Supporting Inclusiveness through Concepts of Gender

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Abstract

Some dads wear nail polish! Is the tooth fairy a boy or a girl? My Grade Two students' voices were integral in developing each of the action research cycles as students became co-creators of knowledge. I gathered data through a personal journal, observations, reflections, work samples, interviews and classroom artifacts. The research question was focused on creating a safe and caring classroom environment by selecting appropriate instructional strategies based on developing my students' concept of gender. Findings included students' acceptance of differences, emulation of gender stereotypes, the significance of role models and student empowerment. Conclusions examined the influence that behaviour has on instructional strategies, creating allies among primary students, the importance of teacher training and the influence that students have in their classroom. Thoughts towards future research include the need for further parent engagement and more exploration of the impact that the school environment has in the classroom.

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Supporting Inclusiveness through Concepts of Gender

Chapter 1 Introduction

As a group of Grade Two students played a partner game in the gym, I noticed that although students could have any choice of new partner, it appeared that students always selected partners of the same gender. During open activity time, these students could select from a variety of games and partners in the classroom. I noted that for most of the time students selected a partner of the same gender and often times an activity that could be seen as gender-based. I began to wonder how these choices may limit students in their ability to work with other classmates and also, how they may be limiting their personal opportunities. These observations led me to recollect how I chose friends and activities when I was younger.

My interest in diversity of gender has evolved from my personal experience as a child and young adult, through to my professional experiences as an elementary classroom teacher. I grew up in a home with traditional roles and responsibilities divided according to gender. In order to experience all that life had to offer, I saw the need to challenge these gender-based constructs by participating in experiences not normally thought of as those for girls, including travelling and living on my own, doing a solo across-Canada drive, moving to another province, and purchasing my own house.

As a classroom teacher, my goal is to provide opportunities for every student in my class to have exceptional learning experiences, inclusive of all genders. Despite my efforts, there are instances where students have divided themselves by gender for different play-based activities, selected gendered toys or activities, and assigned jobs in the classroom based on stereotypical societal roles. Thus, as a practitioner-researcher, I investigated

ways of improving my teaching practice and explained how and why I did so (McNiff, 2010, p. 6) based on expanding students understanding of gender from a binary model (boys/girls) to a more diverse and inclusive model.

My research is grounded in theories related to action research, social justice, and concepts of gender. Methods of research were selected based on the audience and the intention of the research. Ethical considerations were outlined to protect the students involved in the research and to ensure the authenticity of the data gathered. The plan for conducting the research and timeline was focused on achieving research milestones. The results and conclusions of the research are based on a cyclical approach to each action research process. Implications of this research suggest ways that educators may improve their practice to create a more inclusive and accepting learning environment that fosters greater student learning. To assist future researchers, I have given my personal reflections on the process and the lessons learned from this research, which began with the purpose of the research.

1.1 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to implement and document instructional strategies that supported how "students behaved, thought and felt in their classroom environment related to their personal concepts of gender" (Parsons, 2013, p. 16). By gathering information about the results of instructional practices focused on creating more flexible definitions of gender, I improved the ways in which our classroom setting worked, my teaching, and student learning (Mills, 2011). Examples of instructional strategies included using resources from the school library that focused on gender inclusion (i.e. stories about those who do not follow stereotypical gender expectations in career or

clothing choice), and using examples from students' personal experiences, (i.e. sports, toys, prize bags from birthday parties). Through the collection of qualitative data about these instructional strategies used with in the classroom, I reflected on the outcomes of these strategies and modified my teaching practice based on my observations and reflections of both myself and my students. My knowledge of effective strategies was expanded as I delved farther into facilitating an inclusive and equitable classroom. Action research, which involves interactive cycles of observation, planning, acting and reflection, means that instructional strategies and approaches were developed within the research process. This is also the process of teaching.

1.2 From Problem to Action

Grade Two students were working on a problem of the types of toys that should be put into a birthday party grab bag. The discussion quickly went to different toys children would like. In the beginning, students discussed that there might be toys that only boys or girls prefer. As the discussion continued, the students shared that most of the toys that originally had a specific gender associated with them were liked equally by boys and girls. Students began to question why they believed that there were toys just for girls or just for boys. I noticed students choosing to play or work with students of the same gender in the classroom, on the yard, and throughout the school day. It was only after we discussed the benefits of being an inclusive classroom that students began to work and play with all students. As the classroom teacher, I began to wonder what other effective instructional strategies I could use that would support the evolution of my students' concept of gender resulting in a more inclusive classroom environment.

1.3 Importance of Project

Social justice is always in a state of becoming rather than of being (Griffiths, 2009). This

state of becoming can be seen throughout my classroom and within children's families.

While families are a crucial piece in shaping children's values, classroom practices

communicate and reinforce strong, subtle and repeated social messages about what is

and is not valued (Hyland, 2010). Fairness and belonging are the right of every person.

Efforts to create equity and inclusion are linked to a worldwide movement to achieve

respect for all human rights.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO)

International Conference on Education released "Inclusive Education: The Way of the

Future" in 1998. Within this document, it states that:

"inclusive education is not a marginal issue, but is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. If children do not have the opportunity to develop their potential during the critical years of childhood, their whole families are more at risk of becoming poor, or of sliding into more chronic poverty" (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2008).

This UNESCO (2008) document further defines the aim of inclusive education to

eliminate social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity in race,

social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and ability. In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of

Education created a document entitled "Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's

Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy". This document mandated that school boards

create policies and procedures for Equitable and Inclusive Education. Within the Simcoe

County District School Board's Administrative Procedures Memorandum A7125, Equity

and Inclusive Education, under item 3.4 Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Practices,

the board ensures the implementation of an inclusive curriculum supported by resources, instructional strategies, assessment and evaluation practices which reflect and respond to the need of the diversity of learners (Simcoe County District School Board, 2010).

As a method of measuring the success of the focus on equity and inclusion, the Ontario Ministry of Education developed a reflective tool for school and system leaders (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Under Section 4, Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Practices, the question asks "How do we foster a learning environment that gives students a sense of belonging so that they are empowered to take risks, explore new ideas, and take responsibility for their learning?" It is this reflective question that provided the basis for my research project.

Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) and the Ontario Teachers' Federation created a resource entitled to assist schools and teachers Promote Equity and Inclusive Education in Schools suggesting that teachers create classroom environments characterized by fairness and belonging, where differences and commonalities are acknowledged and embraced (COPA, 2010, p. 1). Creating a classroom environment where students are encouraged to develop flexible ideas about gender resulted in a more inclusive classroom environment. Sharing the results of this action research with other teachers allows for a sharing of knowledge about effective strategies related to this specific research question and setting.

1.4 Research Question

What effective instructional strategies can a classroom teacher use to encourage rethinking taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and eliminate social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity of gender?

1.5 Social Justice and Gender

My research question centered on the creation of a socially just classroom environment with special attention focused on gender that created a more inclusive environment for learning. As both the teacher and researcher, it was important to explain my understanding of social justice and gender by answering the questions posed by LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p. 125-126). Social Justice is a concept based on a vision of a society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. It is the belief that each individual and group within a given society has a right to equal opportunity, civil liberties, and full participation in the social, educational, economic and institutional society (COPA, 2010, p. 125). As a classroom teacher, I was responsible for ensuring a safe, secure environment where all students had equal opportunity to be successful and students supported and accepted each other's choices.

One strategy to support social justice was to create an inclusive environment. Inclusion is an approach that aims to reach out and include all people, honouring the diversity and uniqueness, talents, beliefs, backgrounds, capabilities, and ways of living of individuals and groups (COPA, 2010, p. 120). I believe that through my teaching practice, I created a classroom culture of fairness and belonging where students' opinions and ideas were valued.

When thinking about my past practices, I noticed when students classified something as being for a boy or a girl. These gender stereotypes limited opportunities for both boys and girls to act or behave in a manner outside of the stereotypes. When considering gender and education, I often think about all of the media attention that is given to the

difference of boys and girls' literacy skills. Solutions to these differences have come in broad strokes in the form of different resources such as *Me Read? No Way!* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004) that have been put in place to ensure that boys are being supported in literacy learning. A recent report by the Quebec Ministry of Education concluded that

"there are more differences from one boy to the next or from one girl to the next than there are differences between groups of boys and groups of girls. Thus, seemingly innate gender-based characteristics cannot be attributed to an essentially heterogeneous group…in asking questions and seeking solutions, we must not resort to improvised strategies based on anecdotal evidence or hastily adopt radical solutions, but instead rely on controlled experiments and initiatives in the spirit of sound research."
(Quebec Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 16),

Students are empowered, transformed, and emancipated from situations that constrain their self-development and self-determination (Creswell, 2011, p. 577) as students' concepts of gender were explored. I have made conscious choices in the past to limit the types of gender-based materials that come into the classroom including books, posters, and other artifacts. To allow for a more supportive and open classroom environment, I was open to allowing students to bring in objects that I would have normally avoided or downplayed in front of the whole class. An example of this would have been Disney books that my students brought in to share. In the past, I may have allowed for the books to come into the class but prevented everyone having access to the book or shared it in a different manner. In order to support this research, it was important to permit this situation to evolve more naturally and I was prepared to facilitate rich discussion and a structured follow up with students. This approach allowed for critical thinking about media and the messages specific artifacts send to audiences.

In some instances, I imagined that my beliefs and the pedagogy behind equity and inclusion differed from some of my students' parents. I live in a fairly homogeneous, rural community where some families are very traditional in their concept of gender. This added another dimension to the research as traditional gender roles were discussed at school and students were engaged in inclusive activities that resulted with students considering ideas their ideas about gender. In order to facilitate this growth, it was important to have a clear understanding of the terms used within this research.

1.6 Terminology

To understand my research more completely, the following terms must be defined: gender, gender fluidity, gender spectrum, gender identity, gender role, gender variance/gender non-conformity. More extensive definitions are included in Appendix E.

Gender: The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Identity: Gender identity refers to a person's innate, deeply felt sense of being male or female (sometimes even both or neither). A person's gender identity can be different from their biological sex (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Expression: Gender expression is external and is based on individual and societal conceptions and expectations (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Role: This is the set of roles, activities, expectations, and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: Masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females) (Understanding Gender, 2015).

Gender Variance/Gender Non-Conformity: Gender variance refers to behaviors and interests that fit outside of what we consider 'normal' for a child or adult's assigned biological sex (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Fluidity: Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may even change from day to day (Terminology, 2015).

Throughout this research, I refer to these terms related to gender to maintain consistency of terminology. My research was completed based on the assumptions that are further defined under the delimitation factors at the research site, which was my Grade Two classroom.

1.7 Research Site

The action research took place in a Grade Two classroom setting with 21 students for the 2014/2015 school year. The school of approximately 700 students is located in a lower socio-economic community in Central Ontario. The school is in a lakeside community of approximately 31,000 that has undergone major development changes. The community is approximately 20 minutes south of a larger urban centre and one hour north of Toronto. The town has a mix of small urban towns and villages surrounded by a rural environment. An increase in population has led to more economic and ethnic diversity in the student population and a socioeconomic divide between families that have lived in the community for generations and those that are new to the area. The school recently introduced French Immersion and this year's class was the first Grade Two group that was divided into French and English instruction. My class was the only straight Grade Two class in the English stream, the other Grade Two's are in One/Two and Two/Three

split classes. Families have historically been very supportive of school activities and involved in school life.

1.8 Researcher Background

Over the past ten years, I have been in various roles at this school including a classroom teacher for grades Kindergarten, One, Two, Three, in addition to a Special Education Resource Teacher for Kindergarten and school-wide behaviour. Within the same school I have also been a Literacy Coach, Reading Recovery Teacher, and a participant on our school board's English Language Learner's Planning Committee. I conducted action research in my classroom in 2010 focused on improving kindergarten students' writing and oral language through storytelling. I have been involved with a Teacher Professional Learning Community focused on using action research and reflective practice to improve teacher professionalism and advocacy with the end result being improving education for students. For the past six years I have been involved in this group as a participant, community facilitator and facilitator. As the Key Equity Point Person for our school over the past three years, I have been involved in professional development focused on equity and inclusiveness in our schools and classrooms.

1.9 Summary

The introduction to this chapter presented the research question and defined both the purpose and importance of this research. It gave definitions of terms that were used throughout the research as well as a review of social justice and gender. In order to become more familiar with the site and the researcher, a brief overview was given.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to give an overview of the theoretical background and research focused on gender in the classroom in the existing literature related to the research problem. In order to delve further in to the research about the research question, I completed a review of the relevant theoretical research. As LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p. 154) explained, "taken all together, the substantive, methodological and theoretical review permit the researcher to rule out all studies which have already been done and convince an audience that the proposed study not only is the logical direction to proceed, but has not been done before, in that way, or with that particular spin."

