

**“Girls' Books” & “Boys' Stuff”:
Masculinities and Multiliteracies
Within Grade 1 Classrooms
in Winnipeg, Manitoba**

by

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Abstract

In Canada, there is the perception that boys are scoring consistently below girls in academic ranking, particularly in the area of literacies. Is there a bias? Is the school system promoting a certain concept of 'boy'? Is hegemonic masculinity regularly promoted within the Grade 1 classrooms, in particular regarding literacies? If so, how? Are alternative masculinities encouraged and performed by the boys?

This research was conducted over six months, from January to June 2009 in four Grade 1 public school classrooms in two schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Along with participant-observation in these classes, interviews were done with students, both individually and in groups. A theoretical framework supported by Butler's idea of performance of gender and Foucault's notions about the creation of self guide this exploration.

The findings of this research concluded that, though alternative masculinities were performed, hegemonic masculinity was still regularly promoted within the schools.

Acknowledgements

As cliché as it sounds, I can truly say too many people were instrumental in this, what seems, endless undertaking to thank each by name in this brief passage. Their omission here does not mean I am any less grateful or aware of their importance to this project and to me, personally. I would like to especially note all the educators who allowed me into their schools, classrooms, and libraries. The need for anonymity forbids me to write your names but does not diminish my intense personal gratitude to each one of you. Similar gratitude and restrictions go out to the families involved, also.

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And to those who have passed on since I started this marathon:

Pam, I toast you with a glass of wine - red, of course. To life and love. Men? What can you do? Dianne, life is not always easy but it is good. Thank you for sharing your strength; thank you for sharing your fragility. Branco, who was comforting who in the end? It is said comfort given is comfort received. Sometimes I still imagine I am holding you. Susan, you listened to me ramble endlessly about everything and still picked up the phone when I called the next time. (Are you sorry you didn't invest in call display?) Thank you, Susan, for all your help and friendship over these years. I could never have done it without you; I could never have done so much without you; sometimes, I still don't know what I am going to do without you. I love you. Mom, thank you for teaching me to take the time to watch the sun set and to appreciate the beauty in dandelions as well as roses. I love you.

And, last but not least, to Ron, my partner. We made it! And I know it was tough on us, on you. Thank you for your patience, support and love. I do love you. (Okay, let's run away and move to Greece now!)

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

. . . there is nothing natural or inevitable about the way in which . . . gender and childhood manifest themselves in young children's lives. . . (T)hese social dimensions can be said to be socially constructed in that the particular nature and forms that each takes is context specific and the product of particular times and places. There is thus no universal form that either race, gender or childhood takes but rather they tend to vary as they reflect the particular social, political and economic forces that are at play within any specific context . . . (Connolly 2008:173)

1.1 Buying Boys' Books: Where This Project Originated

While standing in the school library, a teaching colleague and I were having a conversation about some recently delivered boxes of children's books which were neatly stacked on the front desk. As we unpacked the boxes, the pristine crispness of the new books excited us both. We rummaged through the boxes wondering which student would be the first to withdraw each title.

“The girls already are avid readers but we are trying to get the boys interested in reading, too,” she said while looking at the back cover of a book. She commented that her school had applied for a grant to purchase boys' books to help attain this goal.

“Boys' books?” I asked. “What exactly are boys' books?”

“Oh, you know. Books that are on topics that interest boys: sports, cars, dinosaurs, things like that.”

Pigeon holes created by binary categorization and gender stereotypes appeared in my mind but I said nothing. I paused and reflected. What holes would I have placed my white, gay, elementary school self? Into which holes was I placed?

* * * * *

As I started this research, I realize that my sexual orientation was fundamental to this project. Would I have done this if I was just 'one of the boys'? (And I could have given a good description of what 'one of the boys' meant at any point in my life because I tried so hard to emulate that look, those behaviours.) From experience, I discovered that 'the' boy was an idealized figure that many fantasied to attain – that many still fantasy to attain. And with that image, the concept of hegemonic masculinity needs to be introduced. Referencing Lesko, Root Aulette, Whittner, and Blakely (2009:5) state that “(h)egemonic masculinity . . . refer(s) to the culturally exalted form of masculinity that is linked to institutional power.” Hegemonic masculinity has also been defined as the following: “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” (Connell 1995:77)

And, as for the rest of the boys, the un-'exalted' the less 'dominant', they were not a monolithic mass but individuals changing, adapting, and often struggling with their identities – at any moment, restrained, constrained, and breaking free from tethers known and unknown but always felt.

Would I have done this research if I was just one of the boys? The question is rhetorical and impossible to answer but, as a public school teacher who is constantly exposed to and personally aware of the challenges of trying to belong and of being 'different', I feel it is necessary to address the issue of genders and literacies. This study addresses masculinities within Grade 1 classrooms. Specifically, I attend to the question, is hegemonic masculinity regularly promoted within the classrooms and schools, in particular regarding literacies? If so, how? This then raises the issue of whether or not

the Grade 1 boys perform alternative masculinities that do not comply with the hegemonic norm, especially through their choices of literacy materials. What do the children make of these literacy images and texts? Are the students made aware of and knowledgeable about alternative masculinities and invited and encouraged to perform these alternatives or are they discouraged from doing so? In schools, where some of the children may come from marginalized groups such as Aboriginals, the economically underprivileged, and newly arrived immigrants, how are multiple masculinities allowed to be expressed and hegemonic masculinity resisted within the literacy programming? Are we, those of us who work in the public school system in Winnipeg, assisting individuals to break free of bonds which bind, or are we, often unknowingly, still tying ropes?

The objective of this research? Realistically: I aim to raise a greater awareness of what is happening in Canadian classrooms in regard to gender and literacies. Ideally: I hope to disrupt the binary categorization of gender, to acknowledge gender's diversity and multiplicities, and to encourage the freedom to comfortably perform any choice from this spectrum. In any case, I will advocate for awareness of and change to the confinements of binary gender compartmentalization. I intend this advocacy will take the form of presentations and writings to both the educational community and the general public. I am inspired by the complex insight and broad vision of Grieg (2009:75) who wrote in his article about masculinities that the goal should be “about securing . . . dignity and self-determination for people of all genders.”

1.2 The Boys in Academic Crisis? Historical Background

Who's at risk? . . .

Boys

The dropout rate for boys in 2004-05 was 12.5%, compared to 7.2% for girls, according to Statistics Canada. Boys are more likely to dropout to work, particularly when wage and employment rates are high.

Kids with poor reading skills

Children who don't have a solid grasp on reading by the end of Grade 3 are more likely to drop out. They struggle to comprehend text books, and fall farther as each year passes. . . . (St. Germain 2010:5)

As can be seen from the above excerpt from an article on high school graduates from the October/November 2010 issue of *The Manitoba Teacher: The Newsmagazine of the Manitoba Teachers' Society*, the topic of masculinities is crucial to current pedagogical literature regarding the perceived crisis of boys' lower academic achievement and disadvantages relative to girls, especially in reading and writing, not only within education systems of Canada, but those of the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Froese-Germain 2006, Connolly 2004, Gurian and Stevens 2005).

The issue of gender inequality in education is not a new one. Discussion of differences between boys' and girls' educational achievement and what comprises the most suitable education for each have been discussed intermittently since 1867 in the United Kingdom (Rowan, Knobel, Bigum, and Lankshear 2002:11). In the 1970's and 1980's, initiatives were made to encourage female students into the 'male-dominated' subjects of mathematics, science, and technology (Connolly 2004:52). Since the mid-1990's, the 'boy turn', the switch of focus from females to males in education, gender policy, and research, has ensued (Froese-Germain 2006, Weaver-Hightower 2003).

Various causes and solutions were espoused to 'equalize' educational opportunities for the genders but the discussions were often inhibited by a zero-sum game mentality, a stalemated dichotomy where one party gained an advantage only if the other party was disadvantaged (Frank and Davison 2006:105, Connolly 2004:43).

Within these wider debates, pedagogical discourse was often trapped in a binary field of masculine or feminine. Some of those caught in this dichotomy supported various explanations for the perceived crisis of boys' lower academic scores. The essentialists' stand of 'natural' male/female differences and 'laddish' 'boys will be boys' behaviour being inhibited by 'feminized' schools are representative arguments of these critics (Rowan et al. 2002, Noble and Bradford 2000). Laddish behaviour, often associated with the working class and including such activities as irreverence to authority and the objectification of girls, represents a particular form of masculinity. This masculinity entrenches itself against the so-called feminized schools which are charged with promoting a curriculum which favours girls' learning styles and not the boys'; again, this accusation is based on an essentialist framework for understanding gender differences. Essentialism is "(t)he idea that gender differences in behavior stem from qualities that are resident in, or possessed by, women and men" as opposed to social construction (Lips 2001:114). Root Aulette, Wittner and Blakely (2009:49) add that essentialism "is the view that gender is a fixed biological or social trait that does not vary among individuals or over time." The predominance of female teachers and the lack of male role models, especially in the early years, are also included by those who decry the feminine schools. Some authors in the field claim feminist aspirations are helping create a crisis of masculinity. (Connolly 2004:31-61)

Schools, though, often exist in crisis discourse. Schools not only propagate and

disseminate certain discourses, they are also subject to discourses. And very importantly, “(e)ducational institutions control the access of individuals to various kinds of discourse.” (Ball 1990:3) These discourses help determine the 'necessary' curriculum, the 'most effective' method of teaching, and the 'appropriate' masculinities and femininities.

Currently, a spectrum of genders with multiple femininities and masculinities is starting to be examined in the pedagogical literature (Connell 2000, Connolly 2004, Gilbert and Gilbert 1998, Imms 2000, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003). The blurring of a hard and fast gender line allows a departing point from that paradigm of duality and a starting point of this research.

1.3 Logistics and Methodology: Stranger in a Strange Land - A Teacher at School

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

There's a reason why limited information is published about Grade 1's and their point of view. (My personal journal)

This is part of my journal entry written in frustration after meeting with a member of the superintendents' team in what seemed at that time – and even in hindsight – an endless process of attaining approval to enter the field and initiate my research. It was shortly after this moment that I realized I had already entered the field and the terrain was one of attrition.

I felt I was becoming almost intimate with the concept of gatekeeper and the diversity and breadth of how this role could manifest itself. Power was a key issue and I became intensely aware of the relationships that it created. The written correspondence,

applications, conversations, and interviews required to gain the permission to be allowed into four grade 1 classrooms began in early September 2008 and finished in mid-February 2009. During this tense period of waiting, other plans were discussed regarding this project including alternative settings, such as public libraries, which would have greatly affected the format for this research. (Little did I realize that this delay would only be the first in a series of unexpected postponements; as I write this, I am grateful for that ignorance.)

Like an elementary student struggling with basic arithmetic facts, I would recite the list of gatekeepers (with the appropriate forms of consent and assent) and count them on my fingers as I was granted access:

1. University of Manitoba Ethics Boards (Yes, 'boards' in plural as I went through both the anthropological (Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board) and educational (Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board) committees. A representative of these boards told me I had “the best of both worlds”. That was not quite my perspective.)
2. Superintendents' team of the school division where the research occurred
3. Principals of the involved schools (see Appendix B)
4. Teachers of the classrooms (see Appendix C)
5. Parents/guardians of the children (see Appendix A)
6. The children, themselves (This was done three times: first in the classroom setting (see Appendix D) and then when individual and group interviews were done (see Appendix E).)

That took fingers from both hands!

I finally entered into the classrooms at the beginning of February 2009. (This late

entry resulted in Appendix G an amendment to Appendix A). Though volunteering in the schools before attaining official clearance entered my mind, I was very fearful of committing any offense or transgression against any gatekeeper, known or unknown, imagined or real, and decided to wait.

The research was conducted in two schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Bernard Regional School is a kindergarten to Grade 8 institution with a population of approximately 450. (All names of schools, staff, and students are pseudonyms. At times, the description of individuals may purposely lack detail or be altered in order to help preserve anonymity.) The school is located within a low socio-economic community. Approximately 60 per cent of the population is Aboriginal, with approximately half of the remaining population being Filipino. Marne School is a kindergarten to Grade 5 school with a population of approximately 250. It has a high percentage of students with significant special needs including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, autism, Downe's Syndrome, and multiple handicaps. Though a wide range of socio-economic standings is present at Marne, it is predominately middle class. It is ethnically diverse with no group numerically predominating. The Filipino and Aboriginal populations are the largest minorities, though.

The descriptions of these two schools, Bernard Regional and Marne, were each approved by an administrator from the respective facility, and are purposely scant; I felt further elaboration of the school, site, or demographics may infringe upon the anonymity guaranteed to those involved in the study. The balance between necessary inclusions and ethical omissions was difficult to attain; ethics, though, always outweighed inclusion. This issue permeated the entire production of this work.

Originally, one grade 1 classroom from each school was to participate. Both of these

classrooms had male teachers. On the suggestion of a member of the superintendents' team, the sample was increased to two grade 1 classes in each school. The assumption of this administrator was that the response, particularly at Bernard Regional, may be very limited and increasing the possible sample size would improve the chances for volunteers. The assumption proved to be valid and I am grateful to that individual. Also, the increased sample size aided the issue of anonymity for the individuals in this study.

The four classroom teachers were Mr. Zhao and Ms. Sand, from Marne, and Ms. Mask and Mr. Evan, from Bernard Regional. Their classrooms fit the demographic descriptions of the schools to which they belong. Each class had approximately twenty students. The majority of students in each class were male with an approximate ratio of 2 boys to 1 girl, with one room, Mr. Zhao's, reaching a 3:1 ratio. Though the vast majority of students from the Marne classes participated, only approximately one-third of the students from Bernard Regional became involved. Though the students who participated represent a cross-section of the population of their rooms and schools, certain groups are under-represented in the research sample. These include recent immigrants, Aboriginals, and students with special needs. Even support of the research by the teachers, when come-by-chance meetings occurred with certain parents, did not generate further involvement by these parents nor their children. This issue is a critical one. The groups mentioned are often deemed 'at risk' of not completing their education in the public schools. It also illustrates certain aspects of power dynamics and accessibility between certain groups and the schools.

Both schools followed a six-day cycle. A schedule initiated by the teachers was created where I would visit each school for two days and make visits with prior approval on unscheduled days. Such periods as computer time and library were taken into account

but scheduling conflicts consistently occurred. Sometimes, entire days would be spent in one classroom. Sometimes the day was shared between the two rooms in one school. Due to the many events and interruptions which occur in school (and in life), the schedule had to be exceptionally flexible and accommodating. At many times, especially near the end of the field research in June 2009, the interruption became the rule and the routine the exception.

This flexible and accommodating schedule rapidly took its toll on me. As the students became somewhat more familiar with me and I, somewhat more with them and their routine, the inverse of my expectations occurred. I became a stranger in familiar territory. Oddly, I felt like I didn't belong anywhere at any given time. Did I incorrectly transfer the expectations of Mr. Kashty, the Homeroom Teacher, a character I know well, with Mr. Kashty, the Anthropological Researcher, a completely new role? I was lost and homeless. Even though I attended two schools and visited four classrooms, all I felt was I was a teacher without a school and a classroom. It was the classic insider/outsider conflict, the latter being performed more frequently. Over time, and with difficulty and frustration, I started to learn my role as the anthropological researcher.

I started as a participant-observer in the classroom. I made both the students and teachers aware that I was there to help them if needed. It is imperative that I note that I *emphasized* this point with the teachers and willingly accepted the tasks they asked me to do. I usually arrived before classes began, 9:00 a.m., and stayed until the students left, 3:30 p.m.. Often I would discuss issues with the teachers before and after regular hours depending on the teachers' availability. I assisted students who asked for help, whether this be with a school assignment, putting on a scarf or looking for a misplaced boot, and did as the classroom teacher directed. Often this meant working with individuals or

small groups of children who were having challenges with assigned material. This was done both inside and outside the classrooms. Also, I helped run small group activities which involved mathematics, science, and other subject areas. At times, in order to assist with scheduling, I was left alone with the students and even given lessons to teach. This created some difficulty for me; I felt I was becoming a pseudo-aid/teacher. (Again, a position in which I put myself.) As Thorne (1993:16) pointed out: “The practical constraints of keeping order and imposing an agenda would . . . run against the open-ended curiosity and witnessing that ethnography requires.” At the time of researching and now in hindsight, I believe I made the correct decision to assist the teachers as I did. Without their goodwill, I would not have had the experience to write this ethnography. The teachers were understanding when I wanted to address issues to the class or ask for students' interpretations of on-going events.

As well as attending library and computer classes, I also occasionally went to music and gym classes and spent some time with the students during lunch and recess, both indoor and outdoor. In many instances, I used these time to discuss and clarify events which occurred with the students and with the teachers.

Student interviews began in mid-March and continued into May. Some of the students involved in the participant-observation aspect of the research did not have parental approval to be interviewed or chose, of their own accord, not to be interviewed. There were approximately fifty students who were interviewed individually. My approach to these interviews was influenced by Connolly (2008:173-188) who stated that children of this age group are socially competent, have agency and that researchers must be critically reflexive especially in regards to the power struggles and relations that may occur between the interviewer and interviewed. The recognition of the need to be

reflexive is vital as “it is impossible to divorce the researcher from the research process itself” (Connolly 2008:174). These premises are supported by others (Thorne 1993, Pattman and Kehily 2004, Westcott and Littleton 2005, Mayall 2008).

The one-on-one interviews were followed by approximately twenty-five small group interviews. The groups were both heterogeneous and homogeneous in regards to sex. I was aware of what Pattman and Kehily (2004) had observed regarding how children would perform different masculinities and femininities within the context of groups compared to a child being by her or himself. At times, the students were assigned into a group by myself, by the teacher, or by the conditions that existed in the classroom at the time; sometimes, the students participated in the creation of the group creating a comfortable social setting where rapport already existed among the interviewed. (Connolly 2008: 175)

The interviews were held in locations other than the classroom. In Bernard Regional, this usually meant the Breakfast Room and in Marne, the Conference Room. Though these rooms were very large given my purposes, they did provide some degree of privacy. Views to events and individuals in the hallway were visible from these rooms and unexpected 'walk-ins' did create some disruptions, though.

Interviews were prefaced with an explanation to the students about the process (see Appendix E). A structured interview was prepared but the goal was to have the students leading the conversation or give their narration, as explained by Engel (2005). Solo interviews took approximately ten minutes; group interviews, approximately fifteen minutes. The range was great, though. Some interviews took half of the average time; some, double. Appendix F gives an example of some of the questions that appeared in the interviews. Questions regarding books dominated the first set of interviews; the

group interviews dealt with computers, television, and gender perception. These interviews, with student permission, were audio-taped.

Following the advice of Dockrell, Lewis, and Lindsay (2000: 53-58), I initially attempted to avoid questions with 'yes' and 'no' answers, but not successfully. The suggested open-ended questions were used as frequently as possible to initiate “naturalistic talk” associated with outside the classroom as opposed to the I-R-E structure (teacher initiates, pupil responds, teacher evaluates) discussion common in some classrooms. As I gained experience with the interviewing process, and the comfort level of the students and of myself increased, the interviews became more “naturalistic”.

Research “conversations” with two students in the classroom, as recommended by Mayall (2008), were never taped. In fact, no recordings were made in the classroom save when doing the class introduction script and assent (see Appendix D). Here, a sample recording with the teacher and myself was done to demonstrate to the children how the digital recorder worked.

This project also has a qualitative and quantitative archival aspect. Books used by staff and taken by the students from the school libraries were examined (see Appendix H). Images and descriptions of forms of masculinities and femininities depicted were documented. This analysis was influenced by the works of such researchers as Harper (2007). Harper focused on characters, especially protagonists, that transgress traditional gender role models by cross-dressing or performing alternative masculinities. Kirsh (2010) and his work on media and stereotyping was also invaluable.

1.4 Ethical Considerations: Degrees of Correctness

. . . consent must be given, and it must be informed. Researchers may be considered to have extra responsibilities when the participants are children. It is necessary to ensure that a child fully understands not only the short term implications of the research but also the long term. (Lindsay 2000:12)

*“You can't can't be judgmental; you're gay.”
Mr. Evan in discussing my subjectivity and lack of objectivity, in general.*

In my ethical considerations, I was greatly influenced by the guidelines suggested by Lindsay (2000:14-15). As shown by the opening quote in this section, the author made very apparent the responsibilities and difficulties a researcher must address in cases such as the one I had undertaken. Lindsay, in discussing the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) code regarding children and vulnerable groups, emphasized foremost the respect of the right and dignity of the individual, informed consent, informed assent, and the right of the subject to withdraw from the study by giving verbal or non-verbal cues. The latter point was exceptionally important given the age of the students with whom I would be working. As in teaching, during my research I was listening not only for the children's words but to their silences, actions, and other signals which signify comfort and especially discomfort. Whenever in doubt, I erred on the side of caution and would ask if the child wished to continue the interview at a later time or not at all. There were instances when I decided to end the interview because of the perceived uneasiness of the student. Tact and compassion were always used and the comfort of the child was paramount in all cases.

The site of the research greatly affected how I was situated in this study. Even though

I entered the field as an anthropological researcher, I was and am a teacher, currently employed in the division where I did the research. I was and am bound by all ethical codes and responsibilities of that position. I was very aware of the difficulties and biases of such a situation as discussed by Jones and Tannock (2000:92-93). And not only was the division 'home' but the research took place in schools in which I had previously worked. I was familiar to some students and many of the staff.

Familiarity can be a double-edged sword. This familiarity was instrumental in my being allowed into the classrooms. Two teachers commented that they would not have allowed the research to take place in their rooms if they did not know me. That personal and professional comfort allowed these teachers to act in a manner they would not have with a stranger. They knew they “could count on me” as a qualified teacher and they could open up to me and discuss matters that were sensitive.¹ And I, for my part, felt an added personal responsibility for having been given this trust. “Genuineness and reciprocity are vexed issues for the ethnographer” (Coffey 1999: 41). As I wrote in my journal after the teachers had given their consent: “I would never have got this far without my connections, and with these connections maybe I've gone too far.”

Everything I observed, did, interpreted, and wrote for this research was affected by this personal responsibility. Everything seemed to have degrees of correctness and, by default, degrees of incorrectness. The degree varied depending on one's perspective; however, there is never one perspective. I am reminded of Hendry (1992: 163) who discussed her experience with “(t)he paradox of friendship in the field . . . (which) demonstrate(s) both a fundamental incompatibility in the roles of 'friend' and 'informant', and . . . benefits of combining these roles.” The definition of 'friend' is, of course, a matter of discussion. Unfortunately, Hendry's tale is not a particularly happy one. In her

story, a long-time friend becomes involved with an ethnographic venture of Hendry's. Difficulty arises and the friendship is terminated. That constantly weighs on my mind as I write this then re-read, delete, and re-write sensitive text. (Again, the definition of 'sensitive' is a matter of discussion.)

Being introduced as a teacher also affected how the students perceived and interacted with me. This labeling was a conscious decision almost demanded by some gatekeepers. Being an older, gay white male also had its bearing – and not always as expected.² As a male teacher with many years of experience, I was wary of being in a room alone with a female student. Male teachers are told to avoid this at all costs. Being a gay teacher with many years of experience, I was wary of being in a room alone with a male student. Male teachers are not told to avoid this at all costs. This is an unnecessary rule in an assumed heteronormative culture. (The publicness of the interview sites may have created some inconveniences but it also created some comfort for me.) Being gay, of course, will have bearing on my perspectives on masculinities and femininities in the classrooms and, as mentioned, may have been intrinsic in my initiating this research.

As I pursued this research, one aspect appeared to have great impact: social class. I am situated within the middle class. Many of the students in the rooms I researched were from the poor and working classes.

