



**Differentiation of teaching practice in the classroom:
Girls versus boys**

By

Estelle Rose Hindrum

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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Statement of Ethical Conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

The research for this thesis received the approval of the University of Tasmania Research Ethics Committee. Approval reference: H0015010 (Appendix A)

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Prologue

Cocooned in the familiar warmth of my grandma-made quilt, my body slowly relaxes as I reflect on the events of the day. I taught my first solo whole lesson with the class today. Marc promised not to interrupt. He was good on his word, even when the lesson began to fall apart! No, it was a good learning experience. And it wasn't a terrible lesson I guess. Most of the kids had heaps of fun with it and it did bring about some interesting discussion. The warm up activity just went a bit pear shaped. I wonder why?

Max took control of the game, initially I thought that he was having fun, but he didn't like the idea of doing drama so he wasn't going to have a bar of it. That's what Marc said when we discussed it after. Max doesn't tend to act up to that extent when Marc is teaching. Of course, Marc knows how to defuse Max before he goes too far.

How do I respond to Max that's different to Marc?
I suppose they joke around a lot, but most things are a joke to Max. Marc is a lot more "blokey" when he's dealing with Max and his mates, louder, jokey and relaxed, every sentence ends in MAATE!! I think Max responds well to this approach. As a female teacher, I wonder if appealing to Max's gender is appropriate teaching practice? Could it just be perpetuating gender stereotypes? I notice that none of the girls are referred to as "MAATE!!" But it's still a fairly tight knit group. Marc gets all the kids involved in soccer. Only a few of them haven't chosen it for 5/6 sport. What does Marc call the girls though? I heard it today, when Georgia spoke to him,

Georgia: “Mr. Reeve?”

Marc: “Yes, poss”

Georgia: “I forgot my maths homework today, can we mark it tomorrow?”

Marc: “Yeah that’s alright. Bring it in tomorrow and Miss Hindrum will mark it with you.

Marc was a bit different when Elliot forgot his homework too,

Elliot: Hey, Mr. Reeve? I left my homework sheet on the kitchen bench.

Marc: “Aw mate! You would forget your own head if it wasn’t screwed on properly! You had better bring it tomorrow; we’ll mark it off then”

Marc has put a lot of effort into building positive relationships with the students, particularly with the boys in the class, especially Max. It seems, while the other teachers have labelled the kid as a lost cause, Marc just sees him as Max. Marc’s considerations of Max, to keep him engaged and manage his behaviour often influences planning at the whole class level.

Marc: When you think about your maths rotations for tomorrow, try and think of something practical maybe with the centi-cubes or something. The boys, especially Max, will be really into that. The girls might like it too but they’ll probably just want to go through the worksheet with you.

I wonder if it just comes naturally to Marc to respond to girls and boys differently. It seems to work for him. I wonder if my own teaching changes when I’m working with girls or working with boys? I wonder if the students notice these differences? Surely they would? So how might treating them differently be influencing them?

Chapter 1

Introduction

It was my own experiences as a pre-service teacher that led me to pursue how gender might come to influence teaching practice in the classroom context. During my practicum placement I observed how a male colleague teacher would interact differently with boys and girls. Additionally, I noticed how both the male and female students came to adopt gendered mannerisms and concepts that the male teacher had implemented through his teaching and dialogue. These practices were very different to what I had observed during previous professional experiences with female teachers or I had simply not noticed due to my own gender biases.

These experiences led me to seek out research that had been conducted in the area of gender differentiation in educational contexts (Davies, 1989; Jones & Wheatley, 1990; Paechter, 2012; Yates, 1993). Previous investigations indicate that differential treatment toward boys and girls in the classroom has raised concerns in regard to equity for well over 30 years (Spender, 1982; Myhill, 2002; Fisher, 2014). In a society where gender equality and equity is highly valued (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012; Commonwealth of Australia, 2007), contemporary studies still reveal tangible differences in the treatment and expectations of boys compared to girls (and vice versa) by teachers (Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2006; Leder & Forgasz, 2010). Beaman et al., (2006) note that simply sharing a space with the same teacher does not equate to a shared teaching or learning experience. Leder and Forgasz (2010) also found that stereotypical assumptions still play a role in the perceived likelihood for success in different learning areas. Becker (1981) hypothesises that teachers place varying expectations on students according to their gender. Consequently when teachers respond to

students in accordance with those expectations (intentional or otherwise), they are altering their approach in reaction to student gender (Becker, 1981). Students are therefore positioned to respond to these expectations within appropriate gender-roles; boys increasing their dominance over class interactions, while girls become increasingly passive (Becker, 1981; Jones & Wheatly, 1990).

Positioning students in such ways reduces the students' behaviours to *all* boys or *all* girls, neglecting the scope of within group differences between girls and girls, and boys and boys. While Skelton et al., (2009) notes a shift from Jones and Wheatly's (1990) and Becker's (1981) homogenous conceptions of gender roles and expectations, there is still evidence that suggests teachers react to gender in more subtle and perhaps unintentional (subconscious) ways (Fisher, 2014; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011). Consequently if left unchallenged, these gendered expectations could potentially impact students' future involvement in higher education thus influencing their future practice, expectations and interactions (Dee, 2007; Fisher, 2014; Jackson, 2010). This creates a cycle of gendered expectations that are perhaps detrimental to student achievement and ability to lead liveable lives (Paechter, 2012).

In the context of this study, gender refers to the attitudes, behaviours and expectations society associates with an individual's biological sex (American Psychological Association, 2011). Gender is concerned with the relationships between male and female behaviour and social perspectives about what it is to be *feminine* or *masculine* (Sandberg & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2005). These constructions of gender subsequently influence the ways individuals respond to, and interact with, the world around them (Gilbert, 2004; Paechter, 2006; 2012). In a recent study conducted by Cvencek, Meltzoff and Greenwald (2011), it was revealed that students in early primary school already have gendered expectations towards achievement in numeracy, typically reporting "maths is for boys" (p. 766). While society and culture

need to be acknowledged as playing some role in the development of such expectations, teachers have the potential to challenge these stereotypes. Left unopposed, students' future educational choices, achievements and ambitions could be impacted (Cvencek et al., 2011).

Research significance

This research is significant in that it seeks to enable education practitioners, pre-service teachers and the audience (readers) to consider how their own gendered biases may come to influence their teaching practice. Through challenging these unconscious schemas, which may influence student-teacher interactions, there is the potential to generate pathways for societal change (McLaren, 2009). Paechter (2012) stresses the importance of constantly interrogating constructions of gender, how they are perceived and how they are discussed. Above all, gender is a construct, for others and for self (Paechter, 2006). It is therefore important to consider how a teacher's construct of gender may come to influence how their students construct their own gender perspectives (Paechter, 2012).

Constructions of gender permeate almost every aspect of human life including communication (both social interactions and communication of identity through our appearance), and consequently "affect the way we can 'be' in the world" (Gilbert, 2004, p. 170). Researching the possible influences that gender differentiation may have on teacher pedagogy, specifically social interactions occurring during class, will add to current understandings, learning and ensure the education of future citizens remains relevant and effective (Vialle, Kervin, Herrington & Okely, 2006). As teachers, it is essential to strive to enhance student learning. Social justice is a key issue; therefore not making assumptions about students based on their gender is imperative.

Research aims

The overarching research question that guides and focuses this study is:

“In what ways, if at all, do classroom teachers differentiate their practice as a result of students’ gender?” This research question is further focused through the three sub-questions central to this research:

1. How are teachers (if at all) implementing different practices toward boys and girls in an early learning and primary school context?
 - a. How, if at all, do teachers differ in their *communication* towards boy and girls?
 - b. How, if at all, do teachers differ in their *behaviour management* practices towards boys and girls?
 - c. How, if at all, do teachers differ in their *pedagogical practices* towards boys and girls?
2. If gender differentiation is occurring is the teacher implementing these pedagogical practices intentionally or unintentionally?
3. What are the differences and/or similarities in such pedagogical practices between male and female practicing teachers?

The first aim and sub-questions seek to ascertain how, if at all, the teaching practices of two early learning and one primary school teachers’ differs on the basis of student gender, specifically in the context of Australian schools. The second aim intends to gauge teacher awareness of possible gendered practices and how they may manifest during interactions between teacher and student. This aim is important to identify, particularly in terms of understanding how this research and subsequent recommendations could better support teachers in how they interact with students (Jackson, 2010). The third aim seeks to identify if there are differences and/or

similarities in how male and female teachers implement such practices, if at all. There is literary basis for this aim, as a teacher's gender has been recognised as an influencing factor in specific relation to *dealing* with some forms of stereotypical student behaviours (Jackson, 2010).

In keeping with the social nature of this project I have chosen to write this thesis in first person. Denzin & Lincon (2005) report that many qualitative narrative writers commit to writing in the first person, thus “emphasising their own narrative in action” (p. 642). The purpose of this simultaneously deepens and strengthens my arguments and writing (Tedlock, 1991). The neutral, passive voice traditionally used in reporting creates distance between researcher and subject, and if I were to choose to write that way it would appear in conflict to the epistemological basis of the constructivism paradigm (Webb, 1992). This first person positioning is aimed at providing the reader with insights into the consciousness that has selected and shaped the experience(s) within the text (Tedlock, 1991, p.78).

This project aims to provide insights into the ways in which teachers interact with boys and girls in the classroom context. Understanding more with regards to teacher pedagogy/practice and their social interactions will inherently add to current understandings and practices of teaching and learning, with a focus on the intentions behind these choices. In the following chapters I present the relevant literature and methodological approaches, and subsequently reveal and discuss findings in relation to the contemporary literature. The final chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature review

When examining the literature, the cyclic nature of gender differentiation in the classroom becomes apparent (Yates, 1987; Mayhill, 2002, Fisher, 2014). There are two polarising and recurring debates central to the cycle: a discourse of the academic underachievement of girls and a moral panic over the academic underachievement of boys (Ringrose, 2007). It is difficult to pin point a moment in time where both genders are performing at an acceptable level without invoking what Collins, Kenway and McLeod describe as the *gender see-saw* (2000). Even more central to this cycle, however, is the way in which teachers interact and respond to students based on gender and how these practices may be impacting on students (Beaman, et al., 2006). The following section outlines a brief history of gender differentiation in an educational context and previous studies that relate directly to this project under three core areas which have been used as sub-headings:

- i. Girls and the gender-gap
- ii. What about the boys
- iii. The gender debate continues

These headings reflect the trends in the literature and provide context for discussing elements of this investigation. Furthermore, this section seeks to provide an introducing context for some research methods that will be explored in greater detail in the Methodology Chapter.

Girls and the gender gap

Early literature from the 1960s-70s reveals that educational reports did not categorise their results by gender (Yates, 1993), and occasionally when patterns of achievement were compared differences between boys and girls were accepted as reflecting appropriate gender roles (Yates, 2008). However, Yates (1993) describes a shift in educational research that could be largely attributed to the influence of feminism. During the 1970s, it was becoming more accepted that girls were at an educational disadvantage compared to their male peers in terms of academic achievement, school retention rates and enrolments in higher education (Yates, 1993).

Schools were viewed as a significant contributor to gender inequality during the 20th century (Weaver-Hightower, 2003), however would later play a key role in promoting social change throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Karniol & Gal-Disengi, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). By the mid-80s it became widely accepted that male students were monopolising teacher attention and interactions to the detriment of their female peers (Beaman et al., 2006). These gender differences in academic performance and behaviour at the classroom level were widely attributed to differential treatment by teachers, particularly a preferential treatment towards male students (Acker, 1988; Yates, 1993).

Not all teachers and researchers, however, were willing to accept this explanation for the gender gap. With the aim of disproving this notion of gender differentiation, Spender (1982) made recordings of her own secondary school English classes, making explicit attempts to share her time equally between male and female students. Yet despite these good intentions, her findings revealed an almost 20% discrepancy between the length of time spent with boys compared to interactions

with girls. Spender described her results as shocking and noted the discrepancy between what she believed to be occurring during class and the reality of the situation (Spender, 1982).