2.1 Theoretical Literature

In the theoretical review of literature, I examined articles on action research in addition to theories of social justice, gender identity and inclusion. Action research is practice-based. It is done by people who see themselves as practitioner-researchers who want to find out more about their practices with a view to improving them (McNiff, 2010, p. 33). Throughout the research, students and the teacher were co-investigators deepening our personal understanding and thinking about gender. As Freire (1970) wrote, investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as co-investigators. By being entrenched in the classroom environment, my students and I were given an opportunity to co-construct new and varied meanings around gender.

As Dewey's (1929) vision explained, the teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to

select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him or her in properly responding to these influences. The scope of this research is to understand how different instructional strategies develop students' concept of gender. This scope contributes to my understanding of the importance of selecting the influences that are in the classroom. Influences may include artifacts, picture books, guest speakers, or moderating classroom discussions and language.

When considering looking at this research through the lens of social justice, I noted that Hyland (2010, p. 82) stated that classroom practices communicate and reinforce strong social messages about what is and is not valued. The consequences of these messages are enormous not only for individual children, but also for a society that strives for equality and justice for all. As Cherian (2001, p.1) noted, "the teaching of social justice must be lived through classroom events that are participatory and experiential." One strategy that Cherian (2001) explored was to use picture books with students to open the discussion of prejudice and to encourage students to relate to a personal experience. Students connected with the story on a personal level and gained greater understanding of the experience through a picture book. Yoder (2013) summarized teachers' feedback from an across Canada research project on using Canadian social justice literature. Teachers may have used different strategies with their students to interpret and learn from the texts, however, "texts and strategies are offered as conversation starters, as sparks for curiosity and experimentation." As Dinkins and Englert (2015) citing Ghiso, Campano, and Hall (2012) case study at a middle school, noted, "reading literature also offers students the opportunity to explore the intersectionality of identities, cultures and

experiences by connecting the complexities of diverse characters to student lives." The importance of using literature as an instructional strategy was reinforced as Englert (2015) referred to Simms (1992) work that explained "stories and perspectives offered within literature serve as conduits for social justice" as the students in the case study question heteronormative environments. In addition, Hyland (2010, p. 82) argued that it is essential that educators continue to develop practices and pedagogies that address the educational injustices that plague children from historically marginalized groups and that teachers examine value laden messages in everyday practices in order to create more just learning environments.

Approaching this research through a gender identity lens allows for a greater understanding of how these messages are interpreted by this group of students. Lorber (1994) writes that most people find it hard to believe that gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interactions, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life. Concepts of gender and one's own personal gender identity are constantly changing and Lorber's (1994) research gave examples from students about how this concept of gender may be formed. Students' language, beliefs, and classroom artifacts related to gender, were collected and analyzed to explore instructional strategies to use in the classroom.

When thinking about classrooms and schools that are equitable and inclusive, gender is one of the social justice issues that is included. UNESCO (2008, p. 5) defined inclusive education as being central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusion is still thought of in some

countries as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general educational settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. The next section of the literature review examines what research has been done in the field of gender, Grade Two students and action research.

2.2 Gender Literature

In order to ensure that this research viewed issue of gender through a new lens with the potential for new learning, it was important to understand the previous gaps in the research related to gender and Grade Two students. Then, I considered how my research would be able to fill these gaps.

Part of this action research was to gather student work samples as a form of evidence. In Turkey, Yildiz (2012) examined primary school students' drawings to understand their thoughts about school, relationship with teacher and classmates, role in the school, and academic relationships. It was important not only to gather work samples from students but to also take the time to interview the students about their work and dig deeper into their ideas if it was not clear from their work.

DePalma and Atkinson (2009) conducted a participatory action research project that looked beyond the discourse of tolerance to investigate and challenge heteronormative processes in primary school. This project used children's books and cross-curricular inclusion projects as a way to open discussion about gender and norms. My research incorporated my reflections about instructional strategies, student work samples, and interviews with the opportunity to develop a new plan of action that was implemented back into the classroom and my learning.

Anderson (2002) studied students in three schools focusing on literacy and gender identity. One of her findings was that girls and boys are also devalued when their gender status is simplified into mere difference and dominance, ignoring the rich subtleties of their ever fluid and evolving social identities. Within the scope of her study she did not consider artifacts from the students' environment that may be influencing students' gender identity but focused on 3 different cases of literacy. This focus only created opportunities for her to respond with preplanned events in the classrooms. The design of this research enabled me to be more responsive to student needs that were identified through students work samples, observations, lesson reflections and student interviews.

Bahana, Nzimakwe, and Nzimakwe (2001) undertook a study in a school within a poor working class township in South Africa. This research determined the process through which boys and girls attach meaning to gender and the ways in which they form gender identity. The findings were that gender and sexuality operate through friendship, routine games and violence. My research also included classroom experiences, flexibility in instructional strategies as part of the discourse and the students were involved as co-constructors of knowledge.

Brooker (2006) compared research from two studies, one from Seoul, the other from the UK, focused on young children in early childhood settings. The studies suggested that children's beliefs about the world and their own role in it, acquired in families, may be more fluid and complex than educators suppose; and that educators' intentions of reducing bias and maximizing children's opportunities may be undermined by their offer of child-initiated activities and freely chosen playmates (Brooker, 2006).

My research allowed for opportunities to have a discussion with students about their decision making when choosing partners for activities and that provided more insight into changes that were made to instructional strategies.

2.3 Summary

To ensure that my research was examining the research question from a new perspective, I completed a thorough investigation into the existing theoretical research including areas of action research, social justice, gender identity and inclusiveness.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

The purpose of the methodology section is to outline the research design and the data collection methods. I selected action research as the most appropriate research design to investigate how I could create a safe, inclusive classroom environment that would enable students to develop their concept of gender.

3.1 Action Research Overview

Action researchers explore a practical problem with an aim toward developing a solution to a problem (Creswell, 2011, p. 576). As Jean McNiff (2010) explains, action research is a practical way of looking at your work in any profession to check that it is as you would like it to be. As practice-based research, the process involved thinking about and reflecting on my practice with in a classroom setting to create a more inclusive learning environment that was accepting of diverse ideas about gender through effective instructional strategies. To select instructional strategies that met the needs of my students, I observed, reflected, gathered work samples, and conducted structured interviews of students. Action research adopts a methodical approach, embracing problem identification, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. The insights gained from Cycle 1 of the research fed into planning of Cycle 2, for which the action plan was modified and the research process repeated. Carr and Kemmis (1986) represent this process in Figure 1.
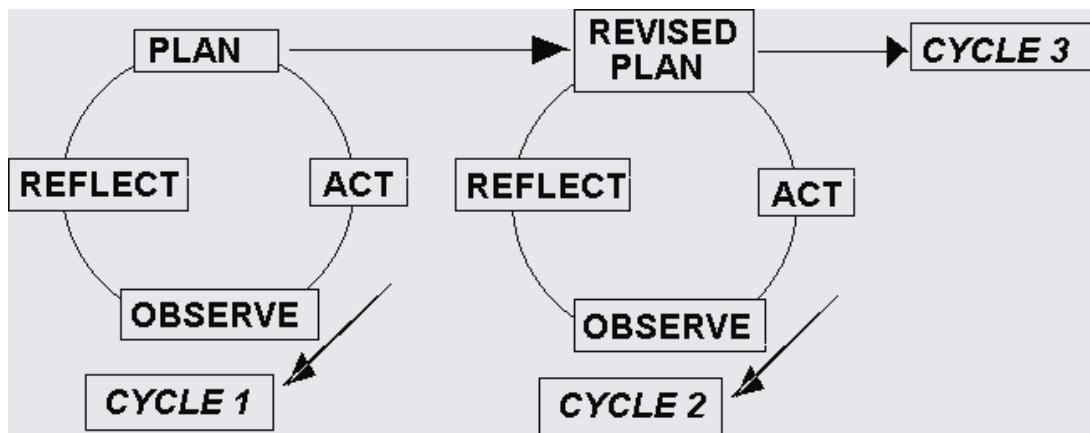
Figure 1 : Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986). Action Research Cycles. Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research. Basingstoke, UK: Farmer Press.

Teacher observations and personal reflections were the basis for making instructional strategy decisions within the first few cycles: however, as student observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts were reflected on, they became the drive behind the next plan of action. At times, I conducted a focused lesson then observed a discussion between two students, for example about which gender can play hockey. This observation led into an interview with these students, then an instructional strategy with-in the whole class context. At other times, the strategy was to have a guest come into the classroom to share stories of individuals who did not follow traditional gender stereotypes. While these cycles seem quite linear, they oftentimes overlap and loop back upon themselves. For one period per week I focused on Character Education. During this research, I used this period as part of the gender instruction and research. Gender was also integrated into areas of writing and reading, depending on the next steps that evolved from the action research planning cycle. After permission had been obtained, these action research cycles were carried out over the research period, between April and June of 2015.

There were four main areas where descriptions and meanings were sought. These were the impact of focused instruction on students' observable behaviour based on their concept of gender, manifestation of gender beliefs in work samples, language used by students around gender, and the influence of gender stereotypes on inclusiveness. To understand how the classroom environment was influenced by students' concept of gender, I observed, gathered work samples, and conducted structured interviews with students. There has been a substantial amount of methodological research into using action research as a way to improve teaching practice with the end goal being to increase student success at school.

3.2 Research Design

An action research design was used to investigate instructional strategies that were most effective in facilitating the development of students' concept of gender. Qualitative research is appropriate to this research as a more open ended approach is taken to the research; thus enabling the participants to shape the response possibilities (Creswell, 2011). As a teacher/researcher, I was collecting and analyzing words plus images from myself and the students involved in the research project. In searching for meaning within this context, the research explored the issues and themes that developed thorough the collection and analysis of my classroom observations, interviews, work samples and classroom artifacts. As Whitt (1991) outlined, researchers can obtain numerous insider perspectives, observe many and varied events and behaviours, and as a consequence, hope to obtain an accurate picture of what is going on in the setting. By collecting and analyzing this data, I was able to implement changes based on my findings (Creswell,

2011, p. 577), then analyze the data, plan and implement new instructional strategies in a cyclical approach to teaching and action research.

3.3 Supporting Literature

By examining the literature related to using action research and the research methods outlined above, the appropriateness of these methods can be compared to the existing research. Yildiz (2012) used interviews, observations, and child school drawings techniques as the main data collection method in a case study format. A recommendation from this study was to carry out work with different ages and variables. My study looked specifically at gender as a variable to be considered when collecting student work samples, including drawings.

Anderson (2002) used grounded theory method and collected data for 6 months through audio taped group discussions, student writing, audiotaped interviews, as well as observation field notes. She was an outside observer in the second, third and fourth grade classrooms. Although it appeared that Anderson was able to gather and observe behaviour around gender, it did not appear that she was able to have in depth discussions with students about their beliefs. In some cases students were co-constructing their ideas but this was not a consistent strategy.

Bahana, Nzimakwe, and Nzimakwe (2011) undertook a small scale qualitative study at a school from a poor working class township, where field notes, interviews, and observations were the sources of data to develop the three main themes from 14 grade two students, seven boys and seven girls. This study also included looking at classroom artifacts and how this may impact on students' concept of gender. My research included interviews, observations, and artifacts in data collection.

Brooker (2006) compared two qualitative studies, one from the UK, and the other from

Seoul on students and the development of gender identity. The UK study compared was

a one year-long ethnographic study that focused on children from ages four-five in poor

and disadvantaged families. The Seoul study was a two month qualitative research study

that focused on five-six year olds in a middle class suburb with 14 students involved. In

both studies observation and discussion were the main methods of data collection. The

two studies confirmed the need for continuing research *with* children rather than *on* them

(Brooker, 2006). My research included the student as co-constructors of knowledge and

meaning. As a result, the themes that emerged are more reflective of what the children

believe and express through their language.

Research methodologies included action research, ethnographic, case study, grounded

theory, and some referred to as simply qualitative. In all of the methodologies presented

qualitative data was gathered ranging from observation, work samples and interviews.

This research differed in that my personal reflections, interviews with students, artifacts

from the classroom and work samples were integrated into the ongoing cycle of action

research.