Ideas about class cannot easily be separated from ideas about gender. The family is where class and gender meet. What distinguishes the middle class from the poor below and the rich above is not just income and education, but also the norms of masculinity and femininity. (Tobin 2000:115)

Tobin's stated that children, even though they may lack the vocabulary, are still able to perceive classes and distinguish between them. This vital topic will be discussed further, later.

1.5 Analysis

“ . . . even after I had finished collecting data, I was not sure what I was seeing.” (Gallas 1998:21)

Each recorded interview was listened to at least once; many, twice, and some, three times. On the initial listening, detailed notes were written on each interview and interesting moments were highlighted. Each class was done separately in chronological order: first interviews were first reviewed.

Due to the apparent repetition of certain responses, a matrix was created to briefly and concisely record answers to key questions that all students answered. (Some of these had the 'yes' and 'no' responses which I was warned to avoid.) The matrices were initially based on each class then a table for each school was created. Finally, all data were combined into one sample space displayed in one matrix. Matrix cells included such headings as the child's perception of her or his reading ability, the child's perception of personal improvement in reading, and the child's views on the importance of reading at home and at school. This led to interesting patterns appearing among individuals, groups, and the research group as a whole.

All the fieldnotes taken each day were read before and after this first round of interviews; key passages in the fieldnotes were highlighted. This helped situate the students in the classroom settings.

The notes written on each interview were reviewed and approximately one-third of the interviews were chosen to be transcribed. Thematic groupings including ethnic background, and masculinities performed by the students, were created. At this point, some interviews were again reviewed. The interviews were combined with the key

passages highlighted in the fieldnotes to give thick description and context. This process, though lengthy and exhausting, was invaluable.

Due to conflicts with my job as a teacher and my work as an anthropologist, I had to leave my research for almost a year. This forced me to review all my data once again to reacquaint myself with this project. This gave me a sense of disjointedness and fatigue but it did allow me take one step back and gain a fresher view and different perspective that only time and distance can grant. (Gallas (1998) emphasized the latter, freshness, in her experience but, to be honest, at this point, the latter, disjointedness and fatigue, seem more apparent to me.) This distancing helped me heed the advice of such authors as Thorne (1993), Boldt (1997), and Tobin (2000) who warned not to exaggerate differences between girls and boys.

By focusing on hypermasculine boys and hyperfemine girls, for example, we may fail to notice what is in fact a continuum of gender identities and performances. Thorne cautions against overattending to the “big men” and “big women” of classroom cultures. These are the most charismatic kids of each gender, those who tend to monopolize much of the attention, not only of their peers, but also of teachers and researchers. A misleading circularity can creep into our arguments. We pay inordinate attention to the most highly gendered children and then cite them as evidence for how boys and girls typically behave in school. (Tobin 2000:33)

As a teacher, these words resonate with such intensity. How often have I felt I “failed to notice” the majority of the class attending to certain individuals who were being particularly “charismatic”. (As with “fortunate”, the ethics committees' choice to describe my double review, “charismatic” is an adjective I would not use.) Was I 'rewarding' certain behaviours I considered undesirable by this attention. Was I giving “charisma” value? Was I, by my actions, reinforcing the “big man” syndrome? And exactly what behaviours and dynamics was I helping reinforce? Not only with the “big people” but with the “small people” too? As a teacher, I may have focused too much on

certain individuals; as an anthropologist, I would try not to do the same.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This research is ethnographically based using a political economic approach. Theories initiated by Foucault (1978, 1984), regarding subjectivity and the creation of the self, and Butler (1990), regarding gender, shape this work. The concept of multiple masculinities is fundamental to the analysis in this study.

My research uses a Foucauldian framework. Foucault's (1978, 1984) concepts of normalizing regimes of practice, technologies of self, and resistance, as implemented by Martino (2000) and Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003), were key in my analysis of the students as they created their identities and perform their genders. What was being investigated was the way a boy or girl learns to act on and monitor his or her own thoughts, behaviour and body to gain a 'desirable' masculinity or femininity; 'desirable' being governed by culture and history with their particular 'truths'.

Versions of masculinity and their relationship with other factors – such as ethnicity, indigeneity, socio-economic status, rurality, sexuality, disability – are understood, therefore, as a set of self-fashioning practices which are linked to normalizing judgments and techniques for producing culturally and historically specific forms of subjectivity. (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:6)

Years earlier, Lesko (2000:xvii) stated this:

Masculinities must . . . be understood as profoundly intertextual: That is, masculinities are constructed, performed, and revised across knowledges, symbols, styles, subjectivities, and norms including distinctive, racial, ethnic, and sexuality components.

Understanding masculinities involves the concept of “technologies of self” with its social relations, self-decipherment, and normalizing practices. The normalizing and policing of the individual, both by the individual and others, create a particular type of boy or girl and a

particular type of masculinity or femininity that helps determine social and power relationships for that individual. In terms of my research, it was necessary to explore how pedagogical methods, curriculum and class relationships, in particular with regards to literacy, may play into how an individual relates to her or himself through particular techniques of self-decipherment determined by the given norms. What types of masculinity are promoted within the classrooms? And given the mechanisms of power that are activated in schools, how do individuals resist? Are alternative masculinities performed by the students?

In order to define alternative masculinities, we must have something to which to compare. This, again, is hegemonic masculinity. “Schools play a vital role in inducting boys into (the) 'culturally appropriate' versions of masculinity.” (Rowan et al. 2002:59) 'Culturally appropriate' can be equated to hegemonic. This idea is reiterated by Browne (1995:225):

It is in schools, during the formative years, that notions of (hegemonic) masculinity (often linked to such images as strength, cleverness, winning, power, and status) are reinforced daily. Schools are a potent site for young people to absorb what it means to be male

Some of the traits often linked with 'culturally appropriate' normative hegemonic masculinity are briefly listed above. Normative masculinity is discussed not only in terms of characteristics but also in terms of behaviours and spaces by Rowan et al. (2002:62):

. . . intelligence, technology, science, invention, rationality, stoicism, independence, assertiveness, aggression, sporting prowess, the outdoors, confidence, humour, objectivity, activity, money, leadership, toughness, discipline, physicality, competition, argumentativeness, risk taking and so on.

“Although there may be agreement that schools are key social arenas for the normalization, surveillance, and control of sex/gender identities, there are not universal

gender representations and relations.” (Lesko 2000:xviii) Kessler, Ashenden, Connell and Dowsett (1985:42) argue that each school has a particular “gender regime”:

This may be defined as the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labor within the institution. The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition. It can be changed deliberately or otherwise, but it is no less powerful in its effects on pupils for that. It confronts them as a social fact, which they have to come to terms with somehow.

“Among the various masculinities and femininities of a particular gender regime, there will be dominant, or hegemonic, masculinity and an emphasized femininity.” (Lesko 2000:xviii)

I also believe that not only does each school create a hegemonic masculinity but each classroom has its own dominant masculinity. As well, each classroom had its own gender regime. This will be discussed in further detail later in this work.

Extending post-structuralist theories of gender even further than Foucault, Butler's (1990) seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, has fundamentally altered views on the social construction and performance of gender. Butler (1990:xv) argued that “gender is performative [because] what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body.” The external produces the internal, or, according to Foucault, the discourse creates the surface (according to E. Judd class notes, March 22, 2004). Bratton (2006) in her discussion of the third wave of feminism expands on these ideas when she states that performance theory “defines gender as the effect of discourse, and sex as the effect of gender. The theory is characterized by a concern with the productive force rather than the meaning of discourse and by its privileging of ambiguity and indeterminacy.”

Building upon Butler's ideas, Imms (2000:159) states that the idea of multiple masculinities is based on four concepts:

- 1) masculinity is a multiple entity, neither homogeneous nor reducible to a set list of characteristics;
- 2) gender is socially constructed and the individual has agency in the continuous negotiation of her or his gender
- 3) gender is a relational construct influenced by other boys, girls, men and women (both real and fictional);
- 4) hegemonic power structures are diversified by multiple masculinities making these power structures easier to alter. "Intramascularity mobility" (Imms 2000:160) creates situations whereby individuals may be both dominant and dominated, oppressor and oppressed creating conflicts within the hegemonic power structures and discourses.

These conflicts may allow new thoughts, insights, and outlooks that may help undermine existing power structures (Marshall 1990; Ball 1990). Connolly (2008:174) in his discussion of relations of power states that ". . . subject positions are . . . highly contested as individuals and groups struggle to re-negotiate these identities in order either to challenge, maintain or to reinforce the relations and structures of power they are located within."

The social construction of gender is the basis of this research and the children's role in this construction is vital. Thorne's (1993:3-4) concepts on multiple masculinities, not unlike Imms' (2000), provide a framework for gender socialization and development analysis specifically for children. In this framework, she states three conditions. The first is to see children as social actors in their own right not as future adults, acted upon by more powerful adults. (The conflicts and contradictions between the perceived entitlement of

power of hegemonic masculinity in the adult world and the lack of access to this power by boys should not be lost, though.³ Secondly, the results of current social practices are varied and unknown. It is the present which must be examined as “children, like adults, live (not in the future but) in (the) present, concretely historical, and open-ended time.” (Thorne 1993:3) Thorne (1993) also emphasized the relational aspect of gender as one needs to look at the group as well as the individual as it is with the former that much of gender is constructed and reconstructed. This reasoning is why Grade 1 students were chosen for this study. Grade 1 is the first time that students in this area of Winnipeg attend school all day for the entire week. The exposure to the social milieu of the classroom is key to this research. It is acknowledged though, that the socialization process commenced well before this grade. As learned from decades of experience by myself and colleagues, the influence of the home on the children cannot be overstated. Also daycare and kindergarten would have parallel powerful influences even if the length of time there per day is shorter.

Skelton (2001:51) categorized masculinities into a three tier hierarchy. Along with hegemonic masculinities, there exist subordinate and complicitous masculinities. She defined subordinate masculinities as those which are repressed and oppressed such as gay masculinity. Complicitous masculinities are those which benefit from hegemonic masculinities without actively supporting or seeking them. These compartmentalizations of masculinities are problematic as masculinities are constantly being negotiated and adapted given ever changing factors. An individual can exist in many, sometimes contradictory, subject positions simultaneously (Imms 2000, Skelton 2001). Yet the labeling of positions proves, at times, useful in discussing and analyzing gender performance.

Skelton (2001) also cited Connell (1995) and his concept of marginalized masculinities to include the perceived effects of social class with ethnicity and gender. Social class and

ethnicity are factors which play key roles in the literacy and lives of many of the students in this study. Tobin (2000:14) in his study of media and gender invokes Butler by stating: “. . . I view gender – and, by extension race and ethnicity – as awkwardly written social scripts that people, once they are cast in a part, perform with as much enthusiasm and conviction as they can muster.” It is vital to remember that the categories for gender precede any performance and the penalty for a 'poor' performance of a normative role is high. Tobin extended this perspective to social class as well.

The performance of social class is an important factor in this study and demands further discussion. The middle class, in Tobin's study with children and media, is associated with the “good guys”. This group is described as having attributes including: “domesticity”, “niceness”, “industriousness and ingenuity”, and a “married-with-children version of masculinity”. “Domesticity” is defined as a single place to live as opposed to wandering or nomadic behaviour. “Niceness” is an interesting descriptor in that it encompasses such things as physical appearance, dress, personality traits, and material goods including houses. “Married-with-children version of masculinity” combines a patriarchal family order with feminine domesticity, a duality which can create a state of uneasiness. That which is not middle class is, by default, working class, the “bad guys”. Interestingly, it was the conflicting duality of the domestic masculine, an 'emasculating' masculinity, which allowed the toleration of the bad guy role in some circumstances. In these circumstances, both the good and bad guys, heroes and villains, middle and working-class are, albeit different, 'acceptable' masculine performances. (Tobin 2000: 114-135). These multiple and often contradictory performances of acceptable masculinity illustrate Ball (1990) and Marshall's (1990) comments about conflicts that may help undermine existing power structures.

These thoughts are reiterated by Connolly (2004: 144):

The sense of identity that results thus represents a fusion of these positions – it is gender viewed through the lens of social class or, equally, social class viewed through the lens of gender. . . . [W]hat emerges is a particular form of identity, a middle class masculinity, which reflects the combined dispositions of social class and of gender.

Connolly (2004:144-145) explained that social identities are relative; they are all determined by references to other identities. He further discusses this concept explaining that the social gendered construction of boy is created in opposition to the social gendered construction of girl; a boy is those things that a girl is not. The hegemonic masculine male is therefore dependent on the emphasized feminine female. These gender performances require that the boys and girls monitor each other's behaviours. If this policing were not done, it would undermine the hegemonic norm.

Connolly extrapolated this idea to social class: “However, this is equally true in relation to social class, where . . . being middle class can often be defined by way of contrast with what are perceived to be working class characteristics and behaviour.” (Connolly 2004:144) “(A) close correspondence exists between the broader elements of the young boys' middle class habitus and their favourable dispositions towards education and schooling.” (Connolly 2004:155) He emphasizes that middle-class masculinity has an “internally-expressed masculinity” which is demonstrated through exhibitions of self-control and specialist skills and knowledge, such as using technology like the computer, as opposed to “externally-expressed masculinity” which is based on being “not a girl” (Connolly 2004:135-161).⁴

Though I do not have access to specific data, giving such information as family income, there is an apparent difference in the socio-economic levels of the two schools. Such things as students' dress, supplies, lunches, and discussion of home environments

by the students were used as my informal indicators of economic and class status. As mentioned earlier, Bernard Regional School has a population that exists in a lower socio-economic bracket than Marne School. It is also important to note that the norms of social class and masculinities not only varied between the two schools but within the schools as well.

As mentioned before, like many teachers, I am situated within the middle class and am affected by the subjectivities of this classification. Some may argue that schools themselves are middle class institutions propagating and disseminating middle class values. Social classes and gender perceptions are deeply entwined. In fact, Heartfield (2002) in his discussion of oppression and masculinities focuses not on gender but on socio-economic class:

Masculinity theories do appear to be telling us something about a loss of power that matches their real condition. But it is wrong to see this loss of power as a loss in relation to women. Rather it is in relation to capital that men and women alike have lost authority . . . The crisis is not one of masculinity, but one of the working class. (Heartfield 2002)

1.7 Summary

Beginning this paper by situating the topics of masculinities and literacies personally and historically immediately makes one aware of the complexity, depth, and constantly changing aspects of the research themes. The discussion of logistics, methodology, and ethical considerations further contribute to the deep and intense sense of interconnectedness and relationships that exist and the difficulty when collecting and analyzing the research findings. The works of Foucault and Butler are invaluable in creating a theoretical framework which assists in the analysis.

To further situate this research, a brief discussion of the school system, literacy curricula, and teachers involved will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 – TEXT IN CONTEXT: THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, LITERACIES, AND TEACHERS

The ability to read is a key factor in living a healthy, happy, and productive life . . . [conversely the] inability to read has been listed as a national health risk. (Reutzel and Cooter, Jr. 2009:4-5)

The ability to read is vital. It paves the way to success in school, which can build self-confidence and motivate your child to set lifelong reading goals. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth 2004:4)

To be fully literate is to take social action by actively deciding how you wish to position yourself in the world and what identity you wish to take on. (Albert, Vasquez, and Harste 2008:12)

As seen by these quotes taken from educational sources used in Canadian school systems, the importance placed upon reading and literacies cannot be overestimated. It appears if one is to be successful in school and life one must be fully literate, an able reader. Though what 'success' in life means is well beyond the scope of this work (and my comprehension), the concepts of 'literate' and 'reader' are intrinsic to this research. Exactly what does being literate mean? What is the difference between literacy and reading? Is any difference perceived by those involved in this study? And what attributes make an able or good reader? In order to better situate this work, these questions must be addressed. Along with a very brief overview of the school systems of Canada, Manitoba, and the division where this study was done, an introduction to current pedagogical concepts of literacies will be discussed as well as the idea of the hidden social curriculum.

We will also be introduced to the teachers. Though the experiences and words of the students were paramount in this study, the voices of the teachers influenced the children's expressions; therefore the teachers' subjectivities in regards to literacies, genders, self-identity and their interplay are necessary to situate the findings of this research.

2.1 The School System

In Canada, the Constitution Act of 1867 made education the jurisdiction of the individual provinces. The governments of the provinces and territories have created educational systems that are fairly similar but with regional differences. There is usually a minister of education who supervises each jurisdiction with the assistance and advice of both private and public agencies. (Government of Canada 2009)

Each province and territory of Canada has a tri-level stratification within its education system: elementary, secondary, and postsecondary. The grade level of each varies depending on the province or territory. In Canada, free elementary and secondary universal education is available for 12 years save Quebec which allocates 11 years. The range of age for compulsory attendance varies by provinces from 15 or 16, to 17 in Manitoba, and in New Brunswick until 18 or high school graduation (Government of Canada 2009). Just recently, Manitoba has followed New Brunswick's lead and implemented a similar policy.

The province of Manitoba is divided into school divisions which operate as separate entities but, as with the provinces and territories, are similar in their structures and functions. In the division where this research takes place, there is a democratically elected board. This school board is elected during the municipal elections in the province. The board is in charge of the division. There are also a superintendent and assistant-superintendents, hired by the board, who help create and implement policies within the school division. In this division, public education begins in kindergarten, when the students are five years old. This means that most students are six years old in Grade 1. Elementary classes run up to Grade 5; Grade 6 to Grade 8 are considered middle school and Senior 1 to Senior 4 are the high school grades. Whereas kindergarten classes run for

only half days in the research region, Grade 1 introduces the students to a full day at school.

2.2 Literacies and Curricula

The social practices that have made Disney, Nike, the Internet, television, Old Navy, Eminem, cell phones, computer games, and other icons of popular culture so prevalent constitute the kinds of “everyday literacies” that truly impact kids' lives. By contrast, school literacy pales to insignificant. (Barry Hoonan 2001:3)

The curriculum is a register of social and historical values and beliefs, just like any other aspect of social and cultural life. (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:261)

The interpretation of the term 'literacies' may be ambiguous and may change given the context. Current pedagogical discussions acknowledge the “multiplicity of communications channels and media . . . [as well as] the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Cope and Kalantzis 2000:5). Included in this view is the understanding that the individual has agency in the interpretation and adaptation of this varied multimodal dynamic material. The New London Group has adopted the term “multiliteracies” to define this broader domain (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). The New London Group first met in the 1990's to discuss literacy pedagogy and its future. This group took into account the multitude of social and technological changes which were occurring throughout the world and their impact on literacy teaching and theory. The New London Group's influence was far-reaching and enduring (Cope and Kalantzis 2009).

This description of multiliteracies is echoed in the English Language Arts (E.L.A.) Curriculum of Manitoba, the general guideline for teachers of language arts in the province. Reviewing the E.L.A. General Outcomes listing, a guide for student learning objectives issued by Manitoba Education and Training (2010), the emphasis on the

importance of each student having the ability to “listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent” . . .”oral, literary, or media texts” . . . “to enhance the clarity and artistry of communication” reflect the New London Group's approach and beliefs.

Within the last two decades, English language arts educators have expanded the understanding of English language arts instruction. At all grades, the focus is on acquiring language and literacy skills through listening, speaking, viewing, and representing, as well as reading and writing. In keeping with the literacy demands placed on them, students now learn to read and produce a wide range of texts, including media, transactional, and literary texts. (Manitoba Education and Training 2010)

. . . reading is currently interpreted far more broadly and encompasses the learning of a complex set of skills and knowledge that allows individuals to understand visual and print-based information. . . . The goal of reading instruction, then, is to empower readers to learn, grow, and participate in a vibrant and quickly changing information-based world. (Reutzel and Cooter, Jr. 2009:5)

Originally, I thought the concept of multiliteracies was particularly applicable for my research given the current E.L.A. curriculum, the expected technologies to be observed, and the ethnic diversity of the students within the Grade 1 classrooms involved. But as the introductory quote distinguishing between “everyday” and “school” literacies emphasizes, the domains and hence definitions of literacies varies. Current philosophies and objectives may not necessarily reflect current instruction, practices, and realities of the classrooms. Of course, the interpretation of literacies and the use of materials and methods of those involved in this study mediated my observations of what I could analyze as literacies. The definitions of literacies given by the educators involved in this study included:

“Anything a child connects with reading, speaking, drawing, inventing spelling, spelling.”

“It's different for each child. You have to recognize the alphabet, associate sounds with letters, grammar structures, repeating patterns.”

“Any opportunity that students have to make meaning from text: pictures, words, making sounds.”

All of these responses are part of the provincially sanctioned guidelines. As can be seen by these responses, literacy was mostly associated with reading print. (Even the quote from *The Manitoba Teacher* regarding reading specifically mentions text books.) Pictures were a tool to assist the decoding of printed text. Books, by far and away, were the most frequently used material in the sites researched and therefore dominate my discussion. To a much lesser degree videos, computers, and other technologies were also used in the classrooms. My observations of these were exceptionally limited, though, and I therefore find it difficult to comment upon these. In this research, I will use all of the definitions of literacies to determine the widest range of material to study.

When asked what was the difference between literacies and reading teachers' answers varied. The range of responses included “not much and that it was simply jargon” to “reading is a subset of literacies”. The reading of printed text though was a fundamental necessity for literacy in almost all answers.

The 'lag' between currently officially promoted and curriculum sanctioned perceptions and those applied by some educators reminds one of Ortner's (1994) critique of Sahlin's (1981) work on structuralism, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*.⁵ Ortner commented that change has a “drag” due to the preserving of structures role of the encultured mature actors, in this case, the teachers. How the teachers define and teach literacy would continue the “traditional” structures. (This is in no way a criticism of teaching practices observed. And, in fact, some may argue the importance of retaining “traditional” literacy practices.) The conservative effects of domestic life on the reproduction of structure must also be taken into account in this drag and the hindrance to the formation of new meanings. This is discussed later in this project. Ortner stated that two to three generations time line for change in structure was needed (Ortner 1994:400).

The structures preserved, though, go well beyond literacies and the official school curriculum but very importantly include the “hidden curriculum”, those things not formally taught but learned nevertheless.

. . . “hidden curriculum” . . . subtly and selectively guides educational practice, structuring classroom interactions in ways that seem natural but are in fact culturally determined . . . The hidden curriculum also transmits to students an ideology about themselves and the world in which they live, an ideology that is all the more insidious because it is generally unacknowledged and thus unchallenged. (Luykx 1999:xxxiii)

Included in this curriculum is the performance of 'culturally acceptable' genders. For this research, it is key to focus on the hidden curriculum and the social construction of literacy: school subjects are constructed as hierarchically oppositional and polarized in their gendernormative and heteronormative articulations and manifestations of masculinity/femininity, activity/passivity, physicality/emotionality, heterosexuality/homosexuality, toughness/softness (Martino 2003:240) Later Martino (2003:241) also added public/private to the list. Within this hierarchy of subjects students climb and fall within a hierarchy of masculinities and femininities learning, teaching, and adapting their identities as part of the hidden curriculum. We are all learners and teachers of the hidden curriculum. Let me introduce, however, those labeled as the officially sanctioned teachers.

