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A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF GENDER  
IN THE CLASSROOM

by  
Ryan Ann Malloy

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the  
Master of Science in Teaching Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 2005

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

Date Approved 06.28.05

## ABSTRACT

Ryan Ann Malloy  
A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF GENDER  
IN THE CLASSROOM

2004/05

Dr. Susan Browne  
Master of Science in Teaching in Collaborative Teaching

The purpose of this study is to examine the role gender plays in the classroom, through considering both teacher and student perceptions of gender and how those perceptions impact student learning and socialization. Conducting my early research it became evident that the three underlying forces that allow gender to impact the classroom environment are socialization, individual perceptions, and instructional practices. In order to understand the true influence of gender in the classroom I incorporated a qualitative study on these three interrelated pieces to see how they came to life in an actual kindergarten classroom. Students took part in face-to-face interviews, a "community helper" picture sort, and a small-group "community helper" mini-lesson. The data sources allowed me to see how early socialization influenced the gender perceptions of kindergarten students and their view of the community around them, as well as the influence a teacher's instructional approach and language could impact students' beliefs.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Students are bustling around the classroom during free time. The teacher is working at her desk grading papers and getting things organized for the next day. You can hear the sound of children talking and laughing as they play. A couple of boys are playing with a Game Boy at the back of the room, while three girls play with cash registers. Another student is sitting at his desk quietly drawing a picture of an airplane. That is when Adam walks over to me.

**Adam:** "Miss. M. will you play house with me?"

**Miss M.:** *(Thinks to herself) Is he really asking me to play house? Adam? The student who acts like "Mr. Tough Guy" around the other boys in the class? Most boys do not play house. Most rather play with the Game Boy or do a puzzle.*

After thinking about it for a moment I reply,  
"Sure Adam I will play house with you."

**Adam:** "Great, you be the Mom. Mom can I go play outside?"

---

This vignette was taken from a true experience that I had in a classroom. The classroom was a self-contained special education class with students ranging from first through fifth grade, between the ages of seven and ten. Every afternoon the students had free time and would play with their peers. The day this student came over to me and asked to play house I was shocked, it did not seem like something he would do. In the days that followed Adam continued to ask other teachers and girls in the class to play

house. Looking back on this experience, it opened my eyes to the world of gender bias. Gender is something that we cannot escape, there are boys and there are girls in every classroom, men and women work together in the workplace, it is part of life. Yet, being in schools I have become aware of how subtly things are “gendered,” or classified as something a boy or girl would, or should do. Having a male fourth-grade student, who seemed to be “Mr. Tough Guy” around his male peers, ask to play house was unsettling because in my mind it was just not something a boy willingly plays at this age. I could image younger children, of both sexes, playing house together in pre-school and possibly even kindergarten, but in the upper-elementary school grades students are usually already socialized to gendered roles of what it means to be a male or female in American society. As children get older their play typically follows “gendered norms.” It was this event that helped open my eyes to the fact that I myself have developed gender bias over the years. While carrying out my study I found that this bias is due in part to our socialization and often comes as a result of expectations around gender and not necessarily a set of beliefs about what boys and girls can or should do.

### Story of the Question

One’s gender influences his or her life in many ways. As soon as a baby is born they are dressed in pink or blue. Children are socialized to fit the “norm” gender roles in their early years. They play games, are given toys, and read stories that foster American society’s gender norms. Once children start school, gender stereotypes are still perpetuated in subtle ways. Teachers often “gender” tasks by splitting the class into boys and girls. This causes young students to create another means of categorizing people, along gender lines: male and female. Teachers’ perceptions of gender associated with



academic subject areas also subtly, or even directly, foster gender stereotypes and bias as the elementary years progress.

Growing up I always told myself I was bad in math, something that many girls find themselves doing. After developing the research question for this study I started to realize that I was most likely impacted by gender bias over the years. The vignette at the beginning of the chapter also shows that I have internalized some of our society's gender biases as I became more and more socialized to meet American norms. As a student, I always received good grades, usually A's, during my elementary through high school career. The only area I struggled in was math. Looking back now, I recall that in high school my teachers always seemed to favor the male students. I recall my geometry teacher especially, who often called on the boys and small talked with them at the beginning and end of class. The boys always received high praise for doing well on tests as well. I usually found myself hiding my test score when I got a test back because I wanted to do better and doubted my own ability. I never asked for help because I feared the "Smart Board." My geometry teacher used the "Smart Board" during class for students to go up and do problems they had trouble with. As the teacher worked with you through the problem he often made sarcastic comments. I did not want to be humiliated in front of my peers so I would sit and hope another student in my class would have difficulty with the same problem and go up to the board. Looking back on my own schooling, higher-level math was when my own education was impacted by gender stereotypes.

During my five-year program at Rowan University, I spent a lot of time in schools in a wide variety of placements and classrooms. Over time I have observed how teachers

gender tasks during a normal school day, usually in an attempt to be “fair.” Watching students seated boy, girl, boy, girl in a music class, to having students walk to the bathroom in all-boy and all-girl lines, I have witnessed the subtle ways teachers split their classes down gender lines. During the early elementary school years this is impacting the students through socialization, allowing them to see one way to categorize people is by gender. I have also witnessed how teachers often interact with boys more frequently than girls during group lessons. Yet, a lot of the attention was focused on getting the male students to calm down, since they often wanted to participate, which was a behavior noted in research on gender that has been noted in boys. From being in actual classrooms I have started to become knowledgeable of ways teachers perpetuate gender stereotyping in both subtle and direct ways.

Due to my experiences in schools I knew that studying gender was what I wanted as the focus of my thesis. Gender is evident in any classroom, no matter what grade level, and both the teacher and the students have their own gender perceptions, which impact interactions between members of the classroom community and with instruction. The wealth of research I found early on in my study showed that gender can be looked at in the areas of socialization, perceptions, and instructional practices. Personally, I began to feel that early socialization and perceptions go hand-in-hand. The perceptions then play a role in a teacher’s instruction and the way students interact with what is presented in the classroom, each other, and the teacher. Once I found myself in kindergarten for my student teaching placement things began to really come together. I knew since the students were young, and had not had much school experience yet, I could really get an in-depth look at the gender perceptions and view of the world younger students bring

with them into the classroom. Thus, studying student gender perceptions is a large piece of this study. Observing the way the teacher interacts with the students, encourages them to work together, and uses instruction to either inhibit or perpetuate gender stereotypes is the other key focus.

### The Research Problem

Socialization is one key source of gender bias because it is how we learn to fill our roles, including those of gender, through interacting with others and modeling our behavior after others around us (Heyman, 2004). We are raised, starting at a young age, to think that boys play sports, roll around in the dirt, and build with blocks, while girls play with dolls, play house, and dress up in fancy clothes. Due to this early socialization, children grow up to categorize activities as either things boys or girls do (Zhumkhawala, 1997). This often leads children to play with peers that are of the same gender (Bigler, 1995). In classrooms, in the park, and on the playground it is evident that girls play with girls and boys play with boys. Children are comfortable playing with others that are like themselves.

Once children enter school gender bias is perpetuated in other ways. Walking down the hall I have noticed teachers taking their classes down to the lavatory with boys in one line and girls in another. Yes, it seems like a convenient, systematic way of giving the class a bathroom break, but it also leads to further categorizing things by gender. Having boys marching down the hall in one line and girls in another allows students to categorize people along gender lines. It is one subtle ways that students see that “boys” and “girls” are different (Bigler, 1995). A lot of things teachers do to be “fair” help students categorize people into two groups: boys and girls. Having the class sit in rows

boy, girl, boy, girl or by splitting the class to read a story page by page having the boys read one and the girls read another, are subtle ways that foster gender categorization (Orellana, 1995). The teacher may be doing this out of fairness, without even realizing that he or she is helping foster students' gender perceptions. Finally, using gender as a means of competition in the classroom is another practice. Teachers often have the students read aloud, boys doing one page and girls doing another, and make comments like, "Girls lets see if you can read that better than the boys just did." Competition is a major part of education today, and splitting it down gender lines also enhances the development of gender stereotypes amongst students (Orellana, 1995).

The biggest problem of "gendering" tasks in school is when it becomes linked to specific academic subject matters. Most noted gender biases associated with education are those linked to the different subjects taught in school, especially math, science, and language arts. These subject areas are commonly equated with gender stereotypes, in that one gender is "perceived" to be better at them than the other. Math and science are subjects that boys are perceived to "do better in" or succeed more. Girls on-the-other-hand are usually seen as good in literacy, good readers and writers, as well as cooperative learners who work well with others (Duffy, 2001). Teachers perpetuate these gender stereotypes in many ways during the school day. It has been found that teachers call on boys more than girls during group lessons to answer questions, especially in math and science (Duffy, 2001). They also receive more feedback than girls in the area of math and science, whether the feedback is positive or negative. Due to this, many girls start to believe that they are bad in math, or that boys are supposed to achieve more in these academic areas. Since girls are often not called on when they raise their hands, it also

causes many female students to become passive learners. Yet, it is not necessarily “bad,” they are viewed as quiet and well behaved (Owens, 2003). Teachers often ask girls to be helpers in the classroom more often because they are viewed as more cooperative. However, even when the activity is hands-on in science class, boys seem to dominate the group work in higher-grade levels because female students have taken on the more passive role (Jovanovic, King, 1998). Gender stereotypes impact male students in the area of language arts (Blair, Sanford, 2004). Boys’ fine motor skills develop slower than girls, which leads to girls being perceived as “neater writers.” Thus, teachers will often call male students’ work sloppy because they are not on the same developmental level as the girls. In all, linking gender to content areas has spawned a lot of research over the years. Research has looked at the impact gender has had on student achievement and self-perception, and whether or not students internalize these very gendered stereotypes. In the following section, I will provide a more in-depth overview of the research done by those studying gender the last ten years and today.

### An Overview of Related Research

To get a better understanding of how gender impacts education I considered research that has been done over the past ten years. My goal was to find literature that addresses to the impact gender has in the classroom and to the ways teachers and their practices foster or inhibit the development of gender perceptions. While researching I found that the key issues that revolve around gender and education focus on socialization, the gender perceptions teachers themselves have related to academic subject areas, and instructional practices. Looking at these three core areas can help guide my own study and help me find ways to close the gender gap perpetuated in many classrooms.

## Socialization

Socialization is the first key area to consider when trying to understand gender and its impact in school. Understanding how a child develops his or her own views of the world can lead to an understanding of gender stereotypes and how they form. Children learn how to fit the gender norms of our society through socialization, starting at a young age, from parents and teachers. Socialization is the way they learn to understand the world around them and develop schema about things like gender (Heyman, 2004, p.1). Much research has been done that focuses on socialization during a child's early years at home and in school. "Dolls, Trucks, and Identity," (Zhumkhawala, 1997), focuses on the study of early socialization at home and in school. Zhumkhawala (1997) concluded that parents and teachers promote the development of gender stereotypes through encouraging children to play with "gender-appropriate" toys (p. 1). Since young children easily categorize things as they create schema about the world, Zhumkhawala believes children should be allowed to explore their world using their imagination, and their adult role models should avoid the use of gendered language (1997, p. 2). Heyman (2004) also studies the impact of early socialization and how it later filters down to students' future perceptions about gender and academic content area achievement. Heyman finds that children's schema of the world are influenced by the larger society's representations of gender, and student beliefs in the academic domains depend on whether or not children internalize society's gender stereotypes linked to these areas (2004, p. 10). Her study provides an in-depth look at how early socialization, coupled with teacher perceptions at school, causes students to apply their gender schema to academic subject areas of math, science, and spelling.

Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, and Blumenfield (1993) carried out another study that helps my understanding of socialization's influence on gender stereotypes, through providing insight on how it impacts the values students place on different tasks in the classroom. This study states how students' early experiences directly influence which subject areas students feel more competent in as they grow older, and by the late elementary school years girls and boys begin to fit into academic gender roles (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfield, 1993). Finally, Bigler (1995) considers the impact the classroom environment itself, especially the social atmosphere, impacted the development of gender stereotypes. She studied three classrooms, classroom one in which the teacher gendered tasks; classroom two in which students were grouped based on colors; and classroom three was a gender-free environment; and found that students in the gender and color oriented classrooms developed more stereotypes and categorized people more frequently, than those in the gender-free, stereotype-free classroom (Bigler, 1995). Her study shows how the classroom environment can easily be a place that perpetuates or inhibits stereotypes. All of these researchers make it clear that socialization has a major influence on the role gender stereotypes can play in the classroom. Through my study I will also consider the role socialization plays in the classroom, and how it filters down into teacher, student perceptions on academics.