3.4 Collection Procedures and Student Participants

As a classroom teacher engaged in action research, I conducted the research with the

students in my classroom. The class of 21 students consisted of seventeen male students

and four female students. From these initial 21 students there were fourteen parents and

students who consented to participate, ten students presenting as male and four students

presenting as female. Interviews, work samples, and observations were based on these

14 participants. This section outlines student participation, the students, the types of qualitative data that was gathered and the procedures established for its collection.

3.4.1 Collection Procedures

The procedures outline how the data was collected, what form of collection were used, how often it was gathered and the protocols that were followed. Although this may seem like a rigid plan, there was flexibility built in to take advantage of situations in the classroom that were unpredictable, in addition to being responsive to the students' needs.

3.4.1.1 Observations: Observations of students and events enabled me to see and record behaviours as they occurred (Whitt, 1991). As both a participant and an observer in the classroom, there were many opportunities to make observations about the behaviours, beliefs and language of these students. It was by making observations that I hoped to gain a better understanding of some of the less obvious interactions in the classroom away from discussions and work samples. I also believed that I would be able to hear ideas that students may not have felt comfortable expressing in front of the whole class. Observations were recorded on an ongoing basis, using the observation protocol. I created a sample of this protocol based on Creswell (2011) in Appendix A. During the research, when two students were having a discussion about what colours could and could not be worn based on gender, I recorded their conversation verbatim as it occurred. At another time, the class was deciding items they might like in a birthday party gift bag, one student made a comment, "No boys would like to get a stuffed animal." Other students objected and in order to turn this confrontation into a discussion, I became more of a participant and was involved in the discussion. I recorded my

observations later as close to verbatim as possible. A third example was at the conclusion of the lesson I had planned as part of my action. I reflected on how I believed the lesson went, unexpected results, student comments or ideas and any reflections, including possible changes in my action or ideas for where to next take the research.

3.4.1.2 Interviews: Interviews are used in qualitative research to obtain respondents' perspectives and perceptions and to confirm or expand the information already obtained during the study (Whitt, 1991). The interviews that were conducted during this study were based on observations and evidence in work samples. When a student created work that required more explanation, I took the time to conduct an interview to clarify meaning and gain a greater understanding about the work. The same was true when there was a discussion in a small or large group setting (recorded through observation) and I wanted to clarify what had been discussed. I had another interview with the students involved. I have prepared a sample Interview Protocol (Appendix B) to demonstrate the type of questions that I asked and how the data was collected based on Creswell's (2011) Interview Protocol. Through interviews, I believed that I would offer an opportunity for students to expand further on ideas not fully explained through questioning and allowing for extra time for discovery.

3.4.1.3 Documents: Work samples represent documents that were gathered from the activities of the students. These documents were written in the language of these Grade Two students and reflected their priorities. Their documents provided rich insights into the beliefs, language and ideas students had about gender identity (Whitt, 1991). Permission to use their documents was obtained at the same time as permission to participate. All documents were photographed using an iPad after school hours and the

students' names were excluded. The documents were gathered then examined for accuracy, completeness, and usefulness in answering the research question (Creswell, 2011).By examining these documents; I hoped that I would be able to see some commonalities in student thinking as well as discover some areas that may need further discussion that would lead into the next cycle of research. These documents were maintained in electronic files. Documents included journal entries, collaborative writing activities, student generated work samples and drawings.

3.4.1.4 Classroom Artifacts: This group of documents differs from work samples in that the artifacts have not been generated by the students. Similar to work samples, these items were assessed by myself for their usefulness in answering the research question, then photographed and held in an electronic data base. Examples of classroom artifacts included posters provided by the school board, books and items brought from home. In examining artifacts from school and home, I had intended to explore how ideas about gender from outside the classroom were influencing our environment. These four data collection tools allow for a variety of forms of data to be compared in the data analysis which contributes to the trustworthiness of the research, as it is based in the experience of the student participants.

3.5 Participants

As part of action research, I wanted to improve my practice for the benefit of my students which resulted in the research being done with my students. The participants were taken from my classroom of 21 Grade Two students. Parents/guardians were sent an informed consent letter (Appendix E) from me before the research began and invited to attend an information session at school. Only the students of parents/guardians who

gave consent were included in the research. Students were also asked to give permission for their work samples to be used in the research. In order to participate, both students and parents/guardians had to give consent. Of the 21 students in the classroom, fourteen gave consent to participate, ten male and four female.

I am responsible for these students every school day. This access allows for a significant amount of time to be spent with the participants and a greater ability to interact with students and gather a significant amount of qualitative data. This was considered a convenience sample often used for quantitative research. As Creswell (2011) outlined, the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied. Throughout the action research, choices were made to ensure that every student within the research group was represented fully and that the research was trustworthy.

3.6 Methodological Issues

Methodological issues include outlining the researcher's role, trustworthiness of the research, outlining the timeline for the project, and the human resource requirements.

3.6.1 The Researcher's Role

As the teacher of this classroom, I had developed relationships with my students since the beginning of the school year and some over the past four years. These personal relationships required less time to build trust with students and within the research framework, it allowed for more time to be spent gathering data. I was knowledgeable about action research, familiar with gender diversity and known to the students. This resulted in being credible to the insiders in the setting and had meant that I had to devote less time to gaining their cooperation and trust (Whitt, 1991). I had access to the students on a daily basis over a long period of time. With this increase in access and knowledge

also came the inevitable bias that is part of being teacher and researcher. To be prepared

for any technical and or interpersonal issues that arose, I followed the research design,

recorded interviews verbatim, used open ended questions, recorded my interpretations

separate from classroom observations and verified my interpretations by member

checking with the students. Being a part of my students' school lives gave me

opportunities that outside researchers would not have and with this added access came

the added responsibility of caring for these students, acknowledging my own bias when

it appeared and working closely with the students to verify the themes that emerged

from the data analysis.

3.6.2 Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research study, ideas considered included

the reliability, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the project

(Whitt, 1991). Since the concepts of reliability and external validity are potentially

problematic in discussing qualitative research, the term trustworthiness is often used

instead (Mawhinney, 2008). *Reliability* in a qualitative study is impossible given the

context-boundedness of qualitative studies (Whitt, 1991). This research was based

partially on an emergent design where the research follows data from observation,

interviews and work samples in order to gain meaning and seek understanding.

Credibility was best supported through triangulation by using multiple sources of data

and multiple methods. Included were observations, interviews, work samples and

classroom artifacts. Perhaps one of the most significant strategies for credibility was that

of member checking. Throughout the data collection stage, I brought the data and my

interpretation back to the students to test conclusions in the study (Whitt, 1991).

Transferability through the final reporting of this research includes thick descriptions of the setting, its contexts, and its subjects. This was given to enable any other researchers the opportunity to explore similarities and differences. By carefully documenting the decisions made within the study to prove the appropriateness, *dependability* was established. *Confirmability* results from demonstrating that the findings were based on the interpretation and analysis of the data leading to logical conclusions (Whitt, 1991). All of these factors combined to prove the trustworthiness of the research.

3.6.3 Timeline

This action research study occurred in the classroom over a four month time frame. Below is a table comparing time and implementation stage in the research study. The white areas depict the timing for each stage of the research.

Research Implementation Plan	Timing of Research								
	2014		2015						
	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July-December
Ethics Review and Permission – MUN, School Board					█	█	█	█	█
Permission from parents Parent Information Meeting	█	█	█	█			█	█	█
Data Collection - Interviews - Observations - Work Samples - Classroom Artifacts	█	█	█	█	█			█	█
Data Analysis	█	█	█	█	█				█
Interim Finding and Conclusions	█	█	█	█	█				█
Final Findings and Conclusions	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	

Figure 2: Research Implementation Plan

3.6.4 Human Resources

I was the only individual responsible for the collection and analysis of the data. Students and families that consented to participate in this research were expected to complete only work resulting from daily classroom activities. This project generated a large amount of data through data collection methods. By using an electronic device to record photographs of work samples and classroom artifacts, it was easier to gather and organize the data. Interviews and discussion were transcribed and coded daily to ensure that results could be compared with other findings throughout the study and were included in the ongoing analysis of data.

3.7 Research Project Scope

Within the scope of this research project, terms of reference were established including research delimitations and assumptions relative to this specific research topic.

3.7.1 Research Delimitations: To make my research manageable, I chose to delimit it in certain ways. The delimitations of my study were to focus on observations that I could make within the classroom. I also chose to focus on what was happening within the classroom and excluded activities or observations from the environment around our classroom including other students, parents, teachers or administration. I also chose to gather artifacts specific to lessons taught on gender or specific events in regards to gender. Artifacts related to other areas of the curriculum were not collected.

3.7.2 Research Assumptions: To complete my research, I made the following assumptions: students could understand the concept of gender and would be able to share their ideas. I assumed that students would participate in discussions truthfully and share openly. I assumed that a safe and supportive classroom environment had been

established since the beginning of the school year and would provide a safe and secure environment where students were open to sharing their ideas, thoughts and questioning their own ideas about gender. All of these assumptions were also based on the research ethics.

3.8 Research Ethics

Before the research began, it was necessary to obtain approval from the School Board's Research and Evaluation Services Branch and approval of the proposal and the Ethics package from Memorial University. Parents/Guardians completed an informed consent form, and students acknowledged their permission to be included. Throughout the research, it was imperative to keep an open and transparent relationship with the students and their parents. This began with a permission letter sent home to parent/guardians and responding to inquiries. Families were invited to attend an information session at the school to ask questions and seek clarification. The purpose of this session, and the informed consent, was to create a sense of understanding among families and students that this research was being done within the regular course of instruction and that the primary focus was to improve my teaching practice. Unfortunately, families did not attend so this understanding was difficult to achieve through this strategy.

3.8.1 Power Dynamics: As a teacher researcher, I was in a power position of assigning grades on report cards. I approached this topic from the perspective that there was no right or wrong answer that students could provide when discussing gender. Students were expected to reflect on their thinking, use their metacognitive ability to unpack where their ideas had come from and contemplate new or different ways of thinking.

With classroom instruction, every effort was made to integrate different curriculum into our collective work surrounding gender. This was the expectation, independent of the action research project.

Parents/guardians had the option to withdraw their children from the research, if they so desired, at any time without being penalized and could have requested to have the research gathered from their child removed from the study until June 28, 2015. Parents/guardians were updated on how the research was going. As the classroom teacher, I held a position of power and privilege where I had the opportunity to spend a large amount of time with these students and set the tone for the classroom. As Creswell states (2011) there is a close relationship between the researcher and participants and data collection cannot be coercive. The focus of this action research was to improve my teaching practice through input provided by my own observations, student interviews, and work samples.

These ethical considerations ensured that the students were protected and that the data was gathered and maintained in an ethical manner. In order to record as much data as possible, it was necessary to photograph student work. This information was maintained in a password protected device. Data will kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. Observation Protocol is outlined in Appendix A, Interview Protocol is outlined in Appendix B. The data was gathered using an action research model through open lines of communication with parents/guardians and students in order to ensure that the results were obtained in an ethical manner.

As Creswell (2011, p. 576) states, action research is the most applied, practical design. Action researchers explore practical problems with an aim towards developing a solution to a problem. Uhlmann (1995) adds to this with the argument that for real change to occur, participation by the people actually in the situation under research or affected by the outcomes (stakeholders) also has to occur. In 2009, Ross undertook an action research whereby she used teacher observations, teacher and student journals, one-on-one and small group interviews, discussion, questioning, and behaviour referral forms to improve her ability to intervene in situations of relational aggression among her students. My study was based on the same methodology and similar methods adding in work samples and artifacts as part of my data analysis.

In order to help primary children develop self-esteem and to improve her own practice, McGinley (2001) used action research in her classroom and gathered data from written reflection, observations, and unstructured interviews that informed her teaching. My project was similar in that I wanted to improve my practice by implementing the same method that she used with the additional data drawn from work samples and artifacts.

As part of a doctoral thesis, Bernie Sullivan (2006) made observations, recorded dialogue with children, kept a reflective journal and field notes as part of an action research study. The objectives of the study were to achieve social justice for marginalized children and the increase the researcher/practitioner's own learning. In my research, I also reflected on observations from the class and recorded conversations with students to improve my practice and create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

In 2007, Christine Lancaster undertook action research in her self-contained classroom to research how establishing a classroom where students experience a high level of success would impact on motivation and absenteeism. As part of her desire to improve the engagement of her students and her own practice, she gathered work samples, observations, anecdotal notes, student surveys, teacher journal, and checklists. My research used many similar methods as well as including artifacts and student interviews.

3.9 Summary

This section on methodology presented supporting literature, gave an overview of the participants involved and ethical issues that were considered when working with this age group. The scope of the project was also defined including delimitations and assumptions that I made throughout the research.