2.3 Teachers and Teaching Literacies (and Other Things)

Teaching is fundamentally a political activity in which every teacher plays a part by design or by default. (Cochran-Smith 1991:280)

. . . the professional middle and upper-middle class, to which most teachers belong, sets up a hierarchy of cultural experience . . . (Newkirk 2002:84)

Social biases (of which school staff may or may not be consciously aware) may infuse various practices of schooling, such as : stereotypes in books, graphics, and the content of classroom talk; expectations that help shape processes of academic tracking: differential attention given to boys compared with girls, or white compared with (non-white) students. Far from muting preexisting forms of stratification, schools may help reproduce class, racial, and gender inequalities that are fundamental to the larger society. (Thorne 1993:51)

Though a major goal of my research was to give the students a voice and focus on their words and actions, I feel it necessary to address the teachers involved. I want to reiterate that I have the highest respect for all these individuals and the work which they do. No comment is meant as a criticism but simply as descriptors in the discussion of the engendered environment of the children. The following section is provided to help situate each child and each child's story and to put events into context. This follows the advice of Begley (2000:99) who states that adults can

. . . provide very important factual and subjective information, that children may not be able to provide. However, one person's views must not be regarded as superior to those of another. Children and adults are entitled to have their opinions respected, regardless of how divergent these opinions may turn out to be.

As my research progressed, I saw the extent of the influence and impact these individuals had on their students. Given the theoretical framework of this study and my teaching experience, it should not have been a surprise. The matter became particularly poignant as I started to create the outline for this paper. I had great difficulty with the concept of hegemonic masculinity. By entering the different classrooms, I realized that different gender regimes existed in each classroom. This regime was determined by the students, by the teacher and the interactions that occurred between and among them. Certain traits of hegemonic masculinity were emphasized or downplayed given the classroom. Alternative masculinities were more or less visible given the

classroom.

Influenced by Mac an Ghail (1994), who placed teachers within a typology defined by social views and self-representation, I found it necessary to explore the views of the teachers more closely than I originally thought when I first went into the field. Though I am purposely avoiding the categorization created by Mac an Ghail (1994:18), I heed his words: “It is important to note that . . . complex interrelationships between the teacher ideologies, self-representations and masculine subjectivities . . . tak(e) place . . .” Though we have a hierarchal system of masculinities within our society, the hierarchy's structure was not consistent in all the rooms observed.

Again, four Grade 1 teachers were involved in this study. Ms. Mask and Mr. Evan are from Bernard Regional School. Mr. Zhao and Ms. Sand, from Marne School, also gave permission for me to do research in their rooms. Originally, I was planning to involve only the male teachers but on the recommendation of an assistant-superintendent the classes of Ms. Sand and Ms. Mask were included. These four classrooms compose the entire population of Grade 1 students in both schools. There is only one other male teacher in Marne out of a teaching population of approximately 14. There are only two other male primary/elementary teachers in Bernard Regional out of approximately 14.

How these teachers perceive and address gender, or if it is perceived and addressed, is a crucial aspect to the issue in their classrooms.

When I asked Mr. Zhao how he would describe himself in regards to gender, he answered, “Neutral. I have masculine and feminine qualities. I know other people see me as a caring person . . . I promote both masculine and feminine qualities. I am not forceful or macho.” Earlier, Mr. Zhao commented that he saw himself as shy and timid. He finds it difficult to be in a large group setting. “I see myself more caring and on the sensitive

side.”

Mr. Evan when addressed with the same question responded, “Um. I don't really hide it well and I have my legs crossed at all times.” Mr. Evan is a single twenty-something openly gay white male. He describes himself as flamboyant. Mr. Evan, further discussing being gay, commented that he “wants to get in your face”, the “more extreme, the better”. I asked him if he ever thought if his behaviour was becoming a stereotype of the heteronormative expectation of the flamboyant gay persona, a caricature. Mr. Evan replied no but he would now. I am not sure if he was truly indignant or just joking.

Ms. Mask, a white middle-aged married woman, sees herself as a typical female interested in the “usual girl stuff”.

Ms. Sand is an older teacher who has almost thirty years teaching experience. She has children who are adults and this was a crucial factor in her perception of gender. When asked how she saw herself in regards to gender she, after much thought, concluded, “I don't know how to answer this.” Ms. Sand's role as a mother played an intrinsic part in her perceptions of children and literacies. Her comments during conversations made this very apparent.

When asked if gender was a conscious issue when teaching literacy or reading in general the responses varied and included from the male teachers:

“I think it is. Boys want to finish work so they can have choice time. Girls want to do everything neatly. Girls want to improve more. This year I have some boys who take time.”

“I don't think so but it might be and I am just not aware of it. Being queer, I make sure there is various representations (of people) and that it's pretty much balanced.”

The question is interpreted differently by the two teachers. The first response shows an acknowledged differentiation between boys' and girls' working habits but the differences

are reinforcing binary stereotypes. The second response involves the representation of genders' varieties.

The female teachers responded differently. One teacher bluntly responded no, gender was not an issue. The other said yes. This was because one of her sons “had to be hooked into reading.” This teacher had to work with the interests of her son.

The addressing and reifying of traditional binary attributes of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity is apparent in these responses. In fact, the heteronormative masculine social order is ubiquitous to the point of invisibility.

When asked about perceived patterns of behaviour for boys, some of the teachers' comments included that boys rush through work, boys will come up and ask for help more than girls. Another teacher commented that boys are more aggressive. They look for actions books and tactile games, like jigsaw puzzles and Lego, where they will build and destroy their creations. When asked the same question about girls, the comments included that girls were passive, stronger readers, and occupied the puppet and art areas when allowed.

Pauses and much thought occurred when I asked the teachers if they promoted equity and freedom of gender in their classrooms and if so, how. Some of the teachers were not sure how to answer. This may imply that gender performance is not a conscious issue when teaching. When I asked this question of other teachers currently working in classrooms in Winnipeg only those who were directly and personally affected by alternative gender performances were able to respond with definitive answers. An example of this include Mr. Evan's response:

“Yes, I do. Um. It's never a question of boys do this and girls can't do that. So I always try to make sure that we have those conversations around books or about conversations that I hear the students have.”

Another response included:

“I want to say yes . . . I tend to talk to boys more than the girls. I tell the boys to play safely and use your hands carefully with each other. When doing work it's okay to use some colours. You don't have to do things in a certain way.”

When asked if they perceived themselves as treating boys and girls differently, in general, or specifically in regards to literacy, the responses included:

I don't because I can't get this mother piece out of my mind.

I try not playing favourites and tell them it's okay to use this colour and it's okay to take your time.

In his or her way, each teacher said no. In the first response, “I don't” states a gender neutrality created by the gender bias of being defined as a mother. The second response is defined by heteronormative structures of gender.

Again, this discussion is not meant to be a criticism. I would give similar responses to many of these questions. It is exceptionally difficult to analyze aspects of one's being that has been learned over a lifetime and often assumed. This is meant to situate the children's gender performances and the creations of hierarchies of masculinities within the classrooms.

* * * * *

The constant negotiating and revision of the children's masculinities became a subject of great concern and frustration as I created the outline for the following chapters. How was I going to present my research in a coherent manner yet illustrate the continually dynamic nature of these gender performances? As Mac An Ghail (1994:3) stated “the complexity of researching and writing in this area is the question of elusiveness, fluidity and complex interconnectedness . . .” By placing certain behaviours into specific categories, I gained coherence but felt like I was losing the fluid-like characteristics of

gender negotiations. Looking at a child as a case study helped illustrate the multiple aspects of the individual but also seemed to isolate and eliminate the dynamic of the classroom setting and group. So I have pieced together moments of days spent in the classrooms to introduce various individuals. As moments abruptly ended, began or segued into other events, individual accounts also terminated, were introduced or continued. This intended avoidance of deconstructions, I felt, best illustrated the dynamics facing each individual, each small group, and each class as a whole. And it is from here I now draw the readers to the dynamic spaces and performances of the Grade 1 classrooms.

CHAPTER 3 – ARE YOU A GOOD READER? BOYS' READING PRACTICES

Thinking Like a Reader (A poster issued by the Government of Manitoba)

Left side of the poster:

I Decide How I Will Read (Two boys shown at a desk reading a book and turning a page.)

I Choose Different Kinds of Texts to Read (A boy is squatting on the floor in front of a book shelf)

I Reflect on and Celebrate My Reading with Others (In the forefront a boy stares solemnly at the camera while in the background a boy writes in a binder.)

The above headings are connected by a box.

Right side of the poster:

I Use Strategies to Make Meaning of Texts

Before Reading, During Reading, After Reading (A girl, in two pictures, is sitting on the ground and smiling enthusiastically enjoying a book.)

The above headings are displayed in boxes connected with a circle.

(Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth 2010)

3.1 Is Reading Important to You? The Varying Importance of Reading

Right in front of the teacher's desk was a table with three students who were demonstrating how truly flexible is the human spine. Site and posture were immediate indicators of these children's status in the room. One of the initial lessons you encounter as a teacher deals with learning the students' names. The first names memorized are those of the very well-behaved and the not very well-behaved children, and not necessarily in that order. Amos was one of those three students and the very first student name I memorized.

Amos came to Bernard Regional a little after classes had begun in September. He was described by some adults as having many behavioural concerns and was struggling not

only with the social but also with the academic. Amos can be argumentative with the peers and adults with whom he interacted at school. He was constantly in motion and many times he appeared almost angry. There was no obvious explanation for this temperament. Amos hadn't developed any stable friendships within the class. He associated with any classmate who was willing to associate with him. Amos often got into trouble at recess.

My first interview with Amos took place in the Breakfast Room. He was wearing jeans and a pullover with a collar which was turned up. He was very fidgety but very cooperative. I think he appreciated the spotlight of this solo performance.

MK: Do you like to read?

Amos: Yeah.

MK: Why do you say 'yeah'.

Amos: Because there's books all over the world. And people like to read and it makes them smarter.

MK: Is being smart important?

Amos: Cuz you can buy your own hotel and if you read, you can read posters like if they say something.

...

MK: Is reading important in school?

Amos: Nods.

MK: Why do you say yeah?

Amos: People want to get good jobs and they want to have a car so they don't have to walk and take a bus. But buses are good too.

MK: Is reading important at home?

Amos: So your mom and dad can hear you read. And you also get pride in yourself and you feel happy and your mom and dad also give you good things to do when you read.

Pride was defined by Amos as being happy for yourself. Good things were defined as being allowed to dye his short blond hair blue. Interestingly, when Amos was discussing in more detail the reading process for this 'home project' his father was no longer discussed and only his mother was mentioned. This is but the first of many accounts demonstrating literacy's connection with the domestic feminine and the omission of the domestic masculine. Questioned why the colour blue, Amos responded "because".

Reading was obviously important to Amos and in these brief encounters, my first meeting with Amos in the classroom and this interview, Amos demonstrated many characteristics often associated with hegemonic masculinity. Physicality, pride, intelligence, global space, and (economic and personal) success are traits that bring to mind the lists mentioned earlier by Browne (1995:225) and Rowan et al. (2002:62).

Amos' initial comment of being forced to take a bus which did not have the preferred status and independence of having a car was interesting. Amos did amend the statement by saying that buses were acceptable. This may be part of the eco-friendly discourse that currently exists both inside and outside of schools or may simply reflect Amos' economic reality of having to take the bus.

There was one question regarding the importance of reading that, no matter the school or student, received a near universal response. Asked if reading was important in school, not one child interviewed responded negatively, even if they did not perceive reading as important to her or himself or at home. The message had been sent, loud and clear, and received. Everyone agreed; reading is important in school. The importance of reading outside the school and school itself were still open to discussion.

Reading was perceived by many of the students to be the vehicle to reach many objectives. Amos equated reading with intelligence. He repeated and emphasized this aspect later in the interview. The greater one's ability to read becomes, the greater one's intelligence becomes, and then the greater one's ability to have access to such things as information. Knowledge is power; reading is knowledge; hence reading is power. Hegemonic masculinity is all about power. According to Amos, reading also gave access to material wealth (hotels and cars). This perception appeared frequently in interviews both in Bernard Regional and Marne and with both boys and girls, though Bernard

Regional students mentioned this issue more frequently. Bernard Regional existing in a more depressed socio-economic area may account for this greater occurrence. Greater economic need teaches greater economic awareness.

* * * * *

With the mentioning of the valentine trucks, Frank cranked his elbow and exclaimed, “Oh! Yeah!” These trucks were decorated with cars and superheroes by the boys; flowers and hearts by the girls. Ms. Sand asked me to assist Frank who had been away. Frank explained he went to visit his dad up North and they went snowmobiling. He was gone for more than a week. He then showed me the pages he was missing in his printing. He obviously did not keep up with this work while with his father.

Frank was another of 'those' students whose name you learn immediately. He has what many teachers phrase as 'challenges with social boundaries'. I had my share of 'boundary issues' with Frank while I was in his classroom at Marne School. Frank was described as being creative by his teacher and was in what appears to be in a state of either building or breaking. Frank's overt and often impulsive behaviour makes him one of the dominant social forces in the room. He is the 'hyper-masculine' Thorne (1993) warned us about, the boy whose performances occupy all the attention thus making invisible to the observer alternative masculinities being performed by others. Frank often teams up with Tony, Abraham, and Ted, or as their teacher referred to them: “the kingpins”, an interesting gender power-related nomer.

Frank led the way to the interview room though he didn't know where we were going. (Bad jokes about lost male drivers and refusing to ask for directions brought a smile to my face.) Frank is a big hefty boy. He has short red hair and is freckled. He was wearing

army pants and a t-shirt with “Machine” written on it. When we made it to the Conference Room, he sat in the chair along one wall and then decided to move to the other side of the table, taking a chair which was beside the window. He asked about the trapdoor underneath the chair. He sat comfortably, kicking the table and playing with his hands which he placed across his chest. He was anxious to hear the recording of his voice, a reaction more common among the boys than the girls.

MK: Do you like to read?

Frank: Nods.

MK: Why do you like to read?

Frank: Um . . . Cause it's fun.

MK: What makes it fun?

Frank: I don't know.

This idea of reading being fun is mentioned by students of both schools, and particularly mentioned by the boys, but not exclusively. This concept of fun is reiterated by Ari; he likes to read because it's fun but, like Frank, he can't explain what is fun about it. Kevin says it's fun to read because “you learn lots and lots of stuff.” Myron, who likes to read, explains, “I have fun with my friend to read.” Myron and his socializing will be discussed later in greater detail.

. . .

MK: Is reading important to you?

Frank: Shakes his head.

MK: No? Why not?

Frank: I don't know.

MK: Is reading important in school?

Frank: Shrugs.

MK: Is school important to you?

Frank: Nods.

MK: Why is school important to you?

Frank: Um . . . Because you have to do work.

MK: Is reading important at home?

Frank: N-n-n-not for me. (He says with a lilt in his voice. Was this a challenge to authority? I've been told that Frank does read at home.)

MK: Is it important for other people at home?

Frank: Y-y-nope.

When he left the room, Frank did not return the chairs into their original positions. Was this an unintentional act or was Frank making a power statement? Was it assumed someone else would clean up after him? Domestic femininity versus public masculinity?

Frank's actions and responses were often situated in the realm of the hegemonic masculine. He was assertive, even aggressive, and even during the interview it was hard not to feel I was being involved in Frank's power manipulation. Frank downplayed the importance of reading in the interview as what appeared to be part of his negotiation and application of power. As will be illustrated later, Frank's perceptions and uses for reading vary greatly depending on the situation and those involved.

* * * * *

Brad, a student from the other classroom in Marne, also performs a similar form of masculinity in his discussion of the importance of reading. Brad is an independent boy. His teacher saw him as the dominant personality and leader of the class, interestingly mentioned just after Suzanna. Athletically-minded, playing both hockey and soccer, Brad “developed an itch to draw” this year. The teacher commented that he didn't see these two, sports and art, meshing often. Is this the unintentional binary engendering of “masculine sports” versus “feminine art” not unlike sports and English? The hierarchical and oppositional engendered construction of subject areas is discussed by such authors as Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003). Referencing their and other previous studies (Martino 1994, Martino 2001, Parker 1996), Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003:240) state that

[p]hysical education and English are crucial sites in which certain forms of masculinity are valorized and endorsed, or denigrated and invalidated. . . [In particular,] sport as a site where dominant masculinities are often reinscribed and reinforced and . . . English as a site where alternative masculinities are policed.

The authors emphasize that this conclusion is their research students' perspective.

Brad sat himself in the Conference Room. He was wearing a hockey sweatshirt with “Property of *the School Division*” stamped upon it. He appeared very confident, sitting with back straight and without fidgeting yet at ease. When I explained the interview would be ten minutes long he commented that ten minutes wasn't very long. He said he was wearing a watch, and pointed to it, to keep track of time.

MK: Do you like to read?

Brad: Um. Sometimes.

MK: Why sometimes?

Brad: Because sometimes I want to get some fresh air outside, play a game.

(Brad spoke with clarity, quickness and great certainty.)

MK: When are the times you do like to read?

Brad: Usually on rainy days when I really don't want to go outside.

Here Brad's replies illustrated two aspects of binary opposition regarding masculine/feminine and literacy. First the active/passive of game-playing and reading and secondly, outdoors and indoors. Being physically active and the outdoors is associated with hegemonic masculinity as described in Chapter 1 Physical passivity and the indoors are in opposition to these hegemonic masculine characteristics.

...

MK: Is reading important to you?

Brad: Not really.

MK: Not really? Why not really?

Brad: Because there are so much more interesting things to do and if you don't know what it's like you won't like it because you didn't try it. (When asked for clarification, Brad said he would rather try new things and play hockey and soccer.)

MK: Is reading important at home?

Brad: Yeah. Sort of. Mostly my sister reads. . . Dad is working on this book. He's been working on this book for about two years. . . He hasn't been reading it. He started on it since the first day of summer . . . He doesn't have time. He has this other book. . . Mom hardly reads.

The apparent unimportance of reading may be explained by Brad's observations of his family members. Brad, though, was able to give a lengthy and detailed response about the

situation showing that he was very aware of the status of each family member. Only his sister appeared to read frequently. Brad, though, mostly discussed his father and only gave a cursory mention of the females. It should be noted that Brad acknowledged everyone in the family does read.

* * * * *

Tony, another student at Marne, is a “strong reader”, a term to be discussed later, and associated with some of the socially dominant personalities in the room. He came into the Conference Room and immediately propped himself up and started to fidget. Tony had a crewcut and wore a t-shirt.

MK: Is reading important to you?

Tony: Uh-hum.

MK: Why is it important to you?

Tony: Silent. No answer.

MK: Is reading important at school?

Tony: Uh-hum . . . because sometimes you need to read to *the teacher* and if you didn't know the words that were in the book . . .

MK: What would happen?

Tony: Um. I don't know what *the teacher* would tell people. . . They would have to practice.

Where Amos saw reading as an opportunity for himself to access power, reading's relationship to power appears different to Tony. Tony saw reading as a possibility for public embarrassment and humiliation. He was aware and could articulate his reason for the importance of reading well in the school environment but could not do so for the importance of reading personally. Reading can emphasize an imbalance of power; in this case, Tony was at the short end of the stick due to position and age.

3.2 What Makes a Good Reader?

“Good readers read the words. Good readers read the pictures. Good readers retell the story.” This was a teacher's announcement before the commencement of a reading period.

The term 'good reader' used ubiquitously in public schools, is a somewhat enigmatic and personal term. I asked many teachers for their definition of a 'good reader' and I heard many diverse answers. Responses included a good reader was someone who liked to read, had confidence when approaching a text, read independently, comprehended reading material, was able to decode text and pictures using a variety of strategies, knew the sounds of letters, and was able to identify certain basic and familiar words.

When the teachers were asked if 'good reader' was an emic term (a specialized educational term) or an etic term (understood by the general population), teachers mostly responded the latter. However, when asked to further discuss this concept, some teachers said that specific skills, such as those mentioned above, attained by the student should be listed by teacher in order to clarify and apply this term to someone such as a parent of the pupil.

This nebulous interpretation of 'good reader' by the adults will influence the children's perceptions of reading ability. How do students interpret 'good reader' and the associated behaviours?

MK: What does a good reader do?

Amos: He thinks and concentrates and . . . (short pause). (The pronoun is volunteered by Amos. It is an assumed male figure – maybe himself.) He mostly just stays by himself and mostly practices and practices and practices and practices until he gets the book right.

MK: What makes a good reader?

Frank: You read lots of books.

Tony: To practice (short pause) lots.

Travis: When you read and you try to read.

Brad: Um. Just by sort of sounding out the words. (Brad felt he was good at that.)

Ari: (Long pause) Brain.

MK: What makes a person not a good reader?

Ari: Not using your brain.

Use your brain and practice, practice, practice! I was amazed at how many times the boys from all classrooms responded with similar answers. The students above have taken active roles in their effort to become good readers. Discipline, stoicism, and intelligence have been categorized as normative masculine by Rowan et al. (2002:62). It appears the boys in this sample have learned this lesson well.

* * * * *

It was after morning recess and the classroom at Bernard Regional was working on Easter bunnies the teacher had given them. I asked the class if the Easter Bunny was a boy or a girl. The vast majority of the students said it was a girl because of the dress. Patrick mentioned it was a girl because the ears were up and that means the bunny was listening. Girls listen. If the ears were down, the bunny would have been a boy.

* * * * *

The example of the practicing boys was in contrast to Dianna and Ariana. These two girls said that we learn to read by listening to the teacher when she was reading. Here the girls were silent receivers of information. Listening was also mentioned by other students as a distinguishing characteristic of the girls; boys, by contrast, these students added, did not listen and misbehaved. Feminine passivity was contrasted against the masculine activity.

Even the poster issued by the province of Manitoba described at the beginning of this chapter seems to comply with this binary categorization of the masculine active versus the feminine passive. Boys are shown making decisions how to read, picking out different texts, and celebrating with others. Boys are independent, take control, and are active. The

one girl in the poster is shown using strategies she may have learned to make meaning of what she is reading. There is an implication of dependence with the girl receiving information and passively applying it.

* * * * *

MK: Are you a good reader?

Frank: (Nod)

MK: Why do you say you are a good reader?

Frank: Cause my parents say I am.

MK: If they didn't tell you you were a good reader, would you still know you're a good reader?

Frank: (Nods)

MK: How would you know that if your parents didn't tell you?

Frank: Um. (Long pause) Um. (No answer)

Frank was reading at grade level, yet another enigmatic term. Definitions of 'grade level' varied greatly. Some teachers said it had no 'real' meaning given the exceptional range of abilities and skills in the classroom; some said it was a relative marker determined by teaching experience; some used standardized tests which determined a child's ranking. Some tried to avoid using the term; some did not. Frank's teacher said he was surprised he could read and he wanted proof of this supposed ability. Frank was quite proud when he was shown this proof. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003:246) stated : “Many boys said that while they were able to perform the techniques of literacy ('I can read'), performing an 'appropriate' masculinity often prevented or deterred them from displaying their literacy abilities ('I can't read')." My research often found the opposite to be true. Students often said they could read well even if they could not. I discussed this matter with one of the teachers and the teacher commented, “Then I have done my job.” (I did not respond and am still not sure of how to respond.) This behaviour of believing or claiming to be a good reader no matter one's ability may also demonstrate a form of hegemonic masculinity. Here literacy may be a venue to demonstrate competitiveness,

intelligence, independence, and confidence. “The boy who learns how to perform a successful version of masculinity within the classroom is likely to be rewarded by teachers and respected by peers. He learns how to position himself within a masculinist discourse that has been adapted for the classroom.” (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:207-208) Frank appeared to need and desire external acknowledgement and he has been successful in attaining it from both his parents and the teacher.

Tony again discusses the importance of practicing in becoming a good reader but he re-introduces a concept first mentioned by Amos: reading and Mum.

MK: Are you a good reader?

Tony: Uh-hum

MK: How do you know you are a good reader?

Tony: Because I practice all the time and we do homereading. That's where we have to read the book and do the sentences. (In this class, a child read a book at home and then discussed in a journal their feelings about the book in one or two sentences.)