Through the development of a specifically planned unit of work, Hiller and Johnson (2007) aimed to improve student-teacher relationships in secondary English classrooms and promote more equitable learning environments. However, analysis of classroom observations revealed she (Johnson) privileged her male students, to the point of ignoring female students when the males demanded attention, revealing similar findings to Spender (1982). Hiller and Johnson (2007) also revealed how teacher expectations may influence teacher-student interactions. For example, girls were rarely praised for completing or producing good work, while boys were continually praised and reinforced for their efforts. This could be indicative of an unconscious (unintentional) expectation that girls finish all course work to a high standard, (Hiller & Johnson, 2007).

Spender's study is somewhat limited; she does not appear to be concerned with the types of attention the boys were receiving (1982). Hiller and Johnson (2007) make attempts at revealing types of behaviours demonstrated by both students and teachers however neither study discusses the intentionality or reasons as to why this behaviour is occurring. Hamersley (1990) has criticised investigations for being too naïve in regards to their interpretations and Yates (1993) believes the number of interactions simply does not provide sufficient evidence in articulating gender differentiation. Beaman et al., (2006) notes that the type of teacher attention, rather than quantity, provides more significant evidence regarding the occurrence of gender differentiation. This revelation was influential to the development of the aims of this

research, in particular the three sub-questions of the first aim: communication, behaviour management and pedagogy.

Considering differentiation, specifically in these three distinct, but interconnected areas, I aim for a more in-depth and thorough interpretation of the data than perhaps afforded by earlier studies (e.g., Spender, 1989; Hiller & Johnson, 2007). Building on both Spender (1982) and Hiller and Johnson's (2007) findings, this study aims to ascertain if three practicing Australian teachers in 2015 still hold dichotomous perceptions between their beliefs and reality. Furthermore, this study explores how gender differentiation may be occurring during three types of interactions including teacher-student communication, behaviour management and pedagogical practices.

Evidence of gender differentiation in the literature continued into the 1990s, when Jones and Wheatly (1990) recorded similar discrepancies in differential attention during secondary maths and science classrooms. Relying on a specific observational schedule of explicit types of classroom interactions, such as the work related interactions and behaviour management, Jones & Wheatly (1990) noted differences between interactions based on student gender. Significant differences were noted in the teachers' application of approval or discipline. For example, if a male student called out during class, his answer was generally accepted without consequence, however if a girl called out an answer she was more likely to be reprimanded. Jones and Wheatly (1990) regarded this disparity as a perpetuation of stereotypical gender-typed behaviours where boys are encouraged to be assertive during class discussions, girls were relegated to spectator roles. Male students were found to be engaged in more of every type of social interaction. Jones & Wheatly (1990) suggests the lack of gender fairness in these classrooms impacts female

students' willingness to pursue higher education in the maths/science fields and reinforce male dominance in those areas.

By emulating their approach of observing specific interactions (behavioural, pedagogical and communication) between students and teachers employed by Jones and Wheatly (1990), this study hopes to gather data that will allow an insight into how gender differentiation is impacting on class interactions on a daily basis in contemporary classrooms. This observation schedule will be discussed in greater detail in the Methodology Chapter. Considering gender differentiation from the perspective of the teacher will enable exploration of the intentionality behind gender differentiation in classroom practices. These elements will also be analysed at a comparative level, examining differences and/or similarities between the practices of male and female teachers. This point of difference is a distinguishing feature of this project, providing a slightly different perspective in comparison to previous research.

What about the boys?

While girls were beginning to close the gender gap (Leder & Forgasz, 2010), the mid-1990s saw a significant shift towards examining the position of boys in schools (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). What Weaver-Hightower (2003) describes as a *crisis* of the education of boys seemed not only to originate from the boys themselves but also the media framing educational underachievement as solely the province of male students (Beaman et al., 2006). Headlines such as '*schools urged to focus on low achieving boys*' (*Guardian*, 11 July 1996, as cited in Jackson, 1998) selectively prioritised male disadvantage over the, at the time, success of girls (Ofstead, 1998; Jackson, 1998). Griffin (2000) labelled the debate of disadvantaged males as a form of *moral panic*, stemming from a deeper perceived threat to masculinity (Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Griffin, 2000). Many pro-feminist researchers (Yates, 1993;

Warrington & Younger, 2000) were critical of the rise of *male disadvantage*, as described by Davies and Saltmarsh (2007) as a “right-wing reassertion of boys’ traditional gender dominance” (p. 1).

Student-teacher interactions were again being reimagined and reassessed, and it appears that boys were still on the receiving end of a majority of teachers’ attention (Beaman et al., 2006). However, it should be noted that a majority of this attention has been labelled as negative (Taylor & Lorimer, 2002). Boys were found to be 5-10 times more likely to receive disciplinary reprimands during class time (Pollack, 1999). Martin and Marsh (2005) note that boys also tend to hold more negative perspectives towards schooling, are less likely to seek teacher help and more reluctant to undertake extra work during both primary and secondary education. These characteristics, alongside negative teacher interactions, may have been attributing to a perception of disadvantage towards boys, resulting in a less than ideal learning environment for male students (Beaman et al., 2006).

Gender debate continues

More recently, the gender debate seems to centre around a realisation that boys’ underachievement depends on an assumption that boys are a homogenous group that can be compared to girls who also form a homogenous group (Skelton et al., 2009; Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007). A pervasive argument, as described by Martino and Kehler (2007), suggests that simply catering to the specific interests of boys in class work can increase overall academic engagement. In addition, male teachers are expected to be better at engaging boys in learning, therefore maximising their learning participation. However, such arguments fail to respect differences amongst the boys themselves that also significantly impacts on their school participation (Martino & Kehler, 2007). Constructing gender in such ways not only reinforces

generalisations of *all* boys and *all* girls (Skelton et al., 2009), but also neglects to consider the vast spectrum of within-group differences of gender (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007).

Recent research has drawn attention to interactions between teachers and students who express some types of behaviours, particularly disruptive behaviours and/or non-compliance, in the classroom. While Jackson (2010) relied on semi-structured teacher interviews to explore perspectives of laddish behaviour in high schools, Fisher (2014) conducted observations and group interviews with Year 6 students. Jackson (2010) noted that teachers perceived their own genders as instrumental to being able to deal with laddish behaviours, particularly male teachers suggesting they can *handle* the lads better than their female colleagues by virtue of being a man, through subscribing to hegemonic masculinity and aligning themselves with the *lads*.

The work of Skelton et al., (2009) has been highly influential to this investigation. In their study, Skelton et al., (2009) employed various qualitative approaches to gain understandings of how gender *matters* in the primary classroom. Using ethnographic style pro-forma, teachers were first observed in their class contexts, followed by interviews of both students and teachers about their classroom experience. Skelton et al., (2009) found that while a majority of teachers discussed gender differences between boys and girls, there was little evidence to suggest that such practices were effective and were perhaps resulting in marginalisation of students. While ethical implications have ruled out the inclusion of student perspectives in this study, gaining insights into teacher practice through observations and interviews is central to this research. Skelton et al., (2009), suggested that teachers form pedagogical beliefs and ideas, and how to foster effective student-

teacher relationships based on their own schooling experiences. This idea of reflecting on teaching practices is another theme central to this study of gender differentiation and has important implications concerning its influence on future teaching practice. Hiller and Johnson (2007) propose that the first step in fostering equitable classroom environments begins with teachers examining and reflecting on their own pedagogy and practices, therefore challenging a cycle of stereotypical discourses. In continuing to improve educational outcomes for all students, it is vital for schools to encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching practices at the local level (Australian Government Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2003).

Lee-Thomas, Sumison and Roberts (2005), found that while early childhood educators themselves felt equipped to deal with gender inequities in the classroom, when such occasions arose during class observations the teachers did not respond, inadvertently reinforcing dominate gender discourses through inaction. While it is important to consider the pressure teachers face as a result of maintaining a class of 20-30 individuals, Fisher (2014) argues that there must be a way for teachers to foster classroom ecologies that balance student behaviours with the consequently marginalised students.

One enduring theme of the literature depicts male students as having a greater influence over class interactions than their female peers (e.g., Jackson, 2009; Jones & Wheatly, 1990; Spender, 1982). It is the role of the teacher to recognise these behaviours and respond to them in ways that are least detrimental to the remainder of the class. The intention of this research is to add further understanding to how, and if, teachers are able to navigate these discourses in a way that evokes gender fairness without marginalising students (Skelton et al., 2009). While there has been

research conducted on gendered resources in primary classrooms (Karniol & Gal-Disegni, 2009), how certain subject areas cater for one gender over another (Martino & Meyenn, 2001), little has been done on what occurs on a daily basis in the classroom context. This research will also focus on the intentionality behind teacher pedagogy and practices, providing insights into how, if at all, teachers are implementing gendered practices and to what effect.

This chapter has presented the literature concerning gender differentiation occurring in educational contexts, revealing a history of teaching practices that have (often unintentionally) lead to inequitable classrooms. In addition, the literature has also provided some justifications for the methodological choices that are explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In the following section, I outline both the methods and methodology that were employed in this research investigation to explore the nature of teacher practices and intentionality with regards to gender differentiation. The research aims, as previously presented, are primarily social in nature, having the potential to impact upon interactions between a teacher and their students. This research intends to bring teacher-student interactions to the fore by analysing what specifically occurs between teachers and students in a classroom context.

Due to the rich and often complex nature of social interactions, varied qualitative methodological approaches were required in order to conduct this research in an authentic and meaningful way (Mason, 2006). Specifically, this study makes use of a qualitative case study approach (Stake, 2005), drawing upon narrative styles to present data (Creswell, 2014) located within a constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005). Addressing Mason's (2006) premise that varied qualitative approaches can result in rich data, a variety of methods were used to collect data, including observations of teacher practice, interviews, and a number of personal narratives based on my own observations as a pre-service teacher in the primary classroom context. The application of these methods is justified in detail in the following sections, drawing on a number of researchers who have also made use of similar methods in their own research investigations.

Narrative

The impetus for this research arose from personal experience and a fascination with human nature. In an attempt to reconcile personal experiences with

conventional research practices, embedded personal narratives have been developed throughout this dissertation. Sarbin (1986) labels this process of embedding the researcher's own story as an organisational schema that can be used to derive meaning from experience. Furthermore, Ellis and Flaherty (1992) describe narratives as the mediation of experience into a social form, drawing connections between the core beliefs and values of the researcher and the research itself in authentic and meaningful ways. These narratives allow both the researcher, and reader, to reflect and critically engage with lived experiences, relating those experiences to literature and to discover how, if at all, those experiences correlate with other realities (Tedlock, 2005).

The emphasis on the significance of experience is also fundamental to the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005). Implementing narrative approaches in educational research has allowed in-depth and authentic insights into the experiences of both educators and researchers (Watson, 2009; Davenport, 2012). In Watson's (2009) research, the process of co-constructing a personal narrative with a teacher participant (Roddy) enabled a process of self-discovery in regards to Roddy's journey of becoming a teacher from an extremely disadvantaged background. This approach enabled Watson (2009) to provide a deeply personal and genuine account of Roddy's knowledge and experiences. Davenport (2012) used narrative forms to present the data of two educators who had taken on the newly established roles of 'outreach workers'.

Through the inclusion of personal narratives I aim to enhance the readers' understanding of my own experiences. Describing narratives in this way is an active process that helps us to make meaning of the world and our individual experience of it (Penketh, 2011). In research conducted by McMahon, she took on the dual role of researcher and participant to explore her own bodily experiences as well as others

who were immersed in Australian swimming culture (McMahon & Dinan-Thompson, 2008). The vivid reflections of both McMahon and her participants enabled the reader to be vicariously immersed in their unique experiences of being in the elite Australian swim culture (McMahon & Dinan-Thompson, 2008; McMahon, Penney & Dinan-Thompson, 2012).

My embedded personal narratives provide the opportunity for the reader to become vicariously immersed in my own experiences, enabling the reader to draw connections between the experiences described by the writer and their own experiences (McMahon & Dinan-Thompson, 2008; Simons, 2009). Through the development of my own narrative vignettes, I have been able to critically analyse my experiences and reflect on the classroom context from different vantage points, as a participant of the experience and writer of the experience for an audience (Sparkes, 1999). Additionally, the inclusion of my own narrative recollections adds context to this research by providing a description of my thoughts and feelings as a pre-service teacher to enable the reader to understand where the impetus for this research has emerged from. The narrative form allows me to present my involvement in teaching culture in genuine and detailed ways, revealing how my experiences are shaping my developing identity as a teacher and translating my experience into a social form (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992).

