MD%* = male disagree percentage.

Another reading attitude that pertains to student performance is “I need to read well for my future” (Table 7). All four males from Ms. Brown’s classroom agree that reading well is important to the future. Mr. Patterson’s one participating male also believes reading well is important to the future. From Ms. Adele’s class all six females also agree that reading is important to the future and all girls but one (nine students) in Mr. Patterson’s class agree. All students that agree in the value of reading to be successful in the future signifies that these students have a high value for reading and possibly has been instilled by their teacher that reading is valuable for success in her classroom and future classes. Four males in Ms. Adele’s classroom disagree in the importance of reading well for the future and two find reading important for future. The males that do not find an importance of reading well for the future could indicate these students believe their performance and success is not affected by their reading abilities. This data does not support the research of Lam et al. (2009) that finds children taught by female teacher were more inclined to reach the understanding that reading abilities are vital to the future more than those taught by male teachers (Lam et al., 2009).

Table 7

Student Attitudes of Importance to Read Well for my Future

Survey Question	Adele				Patterson				Brown	
	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	FA%	FD%	MA%	MD%	MA%	MD%
I need to read well for my future.	100	0	33.3	66.7	90	10	100	0	100	0

Note. *FA%* = female agree percentage; *FD%* = female disagree percentage; *MA%* = male agree percentage; *MD%* = male disagree percentage.

Implications

Through surveys, concept maps, interviews, and observations of male and female middle school teachers and students, several implications can be made. After collecting and analyzing the various forms of data, it was discovered from this action research that male and female teachers place extra expectations on students of the opposite sex. It was also found that girls have more negative attitudes towards literacy than males when anonymously surveyed about their attitudes of participation and engagement with literacy. The data led to the discovery that the physical arrangement of students and the teacher’s proximity and movement among children can play an effective role on student participation and engagement.

The first implication from my study is that male teachers place higher expectations on female students and female teachers place higher expectations on male students. Assumptions about boys and girls that are evident to students can build added pressure for these students to perform well, which may lead to negative attitudes towards literacy activities. Teachers today need to be aware of the biases and expectations that are set among specific genders in order to avoid added pressures on students. On the other side of the spectrum of setting these biases, teachers can undermine other students within the classroom creating an unbalanced classroom,

leading to a lack of motivation when other students are privileged. If teachers are ignoring their unconscious gender biases towards their students, their schools, and themselves, these gender biases, which may have developed from cultural norms, can lead to bias in the classroom.

Scantlebury (2011) states “gender bias occurs when people make assumptions regarding behaviors, abilities or preferences of others based upon their gender” (p. 122). These biases unfold in student practices and teachers’ acceptance of certain behaviors of particular students within the classroom. Teachers need to work to evaluate and examine their pedagogical practices and believes to ensure fair treatment is given to all students in working towards challenging gender biases. Essentially, labeling specific genders with high expectations of performance and success can lead to detrimental environment for all.

The second implication drawn from my study was that girls have more negative attitudes towards literacy than males when anonymously surveyed about their attitudes of participation and engagement with literacy. Gender bias can also impact students’ attitudes towards learning and their engagement in a topic. These attitudes go against the typical findings of a plethora of researchers such as Lam et al. (2009) and Dee (2006), in which females generally have more positive attitudes towards literacy than males. The statistics have been rather consistent over the years, which can therefore create a stereotypical bias about female performance and motivation towards literacy activities. Scantlebury (2011) explains “because there are strong gender role stereotypes for masculinity and femininity, students who do not match them can encounter problems with teachers and with their peers” (p. 123). Teachers need to be aware of the importance of not making assumptions about boys and girls based on stereotypes, rather focus on the diversity of individual students in one’s classroom to create an environment for. By reviewing text from gender perspectives, teachers can work to counteract biases that exist in

textbooks or novels. Teachers would greatly benefit from reviewing classroom texts to ensure they are gender neutral while still meeting their curriculum needs.