MK: Do people tell you you are a good reader?

Tony: No. I just know it. My mum was practicing with me and I am getting better and better.

Tony's experience fitted well with what others have said about how “. . . literacy was clearly linked with mothers and with women, that fathers often identified themselves as non-readers, and that a 'negative' identification with reading was associated with perceived masculine activities and qualities” (Gilbert et al. 1998:203). “Boys' earliest experiences of reading, of literacy and of the home-school nexus are likely to be associated with their mothers, rather than with their fathers: with femininity and the female, rather than with masculinity and the male” (Gilbert et al. 1998:204). Almost every classroom had a homereading program. This was part of the daily routine both at school and at home. And reading at home almost usually meant reading with Mum.

Michael was a recent immigrant from the Philippines and was just beginning to learn to read English at Bernard Regional School. He spoke both English and Tagalog at home.

Michael appeared to lack a school work ethic and, according to his teacher, found the academic aspect of school challenging. From comments made, he seemed to be somewhat indulged by his parents. Michael mostly associated with the other Filipino boys.

MK: Are you a good reader?

Michael: Nnnn . . . not yet.

MK: Why aren't you yet?

Michael: Cause my mom is not teaching me yet.

. . .

MK: Is reading important to you?

Michael: Yeah.

MK: Why is it important to you?

Michael: Because my mom wants me go get 5 out of 5 every time.

MK: Do you want to get 5 out of 5, too?

Michael: Yeah.

MK: Is that just to make your mother happy?

Michael: Yeah.

MK: Do you feel happy about yourself when you get 5 out of 5?

Michael: I'm happy every time.

This is my interpretation of Michael's experience. It is not Michael's responsibility nor the teacher's responsibility for Michael not to be reading well; it is clearly his mother's fault, according to Michael. Michael wants to please his mother with good grades but it is not an issue he personally regards as important.

The similarity of response by Janet, a student from a class at Marne, was striking.

MK: Are you a good reader?

Janet: A little bit . . . cause my mom only teach me a little bit of reading.

MK: Are you getting better?

Janet: Yes . . . Cause . . . Cause my sister teach me.

Janet's self-perception of her modest ability in reading was directly due to her perception of her mother's modest effort. Janet and the teacher seem to have been taken out of the equation. Her big sister, who helps Janet, also told Janet she is a good reader. This relationship with the domestic and women in regards to reading appeared elsewhere

in the interview. When asked if she liked to read, Janet responded affirmatively because she liked to read to her one year old sister. This sister was the reason Janet gave for reading being important at home. Janet and her female siblings appear to see reading as part of their duties and kin relations with one another.

Jared, another student in Janet's class, who is also a recent immigrant from the Philippines, also comments on the importance of his mother to his reading, albeit in a less rigorous manner than Michael did. Jared feels he is getting better at reading and this is confirmed by his interaction at home with his mother. "Sometimes I tell my mom to read to me," he told me. Sometimes a brother will also read to him.

From these interviews, "Mom" is not only associated with reading but also responsible for her child's success from the child's perspective. Mom is the parental figure who is seen as responsible for the child's lack of success with reading. This view was given by both boys and girls from classrooms in both schools, regardless of the teachers. Interestingly, it was children of Filipino descent that most frequently, though not exclusively, made these comments and especially children from families who had recently immigrated to Canada. This raises the question of 'reading practice' as a culturally-shaped practice between children and parents. The interplay of ethnicity, gender, motherhood, fatherhood, childhood, and literacy can produce many interesting results.

* * * * *

Zeke, a very quiet Aboriginal boy from Bernard Regional, sat at the breakfast table. He was wearing a white shirt under a brown t-shirt with the word "Monster" written on it. He often put his hands in front of his mouth during the interview. Zeke had irregular attendance at school.

MK: What makes a good reader?

Zeke: You read and you practice. (This is similar response to Amos's.)

MK: Do you practice reading?

Zeke: Only my mom and dad reads to me.

MK: So you are practicing then! So if you keep on practicing do you think you will become a good reader?

Zeke: Shakes his head.

This was one of the few examples where a student felt they were not improving. Even though Zeke was practicing he did not consider himself to be a good reader nor did he feel he is or will improve. Travis, another Aboriginal child, this time from Marne School, avoided answering this question altogether. Again, an unusual response. What is heard in silences? It is important to listen and address these lack of words. Unfortunately, the number of male Aboriginal students was very limited in this study and too small in number to draw any conclusions. Aboriginal girls, though, were more common in the four classrooms and all felt they were improving.⁷

Only one other student, Tad, a Filipino boy, said he tried and tried “but it won't get better.” His teacher saw him doing well as long as he got support from adults.

Of all the students in this study, only these three boys said they were not improving. Even though the sample was very limited and this result may simply be an aberration, I find the responses startling, particularly the contrast between Aboriginal girls and boys and the boys' lack of hope in their ability to become good readers. Though ethnicity, economic class, and gender play major factors in these children's perceptions, individual agency is key. Given likely similarities in the Aboriginal boys' and girls' backgrounds such as economics and family structure, why are such different results produced?

3.3 'Feminised English' and Masculinities Without Boys

The construction of literacy and of English as feminised areas has an impact on girls as well as boys, because it lessens the significance and value of literate competence and literary sensitivity. It has also meant that the positive and important role that literacy and literature study might have for boys is lessened. (Gilbert et al. 1998:202)

Masculine is not synonymous with boy and feminine is not synonymous with girl. It is a difficult paradigm to avoid. (At times, I am guilty of invoking this gender essentialism.) It is imperative to remember that gender is a social category. “Gender refers to (a) performance itself, the ways people accomplish being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl” (Root Aulette, Whittner and Blakely 2009:58). Gender is constructed and changing given time, place, and context. What comprises the masculine, masculinities, manhood and boyhood vary over time, place and situation. Even the concept of sex, if one is male or female, is a binary essentialist creation. Rephrasing Bratton (2006), sex is not a biological state but a set of traits associated with sexed bodies. “(T)he physical body is enmeshed in a social world of practices and activities that have physical outcome regarding reproduction, sexuality, and masculinity or femininity” (Root Aulette et al. 2009:31).

Though Root Aulette and company (2009:46) propose there may come a time when gender and sex may become irrelevant categories of existence, these categories still exist today. The authors' reasoning though allows the examination of masculinities without males, masculinities without boys. Situations of girls performing traits associated with masculinity were much more frequent than boys performing traits associated with femininity. (This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 6.) The crossings of boundaries between masculinities and femininities for boys is often not an easy one and

these are borders which are heavily policed. The passages appeared easier and less monitored for the girls in the observed classes. Researching masculinities often meant that certain girls in certain situations became the focus.

* * * * *

Shannon of Marne School is described by her teacher as reading well above grade level and would read anything including books about “monster trucks”. Shannon will get into power struggles with other students, including the boys as well as the girls. The power struggles range from reporting inappropriate behaviour to the teacher in front of the individual who was responsible for the actions to publicly correcting a friend. “Shannon is her own person” was another line used by the teacher regarding Shannon.

Shannon came into the Conference Room and chose the chair beside the couch. Shannon commented she was going to pick Jane, her best friend, as my next interview. Shannon wore a pink flower headband with a pink striped top. A “sister” pendant, in pink, hung from her neck. I felt Shannon was not comfortable during the interview. Her body was rigid and her hands were clasped on her lap but she continued with the discussion.

MK: Do you like to read?

Shannon: Yeah . . .because when I read I learn stuff.

MK: What type of stuff do you learn?

Shannon: Well, I uh . . . I don't know. I have no idea. I learn about books.

MK: Are you a good reader?

Shannon: Yes . . . because I have a lot of books and I practice them by myself.

MK: Does anyone tell you you are a good reader?

Shannon: Um. (Pause) Sometimes but not really.

MK: Who sometimes tells you you are a good reader?

Shannon: Sometimes I don't have a good memory. So I don't know.

MK: Are you getting better at reading?

Shannon: Yes . . . because every day and every night I practice reading books.

. . .

MK: Is reading important in school?

Shannon: Yes.

MK: Why?

Shannon (emphatically): I already said it: you learn stuff!

MK: Is reading important at home?

Shannon: Nods

MK: Why?

Shannon: Because (pause) I don't know. My mom just says that.

Reading with your family is good. You get to learn.

Shannon, as will be shown later, negotiates between different gender scripts throughout her school day. She appears to do this without great resistance from her classmates. This movement within a spectrum of masculinities and femininities can be seen in her interview regarding reading. Shannon mentions 'practice', as many of the boys had and becomes almost aggressive when asked about why reading is important at home. Yet Shannon becomes modest and quiet when avoiding mentioning who is praising her for her reading. She excuses herself by saying she has a poor memory. The importance of mothers in the reading process is seen again.

When the other teacher of Marne School was asked about who is perceived as the dominant personality in the room, Suzanna is mentioned first. The teacher defines dominant as the leader of the room. Both boys and girls respond well, that is politely and positively, to Suzanna according to the teacher. She is described as reading many years above grade level and wants to be first to finish her work. These ways of being competitive are associated with masculinity and more specially dominant masculinities. She is both easy- and out-going as well as being co-operative with both adults and peers.

Suzanna wore a pink top with puffy sleeves. Her black hair was shoulder length. She stood in the Conference Room and waited for me to be seated. Suzanna then sat forward with her head in her hands. She appeared calm. When I asked her if she was nervous she responded, "Not that much."

Suzanna thought she was a good reader. When asked to explain why she felt this way

she said, "Because I am a fast reader when I read a book at home or at school."

Suzanna explained that she understands what she reads and is able to sound out words. She is getting better at reading because she is reading smaller print. She reads the Bible at home with her family, specifically her mother and her brother. She does mention later that she sees her dad reading the Bible and sometimes the newspaper. Only her father tells her to read at home, not her mother, although this contradicts what Suzanne told me during the interview about her mother being the parent who instills the value of reading. Suzanna reads at home when she is bored but she would rather play on her mother's computer. Suzanna's older brother doesn't like to read. In some ways, Suzanna's household conforms to the notion of reading as a feminine activity, but in other ways it does not. Suzanna's father appears to be the family member she most associates with reading. This blurring of gender lines is also seen in Suzanna and the books she reads as well. (Again, this will be discussed later, in Chapter 6.)

Edna is an outgoing almost, at times, pushy child. She is very social and will interact with both peers and adults. Usually, she will get along with many people. Her teacher at Marne School explains she will help solve problems by taking problems into her own hands and trying to fix them. The teacher perceives her in a very positive light. She is reading above grade level according to the teacher.

Edna was wearing a pink sweats outfit with blue stripes and sparkles. She found her own seat and sat down. She was very fidgety. Sometimes she would roll up into a ball on the chair. She was very forward throughout the interview.

MK: Do you like reading.

Edna: Shakes her head no. (Edna is the only girl to respond as such.)

MK: No? Why not?

Edna: Because it's boring sometimes . . . Because you just sit and look at pages and that.

When questioned further Edna does find some books interesting, in particular, new books. In reviewing this interview, I am not sure if “new” meant something different from an old book, or one that is not tattered, or a book with unfamiliar content, or if the book had more value because it was recently purchased. Talking with Edna, the last definition seems to be what Edna means. Reading is not important to Edna, personally, nor at home though her mother reads to her. Edna's responses are usually body gestures, again a way of acting that is interpreted as masculine. She does perceive reading as being important in school. You “learn new words” and Edna admits she does want to do well in school. Edna's responses remind one of Frank's responses and the desire for external praise. In fact, much of Edna's interview reflects masculine attributes such as boredom with reading due to its lack of activity.

As I review the interviews of the girls who acted according to masculine gender discourse scripts, all these students were considered strong readers by their teachers. I could find no examples of girls who followed such scripts and who were considered weak readers. Whereas hegemonic or dominant masculinity could be attained without being a good reader by the boys, such as Frank or Amos, girls who had what I consider masculinity traits and did not read well were not recognized as dominant. The girls had to be good readers to attain that status. Is academic achievement for the girls an accessible and viable manner of achieving power and dominance in the classroom? If it is, does this access to power become defined as feminine simply because of its use by the girls? It has been argued that hegemonic masculinity is determined in opposition to the feminine; therefore boys are discouraged to act according to gender scripts of femininity. These scripts of femininities include reading; therefore scripts of masculinities include not reading.

3.4 Socializing and Social Boundaries: Reading Together and Reading to Separate

One morning during indoor recess at Marne School, the usual routine was taking place. Only the boys, including Solomon, an autistic child, carried blue totes which contained various games and game pieces. Shannon was the only girl to violate what appeared to be an implicit rule. The boys stuck together and played with the building blocks on the front mat; Shannon joined them. A Filipino group of boys and girls also formed here. There were two girls, Jane and Eda, and a boy playing with stuffed animals in the theatre. The girls' conversation included "call my boyfriend". Two boys, Frank and Abraham, played some sports game on the computer where their goal seemed to be setting the audience on fire.

* * * * *

In the moments after the bell rings for break, the navigating and negotiating involved in the access to recess activities were bound up in in the performance of gender. Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are played out on the building block mat and on the phone in the theatre. Simultaneously, alternative gender performances are demonstrated in the exact same venues. Ethnicity, social class, and disability are intrinsic to each child's performance. The groups with which he or she may play also influence gender and other identities. Identities are socially constructed.

3.4a Reading Together

. . . boys read books recommended by friends, and are more likely to attend to print stories that can be shared. An ungregarious literacy has no appeal for them. (Newkirk 2002:49-50)

Myron, whom we met earlier, said he had fun reading with friends. In fact, when asked what makes a person not a good reader, he responded “Not reading with friends.” Myron prefers reading with others over being alone because “My friends are nice.” All friends mentioned were boys. In a somewhat circular reasoning fashion, Myron prefers reading with boys over girls because “boys are my friends”. This preference continues with men over women. This act of male bonding where the boys repeatedly create a group to read in the school seems to be part of the masculine practicing mentioned previously. Tobin (2000) also believes male bonding is intrinsic to middle class masculinity. Not all students, though, like this gregarious activity and some choose to socialize with different groups and for different reasons.

A similar response is given by Amos. When Amos was asked about reading by himself or with others in the classroom, Amos said he likes reading with his friends who help him. This makes him “happy and really proud of himself”. When asked who were his friends he named only one boy and then paused and added “. . . everybody in my class.” Amos' hesitation and more inclusive answer may be interpreted as an honest re-evaluation or one given for the appearance of public personal acceptance; only Amos may be sure of the reason.

Travis, an Aboriginal student from Marne School, prefers reading with others especially boys because “they turn into dads”.

Even the provincial poster entitled *Thinking Like a Reader*, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, illustrates the boys (and only the boys) socializing and sharing and celebrating what they have read.

Frank usually reads and prefers to read by himself. If he has to read with someone, he prefers another child over an adult and a male over a female “cause I'm a guy.” Tony

would also rather read with the boys but couldn't give a reason.

In general, most of the boys liked reading with others or at least didn't mind reading with others. The exceptions were usually boys who existed on the borderlands in some perspective. These were the boys who were socially 'removed' from the class, either by their choice or externally imposed, for example, having their desks moved away from others', had difficulty reading, or both. (This is not a surprising combination.) Being exiled socially would make any group activity challenging and possibly humiliating; being unable to read well would be emphasized in the uncomfortable setting. Those students who were socially accepted who had difficulty reading enjoyed and needed the assistance others gave them. Interestingly, the other boys who preferred reading alone were those who were considered strong readers and also performers of hegemonic masculinity. These cases may be examples of these children asserting their independence.

The situation with the girls was not quite the same. The majority of girls were willing to read alone or with others; either option was acceptable. Feminine passivity and compliance were apparent. As with the boys, the weak readers who existed on the social periphery and the girls who performed masculine traits preferred reading alone. These two groups were proportionally much smaller than those in the boys' sample. (Again, the boys greatly outnumbered the girls in this study.)

Shannon had no preference if she read alone or with another. Again, there was no preference if the other was an adult or classmate, male or female.

Joann likes reading by herself or with friends. Friends help her with the word when she gets mixed up. When asked who were these friends, only Patrick is mentioned in particular. (Patrick fits the complicitous masculine description. The grouping of boys who exhibited alternative masculinities with the girls who often performed from

masculine scripts was an interesting dynamic that occurred several times.)

Similarly, Suzanna would read by herself or with others. Interestingly, Suzanna prefers a computer over a human reading because a person “will get out of breath. Their voices get tired.” It was implied that this was not a concern but a critique of reading. She liked strong inflections from the reader. A similar response was given by Brad when it came to humans and computers: “Don't waste your breath” were his exact words. I am not sure how to analyze these responses.

* * * * *

Solomon is a tall boy. He was new to Marne School. Fair-skinned with shoulder length blond hair, he is androgynous in appearance. (He did get a haircut during my stay at Marne.) Solomon is autistic, a very large umbrella label defining those with challenges interpreting external stimuli, and has a full-time aide. He is considered high functioning and is reading at about a kindergarten level and learning quickly. Though he sat with a group of students at a table and though Solomon was addressed by his classmates, from my observations, this interaction appeared cursory and infrequent. I was told some of the girls will read and draw with him. Also, I was told that at recess he often played with trucks in the sandbox where other boys were. Each day Solomon had a buddy classmate who would go through a list of daily routine activities. Interestingly, the teacher commented that Solomon had a higher level of social acceptance within the class compared to other special needs students because of his ability to read. Unfortunately, I do not know what the students' perspectives were on this statement but ethical considerations immediately come to mind in addressing this issue.

3.4b Reading to Separate

Frank, as mentioned previously, was described as having “boundary issues”. Frank, though he downplayed reading in his interview, is also more than capable and willing to use reading for his affirmation in the hierarchy of masculinities as shown by this anecdote:

During reading time, Frank passed by Mohammed's seat and commented derisively at the low reading level of Mohammed's book compared to the level of his own text. (Many of the books in this classroom are leveled by degree of difficulty and students are easily able to identify one's ability and skill in reading by a number pasted on the cover of each book. And by default, students are easily able to identify one's inability and lack of skill by the same markers.) Mohammed appeared to be hurt and embarrassed.

The teacher overheard the comment and reacted. The teacher explained that everyone was making progress in reading at their own rate. It was not fair to compare. Frank looked confused and it was obvious to the teacher that further explanation was necessary. The teacher took Frank and Shannon, a classmate who volunteered for this exercise. The teacher then placed Frank against one wall and Shannon half-way to the opposite wall. The teacher then asked the two students to race to the opposite wall. Both students gave it all they had and, of course, having half the distance to cover, Shannon won. The class yelled in excitement. The teacher asked, “Frank, do you understand now why we can't compare reading levels?” Silence. Confusion was expressed on Frank's face.

“Let's do it again,” the teacher stated. Again, the exercise was repeated and again, the result was duplicated. The teacher looked at Frank and asked, “What's wrong with this race?”

Frank stared back at her. “I didn't win.”

The interaction with Frank and Mohammed illustrates reading as competition. It is not unlike the examples given by Jordan and Cowan (2004: 227-243) when boys took domestic toys and created a war game or had fights with plastic knives from a toy kitchen. Frank had manipulated literacy and made it part of the hegemonic masculine performance by making it a competitive sport. Unfortunately, for him, a sport he felt he lost – and to a girl. (The symbolism in regards to the entire literacies issue is apparent.) Mohammed, on the other hand, struggles frequently within the hierarchy of masculinities and with day to day existence.

* * * * *

I arrived early at Marne School that February morning. It was just after Valentine's Day and some of the holiday projects were still up. I went to the window where the hearts that a class made were posted. The students were paired for this assignment which involved an interview which was written up and presented within a paper heart. Only Shannon and Steve were a mixed gender pair though they both picked the traditional pink and blue as favourite colours. Shannon and Steve chose voluntarily to work together. Mohammed and Solomon were matched up. I was curious about this pairing and asked how it came about. According to one adult working in the room, the reason for this pairing was that no one compatible was left for Mohammed. I was also told later that Mohammed may have been away the day when the activity was initiated and Solomon was the only student left for a partner. It is difficult to leave the borderlands once one is situated there, whatever the reasons for this placement. Mohammed needs to be discussed further, later.

3.5 Summary

The importance of reading in school was perceived by all students interviewed.

Reasons for this included access to intelligence and economic wealth. The importance of reading to the individual and to her or his family varied greatly, though. In many cases, Mom was perceived by the child as the parent associated with and responsible for the child's success in reading. Ethnicity, in this case Filipino, seemed to play a factor in this perception.

In order to become a good reader many students stated that practice was the key. This active involvement, a trait often associated with masculinity, was given not only by boys but by girls who were 'strong' readers. Other girls responded that sitting and listening, passive involvement often associated with femininity, were important to becoming a good reader. Most students felt their reading skills were improving. Only boys responded negatively to this. As before, ethnicity, here Aboriginal, appeared to play a significant factor in the children's forecasting of their future reading status.

Reading was an activity that was at times used to create a social bond, especially by the boys. The boys saw reading as fun when reading with others. Being able to read made social acceptance easier for those marginalized. Reading was also seen as a tool for creating separation. Reading became an arena for competition for top tier in the hierarchy of masculinities. The inability to read could also help marginalize students. The inability to read did not appear to hamper boys' access to power; reading, though, appeared to be a necessary skill for the girls' to gain some form of power in the classroom.

In the next chapter, specific programs and activities involving literacies are discussed in regards to their reinforcement of hegemonic masculinities and their subversion of it. The policing and acceptance of alternative masculinities during these activities are also examined.

CHAPTER 4 – AND THE LESSONS FOR TODAY INCLUDE . . . 'HANDS ON' LITERACIES (AND MORE)

Of all the subject domains at school, English has the most opportunity to engage students with issues of masculinity and power, and to engage them with opportunities to critique, to interrogate and to subvert texts. (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:202)

. . . the masculine personality is characterized by individuality and a quest for assertiveness and personal expansion, the feminine character is strongly characterized by cooperation, relationships, and a desire for closeness and belonging. (Gotz, Lemish, Aidman, and Moon 2005:121)

Almost all activities at school involve some forms of reading and literacies. This may be why Gilbert and company specifically mention English as the subject area where students can critique and subvert texts. These activities take a great variety of formats from the co-operative 'buddy reading' where one class's students read with the students from another grade to special 'hands on' assignments integrating multiple subject areas with various physical materials and manipulatives; literally, the children get their 'hands on' their work. In this multitude of lessons, how are masculinities presented and performed? Responding to Gilbert and Gilberts' quote above, are there “opportunities to critique, to interrogate and to subvert”? Or do school systems and educational structures simply sustain and support the heteronormative structure of masculinity and its relationships to power?

4.1 Dragon's Den: Imagined Places, Real Spaces

The ability to define reality for another is certainly one of the more important forms of social power. (Christian-Smith 1990:54)

Both Grade 1 classes of Marne School were involved in a program which gave them occasional access to a teacher who arranged 'hands-on' projects for the students to do. I was able to see only one of these activities, and that was when it was already completed.

In the observed assignment, the students had to create a dragon's den or castle based on the story *The Knight and the Dragon* (DePaola 1998). This short book deals with a dragon and a knight, both who had no experience fighting the other. One day they both decided they should prepare for their first battle (as the fairy tale structure demands). Each starts reading books on the matter and then practices different skills necessary for the conflict. On the momentous day, both prove quite inept at combat. A princess, who is passing by, witnesses the two and gives the dragon and the knight books. The former gets "The Outdoor Cook Book"; the latter, "How to Build a Bar-B-Q". The former enemies then open a restaurant together.

The traditional structure of the fairy tale is altered. This story gives an alternative ending and alternative masculine roles for the two male characters. The princess, though not in need of rescue, retains the often feminine role of peace-maker.