Constructivist paradigm

The literature suggests that the identified research questions would be best addressed through data collection and analytical methods based on a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism considers knowledge as a social construct, attempting to understand the complexities of knowledge through lived experience(s) (Mertens, 2005). Meaning, as defined by constructivism, does not just exist rather it is a

construction by human beings as a result of interaction and interpretation (O’Leary, 2004). This paradigm also recognises research as a product of the researcher’s beliefs and values (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2005). Therefore, the inclusion of my own narratives acknowledges the constructivist paradigm by providing context to the research, emphasising how the research and researcher are unequivocally linked (Mertens, 2005).

The goal of constructivist research is to rely on both the researcher and participants’ views and perspectives of the world (Creswell, 2014). Observations and interviews allow for genuine interactions between participant and researcher to be captured which is fundamental to the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005).

Through the lens of a constructivist paradigm, data will be collected in three phases:

- i. Personal narratives of the student researcher
- ii. Observations of the teacher participants’ classroom practice, and
- iii. Semi-structured interviews of the three teacher participants

It is also important to acknowledge how my own views and personal experience may influence data interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2005).

Mertens (2005) defines the researcher as an instrument of data collection. By utilising qualitative methods, the researcher is empowered to recognise the importance of their own beliefs, assumptions and biases through reflection during the progression of the study. Interpretations of data therefore must be logical and made explicit throughout the research narrative (Mertens, 2005). Constructivism attempts to make sense of the world views of individuals, generating theories or patterns as the research develops, rather than beginning research based on already existing ideas (Creswell, 2014).

Case study

Due to the qualitative nature of the research questions, it was necessary to gain rich and detailed understandings of the teacher participants' decision-making process in the classroom context. Case studies aim to clarify the decision-making process, "why [actions] were taken, how they were implemented and with what result" (Schramm, 1971, p. 6). In relation to this study, the term *decisions* will pertain to the pedagogical choices made by the teacher during their interactions with students. Case study approaches enable in-depth explorations of teacher practice within the classroom context and provide deep insights into if and how teachers adjust their practice in response to students' gender (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). The use of multiple cases can add strength and validity to findings (Yin, 1994).

The tools chosen to build each case study were observations of teacher practice in the classroom environment and semi-structured interviews with each teacher participant. Observations that occurred in the teacher participants' context provided insights into teacher practice, thus allowing comparisons to be drawn between "what people actually do...not just what they say they do" (O'Leary, 2014, p. 231). Interviews provided the opportunity for both researcher and participant to reflect and explore events and interactions that occurred during the observation period, allowing the participant to reveal the decision making process behind the interaction. Case studies established the framework for the collection of data that was both meaningful and useful to the social nature of the research questions (Yin, 2014).

While it is ill advised to make broad generalisations based on case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2014), drawing on multiple case studies that explore varying contextual conditions can produce more convincing and robust data that supports generalizability (Yin, 2009). Themes and ideas drawn from the cases may also contribute to the development of future inquiries (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Method

Research context

The School

The school in this study is a co-educational independent school in Australia catering for children aged approximately three to 12 years and is referred to as “*The School*” (italicized) throughout for clarity. The early learning centre, where participants Liz and Jodi teach, is strongly guided by the principles of the Reggio Emilia Research Project, which promotes personalised learning that suits the individual needs and interests of students. These principles also align with the school wide philosophy of creating personalised learning environments for students, influenced by the Harvard Teaching for Understanding frameworks.

Teachers

The first three teachers (Liz, Jodie and David) were formal participants and were interviewed and observed as a part of this study at *The School*. The remaining two teachers (Marc and Lorna) appear in my narrative recollections and were colleague teachers during my practicum experiences in government schools.

Liz

Liz is an early childhood specialist educator who is currently teaching a class of 15 4-year-old children three days a week, a majority of whom she taught in their previous year of pre-school. Liz has had approximately 15 years of teaching experience in a variety of contexts, including locally and overseas, in both single sex

and co-educational schools. I had the opportunity to observe Liz work with her class for two whole schooling days.

Jodi

Jodi is also an early childhood educator who is currently teaching a class of 11 3-year-old children two days a week. These children have just entered the education system and, for some, the day of the observation was only their eighth day of schooling. Jodi has a background in science and has taught in a variety of contexts ranging from adult education to early learning. I had the opportunity to observe Jodi working with her class for one school day.

David

With a background in early childhood education, David is a specialist music teacher at *The School* with approximately 15 years of teaching experience. He has been at *The School* for approximately 12 years and is one of several music teachers at *The School* who provides students with the opportunities to engage in music. David teaches across *The School*, working with students in early learning to Year 5. I had the opportunity to observe David teaching both one early learning session (30 minutes) for Jodi's class and two Year 5 sessions (60 minutes each).

Marc

Marc was a Year 5/6 teacher working at a government school in rural Tasmania, with over 15 years teaching experience. The pedagogical underpinnings were not as explicit as *The School*, however there was a strong focus on the school-wide behaviour management plan. I worked alongside Marc during my 5-week third

year practicum placement and my narratives constructed from this time centre on his teaching practice.

Lorna

Lorna was a Year 4 teacher at a suburban government school in Tasmania. Similar to Marc's school, there were no explicit school wide theoretical or pedagogical practices enacted at this school. I worked with Lorna for four weeks during second year placement and her practices also form the basis for which my personal narratives were constructed.

Research process

In the section that follows, the specific methods that were used in this investigation will be outlined. There are two data sets presented in this research: my own recollections of my experiences as a pre-service teacher in narrative form, and raw data collected from three teacher participants through observations, field notes and interviews. The second data set required Human Research Ethics Committee [HERC] approval and once this was granted the second phase (collecting data from participants) of the study commenced. Necessary consent from principals and participating teachers was obtained and information sheets were made available to parents. Data collection from the one co-educational independent Australian school was undertaken in August 2015.

It was originally anticipated that raw data would be collected as 4 case studies from 4 participating teachers (2 male, 2 female), however one participant withdrew, therefore the final data was collected from three teachers in total (2 female, 1 male). Haase (2008) highlights the importance of having a cross-section of male and female

teacher participants revealing that female and male teachers often have varying perspectives and practices for dealing with gendered behaviours. This distinction also relates to the third aim of the study where it is hoped to explore possible differences in the pedagogical practices of male and female teachers when dealing with girls versus boys.

Phase 1 - Narratives

In Phase 1, personal narratives portraying my own experiences in government primary classroom contexts were developed. These narratives tell three storied accounts of my time with two different teachers at two different schools.

In this research I define narrative in the same terms as Sarbin (1986), as “the organizational scheme I use to make meaning of experience in a story form” (p.3). It is a university requirement to maintain a reflective journal during practicum placements, recording personal progress and development throughout the placement. Entries from these journals formed the impetus of this study. Through a process of deep reflection, editing and revision I constructed narrative accounts of my lived experiences as well as conversations, interactions and practices. My narrative vignettes were (re)written between April and August 2015; while the central ideas and themes have been maintained the narratives have been edited for clarity and coherence. The complete narratives have been presented throughout this thesis. However, like Ellis (2009) did in her autoethnographic research, I have “cut and excerpted” (p. 303) from key phrases and themes from the original narratives in the findings section while ensuring original meanings and style was maintained. The inclusion of these journal extracts not only provides context to the research but also

acknowledges the constructivist paradigm by emphasising the relationship between the research and researcher (Mertens, 2005).

These narratives, and the themes that arise from them, have provided frameworks for the observations that occurred during Phase 2. The themes present in the narratives are intentionally specific, focusing on gender differentiation practices and the interactions between teacher and students that include communication, pedagogy and behaviour management. The narratives, generated in Phase 1 aim to provide insights into teacher practice during the varying stages of teacher-student interactions from my own perspective as a pre-service teacher.

Phase 2 - Observations

Phase 2 of the data collection process incorporated observations of the teacher participants' practice in their classroom contexts. Observations have enabled me to ascertain how, if at all, teachers may be responding to student gender and were explicitly focused on social interactions between teacher and student. Time spent with teachers varied from two hours to two whole class days, and was determined by what was convenient for the teacher participant and their teaching arrangements. During this time, observations were made regarding the teachers' interactions and engagement with students across three criteria, which were communication, behaviour and pedagogy. These observations were recorded as a combination of written field notes created during observations and audio recordings that were later selectively transcribed by myself (the student researcher) (Appendix B).

Field notes were recorded on an iPad, using the word processing Microsoft Office application OneNote. As I was granted temporary access to participating

school's Internet, the field notes were automatically synchronised and backed up to the password protected university cloud servers. By recording field notes I was able to capture non-verbal details, such as teacher movement around the class, student placement and grouping, and other descriptive details that would otherwise have been lost during the transcribing of audio materials alone.

The audio recordings allowed for the capture of verbal interactions between teacher and students. Specific instances were later transcribed verbatim, providing accurate accounts of what occurred during teacher-student interactions. These specific instances included whole class discussions (including introduction and conclusion of lessons), small group activities, and one-on-one interactions between student and teacher.

The observation schedule was an adaptation of schedules used by Mertens (2005), Smith (2011), and Skelton et al., (2009) and subsequently guided this phase of the research (Appendix C). Copies of the research questions were at hand during observation periods. Observations focussed on:

1. Program setting or the physical space in which observations are taking place. Patton (2002) recommends the drawing of sketches to describe the layout of the classroom, the use of space and the organisation.
2. Human and social environment: how people in the observable space organise themselves (Mertens, 2005). Specifically observing groupings and patterns of interactions between teacher and student(s).
3. Program activities and participant behaviours: what is occurring in the space and who is involved (Mertens, 2005). This element is expected to make up the bulk of the observations, and has been explored further in

four subcategories (please refer to *Figure 1* adapted from Skelton et al., 2009).

4. Non-verbal communication such as attire, expressions of affection, and physical spacing (Mertens, 2005).

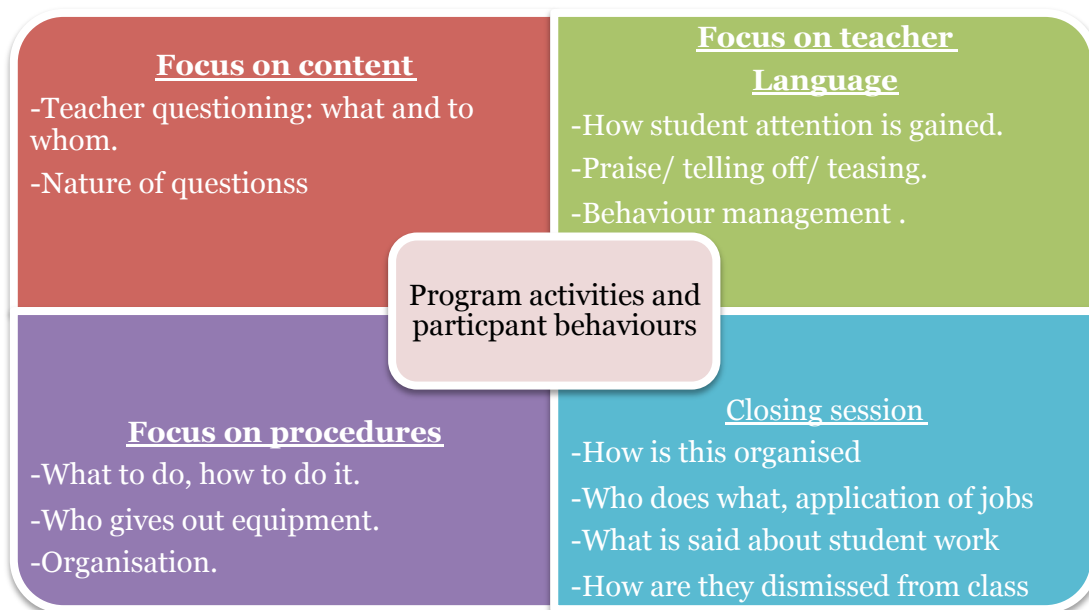


Figure 1: Activities and Behaviours Skelton et al., (2009)

In addition to these explicit observational areas, it was also noted what was not occurring. For example, mixed gender groupings or pet names (Mertens, 2005). These observations allowed for the development of comprehensive and authentic descriptions settings and contexts. The analysis and collation of observation data provided a means of triangulating data between interviews and personal narratives (Simons, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Phase 3 –Interviews

Phase 3 ensured the teacher participants' voices were captured (Yates, 2008), by providing explicit insight into each individual teacher's specific pedagogies

and ideologies behind classroom interactions. The semi-structured interviews assisted me (the student researcher) to gain an understanding into the teacher participants' current perceptions of how gender differentiation may impact and influence their practice. Semi-structured (Hatch, 2002), face-to-face interviews took place within seven days after the completion of the class observation at a negotiated time and place with the teacher participant. The interview schedule (Appendix D) contained several open-ended questions that guided conversation with the inclusion of elements that specifically related to the class observations.