#### Teacher and Student Perceptions of Gender Performance

After considering socialization, it is important to consider teacher perceptions based on gender and student performance. Teachers' perceptions about gender can play a major role in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in the classroom (Duffy, 2001). Teachers should sit back and consider the gender perceptions they place on academic

subject areas and student achievement in their classrooms. Research has found the values a teacher places on math, science, and literacy is often impacted by his or her own personal gender stereotypes. Jim Duffy (2001) considers the impact teacher perception of gender performance has on students in his study. Duffy finds that teacher-student interaction is a major means by which teachers perpetuate gender stereotypes in the classroom. He states the higher level of teacher-student interaction directed towards male students motivates boys to be more active, engaged students and drives them to achieve more, whereas girls are often overlooked (Duffy, 2001). Sherry Owens (2003) discusses teacher perceptions of student performance, as well as instructional practices, which perpetuate gender stereotypes in school. Owens states, like Duffy, that teacher-student interaction perpetuates gender stereotypes (2003). Understanding teachers' perceptions helps provide insight on how these values impact students' self-esteem and self-efficacy when it comes to the subject areas of math, science, and literacy. She feels calling on male students more frequently makes girls passive learners and allows them to conform to society's gender stereotypes that coincide with particular subject areas (Owens, 2003). Incorporating instructional practices and materials that are gender-balanced is the best way to encourage all students to achieve and take risks in the classroom (Owens, 2003). Orellana (1995) looked closely at how teachers own values impact students through a study carried out in two separate classrooms. In the article Orellana closely studies how a teacher's values are perpetuated through instructional techniques. Orellana studies two very different teachers, with very different literacy practices, and finds that in both classrooms gender was perpetuated in different ways. One teacher had a highly structured, organized classroom and often grouped students along gender lines to carry



out classroom literacy activities. The other teacher had a more laidback classroom in which students had freedom of choice in reading material and writing assignments (Orellana, 1995). In both classrooms students perpetuated gender stereotypes in the way they interacted with literacy, sticking to genre's that were "gender" appropriate (Orellana, 1995). Orellana's study provides a powerful insight in how socialization impacts student gender beliefs, as well as how teachers' perceptions and instructional practices can directly, or subtly, foster gender stereotypes. My study will further explore how teacher perceptions influence those of students, and how it impacts student performance across subject areas.

### Instructional Practices

Studying instructional practices constitutes a third area that provides insights into how teachers respond to gender in the classroom. Teachers foster gender stereotypes through instruction, sometimes without even realizing it. Owens (2003) and Orellana's (1995) studies were key in pinpointing how instructional practices used across content areas, coupled with teacher perceptions, perpetuate the development of gender stereotypes. Due to this, I wanted to find ways a teacher could close the "gender gap" through instruction. Jones (2000) considers gender equity training for teachers and found training that was successful in making a classroom "gender-free" and others that had no impact on teacher practices. Jones finds that training that encourages teachers to consider their own personal behaviors and perceptions is the only means to successfully create classrooms that are "gender-free" (2000, p. 5). Jovanovic and King (1998) studies the impact that hands-on learning in science had on both male and female attitudes towards science in hopes that this practice would allow girls to have higher self-efficacy in

science. Surprisingly enough, Jovanovic and King found that hands-on learning did not change female students' perceptions of science because male students dominated hands-on tasks and girls were often passive participants (1998). Thus, pointing out the importance of early socialization's impact on students' gender perceptions and academic self-efficacy. Blair and Sanford (2004) studied the impact instructional practices have on male students in literacy. Their study found that boys and girls interact with literature in different ways, thus leading to boy's being unfairly stereotyped (Blair & Sanford, 2004, p. 453). Providing a literacy program based on student interests is what Blair and Sanford declare an effective approach to developing a gender-free literacy classroom (2004). Orellana (1995) and Zhumkhawala's (1997) studies also considered the area of instructional practices, while linking them to socialization and teacher perceptions on gender related to academic subject areas.

All of the research done over the past ten years shows that gender stereotypes do impact many classrooms. My study will further explore the influence of early socialization on student gender schema and how they impact student performance. Studying the way in which the teacher interacts with the students can give helpful insight on the teacher's own gender perceptions and how it influences students' gender beliefs. Instructional practices will also be considered in order to better understand the direct and subtle ways gender stereotypes are perpetuated in the classroom. Through my own research I hope to find ways to close the "gender gap" in America's educational system through exploring socialization, teacher and student perceptions of academic achievement, and how perceptions are impacted by instructional practices in the classroom.

### Importance of the Study and Potential Audiences

This study is not only beneficial to teachers and administrators in the schools, but to pre-service teachers as well. Teachers should have a better understanding of gender perceptions that are evident in American schools. Even though a teacher may feel that he or she is not personally biased, when it comes to gender, they may be. I never thought I had gender biases until the day the male student asked me to play house. Our society unconsciously socializes children to grow up with a schema of the world that portrays gender roles in subtle ways (Heyman, 2004). If teachers better understand their own perceptions of gender and how they relate those values to academic subject areas they could possibly use their own personal instructional practices to close the gender gap instead of fostering gender stereotypes. There are a lot of subtle ways teachers help socialize children to categorize people along gender lines, including essentially harmless practices of having students sit boy, girl, boy, girl (Bigler, 1995). Knowing how one responds to gender in the classroom is the best way to close the gender gap if a teacher is willing to accept his or her own personal gender bias and is willing to change.

Pre-service teachers would also benefit from this study because they are the educators of tomorrow, and have the ability to go into schools and shed new light on innovative instructional practices. If pre-service teachers are educated on the fact that gender stereotypes are prevalent in American schools, how the stereotypes are fostered, and how they could be avoided students in their classrooms could benefit. A classroom environment that is established to be gender-free from the first day of school would have both male and female students on an even playing field when it comes to academic achievement (Bigler, 1995). Training pre-service teachers on gender stereotypes is

crucial in trying to close the “gender gap” in the future of the American educational system. As time goes on it would be the hope that these new teachers’ practices could filter to the other more experienced teachers in the school, thus slowly closing the gender gap over time.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to better understand the way teachers respond to gender in the classroom. Understanding the socialization of a child at school will allow for a better understanding of how gender stereotypes are fostered in American society. Children spend a lot of time in school and teachers are responsible for educating and socializing them so that they grow up to be productive, successful citizens. Yet, teacher’s perceptions of gender, especially when it comes to academic subject areas, can impact student achievement and self-esteem. As a future teacher, I want to create a classroom environment that fosters learning and achievement, not gender stereotypes. In this study I will examine gender in a kindergarten classroom. In conclusion of my writings, this study will advance the knowledge in the field of gender study in education through my own personal exploration of how teacher and student perceptions, as well as instructional strategies, foster or inhibit American society’s gender stereotypes in the classroom with hopes that I can find strategies for closing the “gender gap” in education.

### Research Question

The core question guiding this study is: **“How do teachers respond to gender in the classroom and in what ways does it impact student learning and perceptions?”** To better exam the question, it is important to exam the instructional practices and teacher-talked used by the teacher in a classroom and how they respond to students of

different genders. To help better answer the core question at the heart of this study, to get to the essence of gender's impact in a classroom, it is best to consider the following sub-questions:

- What are the students preconceived gender perceptions prior to entering the classroom?
- How do students interact with each other in reference to gender?
- Does the teacher provide gender-neutral or gendered-tasks during instruction?
- Are boys and girls treated differently across subject areas?
- Are different instructional strategies geared toward different genders?

After considering these sub-questions I hope to develop an understanding of how teachers' responses to gender in the classroom impact students, while getting an understanding of students' gender views and perceptions already formed before entering school. Only then would it be possible to find ways that teachers can break the gender barriers that are fostered in schools so that all students can achieve in all subject areas, therefore closing the "gender gap" in education. In the following chapters I will further investigate the research done in the field of gender to date, pinpoint my research design, explore my own personal findings, and give implications for further research in the area of gender in the classroom.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

Gender influences a person's life in very subtle ways. We are socialized by our society to fit many roles according to society's norms: from how to be a son or daughter, a student, an employee, and even a man or a woman. Through socialization children build schema, or mental representations about the world, by learning from those around them. These schema become more in-depth and detailed as one grows older, which then develop into perceptions and stereotypes. Gender is one such schema that has been much researched over the last ten years. Children are not only socialized at home, but also at school, which is why there is a wide body of literature out there that discusses how gender impacts education. What might not be common knowledge is the role that gender plays in the American educational system. It is interesting to study the ways that socializing people to fit to societal norms thus leads to the development of both student and teacher perceptions about gender. These perceptions, in turn, often influence student achievement across subject areas either in positive or negative ways.

#### Structure of the Literature Review

The first section of this review looks at socialization and how children are socialized both at school and home from an early age to develop mental schema about

gender. The second piece considers how socialization leads to both teacher and student perceptions of gender, thus studying the impact that these perceptions have on student performance in the various academic subject areas. The third area of research reviewed considers instructional practices used by teachers that foster or inhibit the development of gender stereotypes. This section will also consider the stereotypical gender “roles” of students in an attempt to see how one could close the “gender gap” being created in education. Consequently, in my review of the research of the past ten years I draw connections between socialization, teacher and student perceptions, instructional practices, and student achievement. How students are socialized starting at a young age helps them develop gender schema that can impact their academic achievement over their school career. Understanding how teachers’ perceptions and instructional practices foster or inhibit gender stereotypes in the classroom is key to understanding student achievement and self-esteem when it comes to particular academic subject areas such as math, science, and language arts.

### Socialization

Understanding the impact of socialization is the first vital stride towards understanding how gender influences a child as their education progresses. Children create their own schema of the world through being socialized by their parents, those around them, and in school. Early socialization has a lasting effect on one’s later views of the world (Heyman, 2004). Awareness of how the social construct of a child leads to the development of schema related to gender is at the underlying heart of gender study (Heyman, 2004). Children socialized to fit American gender norms become adults with particular perceptions and stereotypes related to gender. Thus, teachers, whose role as

educator and facilitator of society's norms, foster or inhibit the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, which, if internalized by students, can hinder or propel student achievement (Bigler, 1995).

Rebecca Bigler (1995) discusses the impact of a child's environment on the development of his or her gender schema. Bigler argues, "Children's sex-typed beliefs develop early and increase rapidly throughout early childhood" (1995, p. 1702). Bigler believes children's gender schema are influenced by their environment and social learning. This then leads them to develop gender as a "functional category" to organize people and roles (Bigler, 1995, p. 1073). To study the impact of the school environment on children's beliefs she looks at three classrooms, one "gender" and two "control" classrooms. Students were placed in the "gender" classroom, which showed high levels of gender stereotypes, a "control" classroom in which students were grouped by "colors" instead of gender, and one classroom that had no categorization at all. Over the course of the study students were socialized to their classroom environments, with the gender and color classes being verbally reminded of their group categorizations the entire time. At the conclusion of her study Bigler shows the importance of socialization and environment on student's perceptions of gender and stereotypes. Results conclude that students in the gender and color groups are most adept to use stereotypes and categorize people. Bigler emphasizes this by declaring, "Children in the gender condition were more extreme in their perception of traits within gender groups," (1995, p. 1083) which then had an impact on these students' classification skills. The gender group had a higher level of same-sex bias with students interacting more with students of the same gender. Bigler's study suggests that children categorize people at a young age, which, in turn, socializes



them to see people as only boys or girls and hinders their ability to see people in a variety of different ways, belonging to many different social groups (1995). This study proves how easily the classroom environment socializes students to develop gender stereotypes when the teacher genders tasks.

Heyman (2004) further advances the study of the importance of early socialization on children's gender beliefs. Her study finds that children's mental representations and the larger society's representations of gender influence one another. Thus, understanding how children develop schema that take on societal's gender stereotypes can later aid in the understanding of student self-concepts and behavior (Heyman, 2004, p. 2). These mental representations influence student beliefs in the academic domains depending on whether or not students internalize society's gender stereotypes linked to particular subject areas. Heyman's study bridges the gap between socialization and student perceptions, which will be discussed more in-depth in the next section. Yet, her conclusion about socialization's impact on gender beliefs is that one's own mental representation of gender "interacts closely with, but remains distinct from, stereotype information that is available in the social environment" (Heyman, 2004, p. 10). Therefore, correlating with Bigler's study, socialization influences gender beliefs through the social construct of a child and the environmental forces influencing the development of social schema.