After reading the story, the students had to imagine what the living space of these characters, both dragon and knight (but not princess), would look like. The creation of this space was up to the students who were grouped by the facilitating teacher with what seemed to be some assistance by the students. These groups were both heterogeneously and homogeneously mixed in regards to sex. Each group was given either a large orange cut-out paper castle or a large brown piece of rectangular paper that was to be the dragon's den. There appeared to be no pattern regarding the handing out of the castles and dens. The teacher, when asked about the distribution of these different outlines, commented that she had not really thought about it as time was limited for her interaction with the class.

The students were very proud of their creations. Frank, Steve, and another boy worked on an orange castle. In their castle, they had such domestic items as a fridge, stairs, windows, and the walls covered with yellow and blue wallpaper, adorned and masculinized with a car. Many of the items were related to the traditional structure of the knight-dragon plot including the sword for the knight, crowns, and a whetting stone for the dragon to sharpen his teeth. There was a moat outside the castle. Some objects had to be explained to me as I could not discern their identity. This brings to mind Gotz and associates (2005:133-134) who comment that boys' drawings lack detail and are often sloppily done and contain items that are power-related (i.e. the sword and whetting stone).

Many of the boys' make-believe worlds are characterized by conflict, action, and adventure. Fighting scenes often figure prominently in the pictures and stories. Boys deal with a constant onslaught of threats in their fantasy worlds in which they often imagine themselves under attack. In some cases, they take on the identity of imaginary creatures who are threatened and attacked. (Gotz et al. 2005:134)

The boys had obviously put a great deal of thought into their royal home. They agreed they worked on this very co-operatively, with no person claiming credit for any particular contribution. Though boys may create violent fantasies, the tendency for masculine social bonding in this all-male group was apparent (Gotz et al 2005:120). The boys in this group all appeared comfortable with me and with each other, speaking freely. This is in contrast to Frank's competitive and challenging behaviour with Mohammed during reading time.

Jane, Abraham, Peter, Shannon, and another girl also had an orange castle. Unlike the previous group, they were able to and chose to tell me who did what. Black chunks of construction paper were glued to the top and bottom of the castle. I was told these were rocks. There was a fireplace with a chair nearby. There was a cushion on the chair. These were all Shannon's contributions. Jane also added a chair with a pillow and

scattered coloured rocks among Shannon's black ones. Out of flowered wallpaper, Jane made a vacuum cleaner. Jane also made a bed. A clean, serene domestic haven had been created in this dragon-knight world. Abraham contributed a sandwich. Peter did not appear to have created any addition to the castle. This castle displayed a much more domestic and detailed appearance compared to the boys' castle. Shannon dominated the conversation, assisted by Jane, just as the two dominated the castle creation. The co-operation displayed by the previous group was not apparent here. I could not get further details on the sandwich, the only addition made by a boy. Also, I could not get a response as to why Peter did not contribute to the project.

Amon, Sally, Eda, and Jean had a brown den. As with the previous group, the students were able to tell me who created what piece in their house. And as the previous group, the two girls were in charge with the two boys taking subservient roles. An ornate bed, which occupied most of the paper, and a table with a sandwich and drink on it were created jointly by Sally and Eda. They also produced a fridge. Sally, by herself, made a mirror, a picture, and a puppy.

. . . girls prefer to dream of harmonious scenarios of nature with animals and sometimes people as well. A central characteristic of these paradise-like fantasy worlds is that all creatures live in harmony with themselves and others. . . There is a strict order of things so everything is integrated and in relationship to each another. . . This tendency is exhibited also as a form of the “aesthetics of order.” The visual elements are often placed symmetrically or are somewhat ornamental . . .(Gotz et al 2005:119)

This clearly can be seen in these examples. The contrast between the first project and the latter two is striking. A detailed peaceful domestic abode, often associated with the feminine, was created without the violence of weapons, the oppositional binary masculine, of the heterogeneous groups. Jean made something he called a diamond password that was like a key but he could not explain for what. Eda and Sally claimed that though Jean also made the

silver rocks, it was their idea. Amon made a drawer with flowers and a blackboard. Eda and Sally again stated that though he made these items, it was their idea. Amon sat quietly when asked about this. Though taken out of context, the line by Rodman (2009:650) comes to mind for Amon: “The most powerless people have no place at all.”⁹

The social interaction among the members of the group also must be noted. In both mixed gender groups, co-operative behaviour was limited as the girls were dominant. These girls, in general, were considered good readers, academically strong, and assertive within the classroom. The boys in these groups, in general, were not as academically inclined and represented subordinate masculinities both in their dragon's den setting as well as in the classroom environment. Here, the girls have taken the role of power brokers, generally thought of as a masculine position but given the context, as Gotz et al. (2005:120) states, this is not unusual:

Another motif that characterized a number of the girls' make-believe worlds is a stable relationship and partnership with one or few very close friends. Sharing the power and excitement of the fantasy world equally with a friend is a key element in the make-believe world. Thus, for girls, being part of a group is rather exceptional.

The authors comment that the girls' behaviour may be a way of compensating for the sense of lack of power in the 'real world'.

As stated at the beginning of the text, Gotz et al. (2005:121) also stated that in the 'real world' boys define themselves through personal expansion of boundaries and separation and are socialized into a hierarchical world of competition and public attention. Girls define themselves through co-operative relationships with others and are socialized into an existence of mutuality and caring. These authors admit that this may be an oversimplified stance, and I agree. An essentialist stand seems to insinuate itself into their argument; something these authors admit. It is a problem with which I have

difficulty also.

As the groups explained to me their models of knight and dragon good housekeeping, certain patterns arose. Only those groups with girls had castles or dens that contained bathrooms which, depending on the group, contained such items as a toilet and toothbrush. (Cleaning, domesticity, and benevolent sexism will be further discussed in Chapter 6.) With only one exception, Edna, only the boys created television sets. Technology is considered a masculine domain. (And Edna often exhibits masculine traits in her behaviour.) Though fridges were created by the boys only, no appliance was created to make food save an all boys group that made a fire pit, but this did not appear to be the pit's main purpose. The fire pit appeared to represent a weapon, a more typical masculine response. Both girls and boys did make food, however, though this may not necessarily be an issue of equity. The preparation of food and the final product and its use, if analyzed as a power relationship of giving and getting, domestic and public, would be equated to the feminine process of cooking, domestic labour of love or obligation, and the masculine process of being served the final product. (Connell 2002:62)

Overall, in the fantasy world of dragons and knights created by the children, a clear division occurs between the girls' domestic world and that of the weapon-oriented boys' world. Heteronormative perceptions are maintained with some exceptions. In particular, certain boys are situated in positions of subordinated masculinities with certain girls. By these girls' performances, especially in these small groups, a blurring of the masculine-feminine power relationship occurs. The boys, however, remain consistently subordinated in either social setting, small or large groups.

4.2 Roots of Empathy: Public Education meets Private Domesticity

In modern Western society, gender divisions between jobs are not the whole of gender division of labour. There is a larger division between 'work' – the realm of paid labour and production for markets – and 'home'. The whole economic sphere is culturally defined as men's world (regardless of the presence of women in it), while domestic life is defined as women's world (regardless of the presence of men in it). . . . our notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are closely connected with this division. (Connell 2002:61)

Ms. LeCoiff, the guidance counselor, entered into Mr. Zhao's room carrying a bag in one hand and cradling a toy baby in the other. She walked to the children who were sitting in a group in the classroom's sharing space. “Who hasn't had a turn to hold the baby?” she asked. A multitude of hands, belonging to both boys and girls, went up. Looking at all the volunteers, Ms. LeCoiff smiled. She handed the baby to an eager and excited Kevin. Ms. LeCoiff then sat down in a small chair and smiled again at her attentive audience.

Ms. LeCoiff is the facilitator of the Roots of Empathy program. In Roots of Empathy a baby in her or his first year of life, along with her or his parents, are brought to a classroom on a regular basis throughout the school year. The goal of the program is to create awareness and empathy within the school children for another's differences and changes. Hopefully, these lessons will be transferred to others to create greater acceptance among individuals. Between the baby visits, lessons are given about the different aspects involved in taking care of and raising a baby. Each lesson has a different theme. According to Ms. LeCoiff, it is the mother who is the parent who attends these gatherings with her baby. It is rare for the father to appear. Sometimes, even the grandmother of the baby will attend. In this case, the baby who is the focus of the program is Mr. Zhao's daughter. It is the first time Ms. LeCoiff has had such a situation.

Today, Mr Zhao's daughter is not in attendance and the lesson theme is nighttime routines. The teacher asks the class about their nighttime routines and a variety of responses arise. Ms. LeCoiff asks Mr. Zhao what he does before he goes to sleep. “I watch the sports highlights, “ he responds.

Mrs. LeCoiff asks the students how many of their parents read to them before they go to bed. Many of the students put up their hands. When asked who reads to them, it is usually the mother but many of the fathers read to them as well. Mrs. LeCoiff then pulls out a book from the bag she brought. She holds up the book and reads the title, “*Hush: A Thai Lullaby* (Ho 1996). It's dedicated to the author's father.”

The class listens as she reads the story about a very protective mother who silences everything from a mouse to an elephant so her baby can sleep. At the end, the mother is successful and falls asleep herself just as her baby awakes with a mischievous smile. Though no engendered pronoun is given and the pictures of the baby in the book are androgynous, when discussing the baby the pronoun 'he' is used in the classroom. The father is never mentioned in the book.

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The Roots of Empathy programming, where the domestic sphere is introduced into the early childhood classroom, is a great opportunity to blur and confuse heteronormative parameters on childcare and parenting. This case of the father being the teacher creates a particularly interesting scenario. The blurring of such divisions involving the domestic is considered vital to the issue of gender performance according to many authors (Connell 2002). At the beginning of class, both boys and girls wished to hold the baby illustrating no gender bias for this domestic duty. Giving Kevin the responsibility of caregiver only helped further soften the boundaries of labour division. ¹⁰

The book read, however, reified traditional roles in child rearing. And the children's choice to masculinize the baby follows normative patterns.

Even non-gendered imaginary characters – such as creatures and animals are considered “naturally” male, unless they are specifically marked as female through processes of sexualizing their appearance (e.g., hair ribbons, long eyelashes, colored lips, short skirts). In this way, female characters continue to symbolize a deviation from the dominant male norm and remain the “second sex” . . . (Gotz et al. 2005:148)

Almost twenty years earlier, Intons-Peterson (1988:20) finds similar results when a subject's features are equally divided between male and female or ambiguous: “. . . when the stimulus figure has the same number of typically female and of typically male characteristics, the subjects (adults) are more likely to call the figure male than female, suggesting a male “bias”.” According to this researcher “. . . when faced with a limited set of cues, children rely on hair length and clothing, rather than genitalia, as gender differentiators; whereas adults show the opposite pattern.” (Intons-Peterson 1988:20) The author then draws an interesting conclusion:

Children with unstable gender identities might not be as sensitive to gender-related cues as children with stable gender identities. If so, children with unstable gender identities would make fewer correct gender attributions than children with stable gender identities. (Intons-Peterson 1988:22)

Gender determination entered discussions with the children several times during the period of research. The incidents put into question what cues were actually read and what such terms as “unstable” and “stable” meant and these terms' relationship to heteronormative definitions.¹¹ These conversations allowed the children to express and reflect upon their assumptions of genders as they heard alternative perspectives from their classmates.

The one time I was in the class when Mr. Zhao, his wife, and daughter, Cybil, were all present, the children were around the green blanket on which Cybil lay, her mother right

beside her and Mr. Zhao behind them. Ms. Zhao did most of the handling of both Cybil and the questions from the class, which were addressed to her. Mr. Zhao also held his daughter and answered some questions. The perception of this performance can lead to many conclusions, some supporting the feminine domestic division of labour, some questioning it. Even though Ms. Zhao was perceived by the students as the primary caregiver and information source regarding Cybil, Mr. Zhao was also seen as a part of this domestic relationship. Given another opportunity, further exploration of the students' views would be interesting and valuable.

* * * * *

Another lesson dealt with transitional objects, things that children use to help them go to sleep. Items from toys to blankets to night lights were discussed.

Mrs. LeCoiff then read a book to the students: *Franklin's Blanket* (Bourgeois 1995). In this story, Franklin the turtle misplaces his blanket. Both the father and mother are supportive of Franklin. His mother helps him look for it and his father gives his old blanket to Franklin. Franklin discusses his need for the blanket and how vulnerable he feels to family and friends, who all appear to be male; all are empathetic and try to be helpful. This depiction of the vulnerable sensitive male was very unusual during my research. Franklin eventually finds his cherished transitional object which he forgot under a chair when he was being mischievous.

Sometimes the categorization of gender performance is clear as demonstrated in the Thai mother's domestic duties; sometimes the categorization of gender performance is ambiguous as demonstrated by Mr. Zhao's domestic duties.

4.3 Buddy Time: And They Went in Two by Two (Homogeneously)

Children are automatically and with little thought segregated by gender. (Root Aulette et al. 2009:108)

Before going upstairs to meet with their reading buddies, a middle school multi-age class made of Grade 7 and 8 students, the children of Mr. Evan's class brought books which they had chosen from either the school or class libraries. Without being directed in their choices, the students found books. After a vocal trip across the school, we arrived at our destination and the Grade 1 students then picked the Grade 7 and 8 buddies with whom they were going to read for the next half hour. The Grade 7 and 8's outnumbered the students in Mr. Evan's class allowing for some choices of partners by the Grade 1 students. When finally chosen, all groupings, save one, were homogeneous in regards to gender: boys with boys, girls with girls.

Before reading, Mr. Evan announced, "Good readers read the words. Good readers read the pictures. Good readers retell the story." These instructions were a reminder of what the period should look and sound like. And so buddy time began.

* * * * *

The pairing of students from an older classroom with those of a younger grade is a common practice. Buddy reading can take many forms. Sometimes, students will simply read to each other books, usually chosen by the younger group; sometimes other co-operative activities will take place such as baking or crafts. The goals are often both academic, to improve reading skills, and social, to co-operatively interact with a group of a different age. The latter aspect is of particular interest in regard to the performance of gender.

The teachers wandered among the groups of Grade 1 and middle school students,

maintaining order. As I wandered among the groups, I noted that some read as instructed. Some just talked. It was not unusual to hear Tagalog being spoken. Hather, a Filipino girl in Mr. Evan's class, was upset that she was not with a Filipino student. Sirena, an Aboriginal girl, was aggressive and pushed her way through students, pulling and hitting.

After the class was over and Mr. Evan's class returned to their room, I asked them if they liked buddy time. The response was overwhelmingly positive. It was fun.

The Grade 7/8 classroom had a more mixed response. More boys than girls liked the activity but no response was given when asked why, other than they didn't have to do any regular class work. Given that childcare is often considered part of domesticity, which is often associated with women, it was interesting that the boys liked buddy time more than the girls. When questioned about the gender pairing, the students commented that they were only somewhat aware of the division but, in hindsight, agreed that is what usually happened.

Another Grade 1 class was paired with a Grade 5 class. During their buddy time, the students split up into two groups and used both classrooms. Most of the students went to the Grade 5 room, though. Most students were in the same gender couples. When I asked the teacher about how the pairings came to be, the teacher told me that the classroom teachers just did it for no apparent reason. The mixed buddy groups occurred when they ran out of Grade 1 girls.

Yet another class was paired with a Grade 6 class. When I asked if I could observe buddy time in this room, the Grade 6 teacher commented that they usually mixed up the boys and girls as children were assigned to read together. Even so, after the buddy groupings were completed, girls still seemed to be paired with girls, boys with boys.

The pairing of students for buddy time is usually done with awareness of each child's

traits. Challenging and exceptional social behaviour, friendships, and reading levels are often taken into concern. Sometimes a challenging younger student will be assigned to an older female, maintaining the domestic care-giving position as feminine. Ethnicity also can play a role as illustrated by Hathor. Gender, though, appears to be a subconscious element; homogeneity often occurs by default. With this default, structures of gender normativity are sustained as boy helps boy, girl assists girl.

4.4 I Love to Read

Instead of looking for such unique spatialities of masculinity and femininity, I want to consider now the possibility that along with complex gender topographies there are multiple “gender topologies” multiple masculine and feminine spaces. (Nespor 2000:31)

Homogeneous gender pairings were common during my research and in my teaching career in general. Another such situation occurred during I Love to Read Month. In many schools, February is declared “I Love to Read” month. A variety of activities integrating reading and literacies may be held in each room, between and among rooms, and within the entire school. Examples of these activities include a school assembly, when everyone brings a book to read, and “Stop, Drop and Read”, an activity when an announcement is read everyone in the school stops what they are doing and starts to read.

One February morning, in a room in Bernard Regional, I Love to Read events were held for the first hour. They were facilitated by two adults, who were staff but not teachers. One was a man; one was a woman. The activities were based on rhymes. The students got into pairs. They were all homogeneous in regards to sex save the last group which forced a boy and girl together. The rhyme game caused problems for two groups, especially the boys. Amos snickered when someone rhymed “gay” with “hay”.

Not to be left out of the sexual innuendos, Dianna, another student, snickered when I said “balls” while explaining the word “meatballs”.

Next, the woman read a book about pigs. Interestingly, the girls of the classroom sat right next to the reader, in the front; the boys sat behind. Then the man read a book and the boys from the back actually moved up and gathered around him. The audience immediately became much more attentive and continued to be so throughout the reading. The book was more vivid and the man was a more animated reader than the woman. The students obviously had worked with these adults before and had some degree of expectation of the adults' presentations.

The class finally ended with another rhyming activity which was based on a song about watermelons growing. “Kiss” seemed to get giggles from the girls and Amos mentioned “punch” in his lyrics, while throwing a punch into the air ahead of him. It got a mild laugh from the audience. This activity replaced their library period.

Other than the same gender pairing of students, there are many gender and sex structures being maintained. The sexual comments by Amos illustrate heteronormative masculine characteristics. “Gay” immediately gets a response emphasizing its subordinate position on the hierarchy of masculinities relative to patriarchal masculinity. (In the study by Tobin (2000:127), one of the key distinctions the study children made between good guys and bad guys in movies is that good guys live with women and bad guys with other men.) Dianna, who often performs masculine traits, also enters into the sexual play. It is interesting to note that these comments refer to masculinities and men. I never heard any mention of lesbianism and only rarely about female anatomy.

The choice of where to sit is also affected by gender association. In general, if not given a seating plan by the teacher, the girls sat near the front where the teacher was

located and boys sat further back. There were, of course, multiple exceptions to this statement. In particular, ethnicity would often supersede gender. This was particularly true of the Filipino children, where the mixed group would occupy the space usually reserved for girls. This mixing did not apply to the Aboriginal students, though. Sometimes boys would choose to move and occupy the 'prime' seats if something caught their interest - an application of their sense of power? This was not a common occurrence with the girls. Even in collectives, according to Nespor (2000:30-31), girls will choose to occupy a fixed position while the boys tended to move about.

Seating arrangements were also affected by the teacher. The above was certainly true in the two female teachers' classes. Explanations included such thoughts by teachers as girls bond with their mother, or mother-figures such as teachers, and boys try to separate themselves from the teacher. This may represent a statement of relative independence; the further away one sits, the more independent one is, goes the logic. This girl/boy seating plan was less apparent in Mr. Zhao's class. In Mr. Evan's class, the reverse was usually true: boys sat near the teacher, girls sat in the back. The proximity of the boys to the male teachers may be a form of boys' bonding. As can be seen from the examples involving teachers and recesses, space in the classroom was gendered differently depending on circumstances and individuals.

4.5 Computer Time

It was computer time. The students, each at their own computer, were instructed to use a program that provided a variety of pictures to illustrate or 'stamp' a pattern; in this case, the pattern was "aabbcc". The children were familiar with the procedure. One child stamped ice cream, ice cream, tree, tree, lightning, lightning. The boys frequently used

illustrations of machinery, lightning, and vehicles, the girls, flowers. Both boys and girls used animals, strawberries, ice cream cones, and trees. Suzanna, a Filipino girl, used Oriental symbols exclusively: rickshaw, kimono, temple.

One boy, who finished his work, started playing a game of football on his computer. It was Tampa Bay against Green Bay. I said I was a Minnesota fan; he wasn't.

* * * * *

Though it was a topic I wished to explore in this research, computer time and the use of the computer itself appeared very limited during my time in the schools. As described above, normative gender behaviours were displayed. Ethnicity, again, appears to be an influence to behaviour but socio-economic situations seem to be the most apparent factor. The computer lab at Marne seemed to be up and running much more frequently than that at Bernard Regional. The latter school often had difficulties accommodating one student per computer. This access or lack of access to technology is one of social class but as a social issue may have bearing on the performance of gender.

4.6 Summary:

In the varied literacy activities and programs which occur every day in the class, a myriad of occasions arise which assist in reifying gender boundaries and rehearsing conservative gender scripts. This was illustrated when discussing buddy time and the Dragon's Den assignment.

There are times, also, where these boundaries are erased and scripts re-written. This was particularly observable in the Roots of Empathy program which demonstrated what Grieg (2009) calls a “positively deviant” masculinity.

It is with Grieg, the next chapter begins. Many times, it is difficult to analyze the

script being 'read'. The permutations and combinations of performances from the choices of masculinities and femininities intersected with factors such as class and ethnicity are countless and confusing. What follows are illustrations of what caused my confusion and uncertainty.

CHAPTER 5 – TIME WITH THE ANTHROPOLOGIST: AM I READING THIS RIGHT?

. . . how (do) men and boys internalise, reframe and reproduce gender norms and the ways in which structural forces shape these processes. Looking at the lives of 'positive deviants' to explore the factors that appear to enable some men to resist harmful gender norms has provided some answers, yet these answers remain individually framed. (Grieg 2009:70)

Every child must negotiate the continual and often conflicting masculinities and femininities in her or his world and create his or her own identity. These identities, involving gender, ethnicity and class, must be taken into context, in regard to place and time, and the individual's agency within wider structures always must be accounted for in these negotiations. Given the fluidity and multi-dimensionality of these identities, interpreting and analyzing actions of individuals can be exceptionally puzzling. Some individuals are particularly enigmatic. These students often resisted the norms, with what appeared sometimes to be apparent comfort and often apparent discomfort, entered, at times quite willingly and at times quite forcibly, borderlands of normative gender behaviour, and sometimes traveled far beyond. Though some of the students could be classified as Grieg's 'positive deviants', some could not. How do these exceptional individuals look at literacy? And what are the effects of these 'deviants' on the others in the classrooms?

What follows are descriptions of events, encounters, and excerpts from interviews with some of these students whom I have thought a great deal about and concluded with the idea that I had no idea. In my analysis, I was left thinking: am I reading this right?

5.1 Thomas

Thomas does not want the digital recorder on during his interview.

“Do you like to read?” I ask Thomas. He nods. He is dressed in an orange t-shirt and olive and khaki army fatigue pants. His brown eyes are wide and he is smiling. He is quite still other than his legs occasionally swinging freely in the air. Thomas is a little smaller than most of the Grade 1 students in his class. His legs don't reach the floor as he sits on the stool in the middle of the Breakfast Room of Bernard Regional School.

“Tell me why you like to read?” Thomas looks at me and then pulls his elbow on the table and strokes his chin in scholarly contemplation but there is no reply. He continues to look directly at me, eyes unblinking, and I have the sense that I am being examined or judged. I smile nervously.

“Are you a good reader, Thomas?” Again, he nods.

“Tell me why you are a good reader?” He calmly picks up a pencil, pulls the lined foolscap on the table near to him, and on the first line neatly prints: *becus I look at the words* I am relieved he is writing. I must have passed the examination.