Chapter 4 Results and Findings

The purpose of this action research was to reflect on my teaching through observations of students, collecting documents and implementing instructional strategies that supported how students behaved, thought and felt in their classroom environment related to their personal concepts of gender (Parsons, 2013, p. 16). I collected data through the use of observations, work samples, artifacts, interviews, and personal reflections within a classroom of Grade Two students. Of the 21 students, 14 were included and both parents and students had given their consent. When I analyzed at the data that I collected during the research, there were four main themes that emerged. I analyzed the data by looking at my observations/reflections sheets and using a colour coding system to organize data by larger theme. Then this exploration lead into including student work and information from the interviews based on the themes that were emerging. The themes were acceptance of differences, emulation of gender stereotypes, significance of role models, and student empowerment. The first theme I analyzed was acceptance of differences.

4.1 Theme One: Acceptance of Differences

Throughout the research, I challenged students to accept differences in others and themselves through the use of significant instructional strategies. Through the acceptance of others, a safer more inclusive classroom environment could be established for all students to feel more supported when taking risks and expressing their thinking. In order to gain a better perspective on acceptance, I collaborated with the librarian to work with the students to develop their understanding of human rights. We began with a picture book *For Every Child* (Castle, 2002) which is an age appropriate book that uses

pictures and words to explain the rights of the child. During the discussion, I reflected that human rights are a difficult concept for students to understand and that I needed to expand on this concept. When students were asked what they should do if someone was different, R replied "play with them", S added "don't bully them", V encouraged others to "be their friend" and A wanted to "help them." I wondered if the answers they gave were based on some previous work we completed on bullying and autism. To learn more about their thinking, I considered that I needed more questioning to go deeper. When I asked students what the book was about, C said "you have rights", J added "we can play and rest", and R contributed "the right to wear whatever clothes you want." In class, we had previously read a book about a boy who was made fun of for wearing a dress. As I reflected more on the lesson, I believed that although students seemed to have some understanding of the concept of rights, this concept needs to be anchored more in their lived experience, leading into the next cycle.

The next lesson invited students to take iPads around the school and take photos of how their rights are protected at school. Students shared their photos and most focused on education, safety, clothing and being allowed to grow up. When I thought about their pictures, I realized that these were the human rights most relevant and concrete to them. In order to enable students to have a greater connection to their rights, students changed the words from the text into kid friendly language. The results suggest that students are
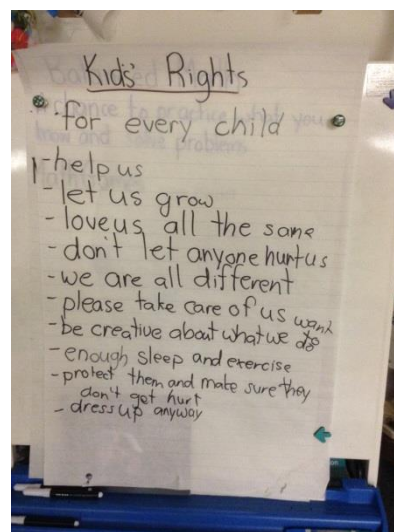
Figure 3: Kids' Rights

supportive of themselves and each other's rights. I appreciated that the summarized list was a good place to refer back to and that the next step was to think about equal vs equality.

To give students a concrete idea about *equal*, I asked students to come up with a pretend injury; then, as the injuries were shared with the class, I applied a Band-Aid. Students quickly noticed that I was putting the Band-Aids in the same spot for everyone and ignoring individual injuries. Although the band aids were being distributed equally they were not meeting the individual needs of students' injuries. This lead into a discussion
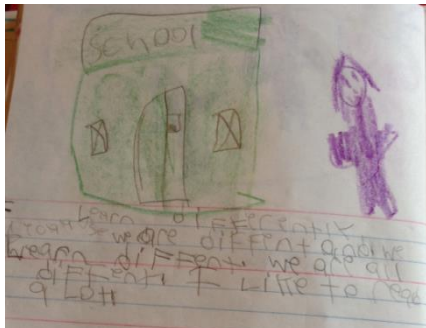
Figure 4: V Learns Differently
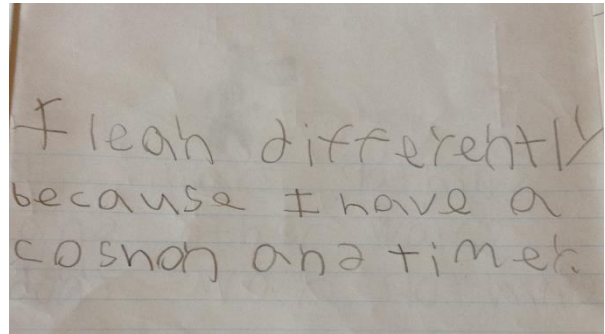
Figure 5: D Learns Differently

about how students all learn differently and they need different kinds of support to succeed. Students then wrote about how they learn differently. V wrote that "I learn differently because we are all different and we all learn differently and we are all different." D wrote, "I learn differently because I have a coshon and timer." This writing gave me some insight into students' view differences. Some students had difficulty knowing how they learn differently but students were able to write about their learning needs. Students shared their work orally with the class to give ideas to others about how students are treated equitably in our class. The research suggests students are aware of

how individuals and they themselves learn differently. The next question to pursue was how do other's opinions influence their ability to accept these differences?

The next cycle in acceptance of differences was to have students consider how what other people think determines their behaviour. To begin with I conducted a survey to ask students if they worry about what other people think. Most students claimed to never think about what other people said (Figure 6). The next strategy was to read *A Bad Case of the Stripes* (Shannon, 1998) where a little girl's concern about what others think makes her skin change into different stripes. In order for me to get a better understanding of the thinking behind their responses to the survey,
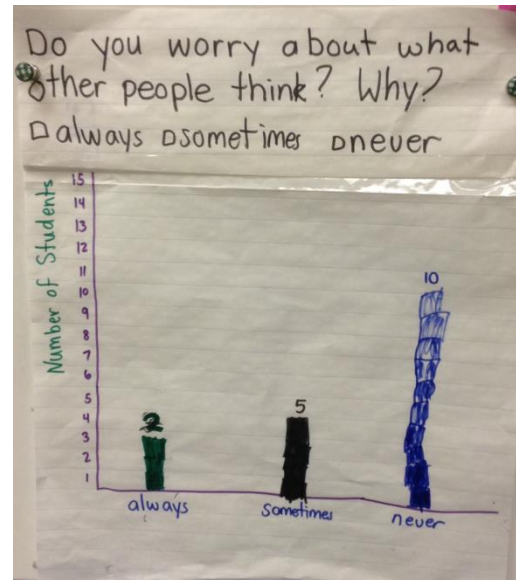
Figure 6: What Other People Think

students were asked to answer the question: Do you worry about what other people think? Some of the results are displayed in Figure 7.

J – I don't like other people to talk about me.
M – I sometimes worry because they be mean.
D – I don't care what people think of me.
R - I ignore other people if they say rude things about me.
H - I am who I am and I can't be anyone else except me.
M – I don't care because it is what I think not what they think what's on the inside that counts.
J2 - I never worry about what other people think of me because I ignore other people if they say some rude things about me.
H – I never worry about what other people think of me because I am who I am and I can't be anyone else except me.
D – I never worry about what how people think of me. Why case I don't caere what people think of me.

Figure 7: Student Thoughts

There were two responses that I was particularly concerned about from A and S. These journal entries are below.
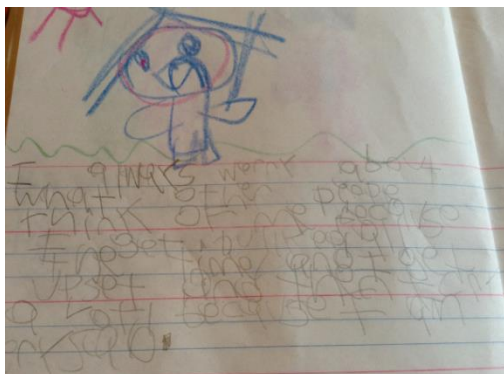
Figure 8: S - Journal
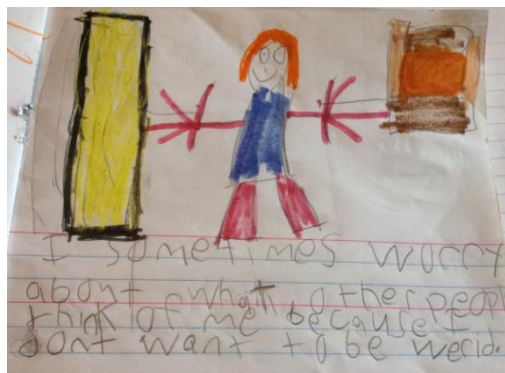
Figure 9: A - Journal

In order to gain further insight into A's concern about being weird I chose to conduct an interview. I spoke with A separate from the class and asked for a definition of weird. The student had a very difficult time explaining his thinking. I asked if it had to do with clothes, or colours he was wearing. Although the student agreed with this, I thought that I was not really sure if all of the concerns were explained orally.

When S wrote, "I always worry about what other people think of me because I get bullied all the time and I get upset and then I cry a lot because I am very sad." I also conducted an interview to learn more about how the student was feeling and if I could provide support. The student was unable to identify any situations of bullying that had occurred or any areas of the school that they were bullying. I reflected upon this student's inability to quantify situations of bullying and my concern about why she believes that she was being bullied yet unable to recount any specific events. When I wondered further about how she believed that she was a victim of bullying, I thought that perhaps she was internalizing these messages about herself based on discrimination she had faced or prejudices. At a workshop entitled *Focusing our Equity Lens* facilitated

by Jane Dewar (2014) my understanding of internalization increased as I learned that this occurs when a person comes to believe certain messages about themselves based on prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination. I noted to continue to observe the student more closely in more free activity time and throughout the day to try and examine where these ideas about self were originating. Now that students had a chance to consider how other people's opinions can matter, I chose to revisit a story that we had read earlier in the school year. The evidence suggests that students are often able to express how they feel but unable to explain why they have those feelings.

My Princess Boy (2011) was written by Cheryl Kilodavis and was a personal recount of the lived experience of this family. The story focuses on a boy who likes dress up and although his choices are respected at home, when he and his family go out into society, they learn about other's opinions. The purpose of revisiting this book was to enable the students to view it through the lens of human rights. When students rephrased kids rights into their own language, one of these rights was to *dress up anyway*. After rereading the book, students were asked to consider kids rights and answer one of two questions: What would you say to the people who were laughing at or hurting the boy or his mother? Or what would you say to the mother and boy? When I first reflected on the work that students completed they did not seem to connect their ideas to our "Kids' Rights" poster; however, now when I reflect again, I can see that they used the same terminology that we had developed as a class.
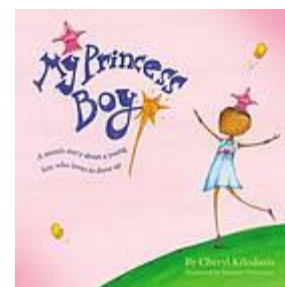
Figure 10: My Princess Boy

Figure 11: A - Response   Figure 12: D - Response   Figure 13: S – Response
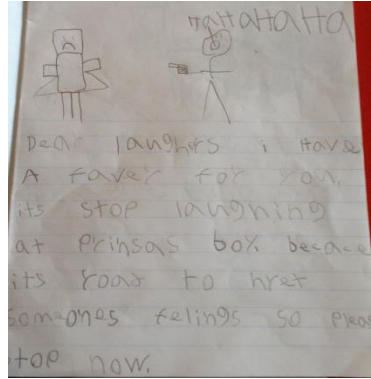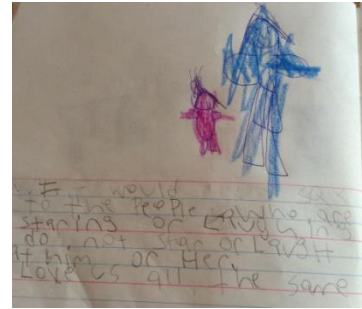
The students' writing demonstrated to me that they understood that not allowing this boy

to dress up was denying his rights. My reflection was to wonder how they would handle

a real life situation. Would they be able to defend their rights or the right of another?

How would they feel if their rights were taken away? The evidence suggests that

students can relate to an individual's rights being denied when given a real life example.