Zhumkhawala (1997), in "Dolls, Trucks, and Identity," points out that children begin to define gender identities as early as their preschool years through play. Parents and teachers subtly promote the development of gender stereotypical norms through encouraging girls to play with dolls and boys to play with trucks, which is viewed as

“socially acceptable” (Zhumkhawala, 1997, p.1). In order to avoid fostering stereotypes, Zhumkhawala emphasizes the need to allow children to explore the world through their own imagination, allowing them to play with whatever they wish from the toy chest. Avoiding gendered language can also help inhibit the development of gender schema (Zhumkhawala, 1997). Young children easily categorize things as they develop an understanding of the world, so the best way to avoid the perpetuation of gender stereotypes is to allow them to explore the world freely, even if it means going against society’s gender norms.

Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, and Blumenfield (1993) bridge the gap between early socialization and academic gender beliefs in “Age and Gender Differences in Children’s Self-and Task Perceptions During Elementary School.” This study shows that students’ early experiences influence the academic domains they feel more competent with as they grow older (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfield, 1993). Due to societal beliefs girls and boys begin to fit into academic gender roles by the late elementary school years. As students progress through school and have negative experiences they become more pessimistic in their views when it comes to academic achievement, particularly in “gendered” subject areas (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfield, 1993).

In conclusion, socialization is the underlying factor that impacts both teacher and student perceptions in education (Bigler, 1995, p. 1072). From an early age children are socialized to fit gender norms, which is evident in classrooms across America. Girls are more likely to play with dolls during free time, whereas boys go for blocks and puzzles (Zhumkhawala, 1997). Teacher talk and gendering tasks lead to further categorization of people along gender lines, which influences a child’s gender mental representations

(Bigler, 1995). Informed by this research, I consider in my study the ways that environmental factors in the classroom might impact students' gender beliefs, as well as the ways a teacher fosters or inhibits the development of gender stereotypes through everyday classroom activities.

### Gender Perceptions

Both teacher and student perceptions about gender are influenced by American social norms. Studies by Duffy (2001), Owens (2003), Heyman (2004), and Orellana (1995), show that teacher and student perceptions are a major factor in perpetuating gender stereotypes in education. These perceptions correlate with the value both teachers and students place on learning and academic subject areas. The academic subject areas most notably pinpointed in literature on gender in education are math, science, and literacy (Duffy, 2001). Through socialization students develop academic gender stereotypes that can foster or inhibit achievement. By their elementary school years students know which subject areas their gender is stereotypically seen as less, or more, competent in (Owens, 2003). Considering the impact perceptions have on the values placed on academic subject areas directly influences students' self-esteem and self-efficacy when it comes to their own achievement.

How teachers perceive gender performance across academic subject areas has been a major part of the literature on gender in education. Teacher's own gender perceptions and stereotypes influence the way they view student success across subject areas based on gender. In one study, Jim Duffy (2001) indicates one manner in which teacher perception of gender is facilitated is teacher-student interaction in "Classroom Interactions: Gender of Teacher, Gender of Student, and Classroom Subject." Research

has shown that teachers interact with both male and female students differently in elementary school, junior high, and high school (Duffy, 2001). Most notably, Duffy (2001) points to the fact that male students generally receive more attention from their teacher than their female classmates (2001). The gender of the teacher did not seem to change the level of interaction between a teacher and male and female students, in fact, Duffy found that both male and female teachers “act in similar manners” and “direct more criticism toward male students than toward female students” (2001, p. 2). This criticism is often viewed as constructive criticism in order to motivate male students to achieve. In order to relate teacher perceptions to academic subject areas, Duffy studied eighteen math and eighteen language arts, or literacy, classrooms that had both male and female teachers. The goal of his study was to note the types of interactions between the students and the teachers. Duffy’s study reinforced past research done on teacher student interactions, finding that teachers did indeed interact with male students more than female students. Male students had a higher level of acceptance from teachers and praised more often for thinking (Duffy, 2001, p. 6). Duffy points out that during the elementary school years most interactions are initiated by male students due to their more overt behaviors, whereas in the high school setting the teachers initiated most of the interaction. Even though, at the higher grade-level, male and female students answered questions at the same frequency teachers still had the tendency to interact with males more through feedback, praise and criticism across both subject areas (Duffy, 2001).

Sherry Owens (2003), in “Are Girls Victims of Gender Bias in our Nation’s Schools?,” states “girls continue a three-hundred year-old struggle for full participation in America’s educational system” (p. 1). Owens opens her study with the fact that during

early elementary school years girls are equal to ahead of their male peers, but by high school they often fall behind (2003, p. 1). Owens beliefs, "Gender equity in education is the elimination of sex role stereotyping and sex bias from the educational process, thus providing the opportunity and environment to validate and empower individual" (2003, p. 2). Owens study shows the impact of the classroom environment and teacher perceptions on student achievement. The means by which teachers respond to students and what they encourage boys and girls to study can directly foster or inhibit gender roles. Like Duffy, Owens points to early interactions between teachers and students as an indicator of future learning patterns. Teachers often unconsciously reward girl students for being passive learners who conform to classroom rules (Owens, 2003, p. 3). Teacher perceptions that consider female students as incapable of learning math and science lead to the internalization of those beliefs by the students, thus hindering the value placed on these academic subject areas (Owens, 2003, p. 4). In order to undo the harm of teacher perceptions, teachers must incorporate gender-balanced materials into the classroom and encourage students to take risks. The early elementary school years are crucial to later success, because students are setting their own self-perceptions related to academic subject areas and achievement. Owens beliefs gender-balanced instruction can help overcome American societal norms of academic gender stereotypes (2003, p. 4).

Heyman (2004) links socialization to student perceptions on academic achievement and self-efficacy in her article discussed earlier. Her study looked at how socialization impacted student perceptions on the academic subject areas of math, science, and spelling. Children participated in tasks that implicitly and explicitly measured their gender perceptions (Heyman, 2004). Tasks ranged from picking pictures

of a person a child felt was good at in math, or at spelling, to an interview that used gendered language that had children fill in a self-rating scale (Heyman, 2004). The study showed that children's gender beliefs were consistent across all domains, thus results were more "consistent with individual differences in valence-based judgment than with individual difference in agreement with stereotypes" (Heyman, 2004, p. 10). The younger students were less likely to rate ability along gender lines as those older elementary participants, which reinforces socializations impact over the years leads to student gender perceptions (Heyman, 2004, p. 10).

Orellana (1995) looks at the values associated to literacy in a gendered social practice in order to see how values of the teacher influences the students own values and beliefs. Orellana studies two very different classroom settings to see how values placed on literacy in each impacted how students learned. To best understand this, Orellana considered the structure of the classroom environment and how students interacted with material. The first classroom was a more traditional classroom, which was neat and orderly, with a lot of teacher directed instruction. The second was not as orderly, but more student focused, geared toward their interests (Orellana, 1995). The first classroom teacher often gendered tasks, having the students sit boy, girl, boy, girl or choral read based on gender. The second classroom teacher did not foster gendering of tasks, but allowed students to work with whom they wanted, and complete assignments based on personal interests (Orellana, 1995). What Orellana found in both classrooms was that gender differences were perpetuated in different ways. The first classroom fostered gender stereotyping of tasks through the teachers direct actions. In the second classroom, students portrayed gender differences by choice. Girls worked with girls, boys worked

with boys, and students written assignments often fell along male and female stereotypical topics (Orellana, 1995). Boys often wrote about heroes, whereas girls wrote stories about family and friendship (Orellana, 1995). Even with the drastic difference in the way students interacted with literature, gender values were perpetuated. The first teacher blatantly used gender in her instruction and showed favoritism towards male students, whereas in the other classroom students gendered themselves, thus again proving that socialization directly impacts student and teacher perceptions in direct and subtle ways.

Thus, understanding how teacher perceptions foster or inhibit gender stereotypes can lead to a better understanding of student perceptions placed on academic subject areas. Student perceptions placed on academic subject areas, and the values students place on them, in turn, influences their beliefs on achievement. My study will further consider the ways that teacher perceptions coincide with the way teacher-student interactions are carried out in the classroom and how this impacts student perception.

### Instructional Practices

Instructional practices used in the classroom have been found to perpetuate or inhibit the furtherance of gender stereotyping (Orellana, 1995). The teacher's pedagogical style is directly influenced by his or her own perceptions on gender (Jones, 2000). Thus, the cycle of socialization and the development of perceptions influence the way students are taught across the subject areas. Much research has been done the last ten years on this area, which studies the means in which teachers perpetuate gender stereotypes through instruction. Research has also shown that instructional practices can be a useful tool to close the "gender gap," which is one of the implications of my own study.

Jones (2000) finds that teachers need to realize their own perceptions and behaviors in the classroom to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes. Jones points to the use of praise in the classroom creates “gender gaps” because female students are usually praised for the neatness of their work and the timeliness of it, whereas male students are rewarded for giving intelligent responses during class discussion. In the study, teachers were videotaped twice, once prior to gender equity training, then once after incorporating what they learned during an eight-week gender equity training course. The study finds that at the end of the eight weeks, teachers who considered his or her personal behavior in the classroom and saw how they were perpetuating gender stereotypes were more willing to adjust their teaching styles. These were the teachers who observed how their behavior influenced student actions in the classroom, and how it impacted students’ self-esteem especially in the area of achievement. Thus, Jones (2000) concluded that a successful gender equity training approach for teachers makes them aware of their own personal behavior in the classroom, making them conscious of how they foster or inhibit the development of gender stereotyping through instruction. Having a willingness to change instruction to make the classroom a place that is gender-free is one means of closing the “gender gap” in the classroom. But first, teachers must be willing to look within themselves and face their own personal gender perceptions and practices.

Blair and Sanford (2004) study the different ways boys and girls interact with materials in a literacy classroom, and how this interaction can be used to incorporate instruction that allows both genders to interact with materials in meaningful ways. Blair and Sanford use the term “morphing” to “describe the distinct characteristics of boys’ practices and behaviors with respect to literacy in the classroom, hallways, and on the



playground” (2004, p. 452). They argue that boys resist the traditional approach to literacy because they want it to be something that is more engaging, meaningful, humorous, and fun (Blair and Sanford, 2004, p.453). Boys tend to fool around in literacy classrooms because of this resistance, which wrongly causes teachers to view them as behavior problems with no interest in literacy at all. However, “if a teacher is willing to restructure classroom activities that allow students to incorporate their own personal interest, give them choices, and allow them to interact with material in meaningful ways boys become more involved in literacy learning” (Blair and Sanford, 2004, p. 455). Blair and Sanford find boys are more selective readers, and enjoy representing their knowledge in various ways, including orally, visually, and even through gestures. Incorporating instructional practices that channel these interests will allow teachers to make literacy more accessible to boys, allowing them to share their knowledge. Blair and Sanford, as well as Jones, show how easily instruction can be used to avoid making students victims of gender in the classroom if a teacher is willing enough to take the time to plan and consider how what is done in the classroom impacts the students.

A common instructional practice incorporated in many classrooms is hands-on learning. Jovanovic and King (1998) consider the role of hands-on learning in the science classroom, and whether or not it can be used to change female students’ attitude towards science. The study examines whether or not boys and girls equally share the performing during hands-on tasks, and how hands-on learning impacts boys’ and girls’ attitudes towards science (p. 477). Jovanovic and King argue that the lack of exposure to science-related material outside of the classroom, coupled with the favoring of male students makes female students less interested in science over the years. Performance-based

teaching, through the use of hands-on experimentation, has been viewed as the “great equalizer” incorporated to compensate for the disparities between boys and girls science experiences outside of school (Jovanovic and King, 1998, p. 478). Observing several fifth through eighth grade science classrooms was the method used to measure the impact hands-on learning has on both male and female students’ attitudes towards science. During their observations, Jovanovic and King found that girls were more likely to be passive participants during group assignments, while boys actively handled all materials and took leadership roles. When it came to student attitudes towards science, a decrease in girls ability perceptions were found in science with a stronger self-perception in all other school subject areas. Even though girls and boys were both as equally involved in group activities in many instances, boys still had better self-perceptions when it came to science and took over the leadership role in many experiments while girls passively participated (Jovanovic and King, 1998).

The types of instructional practices used in the classroom can foster or inhibit the development of gender stereotypes and gendered behavior in the classroom. Instructional practices are often impacted by a teacher’s own gender perceptions, which is a result of his or her own socialization (Jones, 2000). Students socialization also causes them to develop schema about the world and what each gender is “supposed to do” or prefer. This directly impacts their learning and the means by which they interact with material in the classroom, which both Orellana (1995) and Blair and Sanford (2004) indicate in their work. Teachers who are cognizant of their own personal gender perceptions and how they impact their instruction in the classroom are the most likely to be willing enough to take the time to plan and develop a classroom that is gender-free. However, like Orellana’s

study shows, leaving activities up to student choice can also perpetuate gender stereotypes because students partake in activities along gender lines willingly, due to their own personal socialization (Orellana, 1995).