The interview questions were a combination of prewritten questions constructed prior to the observation based on the literature and prior experiences, plus reflections of the observations. Where possible, a period of time was left between observations and the interview to allow time to draw out specific examples of student and teacher interactions for further discussion. While conversation was influenced by the interview schedule, there were opportunities for teachers to provide more details where they felt necessary and add any further thoughts at the conclusion of the interview. On several occasions ideas outside of the pre-determined questions were explored, initiated either by the teacher participant or myself as researcher. These provided insights into teachers' experiences, opinions and views on gender and education. Adopting a more open-ended conversational style of interviewing provided deeper and perhaps more candid insights into teachers' ideas and opinions by being less confrontational (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005).

Teachers' perceptions and the reality of class practice may not always be perfectly aligned. As Haase (2008) and Spender (1982) note, there can be differences between what the teacher believes is occurring and what is actually

occurring. As a prompt to initiate stimulated recall as part of these interviews, examples from the classroom observations were used to initiate reflection and open discussion around specific events. Jensen and Winitzky (2002) suggest that stimulated recall can be a powerful tool in allowing participant subjects to discuss their perspectives and reflect on their own practice. The interviews were audio recorded with prior consent obtained from the teacher participant. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim and used in conjunction with qualitative data from the observations. Transcripts were sent to participants for validation. This process provided the teacher participants with the opportunity to omit or add further information (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Mertens, 2005).

Data analysis

After field notes were taken and interviews transcribed, a combination of manual coding and qualitative software tool *NVivo* was utilised to organise collected data and allow thematic links to be drawn out across the data set. Key themes were drawn out both *intratextually* (single case) and *intertextually* (across cases) (Keats, 2007) and included teacher pedagogy and communication, behaviour management, teacher values, intentionality, and school philosophy. Narrative approaches complimented the observations to ensure participants' perspectives and contexts were 'told' and provided detailed accounts of setting and participants (Creswell, 2014).

First Cycle of Analysis

Descriptive coding was used during the first cycle analysis of observational data and field notes. Saldaña (2013) defines the descriptive method as an uncomplicated approach, especially for novices to qualitative research. This method allowed for the data to be analysed on a simplistic level with just one word to

summarise the theme or basic topic of a passage of data. The descriptive codes were determined before coding and were guided by the research question, which resulted in the following categories: behaviour management, communication, pedagogy, praise, pet names, and interactions. **Behaviour management** focused on any contact relating to student behaviour. **Communication** included conversations not pertinent to school 'work' or 'task at hand'. **Pedagogy** attended to interactions regarding schoolwork and *praise* explored instances of approval from the teacher. **Pet names** highlighted examples where the student was not referred to by their own name and **interactions** captured any interaction followed by one or more response between the teacher and student.

These categories were then further sub-coded into "boys" and "girls" in order for comparisons to be made about the effect of gender (Saldana, 2009). Interview transcripts were manually coded by references to behaviour, pedagogy and communication. Manual coding was chosen for the interviews due to the smaller data set (Saldana, 2009).

Second cycle of Analysis

First cycle data was revisited, drawing comparisons between interview data, observational field notes and my own personal narratives. During this stage detailed analytical memos were developed (Punch, 2014) highlighting specific examples of when gender differentiation did and did not occur. Direct quotes and dialogue was selected to represent the data in the results section. These memos were the basis for the findings chapter (Hatch, 2002; Saldana, 2013).

Limitations of this Study

There are several limitations worth noting. Firstly, there was only one male participant recruited as part of the raw data collection during phase two. While there is another male teacher (Marc) who appears in my own personal narratives he is only portrayed through my interpretation and is therefore lacking the fuller perspective of David's data. The raw data set was only collected from one independent Australian school, which had a highly influential school wide philosophy of education. Raw data may have been more diverse if a longer time-frame allowed a range of independent and government funded schools in different geographical/socioeconomic areas to be approached.

Secondly, teachers understandably find having their teaching practice observed intimidating, which may have affected their practice. Teacher participants were aware of what aspects of their teaching practice were being observed and may have altered their practice, unintentionally, for the purpose of the observation (O'Leary, 2014). *The School* has a strong culture of mentorship and collegial observations, where the teacher will tell their mentor areas they wished to be observed in order for self-improvement. At first, the participants found my intention to observe specific aspects of their teaching daunting. However at the conclusion of their involvement teacher participants stated that they found participation in the study to be useful in providing a different perspective on their teaching practice, and also provided the opportunity to reflect on their decision making processes in the classroom.

Summary

This chapter has provided a description of the research process and provided justification of methodical choices made. Limitations of the study were put forward

and the methods of data collection and analysis were also presented. The following chapter will present the findings as a result of the first and second cycle of data analysis.

Chapter 4

Narrative: Lorna's Class

Part One

This is the first time that I have been in classroom in several months. As I open the door, I hear some familiar voices from the corridor that I just walked through.

Student: "Miss Hindrum! It's Miss Hindrum, she's back!"

One of the boys rushes up to me. He throws his arms around my waist before I can stop him.

Student: "Oh I am so glad you're back!"

I hear Lorna laugh from behind the desk;

Lorna: "I'm such a terrible old ogre to them! It's good to see you, Estelle."

Me: "Nice to be back."

I carefully untangle myself from Zander's death grip.

Me: "What's been going on?"

Zander: "Well Miss, we've been working on a new class text and Mrs O let me choose it! And I've been practising my six and seven times tables and I learnt my five times and my fours and my threes! I'm an independent reader now! Oh and I can finally spell aquarium!"

Zander is breathless as he converses with me. His excitement is noticeable.

Me: "That's fantastic work. You must have been a hard worker this term."

Teacher: "Yes, we have been working hard haven't we Zander, getting you ready for grade 5."

Lorna then turns to the student.

Lorna: "Have you got your books ready yet?"

Zander rushes off to get his gear ready.

Lorna: "This boy always astounds me, all year we get our books ready first thing, but he always acts like it's his first day!"

I smile, remembering what it is like working with Zander. Even though he is often the first kid through the door in the morning, he is often the last to be organised.

Me: "What else is news?"

I glance around the room. Little seems to have changed since I was here last. Student work still covers every available bulletin board, with evidence of the new class text in their work. Positive affirmations fill up the rest of the space. The kids still sit themselves around several large half moon desks, with no apparent order or arrangement. They are all busily getting themselves ready for the first morning task, it is an automatic response.

Lorna: "Well we have had two new friends join our class, Miss Hindrum..."
Lorna then directs my attention to the half moon desk close by.

Lorna: "I would like you to meet Mia and Able. They are twins."
When they hear their names, the two children look up from their drawings. A few strands of thick black hair fall across Mia's face, which she quickly tucks behind her ear. I wave at her.

Me: "Hello, my name is Miss Hindrum."
Mia just smiles and nods and returns to her colouring. Her brother continues to watch me, his mouth held in a typical cheeky boyish grin, his dark brown eyes twinkling.

Abel: "Hello Miss Hindrum?"
Lorna: "You got to keep an eye on Abel, he's a bit of a trickster!"
Lorna laughs.

Abel: "No tricks!" he laughs, and returns to his work.
Lorna directs her attention to the whole class
Lorna: "Excuse me Grade 4,"
The class immediately drops whatever they were doing and turn their attention to Lorna.

Lorna: "It's library time, you know what that means! Pack up, get your books and snake line at the door. Mia, you will be our leader today."
Mia nods and starts putting away her pencils. She whispers something to Abel, pointing at the papers on their table. He shrugs and sits back in his chair; Mia begins to put away his things too.

Lorna: "You watch those two today, interesting dynamic. Abel likes to boss Mia around a bit. I've been trying to... discourage it"
The class begins to cluster around the door.

Lorna: "You call this a line?! Perhaps we need to practise lining up at recess time?" Her voice is not lost over the hum of chatter.

Lorna: "Mia, you are my leader, up the front!"

Lorna directs her to the front of the line, Abel follows, putting himself in the lead.

Lorna: "Abel, behind Mia."

The boy stands still.

Lorna: "Abel here, Mia is first today."

Gesturing how she wants the pair to stand. Scowling Abel moves behind his sister and I lead the class out the door.

Mia taps my arm, holding up her I Spy book.

*Mia: "I liked this one, but it was hard to find all things in the pictures"
pointing to the mess of objects on each page,*

Me: "Maybe we can look together in the library."

I don't notice Abel sneaking ahead and marching in front. Lorna does and calls him over, and Abel is made to walk with her the rest of the way.

Part Two

The library is a cosy room. Books naturally line the wall, creating a space in the centre of the room for large pillows and a teacher's chair. A few small groups have already claimed a few pillows together, reading to each other or just chatting. Zander sits away from the groups, concentrating on his latest novel. I notice Kate (a fellow classmate) plonking herself down next to him.

Kate: "That's a big book Zander, what's it called?"

Zander holds up the cover for her to see, it's Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism.

Kate: "But that's a girl's book Zander!"

Kate laughs, Zander blushes but remains silent. I feel a pang of guilt, I had recommended the book to him, having read it myself when I was his age.

Lorna: "What did you say Kate? What is a girl's book?"

Lorna steps out from behind a shelf.

Kate: "Zander's, it's a book for girls. It's all shiny and girly on the cover!"

Kate looks nervous, although she is not one to back down easily.

Lorna: "But that doesn't make it just for girls Kate! It's a good story. I don't think only girls are allowed to read it. Diary of a Wimpy kid is aimed more at boys, but you still enjoyed that a lot remember?"

Kate pauses for a moment; I can see she is not quite convinced.

Lorna: "Does it really matter to you what book Zander chooses to read?"

Kate shakes her head. "No".

Lorna: "Does it matter if Zander wants to read books for girls?"

Kate: "No, I guess not,"

The girl is still a little taken aback by the exchange.

Lorna: "Well then, let's get ready for recess! Charlie, you can take the lead."

Part Three

On the way back, Mia walks with a small group of girls giggling and pointing out funny animal pictures in one of their books. Abel drags his feet behind his sister. As the girls approach the classroom, Abel appears to remember where he is. Pushing his way through the group, he knocks the book from Chloe's hands as he runs through the door first, knocking it shut behind him. However, not a moment later the door is reopened and Lorna appears with Abel in tow.

Lorna: "You can stand here and hold the door. The girls go in first, it is polite to wait!"

Lorna stands with him while the rest of the children enter the room.

Lorna: "It's good manners to let the girls in first. You can get lunch now, Abel."

The boy nods, slightly shocked by the turn of events. Lorna's message must have sunk in, next time Able was first to hold the door open and let his sister through first.

Chapter 5

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study and is divided into three sections: communication, behaviour management and pedagogy. The communication section outlines the data in relation to teacher communication with students and how, if at all, teachers are differentiating their communication styles towards boys and girls. The subsequent section, behaviour management, presents data pertaining to teachers' behaviour management practices. Finally, the pedagogy section presents data in relation to teachers' pedagogical decisions in regards to boys and girls. These sections flow into one another, telling the story of both the data and the participants.

In order to provide clarity around the various voices present in the findings, direct quotes from participants have been indented and italicised to differentiate the participants' voices from my own academic voice. Direct responses/quotes from the teacher interviews appear within inverted commas, while dialogue from the observation stage appears in a script format, with the name of the teacher and/or student in square brackets. Excerpts from my own narratives are formatted in a different font (Calibri) in order to differentiate my own stories from those of the teacher participants.