Catching the Moon (Hubbard, 2010) was a story of a young girl who dreams of playing

baseball and despite what others say about her gender, she makes it into a summer camp

for baseball. This was based on a true story of the first female player in men's

professional baseball, Marcenia "Tony Store" Lyle Alberga. Students were asked to

share something that they love to do or something they dream of doing. Then they were

asked "How would you feel if you were not allowed to do it anymore?" The results were

very surprising to me. Although most of the students stated that they would feel sad or

mad, they also added some more aggressive reactions.

A – I would feel mad because I can't play video games and I will kill myself.
R – I would feel angry because I would slap him.

V – I would feel like I would die because I can't live without animals.
E – I would feel like I will die. I will grab my bow and fire and pull it down to my ear.
J- I would feel like beating them up because I would never play Minecraft anymore.
S – I would feel sad and mad because I love to play it (prodigy). I would cry. Never (be) bad and I will die without my games.

Figure 14: Rights Taken Away Reactions

To say that I was surprised by students using the words like 'die', 'kill' and 'slap' when referring to something that they love being taken away, was an understatement. I reflected about these strong reactions and thought that at this age, pets, video games and toys, are very important to them and relative to their lived experience. My study indicates that students react strongly when a situation was made personal and relevant to their own lives. As a way to bring things to a close, I asked students to reflect on the question, "What should you do if someone says you can't do something?" Here are some of their ideas:
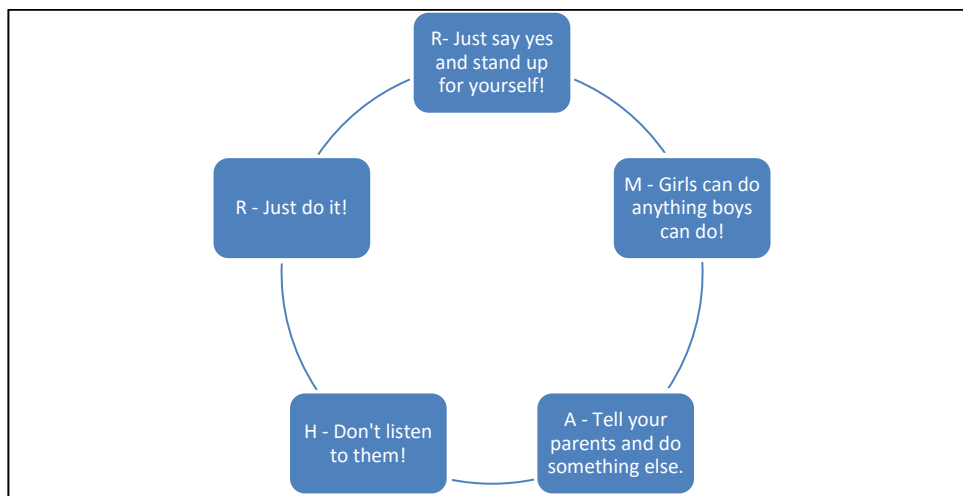
Figure 15: Student Strategies

Throughout this cycle of action research, the theme of acceptance of differences based

on children's rights emerged. Instructional strategies that I used included picture books,

student journals, student surveys, class discussion, and connections to lived experiences,

using child friendly terminology and effective prompting. The data collection tools were

primarily documents and observations with some interviews. Unanswered questions

from of this area of research are:

How would students react in a real life situation?
Would they stand up for someone else whose rights are being denied?
Would they accept someone else who appeared different away from our classroom
environment?

A theme that evolved through this cycle and emerged in other areas of the research was

that of gender stereotypes from outside the school environment, being emulated in the

classroom environment.

4.2 Theme Two: Emulation of Gender Stereotypes

The purpose of the research was to select and implement the most appropriate instructional strategy for the situation based on observations and the strategy's ability to increase inclusion, thereby eliminating social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity of gender. Throughout the research period, gender stereotypes were emulated by the students during instructional time and during other times; such as, lunch and recess. The evidence suggests that stereotypes were used as a way for students to test and questions their beliefs. It was important within the parameters of this research to consider gender stereotypes, as stereotyping children as young as four serves no purpose and should cease, no matter if it is based on gender, race or another superficial factor that has no bearing on a person's character or ability to succeed (Krans, 2013). I had the opportunity to be present during a lunch time conversation as students discussed the tooth fairy. The following was a transcript of the conversation that I observed:

JN: The tooth fairy is a girl.

JA: Boy tooth fairies come for boys and girl tooth fairies come for girls.

Sometime later:

JO (directed towards me): Is she (tooth fairy) a boy or a girl?

Me : I don't know. What do you think?

JO: I think it is a girl because on TV you see commercials and stuff and it is always a girl.

E: There is only one tooth fairy in the world.

When I reflected on this conversation, I thought about many ideas related to gender and instructional strategies. I chose an open ended prompt as a way to learn more about

where this student's ideas originated. I was concerned about the influence that media has on students thoughts and the gender stereotypes that were being reinforced.

The instructional strategies that I imagined were to read a story about tooth fairies or to watch a movie that would question these stereotypes and encourage students to discuss where their ideas come from in order to have them question their thinking. I considered that the prompts that I used during this investigation would be important and focused on asking "What do you know about tooth fairies?" "Where do your ideas come from about tooth fairies?"
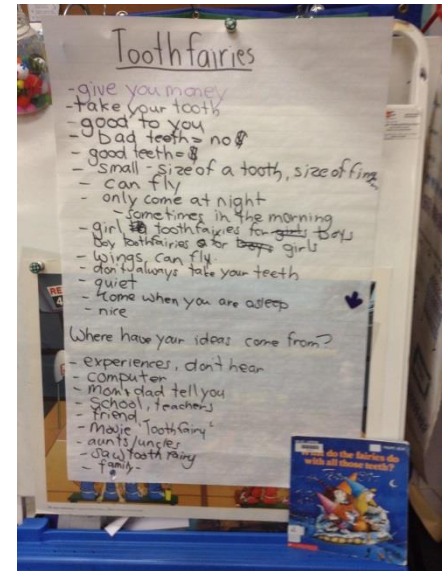
Figure 16: Toothfairies

The strategy that I selected was to read the story, *What do all the tooth fairies do with all those teeth?* (Luppens, 1996). I began the lesson by having students identify what they know about tooth fairies. The list we created was in Figure 16. Some students held strong to the idea that boy tooth fairies come for boys and girl tooth fairies come for girls' teeth. After students had discussed their ideas, they were asked the question, "Where have your ideas come from?" Students were able to identify that families, friends, media, school, and the computer informed their thinking. The book shows fairies being from both genders and many different sizes and shapes. As a way to conclude our discussion about tooth fairies, I asked students if they would like to be a tooth fairy. Students indicated their answer by a show of hands. This quickly turned into a discussion of what else boys and girls might like. From this research, my study

indicates that students often look for validation of their ideas among their peers and adults. The next cycle in my research was to have students consider some of their

concepts of gender by looking at things that boys and girls like.

During my planning for this research, I had found many valuable gender-based resources to use in my instruction. I had found a lesson entitled "Boys Like, Girls Like, Kids Like" (Miller, 2014). Its purpose was to help younger children think critically about gender roles, gender-bias and how diverse and alike we can

Figure 17: Kids Like

be. The lesson that I taught was based on these topics and fit perfectly into my next step for this theme. To begin the lesson I used a Venn diagram with one overlapping section was used to have students organize their ideas about what boys and girls like. As we were working on things boys like, I could hear some grumblings from the students that girls might like some of those things too. After we had identified the list for girls' likes I asked, "Was there anything on here that both girls and boys like?" When we were done the discussion everything that we had recorded was now located at the centre of the Venn diagram. I then moved all of these ideas to a new paper entitled "Kids Like" (Figure 17). I observed that many students were surprised to see how everything could be put in the centre of the Venn diagram. When I reflected on the lesson, I could really see how students were challenged to think about their thinking. Students considered where their ideas had come from and how, what they thought might be the case, upon

further investigation may not be a true for either gender. The evidence suggests that when confronted with new ideas, students are open to challenging their thinking. The next part of this cycle was to invite a local author in to the classroom to further discuss stereotypes from a princess perspective.

I was fortunate to be able to connect with an author who had written a book entitled *What's Up with Princesses?* (Vardalos, 2014). This author based the book on her daughter's experiences. This book challenges the stereotype that every girl wants to be a princess. The author began her discussion by asking, "because you are a boy or a girl, do you like certain things?" K replied, "I like Pokémon and people give me Barbies." The conversation quickly turned to our previous book when E shared, we read *My Princess Boy*. The author asked, "Is there something about a princess that is not a good thing?" E replied that, "They just sit around just like be jealous, yeah, get me that and that." M added, "They may think, I am not good enough, I need to buy something." E expanded, "They feel bad and doubt themselves and only care about themselves." The author added, "If you see a daisy you don't ask it why it is not a rose. Every flower has its own beauty." The author read the book which focused on children having skills, responsibilities, and self-esteem. Students were asked to pick one of these topics and share something that they posess.

Figure 18: S - Response   Figure 19: C - Response   Figure 20: JN - Response
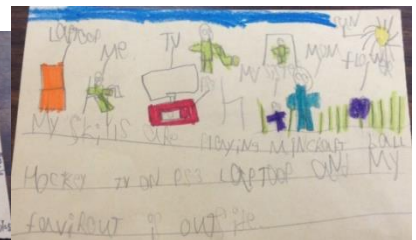
I observed that students were able to easily select one way to show a skill or responsibility that they possess and were proud to share their ideas. When I thought about this lesson, I realized that students possess very stereotypical ideas about princesses but when asked to think beyond the stereotype they are able to relate to how they also do not match up to stereotypes about boys and girls. From our discussion about princesses, we began to discuss more about careers. The evidence suggests that although students begin by following gender stereotypes, with new information, they are able to modify their thinking to be more inclusive and accepting. The next step in the cycle was to have students consider individuals in non-traditional gendered roles in our community.

Once again, I worked with the librarian to create a lesson around the story *My Mom is a Firefighter* (Grambling, 2007). Students were asked, "Do you know of any rules about jobs that men and women can do?" E replied , "Anyone can be what they want to be". He went on to elaborate that boys can be knights, girls can be knights too. He added, "I was watching *Madagascar* and the zookeeper was a woman." After reading the story, students were asked if they were surprised that Bailey's mom was a firefighter. R said, "It's a new thing for me!" In my reflections, there were not many students (three) that were surprised to hear that his mom was a firefighter. This could be due to lived experiences as many of the families in our class have both parents working. Students were then asked to think about what they want to be. Figure 21 shows the variety of responses, as many students did not follow gender stereotypes and many wanted to work with animals.

R – Firefighter. I see a firetruck and I know (a dad who) is a firefighter.
M – Vet, so I can help animals.
J – Spy because they are cool.
E – Miner because I want to find diamonds and gold and give them to poor people who don't have any money so they can buy stuff.
JN – Zookeeper to take care of animals.
A – Vet because I got a Guinea Pig for my birthday.
S – An IBM worker because my gramma is an IBM worker.
J – A Race car driver because people cheer for you.
H – A marine biologist to save living things in the water.

Figure 21: Career Dreams

I found S's career choice interesting. Her choice is to be an IBM Worker like her gramma. When I hear this, I wondered if it was because her gramma was a role model for her or if that is one career that she hears a lot about at her home. Findings for this area of research would suggest that these students are not considering careers based on gender stereotypes but rather on what they enjoy doing and what is modelled by their relatives.

Instructional strategies including, discussion, author visits, prompting, story books, and open ended prompts were used in the research with the theme of emulation of gender stereotypes. Findings were based on my personal reflections, observations and documents gathered from students. For me to get a good understanding of how society's gender stereotypes influenced students' thinking, it was important to have input from students, to create an environment where they could share their ideas and opinions. Enabling students to have a voice in the classroom and feel empowered was the next theme in my research.

4.3 Theme Three: Student Empowerment

The inspiration for this research was observing students being excluded from games by their peers. My belief is that if students are taught to be more inclusive, exclusion would be reduced. Through this action students would be empowered to make changes and reduce the amount of social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity of gender. At the beginning of this research another such incident arose as the result of playing a game called "Museum." In the game, some students pose like museum statues and others are museum visitors who walk through the museum. Once these students have passed statues, those statues can then move around. If the museum visitor turns around, the statues have to be frozen in a new position. If the statues are caught moving, they crumble and are out of the game. As the students were playing the game, I noticed that many of the unfrozen statues were making funny faces, teasing and being disrespectful towards the museum visitors. After the game, I realized that students need to have more discussion around showing more respect, caring and inclusiveness during class activities. I believed that the next instructional strategy to use in this cycle of research would be to facilitate a community circle. To begin the community circle I shared with the students,

"I noticed on Friday during our museum game when the visitor's back was turned, not everyone was showing good character. What is an example of good character we could show during any game or at recess or gym?"