The third implication from my study is that physical space and a teacher's proximity or movement among children can play a valuable role on student participation and engagement. Physical space, though a small aspect of classroom management should be thoughtfully considered by teachers to ensure all students feel apart of the environment. Circulation of the room allows for teachers to see each student's focus is on the lesson and understanding is being made. Another consideration for teachers is placement of students in tables or rows and how that can effect student participation or the message being sent to those students not sitting in the front row. Teachers need to be conscious of all possibilities for a students disinterest or inability to focus, rather than just the content. Lack of focus could be from lack of circulation in the room or placement among peers. As teachers, it is important to consider the message being sent to students if our placement is only at the front of the room, establishing complete control of power in the room, which may create an uncomfortable and less engaging environment to be in. Whereas, teachers that make their presence known to all students and move among all, students will feel more engaged and a sense of balanced power in the room where movement of energy can evolve between both the teacher and the students.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of teachers of different genders instructing students of different genders. I collected various forms of data, which included interviews, observational notes, concept maps, and surveys to determine key aspects of how teachers of different genders instruct students of different genders. Research in the past has shown females to have more positive attitudes and favored to have higher performance in

literacy activities than males. Research also showed that preferential treatment existed in male and female classrooms and essentially boys receive more positive and negative and nonverbal and verbal teacher communication than females. However, I have found that preferential treatment and biases exist for genders of the opposite sex of the teacher. Also, though females are typically seen in research as more likely to have positive attitudes towards literacy, more males had positive attitudes than females in this research study. Lastly, physical space plays a role in student engagement and participation among male and female students.

The research I conducted was limited in several ways. The research conducted was constricted by time in the number of visits I was able to observe the classroom. This study was conducted in three weeks, given more opportunity and longer course of time, rather a year, there would be more variables to measure, such as test scores and a better understanding of student and teacher interactions. Also, from one of the observed classrooms, the initial number of students given assent from parents was much larger than the number of survey sheets returned to me by the teacher. This limitation left me with a small number of student participants rather than a larger population that would provide me with further insight into the attitudes from the majority of this class. I believe observation of a consistent group of students with a male and female teacher may have yielded different results and more objective to whether the gender of the teacher played a role in student participation, engagement and performance.

These limitations have left me with questions that have not yet been answered. For example, why do some teachers engage in providing more privilege to students of the opposite sex? I would also like to know if there would be a change in student attitudes towards their teachers, and participation, motivation and success in literacy over an extended period of time. Do these attitudes change among different age groups of students? As a result, I would like to

examine a consistent group of students over an extended period of time from various ranges of grade groups, such as elementary, middle and high school. This would provide me with opportunities to collect more thorough data such as follow up interviews, collect state test scores and a wider range of class activities. Despite the limitations, this study proves that teachers privilege the opposite sex and present biases and expectations of specific genders. Teachers' unconscious biases can affect student success and attitudes towards literacy. This study also disproves that females have more positive attitudes than males with literacy and that the dichotomies of typical male and female expectations should not be played out. Lastly, physical space and how it is used can greatly impact the engagement and circulation of power in the classroom. As a result, teachers need to be aware and challenge biases that they create and be attentive to the messages a teacher's verbal and nonverbal actions send when instructing students of different genders in order to create a just environment for all.

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Appendix A

Attitude Survey

1= disagree a lot 2= disagree a little 3=agree a little 4= agree a lot

Place a number (1-4) on the line that best describes your feeling.

1. I read only if I have to _____
2. I like talking about books with other people _____
3. I would be happy if someone gave me a book as a present _____
4. I think reading is boring _____
5. I need to read well for my future _____
6. I enjoy reading _____

7. I enjoy this class _____
8. I feel comfortable speaking up in this class _____
9. I like the activities my teacher gives me in this class _____
10. I think the grades I am getting in this class are fair _____
11. I feel my teacher is supportive of my success in this class _____
12. I get along well with my teacher for this class _____
13. I get frequent and positive feedback from my teacher and my teacher makes me feel I am doing my work well _____
14. My teacher is interested in my point of view and allows me to decide on things and/or make choices in class _____
15. I enjoy my teacher for this class _____

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching? And what have been your past experiences?
2. What kinds of strategies do you prefer to use when teaching material to students?
3. How do you encourage students to read? What kinds of text do you use in the classroom?
4. What kinds of resources do you use for class activities and assessments?
5. Do you notice an overall difference in test scores between males and females?
6. Do you think the gender of the teacher makes a difference on male and female student performance, behaviors and interactions in the classroom? How so?
7. Do you think there is an even reading ability among the boys and girls in your classroom?
8. Name 3 titles with the authors and main characters of books you have used in your classroom in the past and why you selected each book to use in the classroom.
9. Who performs highly in this class? Participates frequently? Usually responds correctly? Cooperative? Requests assistance or support? Characteristically, how would you describe this group of students?
10. Do you think the sex of a teacher makes a difference on the students?
11. As a male/female teacher, what is the classroom dynamic or interactions like in your classroom? How do you think that differs from the opposite sex's classroom?
12. What influences your classroom management style? How does it change with different groups of students?
13. Do you think students with same sex teachers perform better?
14. What do you think you do best to ensure students are treated fairly and equally?
15. Do you do anything different with your interactions between male and female students?