Pseudonyms have been selected for the teacher participants as well as students' names that are mentioned in direct quotes and/or appear in dialogue. As this study has a strong focus on gender, pseudonyms chosen are intentionally associated with a specific gender and thus are easily identifiable as reflecting the teachers' and students' gender.

Communication

The following section presents the data relating to teachers' communication practices. The three participants, Liz, Jodie and David, are three teachers who are aware of their communication practices and were observed to be highly in sync with what they believe to be occurring in their classrooms and what was actually observed.

Based on my own experiences working with older students, as showcased in the narratives, differentiating communication was a common practice. However, for Liz and Jodie, gender differentiation is not something that is considered necessary or relevant in the early years. In terms of differentiating communication,

“at this young age...they all respond to a smile, they all respond to a hug or a little joke...it doesn't matter if they are boys or girls, they all just like attention” –Liz

The data shows types of attention and communication varies from student to student, to boy to girl. However it became clear while observing Liz that this variation is not always a direct response to gender but the characteristics and traits that a student brings into the classroom.

“[There may be] rough and tumble boisterous boys and you have to respond in that particular way but sometimes you can have a real rough and tumble boisterous girl and you have to respond the same way” – Liz

In both Liz and Jodie's classes there was a major focus on the development and engagement of the individual. Liz discussed two different ways she interacts with two very different personalities:

“So you've seen in here today James. He is quite a sensitive little soul and he needs a bit of nurturing and he will respond to you but you have got to do it in a really gentle way. Whereas some boys won't respond to that at all! Like they don't want that and you'll get nothing out of them. We had one boy in

here, who's left now, and he would never respond to that at all! If I spoke and responded and gave feedback the way I do to James to Rupert, I would lose Rupert completely...he would turn around and say, "I'm not a baby!" – Liz

This consideration towards personality form the basis of Liz's intentions of communication,

"you teach, give feedback and question the individual" – Liz

Through developing relationships with her students, Liz is able to provide her students with personalised attention, rather than homogenising her communication for boys and girls that reinforce gendered stereotypes and behaviours.

Liz fosters a culture in her classroom that is centred on students communicating their ideas openly, sharing their knowledge and experience. During my two days of observations, these tiny four-year-old children discuss topics such as the existence of dinosaurs to the origins of human life. Girls and boys were both eager to share their opinions and very much equally encouraged to do so. Liz says she has a strong expectation that everyone, regardless of gender, will contribute equally to the class,

"...play dough people [a mixed group] can you put your play dough in one big ball so it doesn't dry out in the sun, and if you are doing drawing on the floor [mixed group four girls and two boys] make sure your names are on the back....put them down on the floor so we can share them. You did a great job Charlie. Mia good job, well done. Let's see if we can put the pastels back in the container before Kitty accidentally steps on them!" – Liz (during class)

During this sequence, Liz is addressing the whole class outlining how she expects them to move during pack up. Proving the power of Liz's expectations, the students even do things without being asked,

"Isn't this class amazing" Liz says as an aside to me,

“I didn’t even ask them to line up!”

Through questioning Liz promotes deep thinking in both boys and girls; she prompts them to uncover prior knowledge encouraging her students to develop into lifelong learners. The following piece of dialogue follows on from Liz initiating a discussion about the existence of dinosaurs. Firstly Liz encourages four-year-old Delilah to share her thoughts and then builds upon her suggestion by seeking contributions from the rest of the class,

(Delilah raises her hand)

[Liz]: Oh let’s see what Delilah thinks.

[Delilah]: No people were around when the dinosaur were there..?

(Children talk over each other)

[Liz]: Hold on boys...

[Delilah]: Where were the people?

[Liz]: Oh that’s a good question! Where were the people? Has anyone got an answer? Where were the people, Esther?

[Esther]: Umm they weren’t around yet. Maybe that means they were not alive yet.

Liz follows a similar pattern when interacting with boys.

[Liz]: Ok, Jackson?

[Jackson]: Before the people there was an ice age. After the dinosaurs there was an ice age.

[Liz]: So before the people and after the dinosaurs there was an ice age. Can you explain what an ice age is?

[Jackson]: After the dinosaurs were extinct there was an ice age and then they got frozen bones.

[Liz]: Oh the bones got frozen?

[Jackson]: And they couldn't survive and there were woolly mammoths.

While Jackson did not pose a question like Delilah, Liz provides him with the opportunity to share his knowledge and explain new ideas with the class. Liz provides both girls and boys with probing questions that encourage them to share their thinking and consider new areas they would like to find more about. This propensity to “dig deeper” closely aligns with Liz’s aim for students:

“to see themselves as learners and they can learn anything they want to....schools not just about drawing and writing and reading, it’s about thinking” – Liz

This idea of deep thinking is also tied to how Liz often praises her students, commending their thinking and contributions to class discussion. Through her praise, Liz acknowledges the effort students put into completing their work. Praise appears slightly differently in Jodie’s class with an emphasis on communicating expectations and encouraging desired behaviours.

[Alex]: Please can you open this?

[Jodie]: Oh Alex it is so nice that you are using beautiful words! Wonderful!

Like Liz, Jodie believes she is differentiating communication based on individual student needs and personalities, rather than their gender,

“...if I follow up on [Alex], he gets worse, if you avoid him he wants the attention and so if you give him your attention for the positives then that seems to work out. Whereas a lot of the other children in our class like Meg, she is used to getting attention for the positive...and Alex is used to getting attention for the negative and so I do accommodate for them differently and they are a different sex but if their sexes were reversed and I would react the same way” – Jodie

As described above, Jodie is communicating with the children in her class in direct response to their individual character and their immediate needs. While Alex needs reinforcement to behave in more school appropriate ways, children like Meg receive the praise for how she is already behaving.

Jodie is aware of being consistent with her language when interacting with students, naturally differentiating in response to a variety of reasons (for instance student age, temperament and behaviour), however she is not convinced that these differences are necessarily related to the student's gender,

"...when you can look across the room and see cars and trucks and think boys would like that and see dolls and think girls would like that but that's not how it works. Actually the boys are equally interested in the babies, if not more in some cases, so I think as adults we categorise these things but to the children it's not a category its universal" – Jodie

Jodie continually encourages students to pursue their interests, even ones she alluded to as perhaps classified by society as traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine. Girls in Jodie's class were interested in building with blocks, while a boy had a keen interest in babies and where they came from.

Jodie engages both in conversations centred on the child and their immediate needs and interests,

"...everything we do in the classroom, the children have initiated... what we are doing [is] based on their interests. If it's not relevant to them it's not useful for them" – Jodie

Communication plays a significant role in the culture of Jodie's class, encouraging students to be both involved and engaged in their learning. In the early years, Jodie does not appear to be responding to student gender but the set of characteristics and

traits they display. However, she suggested that gender differentiation may become more apparent as children age, a theory that David also shared,

“Maybe the age group I’m dealing with...you know the hormones [start to] kick in and the peer pressure is really strong in that area, I’m wondering if there’s more gender differentiation the older they get?” – David

David suggests that teachers may start differentiation in Year 2 in response to the students,

“Seven and eight year olds, becoming more self-aware. The girls are becoming more self-aware; ‘who’s friends with me? Who’s not friends with me?’ those type of things do kick in with the girls but the boys are just running, climbing and jumping” – David

While David was not inclined to “lump” genders into two distinct categories, his suggestion that gender differentiation occurs more with older year levels aligns with my own experiences.

During conversations I observed during my professional placements Marc appeared to be prone to alter his communication between boys and girls,

Elliot: Hey, Mr. Reeve? I left my homework sheet on the kitchen bench.

Marc: “Aw mate! You would forget your own head if it wasn’t screwed on properly!

~

Georgia: “Mr. Reeve?”

Marc: “Yes, poss?”

Georgia: “I forgot my maths homework today, can we mark it tomorrow?”

Marc: “Yeah that’s alright. Bring it in tomorrow...”

These examples demonstrate how Marc would differentiate his communication between boys and girls. However, I cannot say for certain that Marc was

implementing gender differentiation intentionally, if his interactions to students were based on their gender or what they respond best to as at the time I did not question him directly about these observations.

This section on communication reveals how the three participants (Liz, Jodie and David) were inclined to respond to students on an individual basis rather than homogenising responses for each gender. It began to emerge that gender differentiation potentially becomes more of a consideration during classroom practices as students move through primary school as demonstrated by Marc's responses to girls and boys. Student age as an influencing factor of gender differentiation is brought forward more explicitly in the following section.

Behaviour management

In this section, the data pertaining to teachers' behaviour management practices is shared. The three teacher participants make it clear that they do not see themselves as responding to student gender with respect to behaviour management; rather they consider the students' personality and implement strategies that compliment that personality. Teaching in different contexts seems to have influenced their current behaviour management practices. Both Liz and Jodie explained how previous teaching has shaped their current values and experiences of student behaviour. Older students may to benefit from a certain level of differentiation, however David speculates this could be a response to student character, rather than their gender. Links are also drawn between students' home life, and how their backgrounds could be influencing both the teacher and their school experiences.

A large influence on gender differentiation appears not to lie with the teacher, but with dominant personalities of students and the gender-stereotyped behaviours those personalities are often associated with. While Jodie's class may have been too

young for these personalities to become apparent, Liz's class was much more settled, and unlike the other class groups around them, they preferred to play in mixed groups and enjoyed sharing ideas and knowledge with each other. It did not seem necessary for Liz and Jodie to respond to their students in gender differentiated ways, as the children were not performing in gendered ways.

Liz's approach to behaviour management reflected her beliefs in responding to children as individuals. Liz also discussed how behaviour management strategies implemented for one student one day in her early learning classroom may not be applicable the next,

"Sometimes Max will come in tears and really find it really hard to leave his mum, and he can have a day where he's teary all day and you've just got be nurturing towards him and really encourage him and lots of praise. Other day's he'll come in and he'll be absolutely fine. He will be just as loud as the others and join in and you kind of respond differently to him one whatever mood or whatever day he comes in" – Liz

Liz believes her tendency to respond to student personality over gender has arisen from her previous experiences teaching in an all-boys school,

"I had this preconceived idea of what a boys school was gonna be... I went in thinking, ok, I know what sort of teacher I'm gonna have to be. I'm gonna have to be firm. I'm gonna have to have the rules down pat...boys are quite physical and we'll have to lots active kinds of things...But it was very different, it was the same, you have the same personalities as you do in the co-ed schools. I had some really boisterous boys and really placid quiet boys...It taught me a lot ...you don't teach any particular way for boys and girls, you teach to what your classes needs" – Liz

This experience seems to have had a strong influence on Liz's current practice, her awareness of responding to students on the basis of character and personality, and holding the same expectations of behaviour for all students.

"...it doesn't matter if you are a boy or girl, if you've been here all year or just joined, we've all agreed to the same behaviour" – Liz

Liz's emphasis on holding the same expectations for students, regardless of gender, becomes apparent during interactions with two children (Jacob and Sarah). These two children have personalities that could potentially dominate classroom conversation without careful intervention. Jacob would use proximity to Liz to ensure his voice was heard,

"...he's in your ear all the time! (laughs). You automatically listen to who's closest to you!" – Liz

Being aware of this, Liz would often reinforce the *"hands up"* rule with Jacob. While Sarah would also call out during class discussions, Liz described her behaviour as becoming *"bossy"* and *"dominating"* (Liz). Although she would regularly enforce the *hands up* rule with both students, Liz made it clear she was specifically targeting *dominating* behaviours with Sarah.

While gender differentiation during behaviour management may not be overt in this cohort, Liz describes instances of differentiation while teaching older (eight years old and beyond) year levels. All three teachers suggested that from Year 2, students are beginning to differentiate themselves and their interests are increasingly divergent, influencing teachers to respond to them in different ways. Jodie also discussed her experiences of working with a Year 2 class, which required her to differentiate behaviour management to meet the immediate needs of the older students,

“We did art work and it needed to dry...some were blow drying it but we also had a whole group running on the field to dry it that way because they needed to move...there were three boys and a girl that needed that...I don’t know if I would have done it differently if there were more girls that needed to move. I probably would have done the exact same thing” – Jodie

This illustrates how Jodie works to provide personalised educational experiences for her students, being flexible in how she responds to students in ways that best suits their behaviour and personality.