Within our class, we have focused on the school board character traits, so I thought that connecting this discussion to prior knowledge would assist students in coming up with solutions to our problem. K said that students could be inclusive and let other people play. JN and T thought that we could show respect by following the rules of the game.

JC said, "If anyone isn't playing with anyone, I will let them play with me and that will be respect, honesty and courage." I noted that some students were able to make connections between the character traits and actions they could take. While other students needed prompting to make the connection. A capacity building series from the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, p. 1) recommended that leading educators become more keenly aware of student voice for younger children; as well – how competent and capable of complex thinking students are when they are deeply involved in the process of learning. Most students were able to attend during the community circle for about 10 minutes. During our circle, there was some disruption as some students were being withdrawn for reading groups. Questions that remain from this conversation are: Will students make the choices they say they will? How much does student behaviour impact on instructional strategies selected by the teacher? The evidence suggests that having consistent terminology used in the class such as, character traits, enabled students to connect thinking with potential actions that may improve inclusiveness. The next step in this cycle was to see if students would use some of the ideas that they had in a real life situation.

For Father's Day students were drawing a picture of their dads. At one point, I noticed that S had her head down on their desk. When I asked the student what was wrong, she

Integrity
We act justly and honourably in all that we do.

Responsibility
We are accountable for our actions and we follow through on our commitments.

Cooperation
We work together towards shared goals and purposes.

Empathy
We strive to understand and appreciate the feelings and actions of others.

Optimism
We maintain a positive attitude and have hope for the future.

Respect
We treat ourselves, others and the environment with consideration and dignity.

Honesty
We behave in a sincere, trustworthy and truthful manner.

Caring
We show kindness towards each other.

Inclusiveness
We include everyone in what we do and value their unique contributions.

Courage
We do the right thing even when it's difficult.

Figure 22: Character Traits

replied, "He told me that my Dad looks like he has lipstick on." JA came over and said "some dads wear nail polish, some boys love make up." This made S feel better and the other student came and apologized. JA is a very quiet student and it was very encouraging to see him be strong and supportive of another student and encourage diversity and acceptance. I observed that this student had very firm boundaries on what makes a dad and wearing makeup did not fit. I also noted that it took only one other student to come over and support them and they felt better. The evidence suggests that it does not take much peer influence to impact on students in a positive or negative way when considering gender roles. The next step in this cycle was to seek resources that I could use to have students explore characters that do not follow traditional gender stereotypes and I sought to find characters that were close in age to my students, in hope of making the story more relevant.

I was fortunate to discover two books that dealt with exclusion based on choices that were gender non-conforming. *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Malenfant) was written in
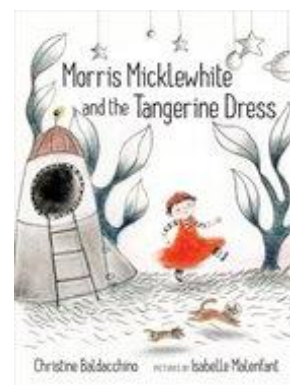
Figure 23: Morris Mickelwhite

2014 and *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (dePaola) is from 1979. Both books carry the same message about students being excluded based on the colour of the clothes they wear or the type of activities they choose to be involved in. We read both books within a day of each other and during our discussion students combined our ideas to say that sometimes kids get teased.
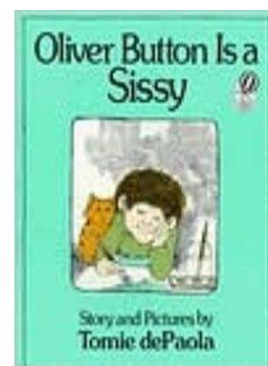

Figure 24: Oliver Button

Sometimes it's a boy doing girl things or a girl doing boy things. I asked students to

think about something you could say if someone was being teased. All of the students

came up with an overwhelming number of positive messages to say. Some of the ideas

were

E – I love you.
A – Wear what you want ignore them.
S – I would say to the bully to stop being mean and to be nice to Oliver.
V – Do you want to play? Do you want to be my friend? You are a star. You are a nice friend. That is a good idea.
J – Be their friend! I am your friend. Ask if you can play.
K – Just do it. You are a star! You are awesome! You rock. You can do it! Be yourself.
M- It is what you think about yourself not what others think. Say you are awesome then why you are.

Figure 25: Empowering Words

I was a little surprised by the variety of responses the students had and how supportive

they appeared to be of others who may be gender non-compliant. Some niggling

questions that I had are how can I further empower my students to be supportive of other

students in a situation outside of the class? Can students see gender as something other

than boy/girl when so many messages reinforce that gender conformity? My next cycle

of research was to look for ways that students could spread words of empowerment to

others.

To empower students and give them an opportunity to share their ideas with other

students around the school, I suggested that we take some of these great words of

encouragement and put them on notes then distribute them around the school for

students to take if they need it. In the Capacity Building series, it highlighted how

children express voice in a variety of ways – in writing art and drama; in gesture, body

language and even silence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2). This activity

enabled students to express their voice through writing and art. Here are some of the messages students posted.

Figure 26: Empowering Notes (Starting top, left to right, JO, JA, A, M, E, V, JO, M)

At the conclusion of this activity, I noted how excited to students were to see their words posted around the school and to think that others may take them to use. Students were happy to make many more than required and took their time to make sure that each one was created with care and looked unique. When the messages went up in the hallway, they kept checking to see if their message had been taken by another student. I was

excited to see the students so engaged in activity that they were able to complete and feel empowered. I observed them telling other students about this activity. The research suggests that when given opportunities to share their ideas with others, students feel empowered. Throughout this research I also felt empowered, that I could make a change. Interwoven through classroom interactions of students, lessons that I taught and guest speakers was the importance of role models for students to learn from.

4.4 Theme Four: Significance of Role Models

When sharing career choices S indicated that she would like to work at IBM as that is where her gramma works. This is an example of the fourth theme that emerged from my research. The research suggested that students and teachers can learn from role models. Within the first few days of beginning my research, I had a conversation with a co-worker about using gender neutral pronouns as part of my research. I had learned of another professional who was using these in her school and she also left notes for her supply teacher to follow the same model. I was not overly sure how well this would be perceived by other staff and felt that although I support this idea in theory, to implement it independently without direction from our School Board would be risky. We continued to have a discussion about language modelled by the teacher and I spoke to her about referring to students as boys and girls. I have heard other teachers ask their students to line up by girls and boys or referred to students as 'boy in blue pants' or 'girl in pink'. For the past few years, I had made a conscious decision to do my best not to use gendered terms in my classroom in an effort to model more inclusive language. After our discussion, I wondered if what I was attempting to do in my classroom would impact on any other teachers. I also wondered if making a change relied on a shift in school culture so that the same ideas are being modelled throughout the entire setting? This became evident to me when I asked another teacher if she wanted to have an author visit to talk about gender stereotypes. She replied that she had too many boys for that to be relevant. I was caught a little off guard as from my perspective this story was not just relative to girls, but to inclusiveness for everyone, I replied that they still had sisters and cousins who are girls so perhaps it might be relevant. Afterwards I wondered, what else

could I have said to show that this story was relevant regardless of gender? Could I be a role model for others who were concerned about increasing inclusiveness among our students? What role models could I find to support me in my research? My action was to use this situation as a suggestion for a role play during some training that I was attending on creating equitable and inclusive schools. The result was that other teachers were able to consider this real life situation and develop prompts to use to if they faced these objections; including using encouraging language, asking thinking questions of the teachers, and being a role model in our schools.

Throughout the research there were other opportunities to observe teacher and student role models. Our school was planning a colour day as part of school spirit. At first the colours were pink for junior students and blue for intermediate.

Figure 27: Colour Challenge   Figure 28: Announcement Script
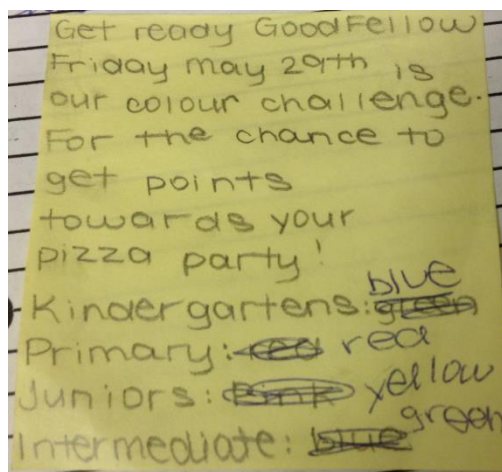
Figure 27 shows the poster that was distributed throughout the school. Figure 28 shows

the changes that staff made to the colours challenge. At the time of the change in

colours, I had contacted the teacher in charge to find out why the colour had been

changed. Unfortunately, I did not receive a reply. I wondered if the change was due to

stereotypes associated with the colour pink. If this was the case, was it a good ideas to

change the colour or would it have been better to stay with pink? Reflecting on the

possible reasons why this might have been changed was my action and; also, to consider

how closely colours are related to gender identity. Blue for boys and pink for girls.

Just as I was reflecting on this situation, another example of staff as role models showed up the during an open house for new Kindergarten Parents when another teacher set out a sample of items students needed to

Figure 29: Samples of Kindergarten Supplies

start school. I observed as a teacher set out a sample of these items (Figure 29). The

teacher appeared to be in a rush to get this set up before the open house but I was

wondering what parents might think of this pink display. What if they preferred to buy

gender neutral products for their child? How inclusive was this example of the types of

lunch bags that were acceptable at school or inclusive of preferences that students may

have? I had thought about changing the sample or adding another option for parents but

was concerned about offending the other teacher. I had thought about asking if I could

help her find another sample but believed that she was in too much of a rush to consider

any further input. I decided that the need to consider what type of artifacts we use needs

to be part of the planning. I asked myself, "By using Disney and pink what messages are we sending to students at our school?" In what way are the artifacts that I use in our class sending messages to students?" Throughout the research, I saw an example of how students follow the example of teachers. I considered how an entire school approach to artifacts we present might be a useful tool to screen the types of examples we use for parents to follow and present a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. The next cycle in, as I continued to observe the role models in our school, was when students were asked to take on a leadership role.

During a Kindergarten and Grade One play day our Grade Seven students were leaders for the play centres. A teacher had modelled having the students compete, boys vs girls. When the student took over the activity the Grade Seven leader followed this example and continued to have students competing against each other based on gender. In my reflections, I considered if this student made a conscious decision or just followed what they were expected to do. I was concerned about the message it may send to students about ability differences among genders. I was also trying to consider, if I was a student who did not identify as a boy or a girl, how they would have felt. The action that I took was to continue to use terms like 'students', 'class', 'friends' to refer to my students to include everyone in our class. How can we expect students to be using inclusive and equitable language if staff are not providing that model? What messages are staff sending to students as role models? The evidence suggested that more thought needs to be given to how schools and teachers can be better role models for equitable and inclusive school cultures. A more holistic approach needs to be taken so that everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities. When I was considering the need for positive

role models, I thought about the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2014) focus, in that the board and schools are committed to the principle that every person within the school community is entitled to a respectful, positive school climate and learning environment, free from all forms of discrimination and harassment. The question for reflection (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) that was significant to this situation was, how do we foster among all members of the school community, including students, staff, parents, and community members, a sense of shared responsibility to create a respectful positive school climate?

This theme was based on my interactions with other teachers as a professional as well as how the culture of a school contributes to the culture within a classroom; how everyone has a role to play when creating inclusive and equitable schools. My actions included self-reflection, considering how I am a role model in my classroom for my students and how the decisions of other teachers can impact my students, including their learning environment. Throughout the research, I have reflected on my selection of instructional strategies, student work, observations, and interviews with students. Through all of this research, findings and results about effective instructional strategies that I used to eliminate social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity of gender have been indicated by the research.

4.5 Summary

In order to collect all of the findings from this action research project, I wanted to organize the results into a table would be a suitable way to present them. Figure 30 My Study Indicates… summarizes each finding down into the four themes.