“Are you getting better at reading?” Thomas looks at me, eyes still wide open, and nods.

“Tell me why you say that.” Pencil still in hand, Thomas writes on the second line: *becus I practice*

When I ask who he thinks are the better readers, boys or girls, Thomas shakes his head and refuses to respond.

In the two interviews I had with Thomas, I learned that he thinks reading is important at both school and home, where his mother reads to him. He prefers reading by himself, but when given a choice of a reading partner prefers an adult over a student. Thomas

prefers when that adult is a man; Mr. Evan is the only male that I could determine who reads to Thomas. (This is the only time Thomas chose to answer a questions specifically involving gender – choices between males and females.) Thomas does not like being asked questions about books while they are being read. He would rather just *read thru*.

When asked about what books he did like, it appeared he knew the answer but chose not to respond. The books he regularly chose from the school library were from the *I Spy* series, books where one locates certain images on a visually cluttered page, and a book illustrating a nursery rhyme, a text well below his reading ability; this appears to be the only word-oriented book he took out during the time of my research. Thomas doesn't like *long* books in what may be a simple avoidance of work and help explain his titles withdrawn from the school library. Thomas likes playing games on computers, at which he considers himself *good*.

* * * * *

Thomas is a six-year old Filipino boy. His family, composed of a father, mother, and older brother, emigrated from the Philippines to Canada. Thomas is described by his teacher as academically strong and friendly, at the “top of his game”. Thomas is also a selective mute. I am told that Thomas' father is concerned that the school will interpret his son's silence as a show of disrespect. Thomas' father states that Thomas speaks, both Tagalog and English, at home, but speech has never been heard at school either by an adult or by a peer. No reason for Thomas' muteness could be given.

I remember being told by one of my professors to listen especially to what is not said when interviewing. I don't think this is what she meant. Though unusual, Thomas' situation and behaviour are not unique.

In many ways, his responses echo the answers of other students. Thomas practices his

reading; again, this active involvement in reading illustrates a masculinity, as I explained in Chapter 3. His choice of books well below his reading level may be a form of resistance bound up in masculinity and power issues. Thomas thoroughly enjoys the active computer games. The masculine/feminine normative binary is being maintained. Reading, as other children have noted, especially the ones of Filipino descent, is the mother's concern at home. Thomas' desire to read alone is not unusual for those students who are good readers. It may demonstrate a masculine sense of independence. That he prefers a man over a woman to read to him is not an unusual response either. Many of the boys in the research sample answered similarly. Everything is normative, but all is not normal. The manner in which Thomas chooses to answer or especially not to answer is unusual. Thomas may not know the word 'resistance' but he knows what it sounds like and how to use it. What is Thomas resisting? Why has he chosen this method of resistance?

* * * * *

It was literacy centres time when I walked into the room. Literacy centres, in this case, involved a variety of activities created by the teacher, each activity based at a different table within the room. These activities included spelling, jigsaw puzzles, clay modeling, and reading books. The students rotate within small groups among these centres in ten to fifteen minute intervals. Thomas was at the front white board with his group composed of both boys and girls. They were to practice their spelling list words from the *-orn* family. Some of the other students in Thomas' group were very good at drawing *anime* characters. No one bothered Thomas or infringed upon his space on the far left of the board, and occasionally, Thomas would stop and look at what the other students were and should not be doing. I started to read the words to the group and see who could spell the

list correctly. This caught the attention of the group only briefly and very soon the group of five was reduced to two: Thomas and a girl. These two students even attempted 'bonus' challenging words I created. They competitively checked each other's work. Thomas was ever bright-eyed and smiling as I left for another literacy centre.

* * * * *

There were fifteen minutes left in the day and the teacher, myself, and two other adults were busily wrapping the clay pots the children had made for Mother's Day. An attempt was being made by the teacher to attain enough control within the room to elevate the chaos to disorder. Susan and Thomas sat quietly at the table beside the teacher's desk where the crumpling of tissue paper and cellophane was being drowned out by the other students who were climbing and wrestling. Neither Thomas nor Susan spoke. They smiled at each other and played with the cover of a book which sat on the table.

As we finished wrapping the pots, Mr. Evan told the class to clean the room. Thomas unreservedly assisted, working beside and with boys who would soon return to their battle royale on the couch.

With the closing bell ringing, Thomas headed home, pot in his backpack.

* * * * *

Some students are placed into the "borderland spaces" (Anzaldua 1987) due to various reasons such as socio-economic status, special needs, or ethnicity. Some students place themselves into the borderlands. In his own way, Thomas is able to enter and leave the classroom whenever he chooses. He wields great power by his decision. It may be the only time and place he can possess such power. I do not know.

He is left alone and not pestered by the students in most cases and he is not shunned by the students when co-operation is necessary. Thomas' strong academic abilities

including his reading and writing, which are far beyond the level of his peers, may grant him respect and some degree of acceptance, as was mentioned for Solomon, or Thomas' ability may cause him to be considered even more different and further alienate him.

Again, I do not know. Though the Filipino social groupings, including both boys and girls, in the classes were apparent, Thomas was not part of any such association in his room. Thomas' behaviour made him a self-imposed exile. Ethnicity may traverse gender borders but it will not or cannot cross other social demarcations.

The performance of gender is interactively involved with class, ethnicity, personal agency and in Thomas' case, what else? I do not know.

5.2 Mohammed

We have already met Mohammed in his altercation with Frank during reading time and with his valentine work with Solomon. The first day I was in his class, Mohammed came up to me and said I looked strong. Thoughts of normative masculinity and father figures ran through my mind. Mohammed's family emigrated from Afghanistan, though I could not determine the year they left. From comments made by Mohammed and others, the transition to Canada was not an easy one.

Mohammed immediately grabs your attention when you walk into the classroom. He is taller than most of his peers and appears much older. His behaviour also garners your attention – especially if you are a visiting teacher or observing anthropologist.

Mohammed was caught in the hallway calling out, “Heh, look at the hot chicks!” When questioned, he had no idea what it meant.

Mohammed tries to spend a great deal of time with Frank, Ted, and Abraham.

Mohammed particularly wants to associate with Frank, though this desire is often not

reciprocated. The teacher spends a great deal of her time with Mohammed, Frank, Ted, Abraham – often this time is in the hallway discussing their behaviour in the classroom. Depending on the individuals involved, various forms of covert and overt class routine disruptions occur. Mohammed usually falls into the overt category. In many ways this behaviour has alienated Mohammed not only from the 'good' students but from the “kingpins” as well. I have been told ethnicity plays a role here. In an attempt to gain acceptance, Mohammed has been exiled. This compares ironically with Thomas, who in his manner is self-exiled but appears to be more a part of the class. Class acceptance, though, is hard to attain and define especially when one is standing outside the borders.

Social banishment may also occur because of academics. According to the teacher, Mohammed has exceptionally weak literacy skills. I have even witnessed him misspelling his first name. Interestingly, though, when he was interviewed, he feels he is a good reader. Again, interestingly, the vast majority of students when questioned about their reading ability saw themselves in a very favourable light. I am still not sure of what I think of this conclusion. This echoes the conversation I had with the teacher mentioned in Chapter 3. Begley (2000:109) wrote “The aim was not to establish how precise their self-perceptions were in comparison to some 'objective' standard. It is the children's conception of themselves that will affect their self-concept, regardless of how accurate their self-perceptions are.” Is an inaccurate self-concept a good aim? I am still not sure what I think of Begley's comment.

Roles and power relations are often fluid. As I demonstrate, Mohammed is sometime oppressed by his cohorts; sometimes, he is the oppressor. Masculinities are constantly being negotiated and adapted given ever changing factors. As mentioned before, individuals can exist in many, sometimes contradictory, subject positions simultaneously

(Imms 2000, Skelton 2001).

Mohammed, wearing a football hoodie and jeans, waited for me to take him to the conference room; he didn't know where it was. (This is very different from Frank's actions.) Mohammed sat at the head chair. His head was propped up by a hand and he remained quite still for most of the interview.

MK: So Mohammed, do you like to read?

Mohammed: Yeah.

MK: Why do you say 'yeah'?

Mohammed: Um. Because (pause) I don't know. . .

MK: Are you a good reader?

Mohammed: Yeah.

MK: Why do you say 'yeah'?

Mohammed: I am good at Bixit (*Biscuit*) books.

Mohammed explains that the *Biscuit* books are about a dog. He and Frank read them to the teacher. Mohammed concludes, “We . . . um . . . are good readers.”

MK: Does anyone tell you you are a good reader?

Mohammed: Uh. (Voice drops.) Yeah.

MK: Who tells you you are a good reader?

Mohammed (with almost a sense of fear): Sometimes my friends – not in here somewhere else . . .

MK: If your friends didn't tell you would you still know you are a good reader?

Mohammed: Uh-hum.

MK: How would you know if your friends didn't tell you you were a good reader?

Mohammed: Um because like my friends have books at their house right and I read them and they watch me.

MK: Are you getting better?

Mohammed: Yeah.

MK: How do you know you are getting better?

Mohammed: *The teacher* is helping me.

MK: Does *the teacher* tell you you are getting better?

Mohammed: Yeah.

MK: What makes a person a good reader?

Mohammed: Um. (Pause.) I don't know.

. . .

MK: Is reading important to you?

Mohammed: I . . . Sometimes.

MK: What times is it important to you?

Mohammed: Not a lot.

MK: Is reading important in school?

Mohammed: Um. (Pause.) I think.

MK: Is reading important at home?

Mohammed: Not that much.

Mohammed likes books about *Spiderman* and *Biscuit* the dog. He doesn't like scary ones. He could not explain why. His choices from the library reflect his likes and reading ability.

When given a choice between reading by himself or with others, Mohammed prefers reading “with other people – maybe”. He prefers adults over children because adults “help you read better”. When asked if he prefers boys or girls with whom to read, he said some boys and some girls. Friends and cousins were preferred. Men were preferred over women as reading partners because “I have no idea.” He doesn't like being questioned while reading.

In the negotiation of identity, Mohammed is being battered in the maelstrom nexus of ethnicity, class, and gender. At times, I wondered if Mohammed was going to stay afloat; he was the only student in the research with whom I felt this. His status as an immigrant from a non-English nation has obvious repercussions for his skills in English. It was apparent from his interview that he was trying to hide his inabilities in the language. Mohammed was not very adept at this, though. His literacy weaknesses were socially used against him as already seen. There was mention of racism, also, though I did not witness this. His ethnicity also may have great impact on his performance of gender. The normative hegemonic masculinities of his place of origin may not coincide with the masculinities of his adopted land and I wondered if he was adapting to the new hierarchy of gender performances. Mohammed's behaviour could often be described by the term “laddish” especially with his derogatory remarks regarding women. Yet, his attempts to join the “kingpins” of his room, who often acted in similar fashion to him, were routinely

rebuffed. At many times and in many ways, Mohammed was often last and least in the class.

I struggled with not knowing how to interpret Mohammed's behaviour and gender performances. Part of this difficulty may be due to Mohammed's ethnicity and my lack of knowledge and vocabulary to describe Afghani masculinities. My limitation is made apparent by the use of such Euro-centric terms as “laddish” and “kingpin”.

Mohammed was continually left in isolation. Though identity-creation is a stormy process in many children's lives, there is usually a safe port to weigh anchor. Mohammed appears to be constantly caught in rough seas. I do not know how he will continue to negotiate his existence.

5.3 Ted

I was helping the class with a valentine math pattern and then a wordfind while the teacher dealt with other matters in the hallway. Ted's short red hair and constantly darting eyes stood out against his white skin. Ted was not working on anything and when I asked him about it, he said he didn't feel like it. I mentioned staying in for recess to finish the assignment. Ted said the teacher didn't do that. The teacher-aide in the classroom heard him and said he had to “fix it”. This and “beliefs” seem to be trigger words that achieve a desired result by an adult. Ted admitted to lying.

Ted is reading at age level according to the teacher. Ted is a “force” within the room. He usually associates with Frank, Abraham, and Mohammed. Though he is capable of being helpful he will often try to disrupt the room, though he will usually get “a third party to do the dirty work.” Last year's behaviour seemed to have been more overtly disruptive. I quickly learned in my experiences with Ted to be careful how exchanges

were worded and how any situation could be manipulated. Ted appeared to be in a constant state of covert operations: Grade 1 guerilla warfare.

Ted was very very restrained during his interview. He put his head on his folded arms which rested on the table. He often answered more with gestures than with words. The interview was obviously seen as a power struggle. It's a prisoner's right to remain silent. No information will be ceded to the enemy.

Ted nodded he liked to read though he would not say why. He also nodded he was a good reader because he was at a high level. Again, this high level was not echoed by his teacher. What little else Ted volunteered included that one had to practice to become a good reader. He also mentioned that reading was important to him and both Mom and Dad read to him. Mom reads to him more frequently. Both Mom and Dad read at home, mostly on the computer, though Mom does her homework. Ted likes being questioned as he reads because you “know what's happening”.

Books Ted has taken from the library include topics like Canada, holidays, animals such as rabbits, monkeys, and tigers, and fiction, including books from the *Biscuit* series as well as books similar to *I Spy*.

Much of Ted's behaviour and many of Ted's responses during the interview fall within the normative masculine parameters; though, to be honest, of all my interviews and encounters, I felt the greatest sense of distance and removal with Ted. I am not sure why I had this reaction. His comments about practicing reading and Mom reading at home repeat what many students have already said. Ted's genuine belief or hopeful articulation that he is a better reader than what his teacher has evaluated, again, is not uncommon. The association of Dad with the computer and technology is not unusual. His lying in the classroom and refusing to speak much during the interview are examples of power

manipulation, and again, not unexpected. It is the constancy and degree to which Ted will negotiate and apply strategies of power that are exceptional. It is interesting that Ted has gone from a more overt hegemonic masculine use of power, the direct challenge to authority, the “hyper-masculine”, to a covert application, the aforementioned use of 'third parties'. It may be, as one access to power for Ted was denied, he created another. Ted's devious schemes can create difficult circumstances for these recruited individuals. These boys, and they are all boys, fall behind academically and often get into trouble with the teacher but it does not terminate the tug-o-wars which are played out among Ted, his peers, and the adults.

Though Ted may represent a 'typical' boy reading with some challenges, he also represents the exceptional personalities encountered while children negotiate their days at school. As mentioned previously, Ted is a 'force' in the room but what exactly is the impact of this force on the other boys? What will be the impact on Ted?

5.4 Travis

Travis is Aboriginal. He is very energetic and often loses focus on the lesson. He is also quite an artist and is proud of his drawings which are detailed, an unusual feature for boys, as discussed previously. According to his teacher, Travis sees himself as a protector of smaller boys and girls. His teacher has witnessed Travis blocking an accidental blow to someone with his body and then showing no pain from the blow. Though Travis predominantly plays with other boys in the classroom, he does not appear to have a strong bond with any of his peers. He is something of an outsider though he is quite outspoken and sociable. Travis is below grade level in reading according to his teacher.

In our first interview, Travis asked to go to the bathroom before we even started.

Eventually, I had to hunt him down. He was wearing a long-sleeved striped top. He pulled at his sleeves constantly. When not working on his sleeves, he would run his hands through his short hair or pull at the shoelaces of his runners. He also yawned quite a bit. Travis loved the digital recorder and wanted to play with the buttons during the interview.

MK: Is reading important to you?

Travis: Yeah.

MK: Why is it important to you?

Travis: Because if there was something important and you think it won't be important, that's dangerous.

MK: Why dangerous?

Travis: Because it might be something bad.

MK: Is reading important at school?

Travis: Yeah . . . because if you were to be the teacher's helper and you don't know the words right (pause) you need to read for that.

. . .

MK: Is reading important at home?

Travis: Yeah . . . because if your parents don't know what it is and they don't have their glasses you could tell them for you. (This creates an interesting dilemma of how Travis would assist since he has said he cannot read the labels.)

Interestingly, Travis appears to be motivated by the desire to help others, what may be labeled a feminine trait though his assistance can demonstrate definite masculine physical characteristics. What motivates Travis to help others is key. Is it an altruistic behaviour demonstrating compassion, a trait often associated with femininity, although certainly not exclusively, or mimicking a superhero and illustrating masculine strength and power? Though Travis never overtly recognized himself as Aboriginal or labeled himself as such, ethnicity could be a factor. Travis' desire to help was discussed with Aboriginal friends. The concepts of helping and giving are key teachings in these cultures but even these friends found such responses as Travis' unusual. And, not unlike Tony, there may be a fear of embarrassment at being unable to assist the teacher, though this is not clearly stated. Given Travis' forthright manner, embarrassment, I believe, is not as great a factor. Travis, for all the importance he places on reading, feels he cannot read at all.

The books Travis had withdrawn from the school library were an assortment of superhero and non-fiction animal books, the typical 'boys' books'.

* * * * *

Ms. LeCoiff gave her lesson on transitional objects, part of the Roots of Empathy Program. Out loud, Travis blurted he still went to bed with a stuffed toy. There was no reaction from the class. No policing. No negative comments. Everyone appeared very comfortable and open. Travis later added, “I wish I was a baby again.” I think of the affects of aging, yet another factor, on the dynamic negotiation of masculinities.

* * * * *

I am not privy to the personal history and life of Travis though comments made by Travis and others imply they have been “challenging”. Without such information, I can only wonder why Travis, the protector, wishes to return to his past and a time of complete dependence and . . . What else?

5.5 Scott

Early in March, I remember having a conversation with Scott. He was sitting at his seat as he explained how he once had pulled a muscle in his leg. He then discussed that he saw someone tap-dancing on the TV. He was very impressed by the show. He now wanted tap-dancing shoes for Christmas. I was not sure what struck me the most: the desire to tap-dance or discussing Christmas gifts in March.

According to Scott's teacher, Scott has “matured” a great deal this year. As a teacher, I am interpreting this to mean that there were some behavioural “challenges” last year. Other than being reminded to play in a safe way, Scott gets along with his peers, especially the boys. The teacher did not mention Scott as one of the dominant

personalities in the room. Scott is quite helpful while in the classroom. I was surprised when informed the teacher felt that Scott was reading below grade level.¹²

Scott was my very first interview for this research. He volunteered. He walked into the conference room and sat at the table, arms inside the chair, but appeared self-assured. Scott was a big boy. He had a page cut which exposed his earring he wore in the left ear. His sweatshirt was blue with *School of Cool* written across it. He spoke clearly and eloquently.

MK: Do you like to read?

Scott: Ummm. Yes.

MK: Tell me why you like reading?

Scott: Ummm. Because you . . . because you can learn different stuff and it helps you . . . um . . . like if you are reading a cooking book it tells you what you can make.

MK: Are you a good reader?

Scott: Mmmm. Well, I have to sound them (the words) out first.

. . .

MK: Are you getting better at reading?

Scott: I would say yes.

MK: Why do you say that?

Scott: Because when I was just four I had to sound them out and now I have to sound them out just a little bit.

Scott then explained that people who do not try to sound out words are usually the poor readers. Scott applies an active rather than passive strategy. The mention of a cooking book is interesting given that the domestic is often associated with the feminine.

MK: Is reading important to you?

Scott: I would have to say yes.

MK: Why do you say yes.

Scott: Because my mom wants me to be a teacher.

MK: Do you want to be a teacher?

Scott: I want to be an artist.

Here again, a student has correlated reading with economic success. Reading allows access to career choices though the choice may not be heteronormatively masculine.

Mom and reading are also paired once again. Scott later mentions that he attends art

classes after school where he drew and painted *The Mona Lisa* and *The Scream*.

MK: Is reading important in school?

Scott: Yes.

MK: Why?

Scott: Because maybe they want the children to get good grades.

MK: And who are 'they'?

Scott: The people in Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

MK: And what are you going to do with the grades?

Scott: I honestly don't know.

This response is similar to Myron's where the motivation to read is externally created.

“They” control and determine the standing of the children, of whom Scott is a part.

Indirectly, Scott is referring to himself in third person. Scott perceives this as a

benevolent relationship, though, as “they” want the children to do well. This is in contrast to Myron who exists with fear.

. . .

MK: Is reading important at home?

Scott: Mmm. To my mom and dad, yes.

MK: And to you?

Scott: Yes.

MK: Who does more reading at home, your mom or dad?

Scott: Mmm. My mom . . . She likes to read stories to me and my sister.

Again, femininity, mother and sister, and domesticity are enjoined with literacy. Scott mentions that his mother “writes stuff” but not for children. She also records “stuff”. Pleasing her appears to be a motivator for Scott. Scott does mention his father but, as mentioned before, fathers play a lesser role.

Scott likes books which are funny. He does not like chapter books because he doesn't know what's going on. There aren't enough pictures. He does not willingly take these. Books he has taken from the library include those based on *Star Wars* and those describing animals. Again, it is a very 'typically' boy's list.

When asked for examples of readers Scott liked, he mentioned his older brother

because his brother did not stop while reading. Scott gets lost if people stop and ask questions too frequently. When asked specifically if he preferred men or women reading to him he gave a list of three adults in the school, all women. Given that his teacher is male, this is very interesting.

MK: In general, who do you think are better readers, boys or girls?

Scott: I would have to go with boys and girls.

MK: Why do you say that?

Scott: Some of them do real good.

In my opinion, Scott is an example of “positive deviation”. Though reading continues to be a challenge, and he readily admits this, he persists and improves. Scott's self-perceptions and those of the external world are synchronized. Scott's interests are varied and allow him to explore many aspects of the masculinities'/ femininities' spectrum with self-confidence. This crossing and blurring of these socially constructed borders, a goal of this research, is a journey which Scott is undertaking. Though gender identity is individually framed, it is important to look at the factors which helped construct Scott's identity. These factors must be encouraged to allow the freedom of choice without social stigma, if “positive deviation” is to become the norm. But what are these varying factors and how do they interplay? Given the individuality of each student, can these factors be duplicated? Is it possible or even desirable to do so?

5.6 Summary

In the construction of his or her identity, each child must negotiate an endless variety of masculinities and femininities. Ethnicity, class, and personal agency affect every moment of this journey. Some, like Thomas, resist in an exceptional manner exiling themselves into the borderlands of normative gender behaviour. Some, like Mohammed,

are forcibly banished into these borderlands. Others, like Ted, entrench themselves in certain scapes. Some, like Scott, though, have a passport which allows them to move freely and comfortably – a diplomatic immunity from the visa restrictions of normative gender behaviour. Though we may analyze the journeys taken, we cannot predict and determine the path. There are too many knowns and unknowns to chart. Each child is unique as is their performance and the factors which affect that performance.

Given that books are the major source of the literacy programming discussed in this research, the next chapter examines the books available to and read by the students. Also, the forms of masculinities and femininities which are illustrated in these texts are described.

**CHAPTER 6 – WHAT'S AVAILABLE TO READ:
LIBRARY PERIOD, SCHOLASTIC BOOK ORDERS, AND
SANCTIONED MASCULINITIES**

. . . texts are never neutral, which is why we engage in analytically unpacking the words and images in them. . . . texts advantage some while disadvantaging others by foregrounding particular themes and “backgrounding” others. (Albert, Vasquez, and Harste 2008: 9-10)

6.1 Sanctioned Masculinities and the School Libraries

It was library time and the children sat cross-legged on the carpeted floor within a cozy nook created by three bookshelves in the school library. Though mixed and scattered, most of the girls sat near the front and most of the boys sat further back. Ms. Wolfe, the librarian, was ready for them with a huge smile and two books. Valentine's Day was rapidly approaching and this appeared to determine her selection for the day. From her chair in front of the class, she held up the first book. “*One Zillion Valentines* (Model:1981) by Frank Model,” she said displaying the illustration on the cover of the book to the audience of Grade 1 students. The children curiously looked at the simple drawing. It featured two boys, whom we would shortly learn were called Milton and Marvin, standing with boxes and a wagon full of valentines.