Jodie also spoke about relying on strategies for children who act in certain ways, and their behaviours may not necessarily be linked to their gender,

“It’s more personality, you get to know those children and you know how they behave and react in situations. You might use a different strategy for...somebody like Alex (who engages in typical disruptive, attention seeking behaviours), but I have had girls that have similar sorts of behaviour and I have had to use the same sorts of strategies with them”. –Jodie

David also agrees that behaviour management is using strategies to target personalities that behave in specific ways. While observing David’s Year 5 music class, I noticed David’s tendency to follow up more on groups of boys than groups of girls,

“They [all] need someone to bring them back to the task at hand...but as far as a boys/girls thing, I don’t know if I’m specifically targeting boys...I suppose its personality which may be the boys” – David

This differentiation may have resulted from the type of task the students were engaged in, a highly self-directed and creative task with minimal teacher input in the process and finished product. David suggested that girls may be better at engaging in this type of task as they are often more mature than the boys and are better able to

remain focused on tasks. However, this is not to say that the girls were not engaging in off task behaviours,

“I suppose the boys are more physical when they are off task, it’s probably more noticeable. Whereas the girls can be off task but...doing it quietly so maybe you don’t notice” – David

David goes on to reflect how students’ home life may also influence their behaviours and experience of gender roles

“[The] kids are coming in from pretty settled homes...Their male and female role models are pretty stable. But...different schools where home life is very different and maybe the stereotype roles are very different. You know with the stay at home mum and working father, very masculine father, very feminine mother”
– David

This background influence may be contributing to the differences between what I have previously experienced in government schools and my observations during my time with the three participants at *The School*. At the two government schools (over 10 weeks of practicum placement) I experienced students arriving at school with a much greater diversity in their home lives and socio-economic backgrounds. Lorna’s approach to behaviour management with the twins (refer to narrative, page 39) could be a response to the gendered expectations they are accustomed to at home, males taking up the dominating role while the girls clean up.

...Mia nods and starts putting away her pencils. She whispers something to Abel, pointing at the papers on their table. He shrugs and sits back in his chair; Mia begins to put away his things too.

Lorna (to me): You watch those two today, interesting dynamic. Abel likes to boss Mia around a bit. I've been trying to... discourage it. – Lorna

Lorna continues to challenge Abel's behaviour by encouraging Mia to take on leadership roles within the class, something that Abel found difficult to accept at first. The ways in which Lorna challenged Abel's behaviour suggests that she has particular expectations of gender roles and seems to have a presumption that students will behave within those expectations. Marc also seemed to promote similar values in his class by responding to the boys in more typically masculine ways, while taking a calmer disposition with the girls.

Student personality appears to play a large role in the teacher participants' application of behaviour management strategies. Teachers are choosing strategies that complement the students' character, and sometimes adapting their approaches on a daily basis in response to the students' immediate behaviour and mood. It also appears that girls and boys engage in similar types of behaviours, however how these behaviours manifest in both genders can be very different, which influences the teachers responses to those behaviours. Student home life also seems to be an influencing factor in student behaviour and therefore impacting on teacher-student interactions. Student influence on teacher practice was also revealed during pedagogical decisions, which will be presented in the next section.

Pedagogy

The following section will share the data in terms of teachers' pedagogical and gendered practices. I begin with my experiences observing Marc and how he engaged boys in their learning which closely links to how David adapted his pedagogy specifically for boys through the use of particular genres of music. Through these practices, David challenged students' perceptions of gender stereotypes, as did Lorna

when she blatantly challenged her student's opinions of gender. Liz was also aware of perpetuating gender stereotypes, and was conscious of not providing her students with gender specific activities and allowing students to follow their interests, as did Jodie.

Marc would often accommodate the more physical nature of the boys in his planning of whole class activities, especially Max. Marc would consider Max's interests and what would keep him interested and engaged with lessons. Max had a keen interest in hockey. For a graphing lesson students gathered and presented data about the hockey world cup. Both male teachers found it necessary to individualise curriculum, content, and presentation to suit the needs of boys, David planning a unit of work that involved rapping and beat boxing,

“the boys get really confronted by singing...we started with beat boxing and...a few boys got really switched on by that, it's music, it's cool...you don't have to sing. It's what they perceive as a cool thing... if I said we are going to do a singing challenge and you have to sing something and record it...they would have worked through it but they wouldn't have been engaged by it...that's one area where we do really target boys and keep them engaged” – David

Cultural pressures promoting the perception that music, particularly singing, is for girls is the reason David suspects that boys tend to become more disengaged with music. However, considering the boys' interests and using a genre that is perceived as “edgy” and “cool” by the boys has enabled David to promote engagement in music in ways that cater for their needs and interests. David provided his male students with this *hook* through an open-ended activity that required students to use recording and editing software to recreate a nursery rhyme or well-known song. This allowed for all students to create music through genres that interested and engaged them.

David found it important to challenge the boys' perceptions of gender and engagement in music, enabling/allowing them to overcome cultural pressures to follow their interests. During my placement I observed that Lorna would also attempt to challenge her students' stereotyped perceptions of gender, challenging Kate's judgement of Zander's reading material,

"But that doesn't make it just for girls Kate! It's a good story. I don't think only girls are allowed to read it. Diary of a Wimpy kid is aimed more at boys, but you still enjoyed that a lot remember?" – Lorna

Similarly, Liz was also conscious of challenging gender assumptions and aims to provide her students with a range of non-gender specific learning activities. Almost all of the learning activities that Liz would plan were based on student interests and were often initiated by the students themselves.

Pedagogically, Liz did not seem to cater for the girls and boys any differently. However, on one occasion during a small group (three girls, one boy) discussion, Liz would continually engage the boy first. On the surface this could be seen as an example of preferential treatment towards boys, since Oscar was the only boy in the group. While the other girls made contributions to the conversation, and Liz was attentive to them too, Oscar was repeatedly called on first to provide his opinion and share ideas. During her interview, I questioned Liz about her intentions, finding her continual engagement of one male student contradictory to other instances of class engagement and her teaching beliefs I had previously observed. I realised, however, there was a very specific reason for Liz's explicit engagement of Oscar: he had initiated the investigation into triceratops and engaging him in the conversation enabled Liz to acknowledge what Oscar already knew and get him to deepen his thinking and knowledge further.

Liz also demonstrated a preference to provide her students with open-ended activities, particularly in the older years, that enabled students to follow their own interests and co-construct their learning,

“When I was teaching Year 2 I did a whole unit of on fairy tales. As you can imagine a majority of the girls were really into Cinderella and those...fairy tales. Whereas the boys were very much into the troll who lived under the bridge and kicked the billy goats all over the place...if you’ve got a group of girls who are really interested in Cinderella and princesses and stuff, you let them go that way and the same with the boys” – Liz

This preference of allowing student interest to dictate the direction of learning and pedagogy was also something I observed in Jodie’s class. Her classroom was almost entirely centred on student interest and was almost always student initiated.

“...the clouds in the sky [started when] we were having a rest and someone asked ‘why do the clouds move?’ So that’s what we ran with. So we said if we want to know how, we should put clouds in our room to see how they move. Then they said, when painting the sky, “what colour is the sky? First they said blue, but it was a rainy day and someone talked about the sun setting, then they realised the sky is all different colours and it depends...If it’s not relevant to them it’s not useful for them” – Jodie

This inclination to allow students to pursue their interests and determine the direction of their learning seems to be heavily influenced by the school wide philosophy of education based on the Reggio Emilia Principles.

“In my room it’s not going to be perfect in terms of an adult perspective, but it’s authentic and for me that sums up a lot of the Reggio philosophy we abide by” –Jodie

This philosophy is explicitly child centred, where the students are seen as co-contributors to their learning. Developing relationships is essential to enable this tailored and personalised approach to learning.

“If you don’t have the relationships then you don’t know. You need to be able to know that when someone is wiggling for the toilet or if they are just wiggly” –Jodie

The pedagogical choices of the three participant teachers, especially Liz and Jodie, are influenced by the Reggio philosophy. This is evident in how the three teachers deliver student centred content that is tailored to suit student needs, rather than making gendered assumptions about what students will engage in. In the early years, Liz and Jodie establish classrooms where students are co-constructors to their learning experiences and content is driven by student interest. David and Marc were still using student interest to drive content and learning, making specific pedagogical choices that targeted the engagement of boys. However, David also aimed to go beyond just engaging boys in music, he worked to challenge the boys’ stereotyped perceptions. Lorna made similar choices, overtly challenging her students’ gendered assumptions. The overarching theme of this section is considering the students’ needs and making pedagogical choices that will maintain engagement in their learning. This includes presenting content that may specifically target the interests of one gender.

Summary

This chapter presented the key findings of this study. Through communication it was revealed that the three participant teachers were responding to student character and personality over their gender performances. Gender differentiation was not considered a necessary practice in the early years, however became more of a feature of teacher-student interactions as the children moved into later primary

school (approximately Year 2 onwards). This suggests that perhaps students are influencing teacher practice of gender differentiation.

This was further revealed throughout the behaviour management section, as David suggested that a students' personal experience of gender roles at home could be influencing their behaviour at school. The types of behaviour students engage in was also revealed, and it was found that girls and boys often engage in the same behaviours but in different ways. How teachers respond to students' behaviour was also found to be heavily influenced by an individual student's current mood and that strategies in dealing with one student may change on a day-to-day basis.

The tendency for the three teacher participants (Liz, Jodie and David) to implement such personalised teaching styles was found to be heavily influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy of education. Central to this philosophy is developing teacher student relationships that enable teachers to provide students with personalised learning that caters for their group and individual interests. The following chapter will discuss the key findings in relation to existing research, identifying how this study supports, contradicts, and adds to contemporary literature.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Through this study, gender differentiation has been explored in terms of how it may come to impact teacher-student interactions with three teacher participants. In doing so, several areas of teacher practice were specifically observed including; behaviour management, pedagogy and communication. In the following section, the findings will be discussed in terms of the aims of this study. Other literature will also be drawn upon in relation to these findings. The chapter has been divided in to sub-sections according to the specific aims. Thus, the following sub-headings will provide the structure of this chapter; 1) Communication, 2) Behaviour, 3) Pedagogy, 4) Intentionality, 5) Differences and Similarities.

Communication

How, if at all, do teachers differ in their communication towards boy and girls?

The practices of the three teacher participants (Liz, Jodie and David) highlight the importance that each of them place on a student's individuality. Jones and Dindia (2004) proposed that the ways in which teachers and students interact with one another is a primary driver behind the establishment and maintenance of classroom culture and environment. Creating a culture of inclusion and fostering environments that are responsive to students' needs was evident in the practices of the three participants. While my data has not exposed a significant amount of gender differentiation occurring in the early primary years, differentiation became increasingly evident in older age groups of students, which is supported by literature (Jackson, 2010; Skelton, et al., 2009).

The three teacher participants appeared to be highly aware of their teaching practices and how their intentions translate in the classroom. While Liz, Jodie and David all admit to differentiation of practice, they maintain that it is purely in response to student character and personality, rather than a direct response to their gender. However, there are numerous studies (Lee-Thomas, et al., 2005; Raines, 2012; Skelton et al., 2009) that asseverates gender differentiation is not only rife in classrooms across the world, it often occurs unbeknownst to the teacher (Davis & Nicaise, 2011; Hiller & Johnson, 2007; Spender, 1982).

In 1998, Gilbert called for educational providers to support students in developing more balanced perceptions in regards to gender. This call appears to have been answered at *The School*, as Liz and Jodie both maintained that gender differentiation is not something they believe to be necessary in the early years of schooling. This was evident in their teaching practice through the consistency of language when interacting with the different genders. Lee-Thomas et al.,(2005) found that early years teachers were inadvertently reinforcing dominate gender discourses through communication and pedagogical decisions. Both Liz and Jodie were consciously trying to provide their students with non-gender specific language and learning activities. Karniol and Gal-Disegni (2009) found that the careful selection of teaching resources and learning activities by teachers in the early years can challenge student perceptions of gender stereotypes and can promote social change.