### Synthesis of the Literature

Research over the past ten years has shown the impact early socialization has on a person's gender perceptions. These perceptions impact one's personal ideas on achievement, learning, and directly or indirectly influence the way he or she interacts with materials in the classroom. Teachers and students alike are both products of socialization in our society. The literature shows how teachers' perceptions are largely impacted by society's views of what boys and girls are supposed to take part in and which subject areas are their strengths and weaknesses. These perceptions in turn impact a teacher's instructional practices and student learning. Gender study in the area of education produces a cycle and makes connections between the three areas of socialization, teacher and student perceptions, and instructional practices. Each piece is closely woven together with the others, making gender intertwined with instruction and learning in the American educational system. My study will add to the body of research by further studying the impact of socialization on teacher and student perceptions during the early years of education in a kindergarten class. The study will look at the ways the teacher and students interact, how students interact with each other and with materials, as well as how they take part in the teacher's instruction and learning. Through my study, I will look at the role gender socialization plays in a child's everyday schooling, and how teacher and student perceptions perpetuate gendered perspectives in the classroom.

## Chapter 3

### Design of the Study

#### Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the impact gender has on students in the classroom. I believe that early socialization causes students to create schema about gender and how it plays a role in the world around them. Students then bring these gendered perspectives to school where they are fostered further by teacher's perceptions of gender on student performance and achievement. Understanding a child's early socialization, as well as both teacher and student perceptions on gender, will shine light on how gendering tasks in the classroom impacts student achievement and beliefs. In this study, I look at the impact societal beliefs of gender have on students' gender schema and view of the world, which is formed prior to starting school. This socialization will be coupled with student perceptions of themselves, others, and on academic achievement along gender lines, and how teacher perceptions and actions may further foster or inhibit student embodiment of gender stereotypes.

My study took place in an actual classroom and follows a qualitative research model. Data was collected and analyzed continuously within the classroom over the course of the study. The data represents student/teacher actions and beliefs within an actual classroom community. Throughout the study I was also a participant observer, who interacted with the students on a regular basis, which helped with data collection. Data

was collected through my research journal, observations, field notes, student work, and interviews. Through applying a qualitative approach, I was able to study gender in the classroom and the impact of socialization on the personal perceptions of my participants without disrupting the normal classroom environment. I also had the opportunity to work closely with my sample population of students, which allowed for me to be a participant observer in the classroom community.

### The Context of the Study

The population for this study consists of both male and female, five and six year old, kindergarten students. The sample is taken from one of two split-session kindergarten classes, consisting of forty-three students, at Holly Glen Elementary School in Monroe Township, New Jersey. The morning session has twenty-three students, with eleven male students and twelve female students, and eight students that come from non-English speaking homes. The afternoon session is comprised twenty students, with ten male and ten female students. Consent letters were sent home to all forty-three students' parents to ask permission for their child to take part in my study. Of the forty-three students, I received parental permission for seventeen students, seven girls and ten boys, to participate. Interviews, a picture sort, and mini-lessons were conducted with all seventeen students, while observations were conducted during the daily classroom routines. By the end of the study, the sample was trimmed to four students, two girls and two boys, in order to get an accurate snapshot of the varying gender perceptions of the wider population, while studying the impact of teacher's instruction on students' views of gender. To better understand how the small sample relates to the larger community I consulted the census 2000 results to get a sense of the township's demographics.

Monroe Township's total population, as of the 2000 Census, is 28,967 strong. Monroe is a growing township with many new housing developments underway. Due to its size, the population has a good mix of cultural diversity. The two largest ethnic groups in Monroe Township are Whites and African Americans, with small Native American, Asian, and "other" racial groups making up the rest of the community. The largest racial group in the township is Whites, making up roughly 85% of the population, followed by African Americans with 11%, Asians with 1.2%, Native Americans are 0.2% of the population, and "Other" racial groups amount to 1.8%. From being in Holly Glen I have noticed some students of Arab, or Middle Eastern decent, which would fall under the "Other" race category on the Census results. The community's cultural diversity is thus present in the school district, which is an important factor to consider in creating a school and classroom management plan.

The 2000 Census covered the occupational levels of the residence in Monroe Township. The industries covered ranged from agricultural work to public administration, manufacturing, retail trade, and educational and social services careers. The industry with the largest number of workers in Monroe Township was that of education, health and social services with 19.9%. The next most highly represented industries were retail trade with 16.4% of the workforce, manufacturing with 10.7%, construction with 8.7% and professional and managerial works making up 6.1%. The rest of the occupational industries were small portions of the population with agricultural workers, entertainment, and other services. The Census also stated that 82.4% of the workers in Monroe Township make private wages or have salary jobs, 12.2% are government workers, and 5.1% are self-employed.

The Socio-economic levels in Monroe Township range from those earning less than \$10,000 per year to those making more than \$200,000 per year. The 2000 Census noted that the largest percent of the population, 22.4%, was in the \$50,000 to \$74,999 yearly income range. Most incomes fall in the \$35,000 to \$149,999 range, which holds the largest portion of the population. On the other end, 6.2% of the population falls under the poverty line when it comes to yearly income. Looking at the occupational and socio-economic standing of the community it is apparent that Monroe Township has a diverse community economically, as well as culturally. The diversity within my sample of students models the diversity found in the census results for the district.

### Research Design

The approach to my research was qualitative in nature due to the fact it took place in the natural classroom setting without causing any more disruption to the environment than was needed to conduct my study (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). My approach was also humanistic, in that participants actively participated in the research and data collection while I build a rapport with each and every one of them in the classroom (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). This allowed me to be actively involved with the students on a daily basis, making me a participant observer throughout the course of the study, which spanned four weeks.

The qualitative research model used in the study was a phenomenological approach. The term phenomenology “refers to a person’s perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists external to the person” (Leedy & Ormrod, p. 139). Thus, I considered gender’s influence in the classroom by observing how students portrayed their beliefs about gender through speech, interacting with classmates, the

teacher, and their schoolwork. A phenomenological study attempts to understand a person's perceptions, beliefs, and understandings of a particular situation through studying the phenomena in its natural setting (Leedy & Ormrod, p. 139).

The implementation of my research was as much in the hands of the students involved as it was in mine with students actively participating in data collection by going about their daily classroom routines, taking part in a interview and carrying out a "community helper" picture sort, interacting with peers, and through being active participants in a mini-lesson on "community helpers." Data collected through my research journal and observations, field notes, interviews, a pictures sort, and through interacting with students and their work allowed for me to get a sense of their personal perceptions of gender with little impact of my presence in the classroom.

Observations were a large part of my study. Through observation I took notice of student interaction with peers, the teacher, and learning. During observation I took field notes, which focused on student behaviors, talk, classroom activities and student participation, and personal interactions (Creswell, 2003, p. 188). Through observation, I was also able to take note of instances in which the classroom teacher used gendered-language, whether intentionally or unintentionally, or conducted a task or lesson that was geared towards one gender or the other. My research journal provided a wealth of information gathered through observations that paint a portrait of the classroom environment and its members. My field notes contain records of all instances where gender was a factor in the classroom, whether it was an instance of student interaction, teacher-student interaction, gendered-talk, or even a lesson.



Interviews were also conducted face-to-face with a number of students with the intent to bring forth the opinions and beliefs the participants had revolving around gender (Creswell, p. 188). Interviews were conducted prior to a mini-lesson on “community helpers” in order to get a glimpse of student views on being a girl or boy today. The interview questions are as follows:

1. What do you like about being a girl/boy?
2. What are some things that girls can do that boys cannot do?
3. What are some things that boys can do that girls cannot do?
4. What are some things you think girls are good at?
5. What are some things you think boys are good at?
6. What do you think girls do best at in school?
7. What do you think boys do best at in school?
8. What do you want to be when you grow up?

The use of a picture sort followed Heyman’s (2004) research design, which called for students to choose a picture of either a male or female student to go along with questions that coincided with the pictures of classroom tasks. For my study, a “community helper” picture sort was carried out twice with each student: first accompanying the initial interview, then as a follow-up to the mini-lessons. During the picture sort students were asked to sort important jobs in the community by whether they felt it was a “girl job,” a “boy job,” or both a girl or boy job. The community helpers used in the sort consisted of teacher, doctor, nurse, librarian, veterinarian, police officer, firefighter, mail carrier, and trash collector. Each picture card had the name of the community helper written on it and a gender-neutral symbol to represent it, such as a police car for the police officer, a chalkboard for the teacher, and a book for the librarian. Community helpers was chosen for the picture sort, and as a topic for the mini-lessons,

because not only are many of the careers often portrayed to fit gender stereotypical roles, for example a police officer being portrayed as a man while a teacher is pictured as a woman, but it also gave insight on students' views of gender in the world around them outside of the classroom. Conducting the picture sort prior to the mini-lesson and again after the mini-lesson allowed me to see if the student perceptions were influenced by my instruction during the mini-lessons, whether the student was a member of the gender-neutral group or the gendered-language mini-lesson group.

Mini-lessons on community helpers were the final piece of my study that also produced documentation in the form of student work. The mini-lessons were meant to study whether or not instruction could impact, or even change, student preconceived beliefs of gender through interactive lessons on various community helpers, such as a fireman, police officer, nurse, doctor, and teacher. All of these community helpers are usually "assigned" a specific gender due to our society's gender beliefs related to the occupation. Through conducting the picture sort prior to the lesson I studied the students' initial beliefs on these occupations to see if students of both sexes followed society's gender stereotypical roles. Students were randomly grouped into groups of four or five to take part in a fifteen minute mini-lesson on community helpers during time usually allotted for guided-reading. Since it was during guided-reading books were used as a teaching tool during the small-group lessons to spark student discussion and get insight on their gender views in the community.

The mini-lessons were taught to four small groups, two groups were "gender-neutral" while the other two were instructed along the lines of traditional gender stereotypes. The "gender-neutral" groups, one in the A.M. Kindergarten class and the

other in the P.M. class, were participants in a gender-neutral learning activity, in which the teacher used gender-neutral language, such as “police officer” or referred to a teacher as “he or she,” while using the book *Where Do They Go?*, which portrays men and women as community helpers free of society’s usual gender stereotypes. The “gendered” groups, had instruction geared toward society’s gender stereotypes and the teacher used gendered-language, such as referring to community helpers as police men or fire men. Like with the “gender-neutral” group, a book was also incorporated in the “gendered” mini-lesson entitled *Busy Workers*, which portrayed community helpers in stereotypical male and female roles. The students’ perceptions were then considered again after taking part in the mini-lessons, through a writing activity. Following the book and discussion in all four groups, students were asked to finish the sentence, “I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.” Each student picked a community helper they would like to be when they grow up and state why. After writing the sentence the students drew a picture to go along with it. The student work was collected to study perceptions they might have as a product of their own personal socialization and the instruction of the mini-lesson they were a part of. The perceptions were also considered again when each student was asked to do the “community helper” picture sort again to see whether or not they rearranged the careers as a result of teacher instruction. For an in-depth look at the “gender-neutral” and “gendered” mini-lessons refer to the appendix to view the full lesson plans.

### Data Sources

During the study data was collected on an ongoing basis to note student perceptions of gender in the classroom. Data was collected through observations that led to the wealth of field notes in my personal research journal, face-to-face interviews with

the students, the results of the “community helper” picture sort carried out by each student twice, and student work produced during the mini-lessons. Frequency charts were also applied to field notes and classroom activities to note the frequency of which certain behaviors were exhibited or students of a particular gender reacted to something in the classroom. The data was used to paint a picture of how gender impacts students in a classroom setting when it comes to student interactions with the teacher, peers, their own personal learning, and views of the world.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Creswell’s steps of interpretation, which include on-going data analysis, organization, interpretation, and descriptive writing (Creswell, 2003). The data was analyzed based on interpretation and coding, which allowed me to find themes within my research findings. Data was clustered together based on similar topics and coded in order to synthesize it and see how each piece fit into the larger picture (Creswell, 2003). Through analyzing my field notes, interview results, and student work I was able to pinpoint two themes and patterns within my data, which were “gender-neutral” and “gendered” interactions, instances, and responses. While synthesizing my data I found classroom instances and interactions, as well as student responses to the interview questions, the picture sort results, and the writing assignment, at the end of the mini-lessons, fell either along gender stereotypical lines or were “gender-neutral,” which were not biased by society’s gender “norms.” Thus, these themes led to trimming down my sample size to eight students who I feel embody the essence of the patterns I saw in the classroom. The small sample size allowed for the construction of a research narrative, which thoroughly synthesizes my findings through meaningful vignettes the paint

snapshots of what happened in the classroom while conducting my research through the voice and actions of the students.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis and Findings

#### Introduction

After conducting my research in the classroom I found myself left with a wealth of data. Through classroom observations I was able to step back and truly observe how my cooperating teacher interacted with the students early on in my student teaching placement, and how she perpetuated her own personal gender stereotypes when talking or interacting with the students. Observation not only gave me insight into the teacher's gender perceptions, but also the students' early perceptions of gender. Being in a kindergarten classroom, it allowed me to really get a sense of the impact early socialization at home, outside of school, influenced students' gender perceptions and how they interacted with the teacher and classmates. Being only five and six years old, kindergarten is just the beginning of the students' school experience. Thus, conducting my study with this early age group really allowed me to explore the gender schema children develop through socialization, which Heyman (2004) discussed in her study, and how that in turn influences the students' perceptions of gender in the classroom. Bigler (1995) noted students are socialized both at home and in school in order to meet society's "gender norms." The studies conducted by these two researchers helped guide my data

analysis by allowing me to pinpoint themes within my data to explore in order to paint a picture of gender's impact in the classroom.