My Study Indicates…
Theme One: Acceptance of Differences • Students were supportive of themselves and each other's rights. • Students were aware of how they and individuals learn differently. • Students often were able to express how they felt but were unable to explain why they had those feelings. • Students related to an individual's rights being denied when given a real life example. • Students reacted strongly when a situation was made personal and relative to their own lives.
Theme Two: Emulation of Stereotypes • Stereotypes were used as a way for students to test and question their beliefs. • Students often looked for validation among peers and adults when confronted with new ideas, students were open to changing their thinking. • Although students began to follow gender stereotypes, with new information, they were able to modify their thinking to be more inclusive and accepting. • Students were not considering careers based on gender stereotypes but rather on what they enjoy doing.
Theme Three: Student Empowerment • Having consistent terminology used in the class such as character traits, allowed the students to connect thinking with potential actions that may have improve inclusiveness. • It does not take much peer influence to impact on students in a positive or negative way when considering gender roles. • When given opportunities to share their ideas with peers, students feel empowered and are more likely to use positive words to encourage others.
Theme Four: Significance of Role Models • Students and teachers learned from role models. • More thought needs to be given to how schools and teachers can be better role models for equitable and inclusive school cultures.

Figure 30: My Study Indicates…

Considering that my research model and selection of instructional strategies were both

based on observation and reflections, action research was a good match for conducting

research to answer the research question; as well as, being an effective match for

observing planning, acting and reflecting both on action and on instructional strategies.

In working toward eliminating social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to

diversity of gender, there were many findings and results that resulted in safe and

inclusive classroom where students can felt included, accepted and supported.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

Based on my research and findings, I have made conclusions related to supporting inclusive and equitable environments; I included the need to have an emergent design not only in the instruction but in the research methodology. I also looked at how teachers influence students, the need for whole school initiatives, and ongoing teacher training to support equity and inclusiveness education initiatives. As this research was based in the classroom and focused on the needs of my students, considering how their behaviour influenced my instructional choices was essential when considering the results and findings. As part of reflecting on the process and possible areas for future research, I have considered how I could have engaged parents, the needs of the students, resource limitations, and external school influences. Engaging my school community could have been done through offering mini workshops for staff throughout the research including a description of my research, the findings, instructional strategies and my conclusions.

5.1 Emergent Design

Using action research in a classroom setting provides a means for teachers or educators in the schools to improve their practices of taking action and to do so by participating in research (Creswell, 2011). This approach is also the process of teaching. Throughout the research, I was constantly reflecting, planning, acting and observing to make appropriate instructional choices to meet the needs of my students. In order to notice any patterns in instructional strategies used, I noted which strategies were used throughout which theme (Figure 31: Instructional Strategies).

Instructional Strategies	Theme 1: Acceptance of Differences	Theme 2: Emulation of Gender Stereotypes	Theme 3: Significance of Role Models	Theme 4: Student Empowerment
Picture Books	*	*		*
Journals	*	*		
Surveys	*			
Discussion	*	*	*	
Lived Experiences/Connections	*	*		*
Terminology	*		*	
Prompts	*	*		*
Graphic Organizers		*		
Author Visit		*		
Observation	*	*	*	*
Community Circle				*
Games				*
Sharing ideas with others				*
Co Facilitation	*			*

Figure 31: Instructional Strategies

Observation was used in all four of the themes and discussion, picture books, prompts,

and connecting to lived experiences were used in three of the themes. At the same time,

it can be observed that a variety of instructional strategies where used when working

within each theme which resulted in a very emergent design with instructional strategies

selected were based not only on the best strategy for the content area, but with the needs

and strengths of the students well.

5.2 Behaviour Influences Instructional Choices

When I look back at the instructional strategies that I chose, I can see how I had to use

my professional judgement not only to design learning experiences for students to

engage in but also to choose a strategy that would be most likely to be successful with the students in my class. This class of students had a significant number of students that had difficulty regulating their behaviour and others with academic concerns. An indicator of this significance of the behaviours was a special education tool that we used to track our concerns referred to as a Strengths and Needs Committee Meeting. Of the whole class of 21 students special note was made of the needs of 18 through this Committee Meeting. Not only did this make it a difficult class to manage but it made the type of Instructional Strategies that would be most appropriate fairly limited. When I made decisions about strategies, using my professional judgement, I had to examine which would be most successful for this group of students on a specific day. This definitely had an impact on the research process and results. When thinking about the work that Hall, Roach and Roach (2015) have done, I note they acknowledge the impact of the student who unintentionally behaves in disruptive ways. This is referred to in their list of mitigating factors that impact on creating a non-biased school environment, as the student does not have the ability to control his or her behaviour and the student does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour. My research study indicated that the design of effective strategies in response to student learning is done through teacher professional judgement based on needs of the students and expectations to be taught.

5.3 Creating Allies

At any age, it is increasingly important to support the development of a strong student voice within classrooms and schools. There were many observable instances in class where one student supported another's idea when they were faced with objections. Using

instructional strategies like discussion, community circle, work samples, sharing ideas

with others, and connecting to lived experiences enabled student voice to be heard in the

classroom and throughout the research. Students initiated and lead the action. This

action by the students would be considered rung 7 of Roger Hart's Ladder of Young

People's Involvement (1992). These situations highlighted for me the importance of

creating allies among younger students inside and as part of the school community. Not

all students at this age are ready for this type of participation. Beginning students at rung

5 might be most appropriate for students of this age range. On this rung, young people

are consulted and informed. With a goal of moving more towards rung 6 where

participation is adult-initiated and decisions are shared with young people. Although

these students are young, the idea of equity is still a very important one for them to

consider with adult support. If we considered a model where adults actively consult

youth while they are involved, although youth only have the authority that adults grant

to them, and are subject to adult approval, youth can substantially transform adults'

opinions, ideas and actions (Hart, 1992). To continue this thought, Hyland's (2010, p.

87) research demonstrated that early childhood teachers can begin to create a more

equitable society by teaching its youngest members to be advocated for justice. The

Ontario Ministry of Education continues the support of developing allies and increasing

student voice in schools by asking the question: How do we provide all students with a

voice and leadership opportunities to help ensure that their perspectives are reflected in

the school's equity and inclusive education initiatives?

5.4 Influencing Students

Teacher should become more aware of the ways in which they can influence students'

thinking and identities. Upon reflection, I realize that I was more than simply presenting

students with different perspectives on gender but I was having them engage fully with

these different ideas to make connections and see different possibilities. The American

Association of University Women published *Gender Gaps* (1997) which shows that

simply offering boys and girls the same menu of career choices without actively

encouraging them to consider non-traditional fields does little to change the status quo.

The encouragement that teachers provide is essential for students to consider options

outside of the stereotypical gender norms. In addition, teachers must reconsider how

they interact with children to identify the subtle ways that power structures classroom

life and shapes children's identities (Hyland, 2010, p. 88). I often wondered how my

gender influenced my teaching and was reassured by Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2014, p.

6) who found that a teacher's gender did not appear to have any direct influence on

students' evaluation of teacher effectiveness. To add to these thoughts, it is also

important for teachers to listen to what students have to say during both open

conversations and at other times. Teachers need to observe students and their

conversations to understand their thinking and to use appropriate prompts to allow for

the ideas to grow and develop by connecting different aspects of learning. As stated in

the Capacity Building Series, educators are grasping the importance of "developing a

pedagogy of listening where they spend more time listening to their students and helping

them build on one another's ideas." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3)Through

my observations in the classroom, discussions and interviews with students I was able to

get a better understanding about what their ideas were in order to be able to make appropriate choices about how I could influence their identities and activities to have them consider their concept of gender.

5.5 Whole School Initiative

In order to be successful equity and inclusiveness of gender diversity needs to be a whole school and board initiative. The expectation of *Ontario's Equity and Inclusiveness Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) is that boards are committed to serving students in diverse communities by incorporating the principles of equity and inclusiveness into all aspects of its operations, structures, policies, programs, procedures, guidelines, and practices. As an individual teacher in a school I am able to have the most influence in my classroom and some influence within the school. When considering equity pedagogy it assumes that if teachers and schools do not consciously attempt to counter injustice, then by default, they support it (Hyland, 2010, p. 1). So to become equitable and inclusive schools, we must consciously counter these injustices. As *Gender Gaps* (American Association of University Women, 1998, p. 8) clarifies the goal of school excellence, that impels the standards movement is one and the same goal behind education equity. Gender equity and the achievement of high standards, as written acknowledge equity issues. Equity is the key to excellence in education.

5.6 Teacher Training

In my initial teacher training, we received instruction on Social Justice which allowed me to view my role from a social justice perspective. This may not be true for all teachers. Importance of teacher training at beginning of career at throughout Gender

Gaps shows that teachers receive little or no training in gender equity from schools of education. In a national survey in 1993 and 1994 the most time spend on gender equity was two hours per semester. One third of teacher education instructors surveyed spent one hour or less on the topic (American Association of University Women, 1998, p. 5). In order to grow and develop as a professional, continual professional development is needed. When looking at implementing effective equity and inclusiveness strategies the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) asks, how do our schools and boards provide staff with learning opportunities that foster safe, caring, inclusive, and accepting schools? Throughout my research I was fortunate to be part of two different professional development opportunities. The first opportunity was to attend an Arts and Equity Technology Conference hosted by our school board. At this conference, I saw many different examples of schools that were implementing equity and inclusiveness strategies. It was at this conference, where I learned of the note strategy that I used at the end of the research as part of student empowerment.

The second opportunity was to be a Key Equity Point Person for our school. Teachers received ongoing professional development to implement equity initiative in their school. One of the lessons from these workshops was to start with what you want at the end and work towards it. Through the action research process, I had in mind from the beginning that I wanted students to be more inclusive of others who are gender noncompliant and that is the goal that I work towards. Ongoing professional development on the implementation of equity and inclusiveness initiatives was important not only to support individual teachers but to foster a community of learners committed to creating safe and caring learning environments. Being part of these

professional development opportunities also allowed me to be with like-minded teachers who are also working towards equity and inclusiveness in their school. This feeling of being part of a larger community empowered me to continue along my research path and often times gave be the boost I needed to try something new or access to a new resource that I previously did not have access. My study indicates that by being involved in professional development, I felt more supported, prepared and confident when selecting instructional strategies, and working with my students towards creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

Ongoing professional development prepares teachers to create and influence students to develop equitable and inclusive school cultures. Teacher professional judgement is informed by professional development and can increase their ability to use more effective instructional strategies while considering the needs of students. Throughout this action research, I have reflected on the process and considered future research directions.

5.7 Reflections on the Process

Throughout this research project, there have been many opportunities to consider things I would have done differently and areas for further research. These include opportunities for parent engagement, timing of the research, needs of the students, human resources, and the external school environment.

5.7.1 Parent Engagement

When I initially sent home the permission forms, there were some interesting reactions from parents. One parent wanted to know if there was a transgender student in the class. Another parent wanted to know if we would be discussing 'gay' people in class and if

that was the intention then the parent wanted to discuss it first with the child. Another parent believed that research should not be done on such young children. All three of these questions raised by parents could have been opportunities to further engage parents in dialogue about their child's education and the equity and inclusiveness initiatives offered through the School Board. A focus for equitable and inclusive education is to consider in what ways is our school supporting the School Board's strategy for parent engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Additional engagement would have enabled parents to be part of the research and this may have resulted in more information going home for families and more dialogue around gender, supporting learning at school and perhaps challenging parents to consider a more fluid approach to gender.

5.7.2 Timing of Research

When I began the approval process for this research, I was working with a class of students that was mostly female (eleven female/four male). The need for all of the students to have a more inclusive approach to gender was very evident as their dominant need. As time passed through the research process from writing my proposal to receiving approval, I was working with a different group of students that was mostly male (seventeen male/four female) and their dominant need was self-regulation. There are two considerations here. The first consideration, is that it would have been interesting to be able to conduct the action-based research on concepts of gender in these two dramatically different groups; then, compare and contrast between what strategies worked best based on concerns. This may have led to a greater understanding of effective instructional strategies for students in Grade Two and an awareness of how to increase inclusiveness based on concepts of gender. The second consideration is looking

at the basic needs of each group. For effective instruction teachers always begin with where their students are then plan from there. The group that I worked with had a dominant need to improve self-regulation skills. Meeting the needs of these students resulted in less time dedicated to interviews and observations. I was also limited by selecting instructional strategies that I believed would require less self-regulation skills or I had experienced success with for these students. In these ways the timing of the research; as well as the needs of the participants should be considered in future research.

5.7.3 Student Needs and Human Resources

Due to the high level of self-regulation needs in the class, it was difficult at times to interview students involved within the study and to gather their ideas on a class discussion or their work samples. It would have been advantageous to have another individual conduct the interviews at times or assist in dealing with the behaviour issue that I was required to work on. This would have allowed for more qualitative data to be gathered to provide data for each reflective process which may have changed my ideas of the concerns and changed the solutions. In addition, some of the concerns that I identified came from observing students during unstructured time; such as, recess and lunch. Additional human resources may have allowed for additional observations and interviews during this time, perhaps this may have uncovered some of the other ways students behave, think, and feel about gender.