In this story, Milton and Marvin create valentines to give to everyone in the neighbourhood. The boys have many left over and sell them, making enough money to buy the chocolates at which they were looking in the beginning of the story. Though the story starts with sharing and thinking of others, it ends with the boys becoming successful entrepreneurs and being materially rewarded for their efforts.

* * * * *

Library period, which was approximately thirty minutes, occurred once a cycle for all

classrooms in this study. The format of library period was also consistent for both schools as it is in almost every elementary school I have experienced. The first ten to fifteen minutes was spent as a group. Usually, but not always, the librarian, sitting in a designated area, would read one or two books to the class who would sit in their designated area. The book or books chosen may be related to a seasonal event, the subject being taught in the classroom, or a book new to the library. The text may be simply the reader's choice. Questions would be asked by the librarian about the text being read; similarly, questions could be asked by the students. Questions may arise before, during, and after reading. Afterwards the students were allowed to look through the library and find books which they wished to borrow and then take home. The number of books and titles which could be taken never appeared to be an issue when I observed the classes. Most students took one to three texts, with one or two being the most common. The books were due the following library period.

There are striking differences at Marne and Bernard Regional Schools with regards to the libraries and their use by the students. The libraries at Bernard Regional and Marne Schools are of similar size, both in physical space and the number of books available; however, it should be noted that Marne is a kindergarten to Grade 5 school whereas Bernard Regional is a kindergarten to Grade 8 institution. And, as mentioned previously, Marne's student population is only about half of Bernard Regional making the ratio of books to students at Marne twice that of Bernard Regional. (The availability and use of computers may be thought to compensate, especially for the older grades of Bernard Regional, but again, the facilities of Marne outstrip that of the kindergarten to Grade 8 school.)

The quality of books borrowed by the students differed greatly in the two libraries.

The books at Marne appeared to be newer and in better condition. This was particularly striking in the sample of books I read and analyzed which appear in Appendix H. Again, these books were those borrowed by the research students during library periods. These aspects, newness and condition, are emphasized in comments made by students of Bernard Regional, particularly Amos, whom we have met, and Joann, who discuss the economic value of books.

MK: Is reading important to you?

Joann (slowly and emphatically): It's *really* important to me.

MK: Why is it important to you?

Joann: Um. Well. (Deep sigh.) Because some books are really expensive and I don't want them to break. So I kind of take care of them a little.

It is hard not to draw some correlation between the economic value of the texts and the heavily represented working class population of the school; such economic comments were not made as frequently by students of Marne School, an institution with greater middle-class representation. Interestingly, these comments were made by a boy and girl who often exhibited hegemonic and dominant gender traits (Edna from Marne School also fits into this grouping.)

Fewer books were taken out by the students at Bernard Regional. In many cases, students were not allowed to take out new books until they had returned the previously borrowed ones. This is a common practice in many schools I have encountered. This situation occurred quite frequently within the research sample at Bernard Regional; less so at Marne. Often fines are levied against students' families when books were lost – or more accurately, fines were 'attempted' to be levied as such policies are difficult to enforce. Again, lost books were a more common concern at Bernard than at Marne.

All of these conditions, the physical quality of the books, number of books available in the library, number of books borrowed and rate of returns, and number of books lost

may again reflect socio-economic realities. It is particularly interesting to note that boys were much less likely to return books than girls but, again, it should also be emphasized that boys greatly outnumbered the girls in the classrooms. In other cases, the students did not find a book they wanted or in which they were interested. Again, this occurred more frequently at Bernard Regional and again, may be due to availability and socio-economic conditions.

An important similarity in the two libraries, and what appears to be true in all the school division libraries, is that the librarians are women. This equation of “the feminine” and literacy is not lost on the adults in these position nor, I believe, on the students.

Though a general description of the libraries is important, it is vital that the individual texts are looked at critically in regard to gender stereotyping, especially by the targeted audience: students. “The way the text is interpreted acts back on the student and extends an identity, which the student may or may not wish to appropriate. . . . learning has social and identity consequences for students” (Murphy and Ivinson 2008:148-149). A student may abandon a text if it conflicts with his or her identity; alternatively, a student may adapt her or his identity to the given text.

Certain stereotypes with normative masculine and feminine roles are still maintained in many of the books currently read by students in elementary schools. These traditional aspects and relationships manifest themselves in many ways. Male characters are depicted alone more frequently than female ones (Gooden and Gooden 2001). In fact, with regards to main characters, the ratio of male to female characters is 2 to 1 and in terms of illustrations, there were 53% more of males than females (Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus and Young 2006). Looking at the sample of books taken by this research group, the numbers for gender representation are similar to those stated in the studies of Gooden

and Gooden (2001), and Hamilton et al. (2006).

The stereotyping of traditionally gendered occupations versus nontraditional ones is striking. In picture books, the ratio is approximately 9 to 1. Examples of this include female characters being illustrated as nurses, dancers, teachers, nannies, and librarians. It is interesting to note that female compared to male characters were more likely not to be employed (Gooden and Gooden 2001, Hamilton et al. 2006, Oskamp and Wolterbeek 1996). Looking at the brief summaries of many of the texts withdrawn by the students in this research seems to again affirm this data. By far and away, female characters often appeared to be unemployed mothers usually with secondary roles in the plot of the book. (Examples from Appendix H, the library books taken by the students within the research group, include: *Baby Bear, Baby Bear What do you See?* (Martin Jr. 2007), *The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey* (Berenstain 1987), *The Dumb Bunnies go to the Zoo* (Denim 1997), *Franklin and Harriet* (Bourgeois 2001), *Just My Friend and Me* (Mayer 1988), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Folktale, Faulkner ill. 1965), *Luck of the Irish* (Paulsen 1989) and *Oscar's Starry Night* (Stimson 1999) among others.) Teacher was another common role for female characters in the borrowed list. (Examples include: *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler* (Cuyler 2007) and *Thomas' Snowsuit* (Munsch 1985).) The male characters had a wide scope of positions from principal (*Thomas' Snowsuit* (Munsch 1985)) to knight (*The Errant Knight* (Tompert 2003) and *Men of Iron* (Pyle 1990)). *Dreams to Grow On* (Hurley Deriso 2002) is the one very noticeable exception to these stereotypes. In this book a girl dreams about various occupations from the traditional feminine roles of mother and teacher to the masculinely associated sea captain, scientist, and architect. The expansion of the feminine into the traditional masculine roles is important to note here.

There are improvements to this general stereotyping, though. Hunter and Chick (2005), in their evaluation of stories in basal readers, those readers specifically used to teach specific reading skills, found animal and child characters were equally divided among males and females, though the ratio of adult human male main characters to adult human female main characters was 4 to 1. The books withdrawn from this research sample do not appear to represent the gender equality as given by Kirsh. Looking at Appendix H, male animals dominate especially in title roles. Examples of this include *Stanley at Sea* (Bailey 2008), *Wings of Change* (Hill 2001), *Oscar's Starry Night* (Stimson 1999), and *The Parrot Tico Tango* (White 2004). Female animal characters are common but often in smaller roles or, when portraying the protagonist, play traditional feminine roles as in *The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza)* (Sturges 1999). Illustrations still favoured males but not to the same lopsided degree. Also, men and women were depicted holding the same jobs more frequently, though traditional gender-roles were still typical. Men were overwhelmingly displayed as labourers, astronauts, and farmers, while women were again more likely to be depicted as unemployed and domestic.

* * * * *

It was now time for the second book. “*The Valentine Bears* (Bunting 1983) by Eve Bunting,” Ms. Wolfe announced as she again showed the cover. This time the illustration depicts Mr. and Mrs. Bear sharing a valentine heart. By now, the children, both boys and girls, were restless and not quite as attentive as they had been for the first book.

In this story, Mrs. Bear wakes up early from her hibernation to surprise her husband for Valentine's Day. She makes a sign, prepares honey and insects for a snack, creates two poetry valentines, and grooms herself for her husband. Her husband pretends to be asleep then surprises her with chocolate ants, and Mrs. Bear is very pleased. Everyone is happy

in the end, including the students.

* * * * *

The imbalance in apparent effort of this happily married (heterosexual) couple is obvious yet taken to be an appropriate Valentine story to be read in school. Mrs. Bear prepares food, poetry, and herself; Mr. Bear remembered to buy chocolates. Reciprocity does not imply equality. The implication of cooking, poetry and beauty being connected with femininity should also be noted. The maintenance of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity is alive and well in the bear world and thus in ours.

As students move from picture and primary texts to chapter books, the stereotyping of female and male characters and roles continues.

Various investigations of elementary school children suggest that stereotyping (of occupations) becomes increasingly rigid up to about the fourth grade and then begins to decline . . . These results impressively document the rather amazing ability of even preschoolers to detect, store, and be able to act on gender-related differences in activities and interests. (Intons-Peterson 1988:25)

A similar pattern is demonstrated when personality and social attributes are discussed. (Intons-Peterson 1988:25-26) It is acknowledged though, due to the vast number of chapter books available, more comprehensive current studies need to be done (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993; Kirsh 2010:109) .

Kirsh (2010), in his comprehensive study on media and youth, discussed not only quantitative categorizations of male and female representations but also qualitative, focusing on traits and the maintenance of the domestic sphere as feminine domain:

. . . males were more likely to be portrayed independent and creative than females, while at the same time, males were rarely depicted doing household chores or caring for children. In contrast, females were characterized more often as dependent and submissive than males. (Kirsh 2010:106)

Kirsh (2010) using Evans and Davies (2000) and Witt (1996) further discussed commonly portrayed characteristics in male and female characters:

(Similarly, Evans and Davies (2000) found that) . . . males, more so than females, were characterized as aggressive, argumentative, and competitive. In fact, male characters in basal readers rarely show feminine traits, such as being emotionally expressive, nurturing, tender, and understanding. Females, in contrast, have been depicted as having both masculine and feminine traits since the 1990's. (Kirsh 2010:109-110)

Kirsh (2010) and Diekman and Murnen (2004) discussed the concept of “benevolent sexism” in children's texts.

At times, such stereotypes manifest themselves in the form of benevolent sexism, defined by the presence of at least one of the following: (a) Women in traditional female roles are idealized, (b) women are viewed as “delicate creatures” requiring protection, and (c) women are portrayed as overly romantic. (Diekman and Murnen 2004)

Fairy tales, still popular among the Grade 1 students of this research, often depict benevolent sexism. The plot of the handsome prince rescuing a beautiful woman from some evil-doer, and then both hero and maiden falling instantly and madly in love with each other is told in many library books. The wedding of pomp and ceremony and the couple living happily ever after ends the story. (The maiden, of course, often will do all the domestic chores and happily so in this wedded bliss - just look at Mrs. Bear.) The themes of the fragile female needing protection by the strong male, uber-romance, and traditional gender role idealization are all illustrated in the well-known and time-tested stories. (Kirsh 2010:109) The concept of benevolent sexism is portrayed in many of the texts taken by the students from the library. This includes: *Classic Star Wars: Luke's Fate* (Thomas 1996), *Disney's The Lion King* (Disney 1994), *George and the Dragon* (Wormell 2003), and *Gus and Button* (Freyman 2001) among others. Disney books based on Disney movies of classic fairy tales are some of the most popular texts borrowed by

female students in this research sample. Seven Disney titles were taken, more than any other series of books. Interestingly, no boys withdrew a Disney fairy tale book with characters and plots as discussed above.

Even when attempts are made to address gender stereotyping, the result is not always successful. Kirsh (2010:109) in discussing Diekman and Murnen's (2004) research on mid-elementary-school novels stated that

. . . nonsexist" books still portrayed female characters as having stereotypically female personalities and engaging in leisure activities and domestic chores that were also stereotypically female. Moreover, the amount of stereotyping in nonsexist books was equal to that of books deemed to be sexist. However, nonsexist books did portray female characters as adopting more male-stereotypic characteristics and roles than sexist books. Interestingly, there was no evidence of gender equality for males, as both sexist and nonsexist books failed to show male characters adopting many stereotypical female characteristics and roles. (Kirsh 2010:109)

Though the authors are discussing an older sample group, again, reviewing the books from Appendix H, the data collected during this study supports Kirsh: some of the female characters appropriated masculine characteristics (The very short list includes: *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch 1980), *Eleanor, Ellatony, Ellencake and Me* (Rubin 2003), *I Like Myself* (Beaumont 2004), but no male characters took on feminine characteristics. (It could be argued that the prince in *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch 1980) does take on a feminine role. In this book, the vain self-centred boy is discarded and not worth the princess' effort. It could also be perceived that the prince has the feminine role thrust upon him. *Franklin's Blanket* (Bourgeois 1995) discussed previously could also be included illustrating caring nurturing males.) Though the rigid boundaries of a masculine/feminine binary are being crossed, the hegemonic normative masculine still appears to be entrenched as alternative masculinities rarely appear in books. This comment is very

similar to the one made in the discussion of the students' reading practices.

Recently, I was informed of two teachers, one who was in the present study, using *King & King* (de Haan and Nijland 2000) in their classroom readings. The other teacher taught an older grade. This book deals with a prince looking for a partner and after reviewing a number of female candidates deciding he wants to be with another prince. The concern by an older administrator involved parent reaction of which there was none. No further details were given to me though both teachers are openly gay. This example further illustrates Ortner's (1994) and Sahlins' (1981) works. Ortner (1994:399) stated that alterations in the meaning of current relations can produce radical change just as surely as new groups with alternative perceptions coming into power. People with different interests will try to improve their lot when opportunities occur but will use traditional strategies to accomplish this. These strategies use "traditional patterns of (social) relations" but the circumstances to which these strategies are applied may be completely new. However, the response may not be as tradition anticipates, causing both the strategy and the patterns of relations to be questioned and may lead to structural transformation (Sahlins 1981:35). Though traditional structures, such as gender performances, may be adhered to by mature actors, change occurs.

It is interesting to note that concern for gender stereotyping is not a well researched domain at all age levels. "Gender representation and stereotyping in literature and textbooks for teens have been completely overlooked. I could find no research on the topic." (Kirsh 2010:110-111) This void in documentation is quite surprising and needs to be filled. This omission may represent the lack of current concerted effort to address gender in literacy. Again, is gender currently a non-issue? Unfortunately, extrapolation of the data given of texts in earlier age categories would not do much to alter the

heteronormative gender models for the boys in particular.

Again, the diversification and broadening of femininities appears to be addressed more frequently than that of masculinities. The masculine remains defined by a relatively narrow list of descriptors and these are usually associated with the culturally accepted and sanctioned hegemonic norm. Given the number of titles read by the students during this research, exceptions to both these statements were exceptionally rare.

6.2 What are Your Favourite Books to Read? (And What are You Actually Reading?)

Initially, one might assume that the books borrowed by the students and the students' favourite books, especially in terms of genres or series, were one and the same. The data recorded during the period of research illustrates that this was not necessarily accurate, though there were often similarities. This may be due to a variety of reasons: the children do not have access to the desired material, the texts borrowed and favourite books did not overlap during the time period for this research, and what a student says and does are two different actions. The latter point is of particular note. When I first started reviewing the material available in the school libraries, I asked the librarians what were the favourite or most read books for Grade 1 students. Series such as *The Berenstain Bears*, *Caillou*, and *Franklin* were given. I do not doubt the response of the librarians. They were experienced, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic educators who were both great assets to their respective schools. Interestingly, though, these books rarely appeared on the students' borrowed lists. This may be due to a variety of reasons, also. Some reasons may be similar to those listed above or the choices for the Grade 1 students in this research were not typical of the choices of Grade 1 students in previous years. One must also remember not all students are represented in this sample. But as before, what is said

and done may be different; the adults' perceptions may be different from the students' realities. It is something I need to remind myself with my views and my perceptions.

Most commonly, boys' and girls' favourite reading material and material which they took from the library were similar and both facets illustrated the binary oppositional categorization of the masculine and feminine. It should be noted that the books students took often showed a greater variety of genre and style than discussed in interviews. This longer list sometimes contained texts which undermined the oppositional binary categorization of genders.

MK: What is your favourite book?

Amos: Mostly my favourite book is Batman and Ben-10 and Spiderman.

MK: Why do you like those?

Amos: (With a huge grin) Because they're my heroes.

MK: Why are they your heroes?

Amos: Because they have powers.

We have been introduced to Amos earlier. His responses here illustrates the hegemonic masculine desire to possess strength and power. From the school library, Amos has taken out the *Luck of the Irish* (Paulsen 1989), *Men of Iron* (Pyle 1990), and *Oscar's Starry Night* (Stimson 1999). All of these books feature male protagonists who are energetic and adventuresome; two adjectives that could describe Amos himself. The first two books mentioned, in particular, feature the fantastical and romanticized history that fits well into the masculine superhero archetype mentioned by Amos. According to Gotz et al. (2005:133-138), it is not unusual for boys in their make-believe worlds to exist in male vs. male violence where superheroes can be recruited to assist in defense. This can be seen in the *Pokemon* series where one is competing and measuring oneself against another in an “aesthetics of fight”, no empathy or sympathy, just the thrill of battling and winning.

These books also feature benevolent sexism with the female character needing rescue

by the male hero. It is interesting to note that Amos' list is made of fiction whereas according to many teachers and librarians I asked, fiction is the domain of the girls; nonfiction is “boys' stuff”.

Amos also is able to define that with which he does not wish to be identified: the feminine.

MK: What books don't you like?

Amos: I don't really like girl books.

MK: What are girl books?

Amos: Like princess books. Like Hanna Montana books.

Frank also illustrates the hegemonic masculine with his responses and choices. Frank likes books about monster jam, fighting machines, and trucks. From the library he has taken out *The Big Bug Search* (Young 1996), *Dear Children of the Earth* (Schimmel 1994), and books about spiders, sharks, and dirt bikes. Nonfiction dominates Frank's list of books.

When asked about books he doesn't like Frank responded, “I don't know. Lots of books.” When asked for one specific example, Dr. Seuss' (1951) *Cat in the Hat* was the only one he could give though he couldn't discuss why he didn't like this book. Though Frank considers reading 'fun', he distances himself from the activity by stating it is not important to him.

It is often difficult to determine where the boundaries of the hegemonic masculine and dominant feminine are blurred.

MK: What type of books do you find interesting?

Tony: Mmm. Like stories . . . I like to read any kind of books . . . anything . . . There's nothing I don't like to read!

Initially, Tony refuses to situate himself with any particular genre, type of book, and hence labeling. He even mentions stories that might centre on the so-called “feminine”

storylines or main characters. Later in the conversation, Tony identifies with a traditional masculinist trope as he mentions that his favourite books are about cars and airplanes. Tony has taken the books from the library which deal about insects, snakes, monkeys, and cars. Obviously, Tony reads 'boys' books'. Even *Gingerbread Friends* (Brett 2008), the sole fiction story book taken by Tony, features a male protagonist facing adversity and ending victoriously. Tony doesn't like *Winnie the Pooh* and other baby books. "I like older stuff." This response fits well with the concept of the independent masculine. It may also explain Frank's response of a Dr. Seuss book; a text that may be considered for the young and dependent, linked to femininity.

Responses and books borrowed are not always easy to categorize, though. Brad, who earlier stated that he would much rather be outside playing than inside reading, interestingly starts to blur the gender lines.

MK: What type of books do you like to read?

Brad: Um. I like some books with pictures. So then I can find out what the word is.

In particular, Brad likes nature books. He's "really into nature". He could not be more specific than this. Interestingly, given his said indifference to reading, mentioned earlier, Brad appears to be an avid reader and has taken many books from the school library including: *Baby Bear, Baby Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin Jr. 2007), a text from the *Baby Touch and Feel* series, *Dance* (Grau 1998), *Dear Children of the Earth* (Schimmel 1994), *Wings of Change* (Hill 2001) and books about sharks and weather. The list is an interesting mix of fiction and nonfiction. The first two books listed are particularly interesting because they represent an interest in babies and the domestic feminine arena. This may be related to the Roots of Empathy program taking place in his class and discussed earlier. *Dance* (Grau 1998), also, is a curious example. This book features a

chapter on role reversal within the field of dance. This interest may be due to Brad's friendship with Scott who mentioned an interest in tap dancing. These choices reflect the varied influences of adults and peers in a student's performance of multiple masculinities. The performance and apparent acceptance of alternative masculinities appeared to be part of the gender regime in this classroom. Such blurring of gender boundaries was demonstrated many times in Mr. Zhao's room during my research.¹³ The reasons for this may be hard to discern and impossible to discretely define though it is very difficult not to take Mr. Zhao's gender performances and the Roots of Empathy program into account.

Policing of the feminine-masculine border was being monitored, though. The most flagrant example dealt with Myron.

Myron is an only child. His parents emigrated from the Philippines after Myron was born. Myron still has memories of the Philippines. Myron is part of a large extended family in Winnipeg and he spends a great deal of his time with his cousins. He entered kindergarten at Bernard Regional half way through the year.

Myron's teacher describes Myron as a "solid and stocky" boy who "stands his ground like a football player." Myron is a respectful student though he occasionally "goofs around". He predominantly socializes with the boys in the class though he will play with the girls. Myron, though, does not interact frequently with the other Filipino children in the classroom. The teacher thought this might be due to the fact that the other Filipino children are mostly girls and the other Filipino boys are those with special needs. Again, perceived boundaries vary given the mix of factors involved in an environment

Academically, the teacher considers Myron to be at grade level which is good concerning Myron is an English as an Alternative Language (E.A.L.) student. Myron exists in the nexus of dominant hegemonic, subordinated, and non-Western masculinities.

In our first interview, Myron chose to sit at the round table nearest the door in the Breakfast Room. During the interview, Myron peeled off tape from the table and then put it on his wrist. He would then remove the tape from his wrist and return it to the table. He wore a green and white t-shirt and sweats. He carried his hoodie in his hand. At first, he was quite nervous and then loosened up during the interview. He has a strong clear voice.

MK: What type of books do you like to read?

Myron: I like X-Man and Marvel things.

Myron in particular likes the Hulk and Iceman because “Hulk smash big metal man” and “because when the bad guys are coming he (Iceman) is gonna make them ice.”

This conversation is reminiscent of Amos and his superheroes.

MK: What kinds of books do you not like?

Myron: I don't like . . . I don't like flowers books.

MK: Why don't you like those?

Myron: Because my friends are laughing.

MK: Who are the friends that laugh at you about that?

Myron: Sven and . . . and . . . and . . . that's all.

MK: Does it bother you that he does that?

Myron: Nods.

MK: Do you tell him it bothers you?

Myron: Nods.

MK: What does he do then?

Myron: Huh?

MK: What does he do then? If he bothers you and you let him know, does he stop?

Myron: Yes.

MK: If he wasn't bothering you, would you look at those books?

Myron: No.

This is policing and a very interesting case because Sven is, in many ways, a child who violates many of the heteronormative masculine attributes and blurs the gender boundaries. It does give a good example how one can occupy many different roles. Here, both oppressed and the oppressor. It also illustrates Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's (2003:240) comment “. . . English as a site where alternative masculinities are policed.”

Myron appears to be an avid reader because he takes out many and varied books from the library. These include books about Pokemon, folktales, and fish. In this long mostly fiction list, there are no flower books.