In this study, all three teacher participants discussed how student age was an influencing factor of gender differentiation. Both David and Liz surmised that gender differentiation becomes more prevalent from Year 2 (7-8 year olds). This observation is supported by the studies of Davies (1989); Lloyd and Duveen, (1992), and Skelton et al., (2009), revealing that middle primary aged students become more engaged

with gender role categories and will perform what they believe is *right* for their gender and as a consequence have a strong sense of gender identity. This gives credence to the notion that students may in fact be more influential on gender differentiation practices than teachers. This could provide one explanation as to why there was very little gender differentiation at *The School*, as the particular groups of children that were observed were not overtly subscribing to gendered performances. This lack of gendered behaviours could be due to age or personality. Subsequently, it was unnecessary for the teacher participants to respond to students in gender specific ways. My own personal experiences have been to the contrary, where I have found that teachers would sometimes respond to students in gender specific ways. It is unclear, however, the intentions behind the differentiation I witnessed and whether or not it was an intentional or unintentional practice implemented by the teacher in those cases.

Behaviour

How, if at all, do teachers differ in their behaviour management practices towards boys and girls?

Rather than allowing students' gender to predict behaviour (Funk, 2002) and influence expectations (Becker, 1981; Raines, 2012), the three teacher participants, especially Jodie and Liz, relied on building relationships with students and tailoring engagement to the individual. The teacher participants also relied on specific strategies that targeted certain behaviours, for instance Liz and Jodie both suggested they would use the same techniques to deal with boisterous girls as boisterous boys. These findings are not unlike the research of Jackson (2010) who found that teachers relied on developing their own responses to specific students' behaviour, with varying levels of success. Jackson's (2010) findings are reflected in my own experiences with

Marc, who by virtue of being male, was able to align himself with Max by subscribing to the more masculine, boisterous behaviours that Max performed (Hasse, 2008).

Another key theme revealed by the findings of this study indicates that boys and girls will engage in similar types of behaviour but how each gender performs these behaviours can be different. David suggested that while both boys and girls engage in off task behaviour, boys will often be more noticeably distracted from their work. David would frequently 'check in' with boys during class and would spend slightly more time with boys ensuring that they were on task compared to girls. The research of Harrop and Swinson (2011) revealed similar findings, suggesting that primary aged boys pose more of a management challenge for teachers than their female peers, and therefore boys require more teacher intervention. David agreed that by Year 5 girls are better able to remain focused on self-directed tasks and are less likely to engage in off-task behaviour than the boys or are better at concealing these behaviours (Harrop & Swinson, 2011; Ponitz, Rimm-Kaufman, Brock & Nathanson, 2009).

Some evidence of differentiation was revealed in teachers' descriptions of student behaviours. An example of this was provided by Liz, who disapproved of a particular behaviour in both genders but used language of gender bias to describe the girl but not the boy (Kamphorst, 2014; Williams, 2013). Liz explained how both children frequently asserted themselves in different ways during class discussions, however she only described Sarah as becoming *bossy* and *dominating*. While the use of gender-biased language was evident during discussion (Davis & Nicaise, 2011), it was not apparent in Liz's teaching practice or how she conveyed her expectations toward students. This use of the term 'bossy' during the interview could be argued as more indicative of the pervasiveness of an unconscious gender bias engrained in current society than the way in which Liz perceives the girls in her class.

Both Jodie and David wondered how much students' home lives were influencing students' gender perceptions and consequently their interests and behaviours. The students enrolled at *The School* arrived from different socio-economic backgrounds, compared with the students who were present in my narrative vignettes.

These contextual differences may be influential in the deviation of gender differentiation that was observed in this study and common practices at *The School* compared to my own experiences in government schools. For instance, both Lorna and Marc's (government) schools had an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value of just below the average score of 1000. This value is determined through a combination of students' family backgrounds, parent occupation and educational levels, the schools geographical location, and proportion of Indigenous students (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2014). In contrast to the government schools, *The School* has an ICSEA value of over 1100. Esturgó-Deu and Sala-Roca observed that independent schools will often receive more homogenous students arriving from more balanced socio-economic backgrounds (2010). In the study of Mullola et al., (2012) it was suggested that a student's socio-economic context shapes student behavioural development. Parental influence and upbringing does seem to have a large impact on a child's development of personality, character and behaviours (Mullola, 2012; Rothbart, 2011; Windle, Iwawaki, & Lerner, 1988). The students at *The School* appeared to be more *homogenic* in their socio-economic backgrounds and home lives, compared to the students present in my personal narratives based on government schools. Further research in this area might shed more light on the link between students' socio-economic advantage and gender differentiation in teaching practice.

Pedagogy

How, if at all, do teachers differ in their pedagogical practices towards boys and girls?

In this study, there was little evidence to suggest that gender based differentiation of pedagogy was implemented by the three teacher participants. Primarily, each of the three teacher participants aimed to provide students with learning and content that catered to individual student needs and interest. In this study differentiation of pedagogy became more apparent in the upper years, where teachers more frequently made pedagogical decisions that targeted the engagement of one gender. For instance, the male teacher participant and the male teacher I observed during practicum were teachers of older year levels (years 5-6), and both made specific pedagogical decisions that targeted the interests of the boys in their classes. David and Marc found it necessary to personalise teaching content and format to cater for the needs and interests of the boys. While Marc would accommodate for the more kinaesthetic nature of the boys in his class, David modified the conceptual content of his lessons to include themes that boys perceived as being *cool*. The research conducted by Azzarito, Solmon and Harrison (2013) also found teachers would often manipulate circumstance in order to engage boys. However, Azzarito et al., (2013) found that this differentiation of content and learning often comes at the expense of the girls' interests. David, however, provided his differentiation in the context of an open-ended task, which allowed both boys and girls to complete the task in ways that complemented their individual strengths and interests.

In the early years, Liz and Jodie did not find that differentiating their pedagogy based on gender a necessary consideration in the day to day running of their classrooms and were much more inclined to allow the students themselves to

dictate the direction and content of learning activities. This is contrary to the research conducted by Lee-Thomas et al.,(2005) who found that early learning teachers would inadvertently create gendered play spaces, often leading to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and/or behaviours and gender domination in one space.

Collaborative learning between boys and girls is something that is greatly encouraged by Liz and Jodie and is heavily influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy that forms the basis of their practice and the philosophy of *The School*. Fundamental to this approach is promoting critical thinking in students and developing strong, positive relationships, which is explicitly evident in all three teacher participants (Baker, 2014; Lewin-Benham, 2008; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). Liz and Jodie demonstrated confidence in their facilitation of the Reggio approach, and their adoption of this approach may be one contributing factor in the absence of gender differentiation in their respective practices. This point highlights the need for more research based on a wider range of school environments to clarify how, and to what extent, the implementation of a school wide philosophy could be influential in the absence or presence of gender differentiation. In this case, the findings indicate the Reggio Emilia philosophy with a clear focus on individualised learning did contribute to the teaching practice of the participants.

Intentionality

In cases where gender differentiation is occurring, is the teacher implementing these pedagogical practices intentionally or unintentionally?

While there were few instances of gender differentiation observed with the three participants, these occasions of differentiation were intentional pedagogical decisions implemented by the teachers. Unlike the abundance of teachers found in the literature (Beaman, et al., 2006; Hiller & Johnson, 2007; Jones & Wheatly, 1990),

the three teacher participants were highly cognisant of their performance and outcomes of their practice. For example, when Liz continually engaged a boy in group discussions first, she was doing so because Oscar had initiated the topic and also knew he was highly knowledgeable in that area. This tendency to heavily rely on student input stems from the Reggio approach, encouraging students to be co-constructors of their learning (Lewin-Benham, 2008). David also made decisions pertaining to the engagement of boys, specifically planning learning experiences to kindle their interests. However, unlike the findings of Davis and Nicaise (2011) and Azzarito et al.,(2006), the ways in which David presented his learning was also inclusive of the girls' engagement.

A review of contemporary literature reveals that not only is gender differentiation a common practice across teaching contexts (Beaman et al., 2006; Fisher, 2014; Lee-Thomas et al., 2005; Skelton et al., 2009), there is a dichotomy between what teachers believe is happening and what is actually happening (Azzarito et al., 2006 Davis & Nicaise, 2011; Hiller & Johnson, 2007; Spender, 1989). While many studies have explored teacher awareness of gender differentiation occurring in their practice (Davis & Nicaise, 2011; Skelton, 2009) there seems to be little data about why teachers are implementing these practices (if they are at all). This study fills the perceived gap in the literature in terms of intentionality of gender differentiation as it has demonstrated that teachers can be conscious of implementing gender specific practices for student engagement purposes.

Differences and similarities

What are the differences and/or similarities between the pedagogical practices applied by male and female practicing teachers?

The only significant difference between the pedagogical practices of the three participant teachers in *The School* was a decision made by David to specifically target the boys' interests during his music lessons. The three participants' practices were similar in the ways in which they purposefully interacted with their students and were highly considerate of personalising content and practices to meet the needs and interests of individuals. This could be attributed to teaching at a school that implements such a clear focus on the Reggio Emilia philosophy toward their educational practices.

In comparison, Marc's approach to interacting with girls and boys was very different to practices of female teachers I have observed in the same school. Marc had a tendency to be more relaxed and joking with the boys while more nurturing towards the girls, reflecting the more stereotyped responses revealed in research conducted by Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp(2006) and Skelton et al., (2009). Jackson (2010) also found that teachers of both genders feel that male teachers are better equipped at dealing with boisterous boys by virtue of being male.

Key aim

In what ways, if at all, do classroom teachers differentiate their practice as a result of students' gender?

The teachers observed during the course of this study were found to differentiate their practice in a multitude of ways. Examples of such differentiation included responding to student temperament and behaviours, and presenting learning tasks in ways that targets student interest. However, it was revealed that the ways in which teachers were responding to students were not always a reaction to their gender or gendered expectations and teachers were often considerate of the students' individual needs and interests. Cultivating this sense of personalised

learning environments for every student may be a result of a key theme of the Reggio Emilia approach which promotes “respecting the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each individual” (Lewin-Benham, 2008, p. 15). The implementation of several whole school philosophies, particularly the Reggio Emilia approach in the early years at *The School* could explain teacher practice, in particular how the teacher participants perceive gender differentiation in their own practice.

On some occasions teachers implement gender specific practices, they can be doing so in deliberate ways with the aim of being educationally beneficial and considerate of the needs of the student. Gender differentiation seems to become more apparent as students move through school, as demonstrated in my own experiences and the literature (Harrop & Swinson, 2010; Skelton et al., 2009). This can be linked to student development, the evolution of their interests and behaviours, and how they conform their own perceptions of gender (Davies, 1989; Llyod & Duveen, 1992; Skelton, 2009). It has been observed through this study that teachers respond to students’ gendered perceptions and in doing so attempt to challenge students’ ideas. This may occur indirectly through targeting their engagement in specific areas (e.g. David and rap music for boys) or directly confronting students’ ideas (Lorna and what book). This interruption of gendered ideas were identified in the early years when both Liz and Jodie consciously ensuring that gendered specific practice or learning did not occur but rather, provide activities driven by individual student interest.

Chapter summary

This chapter has addressed how the findings of this study have answered the research questions, and how the findings support and add to the contemporary literature. This study supports research that suggests gender differentiation becomes

more evident in the older years of schooling (Year 2 onwards)(Davis & Nicaise, 2011; Martin & Marsh, 2005; Swinson & Harrop, 2011). Furthermore, through this study a link between strong school wide policy and congruent teacher practice has been observed, a notion suggested by Jackson (2010), to promote personalised learning environments.

The most persistent theme present in the findings is the three teacher participants' continual reference to responding to students on an individual level and fostering personalised learning environments that caters to student needs and interest. The participants' insistence of providing personalised learning was reflected in their teaching practice, highlighting their awareness between beliefs of practice and classroom reality. Teacher awareness and intention of practice is not always reflected in the literature, and many examples of gender differentiation occurring without teacher awareness have been discussed (Hiller & Johnson, 2007; Jones & Wheatley, 1990; Skelton, et al., 2009; Spender, 1989).