5.7.4 School Environment

The scope of the study was based in the classroom and artifacts that were in our immediate vicinity. As I was researching, I noticed many examples of gender normative beliefs around the school. Including but not limited to gender-based dress codes,

students being divided by male/female, gender-based bathrooms and change rooms and sports teams organized by gender. A question for reflection within Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE) Strategy is to consider in what ways are EIE principles, strategies, and initiatives reflected in board teams, school committees, and student activities and clubs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). These gender stereotypes are echoed in our society and repeated in our schools. If we are truly on the path of equitable and inclusive schools and communities, we need to begin to look at how the traditional way we have done things needs to change. Then, changes in society and schools will support changes in education and classrooms which will result in more inclusive and accepting students.

5.8 Summary

Throughout the action research process, I was engaged with my students to use instructional strategies that would enable them to develop a concept of gender that allowed for acceptance of differences in classmates. I worked towards students becoming empowered to think of themselves as an ally to each other through the use of significant role models in their lives and dissecting their thinking about gender stereotypes. In order inform my practice, I used an action research model of observe, plan, act and reflect that drew on information from a number of sources including observation and reflections, student work, discussions, interviews and classroom artifacts. My conclusions reflected on the influence of students on each other; as well as on the instructional strategies selected by teachers. I considered the need for a whole school approach to create more equitable and inclusive school cultures supported by ongoing professional development for professionals. When considering overall

reflections and implications for further research, I saw a need for further parent

engagement, considering the needs of students, the timing of the research, human

resources available, and the potential influence of the school and community

environment. When I think about my question of how to create a safe and caring

learning environment for students, I consider the role that teachers have in creating

equitable and inclusive schools and societies. I am reminded our role as teachers in a

quote from Nelson Mandela's (1995) book *Long Walk to Freedom,*

"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

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Observation Protocol

Observation/Fieldnotes:
Setting:
Observer: Ms. Goodfellow
Role of the Observer: observer of object/classroom behaviour
Time:
Date:
Length of Observation:

Description of Object/Behaviour	Reflective Notes

Interview Protocol

Project: Gender- Identity

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interviewer: Ms. Goodfellow

Interviewee(s):

Introduction: Remind the subject of what you saw in their work, in the classroom discussion or a comment that they made. (Turn on the tape recorder and test it.) (Consent forms have already been signed by parents/guardians.)

Questions:

1. I noticed that you (said, wrote, created) _____.

2. Can you tell me about it?

3. What made you (say, write, create) _____.

4. Have you seen/heard this somewhere else?

5. Tell me more?

6. What do you like about what you said/made?

7. Open ended questions based on discussion.

Thank the student for meeting with you and answering the questions to the best of their ability and you look forward to seeing/hearing their work in class.)

Student Permission Form:

Dear Grade 2's,

As part of my learning, I am going to be doing some research about what we are doing in our class. My goal is that we learn more about having a safe learning environment and that you are more able to try new things, explore new ideas and be responsible for your learning. Everyone will be included in what we are doing in the class. It is your choice to participate in this research; your ideas and suggestions will still be used and valued in our classroom.

If you would like me to use part of the work that you create or the things that we discuss, I need your permission.

Please indicate below if you will give me permission to do this or if you choose not to have your work used.

◯   Yes, I give Ms. Goodfellow permission to use my work and things that I say as part of her research.

◯   No, I do not give Ms. Goodfellow permission to use my work and things that I say as part of her
     research.

Print your name here: _____

Thank you for thinking about my research!

Ms. Goodfellow

Definition of Terms

Gender: The attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Identity: Unlike biological sex—which is assigned at birth and based on physical characteristics—gender identity refers to a person's innate, deeply felt sense of being male or female (sometimes even both or neither). While it is most common for a person's gender identity to align with their biological sex, this is not always the case. A person's gender identity can be different from their biological sex (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Expression: In contrast to gender identity, gender expression is external and is based on individual and societal conceptions and expectations. It encompasses everything that communicates our gender to others: clothing, hairstyles, body language, mannerisms, how we speak, how we play, and our social interactions and roles. Most people have some blend of masculine and feminine qualities that comprise their gender expression, and this expression can also vary depending on the social context i.e.; attire worn at work rather than play, hobbies or interests, etc. (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Role. This is the set of roles, activities, expectations and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: Masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females). People who step out of their socially assigned gender roles are sometimes referred to as transgender. Other cultures have three or more gender roles (Understanding Gender, 2015).

Gender Variance/Gender Non-Conformity: Gender variance refers to behaviors and interests that fit outside of what we consider 'normal' for a child or adult's assigned biological sex. We think of these people as having interests that are more typical of the "opposite" sex; in children, for example, a girl who insists on having short hair and prefers to play football with the boys, or a boy who wears dresses and wishes to be a princess. These are considered gender-variant or gender non-conforming behaviors and interests. It should be noted that gender nonconformity is a term not typically applied to children who have only a brief, passing curiosity in trying out these behaviors or interests (Terminology, 2015).

Gender Fluidity: Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviors that may even change from day to day. Gender fluid people do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries of stereotypical expectations of women and men. For some people, gender fluidity extends beyond behavior and interests, and actually serves to specifically define their gender identity. In other words, a person may feel they are more female on some days and more male on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately. Their identity is seen as being gender fluid (Terminology, 2015).

Informed Consent Form

Title: *Supporting Inclusive Education through Diversity of Gender*

Researcher(s):   *Ms. Monica Goodfellow, Masters of Education Candidate*

Supervisor(s):   *Dr. Roberta Hammett, Honourary Research Professor, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland.*

Your child is invited to take part in a research project entitled *"Supporting Inclusive Education through Diversity of Gender."*

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your child's participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw your child from the study. In order to decide whether you wish for your child to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, *Ms. Monica Goodfellow*, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent. To learn more about this research you are welcome to attend an after school information session on Day, Month, Year, at 4:00 p.m.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to allow your child to take part in this research. If you choose not allow your child to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw your child from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you or your child, now or in the future.

Introduction

As part of my Master's Thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Roberta Hammett.

In my past practice, I have noticed that students often make decisions based on gender (playmates, toys, games, classroom partners, career goals) which limits their ability to be inclusive in the classroom. Through the use of specific instructional strategies my objective is support students in thinking critically about diversity of gender. A more diverse understanding of gender would support more inclusiveness in the classroom. Creating inclusiveness is within the responsibility of a teacher; however, the purpose of this research is to study my actions and students' reactions more systematically to more deeply understand how I can impact on inclusivity in my classroom.

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of how students behave, think and feel in their classroom environment. Through the gathering of information about teaching practices, I will be improving the way in which our educational setting works, my teaching and student learning. Through the collection of qualitative data on teaching strategies used within a classroom, I will be able to reflect on the outcomes of these strategies and modify my teaching practice based on my observations and reflections. My current knowledge of effective strategies will be expanded as I delve farther into facilitating an inclusive and equitable classroom.

What your child will do in this study:

All students will be expected to participate in regular classroom activities. Data, such as student work samples will be gathered only from students that have both expressed permission to participate and their families have also agreed. Copies of artifacts and work samples produced only by consenting students will be retained for research purposes: otherwise texts produced by students will be treated as traditional student work.

Length of time:

The research will take place during regular school hours, beginning in February and ending in June of 2015. There will be one period per week dedicated to Commit to Character activities, which may include work on diversity in gender, and additional strategies will be integrated into other classwork.

Withdrawal from the study:

Parents and Guardians may choose to withdraw their permission by sending in a written request to Ms. Goodfellow at any time until June 26, 2015 after which date data cannot be withdrawn. Data that has been gathered up until the point of notification will be included in the research, unless otherwise requested. Once the research period has been completed data cannot be removed from the research. There are no consequences for withdrawal from the research for participants or their families.

Possible benefits:

By thinking more critically about gender and how students often think of gender as being just boy/girl, students may begin to look beyond this and find careers/interests/friendships without consideration of the gender stereotype that may have been previously associated with that idea.

Recording student responses to the instructional strategies used, will allow myself and other professionals to make decisions on what strategies they would use in their classrooms when developing critical thinking skills among Grade Two students and in developing diversity in gender.

Possible risks:

Students will be expected to question their thinking about gender and begin to wonder where their ideas have come from and why they have that belief. This may be uncomfortable at times; however, having created a safe classroom environment, students will have the support from the classroom teacher and their classmates. Students will not be made to feel bad about their ideas, just question how their ideas impact the inclusion of others in the classroom.

Confidentiality

All records will be maintained by myself. Students who are participating in the research will have their names replaced with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Age and gender will be the only identifiers used on the reported data. Photographs will not be taken of students; however, student work may be photographed or copied. Access to the information will be restricted to myself and my thesis advisor.

Anonymity:

Whether parents or students have given permission to participate will not be discussed in class. Participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance, will not be recorded. As this will be a small scale research project involving only students from our class, every reasonable effort will be made to ensure student anonymity, and that pseudonyms will be used to identify work or comments in any reports and publications.

Recording and Storage of Data:

In order to record as much data as possible, it may be necessary to make audio/video recordings of lessons or interviews and photographic records of student work may be taken. Once the thesis has been written, submitted and approved this information will be maintained in a password protected device. Data will be kept in a secure location for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research and then securely destroyed.

Reporting of Results:

The data collected will be used in my master's thesis paper and may also be used in journal articles or conference presentation. Within the data analysis, I will be looking for common themes in instructional strategies, my observations, quotes from students and work samples to

reflect on my learning through this research as well as to suggest ways that this research may contribute to the learning of other professionals.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

In June there will be an information session for parents to attend a discussion of preliminary results and another session in the fall to review the draft research paper and make comments. Families will be able to access the final study results on our classroom blog once the paper has been submitted and approved. https://sites.google.com/site/msgoodfellowsgrade2/

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: Ms. Monica Goodfellow, 705-436-3600 or Dr. Roberta F. Hammett (902) 542-9875.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what your child will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw your child from the study without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from your child up to the point of your withdrawal will be retained by the researcher for use in the research study, unless otherwise requested.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature:

☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to allow my child to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my child's participation, that my child's participation is voluntary, and that I may end my child's participation.

I agree for my child to be audio-recorded during interviews   ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree for my child to be video-recorded during interviews   ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to the use of quotations.   ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow my child's work samples to be photographed.   ☐ Yes ☐ No

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant's parent/guardian fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to allow their child to be in the study.

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Simcoe County
District School Board

April 2, 2015.

Dear Monica

I am pleased to confirm approval for your Masters research project entitled, Supporting Inclusive Education through Diversity and Gender. The project approved reflects your revised submission and consent form, received March 23, 2015. Thank you for creating the FAQ resource for parents/guardians. I think this will greatly assist parents in understanding what the project involves for their son or daughter.

I would like to wish you success in completing your research and meeting the requirements of your degree.

Sincerely,

Sandra Sangster, Ph.D., C. Psych.
Manager, Research and Evaluation Services
Simcoe County District School Board

MEMORIAL
UNIVERSITY

**Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)**

Research Grant and Contract Services
St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864 2561 Fax: 709 864 4612
www.mun.ca/research

ICEHR Number:	**20151105-ED**
Approval Period:	March 11, 2015 – March 31, 2016
Funding Agency:	N/A
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Roberta Hammett
Faculty of Education
Title of Project:	*Supporting Inclusive Education through Diversity of Gender*
[Previous: Supporting Inclusiveness through Concepts of Gender]
Amendment #:	*01*

April 9, 2015

Ms. Monica Goodfellow
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Goodfellow:

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) has reviewed the proposed amendment for the above referenced project, as outlined in your correspondence dated April 7, 2015, and is pleased to give approval to the revisions in your consent form and the addition of the FAQs document, as requested, provided all previously approved protocols are followed.

If you need to make any other changes during the conduct of the research that may affect ethical relations with human participants, please forward an amendment request form with a description of these changes to icehr@mun.ca for further review by the Committee.

Your ethics clearance for this project expires March 31, 2016, before which time you must submit an annual update form to ICEHR. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide the annual update form with a final brief summary, and your file will be closed. The annual update form is on the ICEHR website at http://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr/applications/.

The Committee would like to thank you for the update on your proposal and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Gail Wideman

Gail Wideman, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

GW/lw

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Roberta Hammett, Faculty of Education

Research Grant and Contract Services, Bruneau Centre for Research & Innovation   Page 1 of 1