### Themes

There are two core themes at the heart of my study: teacher and student gender perceptions and socialization. Conducting my research I found that these two themes are closely interrelated and almost inseparable. The teacher's perceptions impact the classroom environment and how students are socialized toward meeting society's "gender norms," which then impacts the students' gender perceptions. However, the students also bring gender perceptions into the classroom from the socialization that occurs at home and in the world outside of school. To see how all of these factors interact and influence gender's role in the classroom I conducted my research through several means in order to get a clearer picture of how all of these themes tie together. Since the themes are so closely interrelated, my data analysis has been organized into three main parts. Part One: Teacher Gender Perceptions & Student Socialization; Part Two: Teacher Gender Perceptions & Instruction Practices; Part Three: Student Gender Perceptions. Each part explores gender's influence in the classroom in different ways in order to see how the teacher's perceptions and instructional practices impact the students' views of gender both inside and outside the classroom.

### Part One: Teacher Gender Perceptions and Student Socialization

This section focuses on the teacher's perceptions of gender prior to conducting the interviews, picture sorts, and mini-lessons with the students. Here data was obtained through classroom observations. This section focuses on how the classroom teacher perpetuated her own personal gender stereotypes through how she talked to students,

interacted with the students, and instructional activities carried out in the classroom. Jones (2000) points out in her study, on teachers' behavior in the classroom, that teachers need to realize their own personal gender perceptions and how they act towards students of different genders to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes in the classroom. When I discussed gender with my cooperating teacher, she admitted that she was never fully aware of her own gender bias but now that I was conducting a study she was more gender conscious. My observations proved that my cooperating teacher became more gender conscious as she interacted with the students because I only found a few instances of gender in the classroom.

The most common instance of gendered teacher talk being perpetuated by my cooperating teacher occurred after circle time, when students would be dismissed a few at a time to pack up to go home. On many occasions students were dismissed based on appearance or the type of clothes they were wearing. The teacher would say things like, "If you have a dress on you may go pack up," or "If you have a ponytail you may go pack up and get your snack." Whenever gender became apparent during this usual classroom routine, it seemed to favor the girls. Since girls wear dresses and tend to have longer hair than their male classmates the students began to catch on. The boys in the class would make comments amongst themselves, "Boys don't wear dresses," or "Boys don't wear ponytails." However, there was one day where a boy in the classroom did fall victim to gender stereotypes:

**Teacher:** "Did everyone like that story?"

**Students:** (In Unison) "YEAH!"

**Teacher:** "That is one of my favorite stories, I'm glad you enjoyed it. Let's see who is ready for snack."



The teacher scans the students seated on the carpet.

**Teacher:** “If you are wearing blue today you may go pack up and get your snack.”

Several students get off of the rug and go to their cubbies.

**Teacher:** “If you have long hair you may go get your snack.”

Four girls from the class go pack up and two little boys look over at a classmate.

**Boy 1:** “She said the girls can pack up.”

**Boy 2:** “Yeah, you have long hair.”

They looked at their classmate, who was wearing a bun on top of his head wondering why “she” didn’t go pack up.

**Boy 3:** “I’m not a girl!”

This happened several times in the classroom, where an ELL student from India was repeatedly mistaken for a girl due to the fact he wore a bun on top of his head because in his culture it was a tradition for the males to grow their hair long. With the teacher dismissing students to pack up using gendered identifications, which were then often perpetuated when the students who fit them stood up from the carpet, it was apparent that the students were being socialized to these very normative expects of gender. When girls were standing up from their seats on the carpet when the teacher would dismiss the students with long hair the students began to assume that their male classmate was a girl based on appearance. These observations made it clear that the teacher’s choice of words can truly influence students’ gender perceptions intentionally or unintentionally. That is why when I began to teach circle time I dismissed students not based on personal appearance, but instead by the things like the colors they may have been wearing or the table they sat at during the day.

The other powerful instance of gender in the classroom was an actual instructional activity the teacher planned for the letter “K.” The teacher read the story, *King Big Good in the Bathtub*, to the class and discussed how the word “king” starts with the letter “K.” The students enjoyed the story and were excited when the teacher told them that they were going to make king’s crowns for the letter “K.”

**Teacher:** “When I dismiss you get your crayon box and scissors and go to a table when I call your name. But first let me show you the crown we are going to make.”

The teacher holds up her crown and reads what is written on it.

**Teacher:** “My crown has jewels and gems on it and I wrote my name, King Jones. You can decorate your crowns however you would like. Who can tell me what word on the crown starts with ‘K’?”

Students raise their hands excitedly.

**Teacher:** “Hayley.”

**Hayley:** “King starts with ‘K’.”

**Teacher:** “Great! What are you going to write after the word king on your crown?”

**Hayley:** “King Hayley.”

The students laugh.

**Hayley:** “But I’m a girl, can I put Queen Hayley?”

**Teacher:** “Good question, you are right girls are queens but today we are learning about the letter ‘K’ so we are all going to write ‘king’.”

The students were then broken up into small groups to make king’s crowns. The girls in my group asked several times why they could not write queen and asked if the class would be making queen’s crowns for the letter person “Q.” When I later asked my cooperating teacher if they would be making queen’s crowns she said no, and commented

on how she knew that was not fair since the girls had to make king's crowns. The teacher was gender conscious enough to realize that a gender stereotype was perpetuated, but did not plan to be fair and balanced when the week came to teach the letter "Q." This particular activity made it obvious how an innocent classroom learning activity can spark questions about gender and show the impact gender stereotypes and perceptions, both the teacher and students have, can impact the classroom.

Overall, my cooperating teacher was gender conscious once she realized the topic of my research. My observations noted only a few instances where gender became an issue in the classroom and how it brought about the teacher's and students' own personal gender stereotypes and perceptions. These instances made it clear to me that the students already had preconceived notions of gender that they brought with them to kindergarten and through the classroom door each day. Thus, supporting the concept that early socialization inside and outside of school does shape young children's gender schema and how they view the world around them.

### Part Two: Teacher Gender Perceptions and Instructional Practices

Conducting my early research I found numerous studies on how instructional practices used in the classroom could perpetuate or inhibit gender stereotyping. Orellana (1995) and Jones (1995) influenced my own study because they stressed how a teacher's pedagogical style, use of language, and interaction with students across subject areas could perpetuate gender stereotypes in the classroom. Due to this, I wanted to incorporate instruction into my study, and did so through the mini-lessons I conducted with small groups of students on community helpers. The mini-lessons were meant to study whether or not instruction and, more directly, teacher's use of language could impact students'

preconceived beliefs of gender. Students were randomly grouped into groups of four or five to take part in a fifteen minute mini-lesson on community helpers during guided-reading. Books were used as a teaching tool during the small-group lessons to spark student discussion and get insight on their gender views in the community. Mini-lessons were taught to four small groups, two groups were “gender-neutral” while the other two were instructed along the lines of traditional gender stereotypes.

The “gender-neutral” groups listened to the story, *Where Do They Go?*, a book that used illustrations of people getting ready for work. On each page was a man or woman with picture clues that allowed for student predictions. I chose this book because it allowed for the students to predict where they thought each person worked and what they did for a living, which gave insight into their preconceived gender stereotypes of community helpers. Prior to the lesson students brainstormed and discussed different community helpers they knew and why their occupations were important. Throughout the activity I made sure to use “gender-neutral” language, referring to occupations by saying things such as “firefighter,” instead of “fireman,” even if a student referred to the occupation as a “fireman.”

Both the A.M. and P.M. sessions had a “gender-neutral” group made up of four students each. The A.M. group consisted of two girls and two boys, whereas the P.M. group consisted of one girl and three boys. In both sessions the groups were taught the same exact way starting off with the brainstorming activity, the story and discussion, then each student completed a “I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_ .,” card about a community helper they would like to be. Here is a vignette that gives a snapshot of one of the “gender-neutral” group lessons:

It is the end of the day in the A.M. kindergarten class and students are making their way to different tables for small-groups. I call my four students back to my table for guided reading. The students walk over and take a seat at the table with their crayon boxes as they small talk.

**Miss M.:** "Today we are going to read a story about people who help us in our community. Can anyone tell me some of the important jobs people have in our town?"

The students raise their hands after giving it some thought.

**Miss M.:** "Hayley, what job do you think is important?"

**Hayley:** "A fireman."

**Miss M.:** "You're right a firefighter is an important person in the community. What does a firefighter do for us?"

**Nick:** "They put out fires but policemen catch bad guys."

**Miss M.:** "A police officer is another important community helper because they do keep us safe. Today we are going to read a story about community helpers and it is like a guessing game. The story is called *Where Do They Go?* and we are going to guess where they go to work."

Miss M. reads the story and stops on page three. There is a picture of a woman holding a white lab coat with a stethoscope and syringes bordering the page.

**Miss M.:** "From looking at this picture who thinks they know where this lady might work?"

Students study the picture and raise their hands.

**Nick:** "At a hospital."

**Miss M.:** "What might she be then?"

**Hayley:** "A nurse."

**Nick:** "I think she is a doctor."

**Miss M.:** "You both might be correct she could be a doctor or a nurse let's take a vote. Who thinks she is a nurse, raise your hand?"

The two girls in the group raise their hands.

**Miss M.:** “Who thinks she is a doctor?”

The two boys raise their hand as Miss M. turns the page and reveals she is in fact a doctor. Hayley groans and laughs.

**Miss M.:** “Are you surprised she was a doctor Hayley?”

**Hayley:** “No, I thought she was a nurse because my mommy is a nurse.”

The group continued reading the story and made predictions on the page where a man is getting ready for work as a teacher and another child’s mother is getting ready for work as a firefighter. Both the A.M. and P.M. groups thought that the doctor was indeed a nurse, and when I questioned the students they always pointed out that they knew a lady that was a nurse or that their doctor was a man. The students also thought that the man getting ready for work as a teacher was either a principal or someone who worked at an office. They were shocked that it was a teacher because they looked to the teacher in their classroom, who was a woman. Therefore, how the students interacted with the text did show that even at a early age they had already been socialized to see different genders as “fit” for certain careers.

After the story the students completed the activity where they picked a community helper they would like to be and why. What I found was that even though they were in the “gender-neutral” groups that read a story that depicted men and women in jobs that went against society’s traditional representations, the majority of the students still picked jobs along gender lines. All five of the boys in the “gender-neutral” groups said they wanted to be a police officer. The reasoning behind their choice revolved around the fact that they “catch the bad guys” and keep us safe. The boys also thought police officers were brave and courageous. The girl in the P.M. “gender-neutral” group

also chose to be a police officer and wrote, "I want to be a police officer because they arrest bad guys." Being that she was in a group with three boys and has three older brothers at home I feel that she chose a police officer because of the make-up of the group she was placed in. The two girls in the A.M. group both chose to be a nurse because they help people and keep them healthy. The boys tended to chose a career that was viewed as courageous and powerful, whereas the girls went with community helpers that were caring and nurturing.

To further study the impact of a teacher's use of language I taught two groups a mini-lesson on community helpers using gendered-talk and a book that showed men and women in more "traditional" roles. The A.M. "gendered" group was made up of five students, three girls and two boys, while the P.M. group had four students, with one girl and three boys. The "gendered" groups' lessons followed the same format as the "gender-neutral" groups with a brainstorming session, a story and discussion, and the writing activity. For the "gendered" groups the book *Busy Workers* was used because it showed men and women in stereotypical careers based on gender, with a woman as a teacher and a nurse and man as a firefighter and a doctor. I also used gendered-talk throughout the lesson referring to different community helpers as fire men, police men, or to the teacher and nurse as "she."