When the participants made pedagogical decisions to implement gendered practices, they did so in ways that minimised a negative impact on the other gender. For instance, when David chose to specifically target the interests of boys through beat boxing, he situated learning within an open-ended task, therefore still being inclusive of girls by allowing them to pursue their strengths and interests. Not all teachers found in other research have been so accommodating of both genders (Azzarito et al., 2013; Davis & Nicaise, 2011).

Teachers can differentiate their practice in a number of ways, from responding to student behaviour, to targeting specific interests within their class. However, these examples of differentiation are not always a response to students' gender, and teachers are often more concerned with establishing learning environments that cater for the individuals in their care. While there are times when it is appropriate to

differentiate based on gender (e.g. specifically targeting the interests of boys for the sake of their engagement), these decisions were made with purpose and were implemented in highly deliberate ways. A highly influential school-wide philosophy seems to have had a significant impact on teacher practice and contributed to their awareness of what occurs during their classes on a daily basis.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this honours dissertation, the following question was the primary focus of the study.

In what ways, if at all, do classroom teachers differentiate their practice as a result of students' gender?

In addition, three sub-questions guided the study:

1. How are teachers, if at all, implementing different practices toward boys and girls in early learning and the primary school context? In particular:
 - a. How, if at all, do teachers differ in their *communication* towards boy and girls?
 - b. How, if at all, do teachers differ in their *behaviour management* practices towards boys and girls?
 - c. How, if at all, do teachers differ in their *pedagogical practices* towards boys and girls?
2. In cases where gender differentiation is occurring, is the teacher implementing these pedagogical practices intentionally or unintentionally?
3. What are the differences and/or similarities between the pedagogical practices applied by male and female practicing teachers?

Through an empirical study based on these questions, the ways in which teachers perceive gender differentiation and how it can be expressed in classroom practice has been investigated. These questions have allowed for explorations in both early years and primary classrooms and have provided insights into the daily practices of teachers and the intentions behind gender differentiation if it occurred.

Key findings indicate that in the early years, gender differentiation was not seen to occur in the day-to-day teachings of Jodie and Liz. In the context of *The School*, there is a much greater focus on the individual and personalising learning to meet the needs and interests of students rather than gender as a determining factor for determining student learning needs. However, this was deemed directly dependent on the individual student's behaviour, temperament and age.

Student age was deemed to be a highly influential factor in the presence of gender differentiation in the classroom, with all three teachers theorising that gender differentiation becomes more of a consideration from Year 2 onwards, when students are about 8 years old. At this age, students are more likely to notice differences between themselves and others and are starting to develop a strong sense of gender identity and students begin to perform within their own perceptions of gender. In doing so, these perceptions can be pervasive and influential on teachers' practice. Student views of gender, particularly ones attached to stereotypes, can be interrupted by teachers in order for students to develop more balanced perceptions.

Findings also indicate how strong school wide educational philosophies have a substantial influential effect on teacher practices. The three teacher participants' awareness of their classroom practice appears to stem from the strong school philosophy and policies. The teachers are encouraged to seek professional development and mentorship, establishing a culture of reflection to improve practice. This strong culture of professional reflection and development resulted in some initial clashes with my observational research methods. Typically a teacher at *The School* will request to be observed by a colleague and specific areas of their teaching will be focused on, as outlined by the teacher. My research targeted a specific area (gender differentiation) and an area that can be, at times, sensitive and controversial (Paechter, 2012; Yates, 2008).

This project was undertaken out of personal interest in how gender differentiation can occur in the classroom. While I tried not to allow my personal bias affect my expectations, I did anticipate finding teachers performing gendered practices similar to what had I witnessed in previous teaching contexts and what was presented in a variety of research investigations (Hiller & Johnson, 2007; Jackson, 2010; Spender 1989). However, what I found was three exceptional teachers, all highly dedicated to their practice and passionate about providing their students with high quality education. These three teachers were distinctly aware of what was occurring in their classrooms on a daily basis and of their own teaching practice. This is perhaps a virtue of working in a highly resourced school, which has the means to provide constant support toward professional development. I do not mean to imply that government schools do not support their staff, or that the teachers I have previously worked with are any less dedicated to their profession. I am simply highlighting the differences between the two vastly different teaching contexts I have now experienced.

The limitations of this study include the recruitment of participants from a specialised teaching context, an imbalance of participant gender and the small number of participants. Age of the students may also have influenced the findings. *The School* caters to a specific population and this may have also influenced the findings. The small numbers of participants also make generalising findings to the wider teaching community challenging. Further research is required to explore the relationships between strong school wide philosophy and levels of gender differentiation occurring at the classroom level. Recruiting participants from a diverse range of schools would also benefit from further research in order to broaden the findings and allow for some transferability.

My own teaching practice has been influenced through the development of this project. I have had the opportunity to deeply reflect on my own teaching and classroom experiences, and have observed the practices of some truly exceptional teachers. I have developed a stronger sense of my own gender perspectives through this project, recognising and understanding how they have potential to impact on my future practice if left unscrutinised. While I do not believe that all gender differentiation has negative effects, I hope that this project will allow readers to become more aware of how gendered practices can manifest in teaching in unexpected ways.

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APPENDIX A

Social Science Ethics Officer
Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Tel: (03) 6226 2763
Fax: (03) 6226 7148
Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

18 June 2015

Dr Heidi Smith
Faculty of Education
Locked Bag 1307

Student Researcher: Estelle Hindrum

Sent via email

Dear Dr Smith

Re: MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL
Ethics Ref: **H0015010 - Differentiation of teaching practice in the classroom: Girls versus boys**

We are pleased to advise that acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 17 June 2015.

This approval constitutes ethical clearance by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. The decision and authority to commence the associated research may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or review by your research governance coordinator or Head of Department. It is your responsibility to find out if the approval of other bodies or authorities is required. It is recommended that the proposed research should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics Committee, and to notify the Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

2. Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 03 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au.
3. Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
4. Amendments to Project: Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval is obtained from the Ethics Committee. Please submit an Amendment Form (available on our website) to notify the Ethics Committee of the proposed modifications.
5. Annual Report: Continued approval for this project is dependent on the submission of a Progress Report by the anniversary date of your approval. You will be sent a courtesy reminder closer to this date. **Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean that ethics approval for this project will lapse.**
6. Final Report: A Final Report and a copy of any published material arising from the project, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely



Katherine Shaw
Executive Officer
Tasmania Social Sciences HREC

Appendix B

Example of transcripts, observations and field notes

Excerpt: Transcript and observational fieldnotes from David's Year 5, group 1

Start Time	End Time	Transcript	Field Notes
			Class sits clumped together. But girls sit near each other and boys sit closer together. Different to early learning, where the kids just sit anywhere.
00:00:08.4	00:00:26.6	[David]: Estelle we've got 10! [Me]: wow! [David]: I know! There's some away at chess club, (kid yells out England) England.. [Boy]: (sounds like) but we work well together [Girl]: "its only us lovely people" [David]: This is it!	With only 10 students (5 boys) changes plan.
00:00:30.5	00:00:52.9	[David]: good morning everyone (choral reply from group) (introduces me to the group, asking that they be kind and polite to any of my requests) guys look that really changed my plan when there's only 10 of you...(goes onto explain the audacity challenge)	Guys referring to the whole class
00:03:22.1	00:04:49.1	Julian hand up. And asks questions relating to work. [Julian]: umm my partner is away [David]: you can always do this on your own ok?...	No mixed gender groups, students choose their own partner/small group
00:03:49.7	00:04:33.1	[David]: remember you can make up your own, nursery rhymes are probably easiest. But you can always add a few words (boy calls out, Humperdinkle) Ha! Yeah humperdinkle. But what I'm looking for is it has to in time with the click track...	
00:04:49.1	00:05:13.2	Students tell him how to follow the link	

Excerpt: Jodie's 3 year olds , morning session

Start Time	End Time	Transcript
00:10:22.2	00:10:47.7	<p>[Jodie]: Joseph we will see you on Wednesday. I hope you feel better my dear ok?</p> <p>[Joseph]: Bye bye</p> <p>[Jodie]: should we put the dinosaurs on ice again on Wednesday?</p> <p>[Joseph]: (Nods)</p>
00:10:47.7	00:16:04.4	<p>[Girl]: where's Joseph going?</p> <p>[Jodie]: he's not feeling well so he's going to go home today he's not feeling himself. That happens sometimes doesn't it? We can be really healthy and happy and sometimes we get a bit of a cold and you don't feel so good do you? And you need to go see the doctor</p> <p>[Girl1]: my mummy went to the doctor</p> <p>[Girl2]: I looked after my mummy</p> <p>[Jodie]: were you looking after you mummy when she wasn't feeling well?</p> <p>[Girl1]: yeah</p> <p>[Jodie]: were you looking after your mummy too?</p> <p>[William]: yep</p> <p>[Alex]: I looked after my mummy. I help looked after my mummy)</p> <p>[Zoey]: I went to the doctors!</p> <p>[Jodie]: what did you do at the doctors Zoey?</p> <p>[Zoey]: Rosie goed to the doctor</p> <p>[Jodie]: does she?</p> <p>[Zoey]: yeah and I come too</p> <p>[Boy]: I go to the doctors?</p> <p>[Jodie]: ooh when we are not feeling well we go to the doctors. That's what we do when we are not feeling good.</p>

Excerpt: Liz interview. Interviewer speech in bold

Yeah. So some that I noticed..

Yes this was interesting and something that I didn't even realise

Yeah with that little research group, you sort of tended to sort of engage Charlie first and then maybe bring in the other girls. Was that an intentional thing that you did?

Well actually, we were doing triceratops and umm Charlie initiated that last week,

Oh ok!

So umm, as we have been doing the dinosaurs, I sort of said, "Has anyone got interesting dinosaur that they would like to know bit about?" So some wanted to pterodactyl, last week I think we had who five girls wanted it to know about pterodactyl, we had one boy who wanted know about allosaurus.

So we've kind of done different dinosaurs and it's been their choice. Last Thursday Oscar said to me I really want to know about triceratops. Now Oscar already knows A LOT about dinosaurs and he had a toy triceratops in his bag and that's why he bought it in. Then we looked at it and we went oh no that's not a triceratops, its got three horns. And he said oh no it's a pentasaurus or something. So he kind of knew that but because he had this toy, Oscar and Jacob, they were doing the research but they were too busy playing with the dinosaurs cos Jacob went and got the triceratops and we compared the two. So they were busy playing. So I said "I don't know that our heads are into this, how about we leave it for now and we come back and research."

Because Oscar is only here for Tuesday and Thursdays, and Tuesday was his first day back so I really wanted to drag him into the research because it was his initiated topic of conversation.

So I suppose that's why I asked him and I also know that he knows a lot. So wanted him to share, acknowledge what he already knew but try and get him to dig a little bit deeper. What else he would like to find out. So umm when you get somebody who digs a bit deeper then that kind of gets others thinking a bit deeper rather than just those top questions.

Appendix C

Observation schedule

Observation Schedule and checklist (adapted from Mertens, 2005; Smith, 2011; Skelton et. al., 2009)

Setting

- Describing context, classroom make up, use of space, gender oriented
- Where do people go, sit (organisation) interactions with the physical space
- Draw picture

Human and social environment

- Groupings, patterns of interactions (teacher and student)

Program activities and participant behaviours

Focus on content

- Teacher questioning, what and to whom
- Nature of questions

Focus on procedures

- What to do, how to do it
- Who gives out equipment
- Where do they sit

Focus on teacher

- Language
- How student attention is gained
- Praise/ telling off/ teasing
- Behaviour management

Closing session

- How is this organised
- Who does what, application of jobs
- What is said about student work
- How are they dismissed from class

Nonverbal communication

- Dress
- Expressing affection
- Physical spacing

What does not happen?

Appendix D

Interview schedule basic framework

1. Did you see a difference between the way you interacted with the boys and girls in that lesson?
2. Do you feel that there should be a difference between the way you interact with boys and girls?
3. What leads you to make those decisions?
4. Do you provide different types of feedback to girls and boys?
 - a. In relation to their work? Can you give some examples?
 - b. In relation to their behaviour? Can you give some examples?
5. Do you find different things important for boys versus girls in relation to how you work with them?
6. What motivated you to become a teacher? What are your core values?
7. What are the most important things you want to achieve as a teacher you're your students?