It's 3:00 P.M. and Miss M. is sitting at the back table with four students. Other student's are moving about the classroom as they finish up snack and go to their small groups. The three boys at the table are playing with their pencils and crayon boxes while the little girl sits quietly looking at the teacher. Miss M. smiles at her as she takes out the book, *Busy Workers*.

**Miss M.:** "We are going to talk about community helpers today."

Can anyone tell me what some important jobs people have in our community?"

**Michael:** "Cops are important."

**Miss M.:** "Yes policemen are important, what do policemen do for us?"

**Michael:** "They arrest bad people."

**Miss M.:** "Yes they do. What is another important job?"

**Bianca:** "My mom is a nurse is that important?"

**Miss. M.:** "Yes nurses are very important. What do you think your mom does at work?"

**Bianca:** "Takes care of sick people."

The group brainstorms for a couple more minutes and discuss why a fireman and electrician are also important to the community. Then Miss M. introduces the book.

**Miss M.:** "I am going to read *Busy Workers* and it is going to tell us all about important community helpers."

Miss M. starts to read the book as the students listen and comment on the pictures. Miss M. stops on the page with a picture of a classroom.

**Miss M.:** "Who is this important member of our community?"

**Andrew:** "A teacher."

**Miss M.:** "What does she do?"

**Andrew:** "She's the lady that teaches us."

As the story was read I stopped and discussed the pictures of various community helpers. In the book *Busy Workers* the firefighter, police officers, and doctor are all depicted as men, whereas the teacher, waitress, nurse, and librarian are depicted as women. The pictures made it easy to use gendered-talk when discussing the pictures with the "gendered" groups and the students did not question the depictions of the community helpers at all. After the story the students did the same writing activity as the "gender-



neutral” groups completing the sentence, “I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”

Again, I found that the students’ chose community helpers they would like to be according to traditional gender stereotypes. The four girls chose to be nurturing community helpers, fitting the gender stereotype that women are more nurturing and caring, writing that they would want to be veterinarians, nurses, or a doctor to help people and animals. One of the girls in the A.M. group wrote doctor but then changed her mind commenting, “Actually I am going to be a nurse,” as she drew a nurse on the paper under her sentence. Her actions showed again how early socialization has kindergarten students already categorizing people and careers based on gender stereotypes and society’s “norms.” The five boys, like their “gender-neutral,” counterparts chose to be police officers, firefighters, and an electrician. They commented that these jobs were “cool” because they helped people stay safe. The little boy who wanted to be an electrician told me that his dad is an electrician when I asked him about his choice. Many of the students in both the “gender-neutral” and “gendered” groups chose the occupations of their parents. Thus, this phenomenon shows how influential early socialization and observations children make in the world around them impacts their beliefs on gender long before they walk into the classroom in pre-school and kindergarten.

The mini-lessons gave me the opportunity to see whether or not a teacher’s instructional practices can impact students’ gender perceptions. Through the mini-lessons I focused on the use of teacher’s use of language, which is the biggest way a teacher can impose his or her own personal gender perceptions on students unintentionally. During my instruction I was intentionally using “gender neutral” or “gendered” talk to see whether or not it influenced student perceptions on gender. What I found was that

students' perceptions on gender were not drastically changed by the mini-lessons no matter which group the students were in. In order to fully study the impact of teacher talk and instruction I feel further lessons would need to be conducted through a full unit on community helpers. At the conclusion of a unit the impact of a teacher's use of language may have been greater on the students' gender perceptions.

### Part Three: Student Gender Perceptions

Heyman (2004) argued that early socialization has a lasting effect on a person's later views of the world. To fully understand a teacher's impact on a student's gender perception it was necessary to look at the preconceived gender perceptions of all of the students involved in my study. Prior to carrying out the mini-lessons, I interviewed all of the students and had them sort pictures of community helpers into categories based on whether or not they thought it was a "boy" job, "girl" job, or a job "both" boys and girls could have. This allowed me to see what gender perceptions they may already have prior to walking into the classroom each day. Bigler (1995) found that children's gender schema leads them to develop "functional categories" to organize people and roles in society, which is why a picture sort was incorporated into my own study to obtain further insight on the impact of early socialization on students' gender perceptions. Having the students complete the picture sort after the lesson gave me the opportunity to see if the language I used, as a teacher, impacted the students' gender perceptions or if their early socialization inside had made them set in their views. Below you will find a table that indicates the picture sort results for the entire sample population, which gives a glimpse of the gender perceptions of the group both before and after the community helper mini-lesson.

Table 4.1: Sample Population Picture Sort Results

Before Lesson:

After Lesson:

Community Helper	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Police Officer	14	1	2	15	2	0
Firefighter	15	1	1	11	3	3
Veterinarian	5	8	4	7	9	1
Librarian	1	14	2	2	10	5
Teacher	0	16	1	1	14	2
Trash Collector	17	0	0	17	0	0
Mail Carrier	9	1	7	7	3	7
Doctor	10	4	3	8	5	4
Nurse	0	14	3	1	15	1

To get a more in-depth sense of the gender perceptions the students brought with them into the classroom I chose four students, two girls and two boys, from the sample population of seventeen that I felt captured the essence of the entire population's views. A girl and boy from both the "gender-neutral" and "gendered" groups were chosen in order to study whether or not the teacher's use of language during the mini-lesson impacted or changed the students' personal gender perceptions. In this section I will look at the four students' interview responses, picture sort results, and the community helper

they chose during the writing portion of the mini-lesson to see the early gender perceptions of kindergarten students.

The first interaction I had with each student prior to the mini-lesson was when I conducted pre-lesson interviews and picture sorts with all of the students. With each interview and picture sort my interaction was minimal and the students were made aware that all of their answers were correct because it was based on personal opinions. During the pre-lesson interviews and picture sort my role was to be a facilitator, which consisted of asking the questions and giving the directions for the picture sort. Prior to the picture sort all of the students were told that they were going to be shown pictures of different community helpers and they were going to place them under “boy” jobs if they thought it was a job a boy would have, a “girl” job if they thought it was a job a girl would have, or “both” if they thought it was a job both boys or girls had. After conducting the sort each student was also asked what made them sort the community helpers in the way they did.

#### Student One: Mary

Mary was part of a “gender-neutral” group during the mini-lesson. Her interview responses and picture sort results are as follows:

- Q:** What do you like about being a girl?  
**A:** “Wearing dresses.”
- Q:** What are some things that girls can do that boys cannot do?  
**A:** “We get to wear make-up.”
- Q:** What are some things boys can do that girls cannot do?  
**A:** “Build a house.”
- Q:** What are some things you think girls are good at?  
**A:** “Counting to 100 and counting things.”
- Q:** What are some things you think boys are good at?  
**A:** “Fishing and hunting.”
- Q:** What do you think girls do best at in school?  
**A:** “Doing their work.”
- Q:** What do you think boys do best at in school?

A: "Coloring."

Q: What do you want to be when you grow up?

A: "I want to be a nurse."

Overall, Mary's interview responses seemed to perpetuate some gender stereotypes, considering she talked about girls wearing dresses and make-up while boys were good at building houses, fishing. Mary captured the essence of the girls' interview responses in that they tended to revolve around clothes, interacting with others, and other stereotypical girl behaviors. During the interview Mary had stated that she would like to be a nurse when she grew up, which stayed consistent with her career choice at the end of the mini-lesson. Even though she was a member of a "gender-neutral" group, Mary wanted to be a nurse. During the writing activity she wrote, "I want to be a nurse because they help people stay healthy." Many of the girls involved in the study stated they wanted to be nurses, dancers, teachers, or veterinarians when they grew up during the interviews, which correlated with the career choices during the writing activity during the mini-lessons for the most part. Overall, the girls tended to lean toward occupations that they saw as caring, nurturing, and allowed them to work with other people. All character traits that are stereotypical of women's roles in society.

Table 4.2: Student One Picture Sort Results

Before Lesson:

After Lesson:

	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Community Helper						
Police Officer	X				X	
Firefighter	X				X	

Community Helper	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Veterinarian		X			X	
Librarian		X				X
Teacher			X			X
Trash Collector	X			X		
Mail Carrier	X					X
Doctor		X				X
Nurse		X			X	

Looking at Mary's picture sort results prior to and after the mini-lesson shows a considerable shift. Prior to the lesson her categorizations fit what is seen as traditional gender roles for each career. After taking part in a "gender-neutral" lesson on community helpers her results shifted considerably. The student moved many of the community helpers she had once viewed as a "boys" job to "girls" or "both" after taking part in the interactive lesson that incorporated a book that showed men and women in non-traditional roles. However, even with her shift, she still wrote that she wanted to be a nurse when she was older, a career that she viewed as a woman's job both prior to and after the mini-lesson.

Student Two: Michael

Michael was also part of a "gender-neutral" group during the mini-lesson. His interview responses and picture sort results are as follows:

- Q: What do you like about being a boy?  
A: "Playing with my dad. We play basketball, football, and soccer."  
Q: What are some things that girls can do that boys cannot do?  
A: "Girls can play with dolls."  
Q: What are some things boys can do that girls cannot do?  
A: "Play basketball."  
Q: What are some things you think girls are good at?  
A: "Jump rope."  
Q: What are some things you think boys are good at?  
A: "Playing football."  
Q: What do you think girls do best at in school?  
A: "Doing homework."  
Q: What do you think boys do best at in school?  
A: "Writing and reading."  
Q: What do you want to be when you grow up?  
A: "A doctor."

Michael's interview responses also showed a tendency towards socially constructed gender roles for boys and girls. He saw boys as good at sports and academics, while he saw girls as nurturing, more likely to follow directions and get their schoolwork done. Like Michael, many of the boys discussed sports, building, climbing and being active during their interviews. The boys also saw girls as caring, people who liked to play with others, and liked to dress up. When he was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up Michael said a doctor. During the writing activity he changed what he would like to be to a police officer and wrote, "I want to be a police officer because they drive fast." A majority of the boys stated they wanted to be police officers and firefighters when they grew up during the pre-lesson interviews and the writing activity during the mini-lessons. The boys tended to choose occupations that were viewed as "cool," exciting, and courageous, which are traits that make these careers often portrayed as male careers in our society.

Table 4.3: Student Two Picture Sort Results

Before Lesson:

After Lesson:

Community Helper	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Police Officer	X			X		
Firefighter	X			X		
Veterinarian	X				X	
Librarian		X			X	
Teacher		X			X	
Trash Collector	X			X		
Mail Carrier	X			X		
Doctor	X			X		
Nurse		X			X	

Michael’s picture sort results prior to and after the mini-lesson did not show much change. In fact, the only community helper he shifted after the mini-lesson was a veterinarian, which he moved from a “boy” job to a “girl” job. Even after taking part in a “gender-neutral” lesson on community helpers, Michael’s results still portrayed society’s traditional gender stereotypical male and female roles. He saw careers that are largely viewed as “male” jobs in our society, including police officers, firefighters, and doctors, as “boy” jobs, and stereotypical “female” careers, such as teachers and nurses, as “girl”



jobs. These results mimic many of the students' responses in this study. A majority of the students that participated in this study saw the community helpers in traditional ways, which shows the impact of early socialization and how children are socialized to perceive people in stereotypical ways. It also shows how one does indeed get set in his or her own gender perceptions at an early age. Even though Michael was in the "gender-neutral" group, my instruction was not enough to change his views.

### Student Three: Amanda

Amanda was part of a "gendered" group during the mini-lesson. Her interview responses and picture sort results are as follows:

- Q: What do you like about being a girl?  
A: "Coloring and reading."  
Q: What are some things that girls can do that boys cannot do?  
A: "Girls wear make-up."  
Q: What are some things boys can do that girls cannot do?  
A: "Play Spiderman, I don't like Spiderman."  
Q: What are some things you think girls are good at?  
A: "Dancing."  
Q: What are some things you think boys are good at?  
A: "Football."  
Q: What do you think girls do best at in school?  
A: "Doing homework and reading."  
Q: What do you think boys do best at in school?  
A: "They talk a lot."  
Q: What do you want to be when you grow up?  
A: "A dancer."

Amanda's responses, like Mary's, also perpetuated gender stereotypes. Again, the student saw things that were acceptable for girls and boys to do, or that girls and boys traditionally take part in. She said that girls are good at dancing because she goes to dance classes, which shows how girls and boys are socialized differently in our society. Little girls are often take part in dance, cheerleading, and Girl Scouts outside of school

while boys play sports. These “gendered” extra-curricular activities were apparent during the interviews, which in turn shows the impact of early socialization on the students’ early gender perceptions. During the interview Amanda said she wanted to be a dancer because she likes dancing, but during the writing activity she changed her answer. Amanda was part of a “gendered” group during the community helper mini-lesson. When it came time for the writing activity she stated and wrote “I want to be a doctor because they take care of people.” Yet, after writing her sentence she thought to herself and commented, “Actually I should be a nurse,” and proceeded to draw a nurse for her picture. When I asked her what made her change her mind she said, “Girls are nurses like my mom.”

Table 4.4 Student Three Picture Sort Results

Before Lesson:

After Lesson:

Community Helper	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Police Officer	X			X		
Firefighter	X			X		
Veterinarian		X			X	
Librarian		X			X	
Teacher		X			X	
Trash Collector	X			X		
Mail Carrier		X				X

Community Helper	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Doctor			X	X		
Nurse		X			X	

This student's picture sort shows little change prior to the lesson and after the lesson, which again was found with a majority of the students' results. The lack of changes shows how socialization impacts a student's gender perceptions prior to coming to school and how easily we get set in our views when gender stereotypes are reinforced in the environment around us. Amanda was part of a "gendered" group who took part in a mini-lesson that portrayed community helpers in stereotypical, traditional gender roles. Therefore, her preconceived gender perceptions were reinforced resulting in little change in the way she sorted the pictures prior to and after the lesson. The one drastic shift was with her view of a doctor, a career she saw as both prior to the mini-lesson, but that she changed to a "boy" job after reading a story that portrayed a doctor as a man. When she wrote that she wanted to be a doctor during the writing activity she even went so far to change her response to a nurse because that is what her mom does, and because she sees "girls" as nurses.

#### Student Four: Ricky

Ricky was also part of a "gendered" group during the mini-lesson. His interview responses and picture sort results are as follows:

**Q:** What do you like about being a boy?

**A:** "Playing, drawing, and playing outside."

**Q:** What are some things that girls can do that boys cannot do?

- A: "They are nice to us."  
 Q: What are some things boys can do that girls cannot do?  
 A: "Boys can play with trucks, throw snowballs and footballs and eat gum."  
 Q: What are some things you think girls are good at?  
 A: "They are good at coloring in the lines."  
 Q: What are some things you think boys are good at?  
 A: "Playing baseball."  
 Q: What do you think girls do best at in school?  
 A: "Cleaning up and coloring in the lines."  
 Q: What do you think boys do best at in school?  
 A: "Drawing and reading."  
 Q: What do you want to be when you grow up?  
 A: "A policeman."

Ricky's interview responses portray gender stereotypes much like his classmates. He saw girls as caring, friendly and neat. Ricky observed that his female classmates were better at coloring in the lines, which studies show girls have better fine motor skills at that age than boys. He also tended to see boys as more physical and into sports that include the use of gross motor skills. During the interview and writing activity Ricky stated he wanted to be a police officer when he grew up and wrote, "I want to be a police officer because they help firefighters." Again, this student shows the tendency for the male students to choose occupations that were stereotypically viewed as a "man's job" in our society.

Table 4.5: Student Four Picture Sort Results

Before Lesson:

After Lesson:

	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Community Helper						
Police Officer	X			X		
Firefighter	X			X		

Community Helper	Boy	Girl	Both	Boy	Girl	Both
Veterinarian		X		X		
Librarian		X				X
Teacher		X			X	
Trash Collector	X			X		
Mail Carrier			X		X	
Doctor	X				X	
Nurse		X			X	

This student's picture sort results shows again how the majority of students in the study did not change their views drastically prior to and after the mini-lessons. His results also show the tendency for the students to categorize the community helpers along "gender lines," with police officers, firefighters, and trash collectors traditionally being seen as "boy" jobs because they require courage and strength. The jobs viewed as nurturing and caring, such as a nurse and a teacher, were often categorized as "girl" jobs.

### Conclusions

The students' interview responses and picture sort results, both prior to and after the mini-lessons, overwhelmingly supported our society's stereotypical gender roles. Moreover, drastic shifts in the way students categorized the community helpers prior to and after the lesson, like in Mary's case, were rare. For the most part students' categorizations stayed consistent, and these categorizations consistently showed the

perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Both male and female students saw “boys” as stronger, more active, and suited for occupations that required courage and strength. Thus, students overwhelmingly sorted the police officer, firefighter, trash collector, and doctor under “boy” jobs since they are often carried out by men in our society. Careers that involved nurturing and that are predominantly carried out and portrayed by women in our society, including the teacher, nurse, and librarian, were categorized as “girl” jobs by a vast majority of the students.

Most importantly, I found that no matter what group the students were in during the mini-lesson, whether it was the “gender-neutral” or “gendered” group, students’ sorts did not change much from before the lesson to after the lesson. This brings me to conclude that, much like Bigler (1995) and Heyman (2000) found in their studies, early socialization does indeed have lasting effects on a person’s later perceptions of the world, and the “functional categories” we organize people into, which is a direct result of children’s early social learning. Therefore, the students involved in my study had already had enough life experiences, interactions, and environments that helped socialize them to our society’s traditional gender schema. Their responses were direct results of what they have seen, heard, and experienced in the world around them both inside and outside of school, which also has led me to realize the minimal impact my mini-lessons had on the students’ perceptions. If I had the opportunity to teach a more in-depth unit on community helpers with the use of “gender-neutral” or “gendered” language for an extended period of time the result of my influence as a teacher may have been greater. Even though my teaching did not cause drastic changes in student views, the mini-lessons

did influence the students in some way, which I found with Mary and Amanda, and the minimal shifts in the way some students sorted the community helpers.

In conclusion, my study found that gender does impact what happens in the classroom, which is a direct result of the socialization students have been apart of that impacts every member of the classroom community's gender perceptions. This socialization and the individual's perceptions, whether the individual is the teacher or a student, in turn impacts the way the person interacts with the other members of the classroom community, the material that is being presented, and the instructional methods the teacher incorporates throughout the day. The socialization that takes place in the classroom on a daily basis also accounts for why a person's gender perceptions and view of the world is always evolving and changing due to personal experience and interaction with one's environment.

## Chapter 5

### Summary of Study

#### Conclusions

The purpose of study was to examine the impact gender has in the classroom. I chose the topic of gender not only because it could be studied in any classroom setting, but because I found that gender does indeed play a role in the classroom as I conducted my literature review, which lead to the core question guiding this study: “How do teachers respond to gender in the classroom and in what ways does it impact student learning and perceptions?” Gender impacts the way a teacher interacts with the students, the students interact with the teacher, and the way students interact with each other whether the actions are done intentionally or unintentionally. A lot of the previous literature on the topic of gender in the classroom looked at the role teachers’ gender perceptions play on male and female students’ views of themselves and academic success. Prior researchers had conducted numerous studies on teacher’s perceptions of gender and academic ability, and have proven that teachers do have varying perceptions of male and female student performance, which directly impacts students’ own gender perceptions.



Early on in my study it was evident that focusing on teacher perceptions was not enough to best understand the impact gender has in the classroom. Students bring their own gender perceptions into the classroom as early as pre-kindergarten. Thus, I knew that I must focus on students preconceived notions of gender during my study, as well as teacher perceptions. While conducting my literature review I became aware that in order to fully understand the perceptions of the teacher and students in a classroom I had to consider one key factor: socialization. Understanding the socialization of a child both inside and outside of school allows for a better understanding of how gender stereotypes and perceptions are fostered in American schools. Children begin to form schema about the world around them from an early age through being socialized to meet society's norms by their parents, teachers, the media, and others around them. Students spend a lot of time in school and the teacher is responsible for educating and socializing them so that they grow up to be productive, successful citizens.

A final core piece of my study was examining instructional practices in the classroom, especially the teacher's use of language, and how it impacts students' gender beliefs. During my review of the literature it became apparent that socialization, teacher and student gender perceptions, and instructional practices were all interrelated factors, which influence one another, thus in order to fully understand the impact gender has in the classroom I had to take those three pieces into consideration in my own study.

Once the core themes were in place, and I found out my student teaching placement was in kindergarten, I began to construct the design of my study. Observations and field notes were taken during the early stages of my student teaching to examine the teacher-student and student-student interactions in the classroom in relation to gender.

Through observation I was able to note any instances where teacher or student gender perceptions came to light during the usual daily classroom routines and instruction. To examine the gender perceptions students brought with them into the kindergarten classroom I designed a interview, picture sort, and mini-lesson that took into consideration student views of the world around them. The interview asked students questions about their experiences, likes and dislikes, and views related to gender. A community helper picture sort and mini-lesson was then created to see how students view gender in the outside community, using careers that are often gender stereotyped as “male” or “female” occupations. The interviews were conducted with seventeen kindergarten students, seven girls and ten boys, along with the community helper picture sort prior to the mini-lesson to document students’ preconceived notions of.

To study the impact of teacher perceptions and instructional practices, students were randomly grouped for a community helper mini-lesson. The groups consisted of four or five students, two groups in the A.M. kindergarten class and two groups in the P.M. class. A group from each the morning and afternoon class was designated as a “gender-neutral” group or a “gendered” group for a mini-lesson on community helpers. The “gender-neutral” groups read a story during guided reading that showed community helpers like a teacher, police officer, and firefighter in ways that go against society’s usual representations of those who “usually” fit the careers. The teacher also used “gender-neutral” language during the mini-lesson with these groups, referring to them as a police officer rather than a policeman, or the teacher as he or she. The “gendered” groups were taught using society’s traditional gender stereotypes. The book used with these two groups showed men as police officers, doctors, and firefighters, and women as

nurses, teachers and librarians. The teacher also used “gendered” talk, referring to the police officer as a “policeman,” and a teacher as “she.” To study the impact of the teacher’s instructional practices and language the community helper picture sort was completed with each student again after the mini-lesson to see if any perceptions had changed.

At the conclusion of my study, I found that gender does impact what happens in the classroom as a direct result of the socialization students have been apart of, which influenced their personal gender perceptions and view of the world. The individual’s gender perceptions, whether the individual is the teacher or a student, impacts the way the person interacts with the other members of the classroom community, the material that is being presented, and the instructional practices the teacher incorporates in the classroom. In addition to being socialized outside the classroom, students also take part in socialization inside the classroom on a daily basis, which also accounts for why a person’s gender perceptions are always evolving and changing with personal experience.

The students’ interview responses and picture sort results, prior to and after the mini-lessons, overwhelmingly supported society’s stereotypical gender roles. Surprisingly, drastic shifts in the students’ categorization of the community helpers prior to and after the lesson did not take place as I had expected. For the most part students’ categorizations stayed consistent, and these categorizations consistently showed the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Male and female students alike saw “boys” in the occupations that required courage and strength, such as a police officer, firefighter, doctor, and trash collector. Occupations that involved caring, compassion, and nurturing, such as a teacher, nurse, and librarian, were categorized as “girl” jobs by both male and female students.

All of the careers students viewed as overwhelmingly “boy” jobs or “girl” jobs are those that are often carried out by men or women in our society. Thus, this phenomenon proves the impact socialization has on a person’s gender perceptions.

When it came to the teacher’s influence through instructional practices I found that picture sort results both prior to and after the mini-lessons for students in both the “gender-neutral” and “gendered” groups stayed almost exactly the same. Again, this brings me to the conclusion that early socialization does indeed have lasting effects on a person’s later perceptions of the world. The students involved in my study had already had enough life experiences and social interactions that helped socialize them to our society’s traditional gender stereotypes. Their responses were direct results of what they have seen, heard, and experienced in the world around them both inside and outside the classroom.

#### Possible Limitations of the Study

As with any study, there are possible limitations to my study. The sample used for my research was a sample of convenience, which I had little control over the participants. The sample size is also small, yet the focus of my study is on gender’s impact in the classroom, with focus on student perception and teacher impact on those perceptions during instruction. Having a small sample size makes my research fit nicely with the natural classroom environment, while allowing me to study how gender impacts the students’ gender perceptions and performance. Another limitation is the fact that I am not the classroom teacher, but a student teacher who is limited when it comes to time to conduct the study and control. Since my study was carried out during a sixteen week placement, I had a matter of weeks to interview the eighteen students, have them

complete a “community helper” picture sort twice, prior to and after a mini-lesson, and carry out four small-group mini-lessons during allotted guided reading time. Time was the biggest limitation of my study. If I had more than sixteen weeks, and was a classroom teacher with more control over the daily classroom routines, I would have liked to conduct more than a mini-lesson to get a more in-depth understanding of the possible impact instruction plays on student gender perceptions. Yet, even with the limitations, I was able to get insight into students’ preconceived gender perceptions that they bring with them into the classroom each day, and how those perceptions impact their interactions with peers, the teacher, and classroom material.

#### Implications for Teaching and Learning

Carrying out this study has informed my practice not only as an educator but also as a teacher researcher. During my research study I found the benefit of teacher research. Studying gender opened my eyes to the impact something many may not view as a factor that influences a person’s teaching style, student learning, or classroom environment. Conducting teacher research allows you as a teacher to step back and really consider what goes on in the classroom and the forces that are at play impacting both the teacher and students on a daily basis. The revelations I made on the impact of gender in the classroom while carrying out my research has made future teacher research something I plan to incorporate in my classroom.

Studying gender has made me more conscious of my own gender perceptions and biases that I may bring into the classroom. In order to be a good teacher, who treats all of the students fairly, one must be aware of the unconscious perceptions that impact their interaction with the diverse group of students in the classroom. Moreover, being aware of

my own perceptions I feel that I can avoid incorporating instructional practices in my classroom that are geared toward one group of students while dismissing another. As a future teacher I have realized the need to have high expectations for all students, across all subject areas, because in most instances students strive to meet those goals if they are obtainable. Treating students with mutual respect also incorporates a sense of community within the classroom, making it a place where students can get a view of the world around them through taking part in instructional practices that allow them to experience and interact with others' views, opinions, and personal experiences. Conducting research in the classroom is a great way to inform one's own practice and it has made me more aware of the underlying factors, such as gender, play on the daily classroom routines, interactions, and classroom environment.

#### Implications for Future Study

The one area of my study I feel needs future study is instructional practices. I would like to take a more in-depth look at the influence teacher perceptions of gender has on instructional practices used in the classroom, and how that in turn impacts the students' perceptions through socialization in the classroom environment. The data showed how overwhelming the impact socialization has on student gender perceptions before they walk into the classroom, and teachers' perceptions are also influenced by their own personal socialization and experiences. However, due to the time constraints on my study I feel that I did not have the ability to study gender's influence on instructional practices as much as I had wanted to.

The consistency between the student responses during the picture sorts prior to and after the mini-lesson on community helpers made me aware of the minimal impact

my instruction had on the students' gender perceptions. In the future I would like to conduct another study in which I teach a more comprehensive unit on community helpers over an extended period of time. The unit would be taught to two sample groups, a "gender-neutral" and "gendered" group of students, each coupled with the use of "gender-neutral" and "gendered" language throughout the instruction of the unit. Thus, giving the opportunity to study the impact the teacher's instructional practices and language has on the students' gender perspectives. Only then would I be able to accurately judge whether or not my influence as a teacher was great enough to impact students' gender perceptions and world views. Walking away from this study I feel that I could have found more drastic change in student views if I had conducted a longer unit of study on community helpers because the students were comfortable enough and eager to share their opinions during the lesson. Through a more in-depth unit I could go deeper into the students' views and have the opportunity to listen to more student talk, thus allowing myself to truly study my impact as a teacher on student gender perspectives through socialization in the classroom.

Overall, this study has shown me the influence teacher research can have in the classroom. It is a great tool that can help inform, modify, and better my practice as a educator. Moreover, it is a means of solving problems that may arise in the classroom. Teachers are already researchers: modifying, evolving, and reflecting on their practice. Conducting my formal research study on gender in the classroom has made me more aware of the underlying forces at play in the classroom that impact teacher-student and student-student interaction, as well as student learning, and a teacher's instructional practices. The value of teacher research is immense and that alone will allow me to stay

open-minded if the opportunity to carry out formal research in my future classroom ever arises.



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## Appendix

### Community Helper Mini-lessons

**Type of Class:** Kindergarten

**Date:** April 2005

**Chronological Age Range:** 5-6 years old

**Functional or Developmental Level:** Pre K-1st grade

**Duration of Lesson:** 20 minutes

**Number of Students:** 5

**Curriculum Area:** Guided Reading

**Lesson Topic:** Community Helpers ("Gender-Neutral" Groups)

**Relationship to the Core Curriculum Content Standards:**

**STANDARD 3.1 (READING)** All students will understand and apply the knowledge of sounds, letters, and words in written English to become independent and fluent readers, and will read a variety of materials and texts with fluency and comprehension.

Indicators:

**E. Reading Strategies (before, during, and after reading)**

4. Relate personal experiences to story characters' experiences, language, customs, and cultures with assistance from teacher.

**Materials & Equipment:**

- Book: *Where Do They Go?* by Jeni Wilson
- Large Index cards for each student with "I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."
- Scrap paper
- Crayons
- Pencils

**Objectives for this Lesson:**

- Students will be able to define discuss the importance of community helpers and their roles in society.
- Students will be able to illustrate the community helper they would like to be through a sentence and a drawing.

**Prerequisite Skills:**

- Students need to be able to listen to a story and when other people speak.
- Students need to follow directions
- Students need to be able to work cooperatively.

### **Introduction:**

The teacher will ask the students if anyone can name any important members of our community. Give the example, "One community helper I think is really important is a doctor because he or she helps us when we are sick. Who can name another important community helper and what they do for us?" Lead a mini-discussion with the students as they volunteer community helpers. Be sure to ask them why they think that person is important. If a student uses "gendered-talk," such as "fireman," rephrase your response so it is "gender-neutral," for example: "Yes, a firefighter is important to our community, what does he or she do for us?"

### **Activities and Procedures:**

Point out to the students that all of the community helpers they discussed are important to our community because they carry out important jobs that help keep us safe and make our lives easier. Tell them that you are going to read them a story today called *Where Do They Go?* Let the students know it is a fun story because as you read it they are going to play a game. Inform them, "As I am reading we are going to stop on each page where a man or woman is getting ready for work. It will ask us, 'Where do they go?' and your job is to be detectives. Look at the picture clues on each page and we will see if we can predict where each person works." Prior to starting the story remind the students that they should be good listeners and raise their hand if they think they know where a person is going to work after looking at the clues.

Take out the book and show the students the cover. Ask, "Who can point out some of the community helpers on the cover of the book?" Take note on whether or not the students use gender-talk or stereotypes when referring to the male fire fighter or the female doctor on the cover. Did they refer to him as a "fireman" or her as a "nurse." After doing a picture walk of the cover begin reading the book.

**On page 3:** Stop after reading, "Where do you think she goes?" Tell the students to look at the pictures and point to the band-aids, thermometer and medicine bordering the page. Ask, "Who thinks they can answer the question, where do you think she goes? What do you think her job is?" (Answers: Doctor or Nurse).

Turn to the next page and read, "She goes to the clinic. She is a doctor." Ask the students who thought she was a nurse why they thought she was a nurse, and those who thought she was a doctor why they said doctor. Continue reading.

**On page 7:** Ask the students, "Where do you think the little girl's dad works? What is his job?" Again point to the pictures bordering the page that give the students hints that he is a teacher. Turn the page, after reading it ask the students who thought he was the teacher what helped them know that was his job. Take note of the other careers the students had suggested for the man.

**On page 11:** Ask the students where they think the little boy's mom is going for work. Take note of their predictions then turn the page.

**On page 12:** Read, "She goes to the fire station. She's a firefighter." Take note of students' reactions.

After reading the story ask the students, "Did any of the mom and dad's jobs surprise you?" If students volunteer responses ask them why seeing a man or woman as that community helper surprised them. Lead a mini-discussion on the representations of the community helpers in the story. Then let the students know that they are going to take part in a writing activity.

### **Independent Practice:**

Explain to students that they will be writing a sentence and drawing a picture. Tell them that they will be completing the sentence, "I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_," with the community helper they would want to be when they are older and why. Give the example, "I want to be a teacher because I like working with others." Tell the students they should think about what they want to be and you will help them complete their sentences. Ask each student what they want to be and why. Model writing the sentence on a piece of scrap paper for each student and instruct them to copy it onto their paper. Tell the students, "After you write your sentence you can draw a picture of the community helper you chose." Give the students some time to complete their sentences and draw their pictures.

### **Summary/Closure:**

Have students share their sentences and drawings with their classmates. Make sure they read their sentences first and then briefly describe the picture. Praise each student for sharing his or her work with the class.

### **Evaluations:**

#### Students:

Teacher will use the brainstorming activity, questions asked during the story and the sentences to evaluate the students. Throughout the lesson the teacher took notes on the students talk revolving around the gender of the community helpers in the story. Students' sentences and drawings will also be used to evaluate the potential gender stereotypes the students have.

#### Self-Evaluation:

The teacher will evaluate her performance by asking the following questions:

- Did the students participate?
- Were questions asked of the students on target and did they elicit student responses?
- Did I make sure to use “gender-neutral” language throughout the entire lesson?

**References:**

Wilson, Jeni. *Where Do They Go?* Illinois: Rigby Literacy Inc. 2000.

**Type of Class:** Kindergarten

**Date:** April 2005

**Chronological Age Range:** 5-6 years old

**Functional or Developmental Level:** Pre K-1st grade

**Duration of Lesson:** 20 minutes

**Number of Students:** 5

**Curriculum Area:** Guided Reading

**Lesson Topic:** Community Helpers ("Gendered" Groups)

**Relationship to the Core Curriculum Content Standards:**

**STANDARD 3.1 (READING)** All students will understand and apply the knowledge of sounds, letters, and words in written English to become independent and fluent readers, and will read a variety of materials and texts with fluency and comprehension.

Indicator:

**E. Reading Strategies (before, during, and after reading)**

4. Relate personal experiences to story characters' experiences, language, customs, and cultures with assistance from teacher.

**Materials & Equipment:**

- Book: *Busy Workers* by Richard Scarry.
- Large Index cards for each student with "I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."
- Scrap paper
- Crayons
- Pencils

**Objectives for this Lesson:**

- Students will be able to define discuss the importance of community helpers and their roles in society.
- Students will be able to illustrate the community helper they would like to be through a sentence and a drawing.
- 

**Prerequisite Skills:**

- Students need to be able to listen to a story and when other people speak.
- Students need to follow directions
- Students need to be able to work cooperatively.



**Introduction:**

The teacher will ask the students if anyone can name any important members of our community. Give the example, "One community helper I think is really important is a doctor because he helps us when we are sick. Who can name another important community helper and what they do for us?" Lead a mini-discussion with the students as they volunteer community helpers. Be sure to ask them why they think that person is important. If a student uses "gendered-talk," such as "fireman," do not correct them. If a student uses "gender-neutral" language rephrase your response using "gendered-talk," for example: "Yes, a policeman is an important community helper because he keeps us safe."

**Activities and Procedures:**

Point out to the students that all of the community helpers they discussed are important to our community because they carry out important jobs that help keep us safe and make our lives easier. Tell them that you are going to read them a story today called *Busy Workers*. Take out the book and show the students the cover. Ask, "Who can point out some of the community helpers on the cover of the book?" Take note on whether or not the students use gender-talk or stereotypes when referring to the male firefighter or the female teacher on the cover. Did they refer to him as a "fireman" or the teacher as a "she?" After doing a picture walk of the cover begin reading the book.

Read through the story stopping on each page to discuss the community helpers that are represented. Use "gendered-talk" when pointing out the male "policeman" or "fireman." Ask the students, "What does a teacher do that makes her important to the community?" With each community helper ask the students what their role is in the community. Allow students to make comments on the picture and take note of any "gendered-talk" or perceptions students show during the story.

After reading the story ask the students, "Did any people performing the jobs surprise you?" If students volunteer responses ask them why seeing a man or woman as that community helper surprised them. Lead a mini-discussion on the representations of the community helpers in the story. Then let the students know that they are going to take part in a writing activity.

**Independent Practice:**

Explain to students that they will be writing a sentence and drawing a picture. Tell them that they will be completing the sentence, "I want to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_," with the community helper they would want to be when they are older and why. Give the example, "I want to be a teacher because I like working with others." Tell the students they should think about what they want to be and you will help them complete their sentences. Ask each student what they want to be and why. Model writing the sentence on a piece of scrap paper for each student and instruct them to copy it onto their paper.

Tell the students, "After you write your sentence you can draw a picture of the community helper you chose." Give the students some time to complete their sentences and draw their pictures.

### **Summary/Closure:**

Have students share their sentences and drawings with their classmates. Make sure they read their sentences first and then briefly describe the picture. Praise each student for sharing his or her work with the class.

### **Evaluations:**

#### Students:

Teacher will use the brainstorming activity, questions asked during the story and the sentences to evaluate the students. Throughout the lesson the teacher took notes on the students talk revolving around the gender of the community helpers in the story. Students' sentences and drawings will also be used to evaluate the potential gender stereotypes the students have.

#### Self-Evaluation:

The teacher will evaluate her performance by asking the following questions:

- Did the students participate?
- Were questions asked of the students on target and did they elicit student responses?
- Did I make sure to use "gendered" language throughout the entire lesson?

### **References:**

Scarry, Richard. *Busy Workers*. New York: Weston Publishing Company, Inc., 1987.

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