As different masculinities are exhibited by the boys, so different masculinities are being demonstrated by the girls – in particular, certain girls. Edna's performance during her interview reminds me of the apathy of Ted, with the claimed indifference to reading, as well as Brad, with the lengthy list of library books. (The same book from the *Baby Touch and Feel* series appeared on both Edna and Ted's library withdrawals). Edna's comment that she doesn't like books about “boys' stuff” like “motorcycles, cars, and that” is the perfect complement to Amos' binary gender compartmentalization of “girls' books”. Or in another perspective, Ted, Brad, and Amos' behaviours reminds me of Edna.

Edna likes animal books; cats and dogs are mentioned specifically, but this is all done without enthusiasm in her voice. Interestingly, given that she said she doesn't like reading, Edna does take a great deal out of the school library and the topics are varied including books about baking, art, rainbows, a *Clifford* book, and *Dreams to Grow On* (Hurley Deriso 2002) and *Gingerbread Friends* (Brett 2008). Not all of these books are the new and expensive ones she previously mentioned and not all of the titles fit within the conservative boundaries of femininity.

Another student whose response and withdrawals were particularly interesting was Suzanna.

MK: Are there particular books you like?

Suzanna: She nods.

MK: What type of books do you like?

Suzanna: Um. Small books.

MK: Why small books?

Suzanna: Because they are easy to read. They have big letters.

My initial reaction was work avoidance so I wanted clarification. A list of themes and genres from which to choose was offered to Suzanna but she still responded she liked “little books”. This is more typical of boys' responses or some who find reading challenging. Suzanna is a very strong reader according to her teacher. Books taken from the library by Suzanna include fairy tales from Disney, a *Baby Touch and Feel* book, *Eating the Alphabet* (Ehlert 1989), *Kippy Koala* (Pledger 2003), and two *Star Wars* books. Suzanna's list does give many titles which are “little” in terms of reading material but not all of them can be defined as such. In particular, the last two science fiction books not only contain much more written text they also represent a genre usually associated with boys.

It is interesting to note that both Edna and Suzanna are in Mr. Zhao's class and both display masculine attributes in other manners. Again, the blurring of gender boundaries is not an uncommon event in this room's environment; here, the border is being infiltrated on all sides.

Girls who may perform masculinity by acting in ways typically regarded as 'boys' behaviour' may not do so in reading. Shannon, at Marne School, likes to read about Terry Fox. She almost appears to have a preoccupation about this individual though no definitive reason was given. Shannon also likes the books the teacher gives them in homereading. She doesn't dislike any books. (This response is not unlike Tony's initial statement.) The teacher said that Shannon would read anything, even a book about monster trucks. “I like to read books.” The desire or willingness to read anything appears more frequently among the girls than the boys and usually among girls who display often considered masculine traits. Shannon's enjoyment of the homereading program material may be due a demonstration of respect and obedience to the teacher and order, the status

quo of masculine hegemonic power structures.

Joann in terms of her behaviour can exhibit many traits often associated with hegemonic masculinity such as independence, confidence, aggressiveness, and toughness.

Her discussion below demonstrates other aspects:

MK: What are your favourite books?

Joann: Well, my favourite books are the Dumb Bunnies, Princess books; I like Cinderella, and, uh, Skippy John Jones (The teacher reads this in class) and, um, the Magic School Bus and um . . . what is that called again? I know the last one. It's Alphabet Book I have at my dad's and it's about bears and foxes and mouses.

MK: What books don't you like to read?

Joann: Well, I don't like to read . . . Well, I like to read all of them. I don't like to read . . . nothing!

As with Shannon, Joann claims to like everything but her library withdrawals are mostly what would fall again within the conservative boundaries of femininity. Books Joann has taken from the library include: *Amazing Spot What* (Bryant and Summers 2002), *Disney's Little Mermaid* (Marsoli 1998), *Disney's Toy Story* (East Dubowksi 1997), *Disney's Lion King* (Disney 1994), *Disney Fairies: The Great Fairy Race* (Redbank 2008), *How They Grow? From Chick to Chicken* (Powell 2001) and *On the Farm* (no author or date).

The choice of text by individual students is interesting but the patterns of borrowing among students in each classroom and between classrooms of each school are fascinating as well. In Bernard Regional, in Mr. Evan's classroom sample, there were no books that were taken out by both a boy and a girl. In the same school, in Ms. Mask's room, two books were taken out by both a girl and a boy and only one had words; the other was a look and find book. The only 'cross-over' book between both rooms is *Amazing Spot* (Bryant and Summers 2002).

The cross-gender exchange in Marne was much more common. Ms. Sand's class had

Amon taking out books that Cora, Sally, and Jane withdrew. These titles include *Kippy Koala* (Pledger 2003) and *Just Me and My Mom* (Mayer 1990). Benedict took out books that Cora and Martina had also taken out. These books were about Terry Fox and peace. In these cases we have groupings of 'strong', both academically and socially, females with 'weak' males.

In Mr. Zhao's class, Brad, Edna, and Suzanna all took out the same book from the *Baby Touch and Feel* series. This may be due to the Roots of Empathy program and is particularly interesting to see that Brad, with his demonstrated masculinities, withdrew this text. *Dear Children of the Earth* (Schimmel 1994), *Gingerbread Friends* (Brett 2008), and a *Spongebob Squarepants* book, also were taken out by both boys and girls. Where a large number of boys borrowed *Star Wars* books, Suzanna was the only girl to do so. In most of these cases, dominant girls, for example Edna and Suzanna, are the ones who are taking the same books as the boys. The boys involved, on the other hand, cover the spectrum of masculinities within the room.

If both rooms in Marne School are made into one sample, we continue to see a crossover. Eda, Miguel and Marcus all took out a book about a kitten. Cora, Amon and Jaymie took out *Blue's Sleepover* (Peltzman 2005). Shannon and Ali took out *Flight of the Snow Geese* (King 1997). Tony, Edna, Brent took out *Gingerbread Friends* (Brett 2008). Jean and Janet took out a book about mummies.

Again, in most of these cases the girls are dominant (Cora, Shannon, Edna) and the boys, again, cover a range though many are not from the dominant group (Amon, Ali, Jean).

This can be perceived in a variety of manners. The dominant feminine, not unlike the females in the studies above, have accessed male domains. For example, Suzanna reading

science fiction, a typically labeled masculine genre. The converse could also be interpreted with alternative masculinities being illustrated by Brad's choice of a baby book or Miguel and Marcus taking out a book about kittens. There is a repetition of certain girls but not of the boys. This cannot but make one remember Kirsh's comments about the increased presentation of the masculine feminine in some of the texts used in school.

The lack of violation of normative gender choices in Bernard Regional may reflect the lower socio-economic demographics of that school compared to Marne. This adherence to social norms is particularly striking given Mr. Evan's overt attempts to advocate alternative masculinities and femininities, whereas Marne School transgressed the boundaries and blurred the "gender appropriate" label.

6.3 Scholastic Book Orders

. . . advertising uses gender cliches excessively in presenting goods either as pastel glittery color for girls or action-packed blue for boys. (Gotz et al. 2005:148)

*The Girls' Book of Excellence:
Even More Ways to be the Best at Everything*

Contents
How to Be the Best Cheerleader
How to Make Your Own Pom-poms
How to Make Ice Cream in a Plastic Bag
How to Interpret Your Doodles
How to Make a Clothespin Christmas Angel
How to Set Up a Nail Salon

. . .
(Norton 2008: 6)

*The Boys' Book of Greatness:
Even More Ways to be the Best at Everything*

Contents

How to Play Air Guitar
How to Pitch a Tent
How to Make a Tangram
How to Boil an Egg
How to Survive at Sea
How to Make an Ice Cream Float

...
(*Oliver 2008:6*)

(*These two books, the former with a pink cover, the latter with a blue cover, were ordered from Scholastic Book Club.*)

It was the end of the day and clean-up time. Before the children leave, the new Scholastic order forms were handed out. Scholastic is a company that has a monthly and seasonal book order that also contains other 'educational' material for students and teachers. (The teachers, in fact, have an additional section to the students' order booklets.) Other 'educational' items include such things as computer software, craft activities, toys, jewelry, science kits, along with other miscellaneous goods. The company is national and I have even seen orders being placed from international schools. This is a time of great excitement for the students – and teachers – even if you know you are not ordering any books. It is just interesting to see what is being offered; one is never too young to enter into the material consuming ranks and be exposed to advertising.

Different pamphlets are distributed depending on the age level of the class. At the Grade 1 level, two pamphlets are handed out: *SeeSaw* and *Elf*. On the cover of *SeeSaw* (March 2009) over a dozen books are shown. Half of them are from a series about insects. Drag racing and weather are other topics from the non-fiction selection. Interestingly, all the non-fiction books are found on the left hand side of the page.

Some of the fiction books, found on the right hand side, deal with an Easter egg hunt being hampered by a cheating male bully and princesses finding the perfect dress. (Jane ordered the latter book.) Inside the pamphlet, you can find under the heading “Writing Skills” a pink wire purse writing set. There is a wide range of books from dinosaurs to fairies illustrated but the only photograph is of a boy who is shown under the caption “BLAST OFF!” He is wearing a striped blue top and looking through a constellation box. “Design your own constellation! Tons of cool space activities!” is describing the product.

In *Elf* (March 2009), there is a writing set, also: The Disney Princess Writing Set. It contains stationery with hearts and a mini feather pen; it's all pink, of course, a colour deeply linked to femininity. The only person shown in this copy is a little girl smiling at the camera while she sits on the floor with a sing-along book on her lap. She's wearing a cardigan – pink.

These pamphlets were not taken by me because of their exceptional stereotypical presentation of gender; they just happened to be given to me to hand out to the class that day. They do emphasize though the blatant stereotypical characteristics of the hegemonic norm of the masculine and feminine.

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There were very few times that I was informed that someone had ordered an item from Scholastic and those were from Marne School. Again, this may be due to economic reasons. Though not used, it is important to note that there is still exposure to the images in the advertising. That the school is distributing them implies that the school sanctions the material not only on an academic basis but a social one as well. Awareness of messages given, both covert and overt, in a number of arenas, must be addressed and critiqued especially if we are to alter such aspects as gender stereotypes and accepted norms.

6.4 Summary

As Kirsh (2010) and others researchers have found, books available to children still illustrate normative gender roles. This is a concern since books and their contents in schools are considered by students to be sanctioned by the schools and are often not examined critically. Roles for women, though, are expanding into traditionally masculine roles creating a diverse spectrum of femininities in the material in school libraries. The reverse is not true about masculine portrayals, though. There are few exceptions to the heteronormative masculine model from which the students can choose.

Economics appear to play a large part in the choice of reading material, with Marne, the middle class school, possessing a greater, more varied, and newer book collection than Bernard Regional with its lower socio-economic population. Also, a greater blurring of the gender line in regard to who chooses what text also occurred at Marne even though a concerted effort to focus on gender roles and stereotypes was implemented at Bernard Regional.

Scholastic book orders available at the school often presented boys and girls in a stereotypical heteronormative manner.

**CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION:
HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY, BINARY OPPOSITION,
AND BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES**

And what can be concluded by this study? Briefly addressing the research questions that defined this work, hegemonic masculinity is still regularly promoted within the classrooms, libraries, and schools. Examples illustrating this statement permeate this paper. Do the boys perform alternative masculinities that do not comply with the hegemonic norm, including through their choices of literacy materials? Yes, but with varying degrees of 'success' and social acceptance, and, I have to admit, to a lesser extent than I hoped. Even when the boys are made aware, knowledgeable about, and encouraged to perform alternative masculinities, this does not ensure that the boys feel comfortable initiating or pursuing such performances. Many aspects affect negotiations of gender scripts and performances including socio-economic standing, ethnicity, peer group, and personal agency. The degree to which each facet interacts with the others is determined by individual circumstances, time, place, and biology; each individual plots her or his own course; each navigation is unique but one can be made aware of the waters in which we all sail.

7.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

“Masculinity,” like “whiteness” does not appear to be a cultural/historical category at all, thus rendering invisible the privileged position from which (white) men in general are able to articulate their interests to the exclusion of the interests of women, men and women of color, and children. (Hanke 1992:186)

I was helping the class with their printing when Peter, in asking a question, accidentally addressed me as Mrs. Kashty. Frank immediately laughed. I asked the class

why some found it so funny. The responses were along the line: “You're a man not a woman.”

I then asked what would be worse: calling me Mrs. Kashty or Ms. Sand, Mr. Sand? There was silence.

Shortly, Shannon and Jane raised their hands. “It is worse to say Mrs. Kashty.” They could not give a reason for their reply.

* * * * *

We exist in a culture of power relationships. It helps define us. Many of these relationships are practiced but not questioned, applied but not with conscious thought, and learned in our schools without formally being taught. We are repetitively socialized to believe these interplays to be 'natural' and can 'spot' when a transgression to this 'natural order' has occurred. We are good at correcting these 'mistakes'. And isn't school all about getting it correct? Such is the case with hegemonic masculinity. “Mr.” is a position of power relative to “Ms.”. Even Grade 1 students can spot this and were quick to correct an error. It is a difficult relationship to alter. So how does one go about creating egalitarianism and end the hegemonic and their hegemony especially when every act seems to reinforce the status quo?

We must become aware of the power relationships in our lives. Awareness is conscious thought which allows questioning. Awareness allows us to question what we are being taught and what we are learning. And with more questioning, our awareness and understanding of power and gender will increase. We must make visible the privileged position of hegemonic masculinity.

7.2 Oppositional Binaries

... boys' involvement in reading is limited by a gender regime in which masculinity and femininity are defined as opposites understood in terms of the following dualisms – active/passive, public/private, outside/inside, and so on. (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:242)

I hadn't been to Marne for a couple of days. It was comforting when many of the children greeted me in the hallway as I made my way to the teacher's room. As I walked into the room, I noticed at the far end of the room a small ivy in a pot and a fish in a bowl. The teacher explained that the students had started the science unit on the plant and animal kingdoms.

The children were very excited by these two new additions to the classroom. New monitor positions had to be assigned as the the fish had to be fed and the plant watered. The fish, I was told by the students, was a Siamese fighting fish. The children then added that the teacher who had donated the fish had told the class it was a boy fish. I then asked how the teacher knew it was a boy fish? Silence. I continued and asked what if the teacher was wrong. I was met with incredulous stares. The students were truly shocked. "It must be true. The teacher said so." Never question the word of the teacher – at least not in front of a six year old. (I should know this by now.)

"Well, if the fish is a boy, what is the plant?" I ventured.

Another moment of silence then shouts from the children who were gathered around the fish and ivy. "It's a girl!" the majority responded.

"Why a girl?" I asked. Short silence then rapid responses.

"It's small."

"We like plants."

“It’s a boy.” The thought crossed my mind that since I had not confirmed the answer of a girl, an alternative answer was thrown out.

“Why a boy?”

“It looks like a boy.”

“What does a boy look like?”

“Like that.”

Later, by himself, Brad came up to me. “It’s a girl,” he stated. I asked him why he thought that. “If the fish is a boy, then the flower has to be a girl.”

* * * * *

This simple example illustrates how entrenched, and at an early age, we are to defining our world in oppositional binary. Animal is to plant as mobile is to stationery as boy is to girl? Oppositional binary logic is being applied and the hegemonic norm is being reified. As stated before, masculinities are defined by what they are not, femininities. It is a difficult paradigm to change. Even as I write this paper which challenges this order and compartmentalization, I lapse into this oppositional categorization. Males and masculinities are not synonyms. Oppositional binary implies an “either or” situation. Even 'and' is often associated with combining pairs thus still functioning in this binary. Maybe it is not the conjunctions that are important or even the nouns which are linked by these conjunctions for they often help label and compartmentalize. Maybe it is the verbs on which we need to focus. Verbs can incorporate time and imply processes of being and changing. This focus would eliminate the “either or and” and specific labels and offer a spectrum of changing options and choices not tainted by current binary biases. In the language of the primary classroom, let's not just “be free to be you and me”, let's just “be free to be”.

7.3 And Blurring the Boundaries

*Far from calling for a gender-specific pedagogy that purports to meet the neglected needs of boys, an intersectional analysis of boys and education emphasises the need for a pedagogy that builds a critical consciousness of privilege and oppression among both girls and boys a public policy commitment to investing in the education of the socially marginalised with due attention to its gender dimensions.
(Grieg 2009:70)*

At the beginning of this paper, I wrote about pigeon holes appearing in my mind in response to my colleague's definition of boys' books. Yet, I said nothing. I paused and thought. Into what holes would I have placed my plump, gay, elementary self? Into which holes was I placed? Maybe the more important questions are: Can I see the holes? And if I choose, can I not fall into them? Then, how do I go about attaining this?

Given the information presented in this paper, there is a need to address the performance of genders in our classrooms and schools. The normative hegemonic binary is still a very apparent facet of our public education system. As a public school teacher, too often have I seen social issues addressed by creating a committee, making a handbook of applicable material, and declaring a day of acknowledgement for whatever the subject matter may be to 'teach' the handbook. I do not want to negate the initiative and hard work of those who are involved in such programs. These program starters are invaluable. It is their concern and energy which inspires reflection, change, and growth. It is their work which illuminate the contradictions and cracks of hegemonic discourse and allow new discourses to flourish.

If we are to start dealing with our concerns, we must start somewhere. And as a public school teacher, I do not want to hand out yet another teaching unit to educators and parents who are overwhelmed and stretched thin by what is already expected of them.

Unfortunately, such packages are often used only once and then disappear into the recycling bins as other 'concerns' arise in education and parenting. Yet, I feel I need to suggest a more detailed response than simply becoming more aware and increasing choices of gender performances (even though these may be the keys). As gender is constantly created by simple mundane acts and discourse, so must its examination be simple and everyday; therefore, there are a few things which I recommend we, as adults in children's lives, do. And as much learning and socializing occurs before kindergarten, it is exceptionally important to address these issues at home by families and in the daycare contexts as well as in school. The 'advice' which follows is similar to that given by such authors as Gilbert et al. (1998), Martino et al (2003) and Thorne (1993) who inspirationally writes:

As adults, we can help kids, as well as ourselves, imagine and realize different futures, alter institutions, craft new life stories. A more complex understanding of the dynamics of gender, of tensions and contradictions, and of the hopeful moments that lie within present arrangements, can help broaden our sense of the possible. (Thorne 1993:173)

First, masculinities does not mean men and femininities, women. These are all social constructs. It is a difficult concept that needs constant addressing.

In trying to recuperate a non-oppressive masculinity for men, the field persists in aligning masculinity with men (and by implication femininity with women) and, in doing so, risks being complicit with the fear and refusal of the feminine that underlies misogyny. Rather, the task must be to drive a wedge in, early and often and if possible conclusively, between the two topics, masculinity and men, whose relations to one another it is so difficult not to presume. (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1995:12)

Gender is deeply entwined in many aspects of one's existence and “one” is key; boys are not a monolithic homogeneous group as girls are not a monolithic homogeneous group. Each person, each child is unique and each one of us is constantly changing as we

negotiate our existences. Equality is a difficult concept with regard to such heterogeneity and diversity and, what may seem counter-intuitive, may be a concept that is not even desirable. This idea was applied by Murphy and Ivinson (2008:149) in their discussion of literacy and gender:

Underlying the debate about the gender gap in literacy achievement is the assumption that equal outcomes for boys and girls are an indication of gender neutrality and imply equality in treatment and opportunity. This position implies that gender is interchangeable with sex group and that essentialist generalisations can be made about girls and boys. Furthermore, the social and cultural contexts in which actions and outcomes are produced remain unchallenged. We are concerned with the way gender-based inequalities are produced within settings and the pedagogic practices that may reinforce, challenge or transform social representation of gender.

Secondly, ask how do we perceive ourselves, particularly in regards to gender. It is a very personal question that emphasizes individuality and the acknowledgement of the multiple facets of genders. As illustrated by the teachers whom I asked this question, it is a very difficult question to answer. And the answer constantly changes given the context. As stated previously, ethnicity and class are entwined in this discussion and should be part of this reflection. This self-exploration is invaluable to one's personal growth and very revealing. Awareness and knowledge of our subjectivities gives great power to address normalizing tendencies.

We need to critique our gender performance. And there is no easy way in which to do this. Gender is continually part of us and it is very difficult to be continuously aware. One can start by critiquing our own reading habits (or lack thereof). As reading was a starting point for this thesis, so reading can be the starting point for our gender critique.

Next, have the students critique gender performance whenever possible or applicable.

. . . attempts need to be made in the English classroom (and libraries) to interrogate gender regimes and provide boys with an opportunity to

critically evaluate the effects and impact of masculinities in their own lives and in the lives of others. However, this can hardly be achieved if the texts selected for boys do not somehow accommodate their existing cultural experiences and knowledges. But the dilemma is that this may run the risk of reproducing the very forms of masculinity that need to be challenged. Moreover, it may lead to homogenizing boys and framing their interests in narrow and essential terms. In addition, it may result in merely catering for the dominant boys' interests in the literacy classroom as a means of enhancing their motivation to read. (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003:242-243)

I do not mean 'applicable' to be some enigmatic descriptor. This can be done as a 'teaching moment' of which educators and parents are well aware. Often, when we are cognizant of our gender performance or the performance of another, the moment has arrived. If it never arrives, repeat Step 2. (The above quote from Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli echoes the multiliteracies concerns of self-centredness by Cope and Kalantzis.)¹⁷

Look at the various texts and images the children are using and have available to them for depictions of gender. Is the material the students are accessing reifying the norms of hegemonic masculinity and dominant femininity? Or is there a diverse spectrum of masculinities and femininities being presented? As mentioned previously, it is vital that not only do the adults critique and reflect upon the texts but that the students do also. And in order for this reflection to have greater benefit, there must be a variety of gender performances to analyze.

The concept of genders and schools goes well beyond books, computer screens, and literacies. The performance of masculinities has a correlation with homophobia, bullying, and other forms of violence (Kimmel 2004:256, Gilbert et al. 1998). The acceptance of multiple masculinities is acceptance of the freedom of gender expression by the individual. An individual accepting his or her own performance of masculinities and femininities is a start to a society which is accepting of multiple performances of genders.

There are no inherently feminine “traits”; there are no innate masculine “traits”. There are simply ways of acting and being that are coded through cultural processes as one or the other. “Self-determination” and “dignity” should not be engendered. And one day, with awareness, sensitivity, and perseverance, instead of reading “girls' books” and “boys' stuff”, we will simply have 'books' and 'stuff'.

NOTES:

Chapter One:

1. As I went through various gatekeepers in the education system, it was only the women who asked me if I would be passing judgment on them or the education system. No men gave a similar query. It must be taken into account that most gatekeepers within the education system whom I encountered were female. This issue, though related to my research of gender performances and power relationships, is beyond its scope. Also, I have to admit, when I reflected on these comments, that I, the teacher, would not have allowed myself, the anthropologist, into my classroom. (How does this reaction situate me within the spectrum of masculinities and femininities?)
2. During this project, I sometimes found myself becoming unfocused, losing perspective and feeling confused. The following encounter helped ground me and reminded me to always pay close attention, never make assumptions, and always keep a sense of humour:
Occupying every space in the small room except the intended chairs, the three Grade 1 students I was preparing to interview were playing with my digital voice recorder which was sitting on the table. Fearing they would erase my previous interviews, I finally asked them to stop. Travis, a very artistic and 'energetic' student who was thrilled to be out of his classroom, handed me the recorder. Suddenly, he stopped, looked me directly in the eyes, and with such uncharacteristic focus announced, "Mr. K, you look like a pirate."
My mind ran through possible reasons for the comment. I hadn't shaved that morning. Obviously pirate stubble, I thought. I hadn't done much with the hair either. Pirate coiff? Possibly. "So, Travis, why do you say that?"
"Your teeth are yellow," he stated without giving away any intention.
"Oh," I responded as I tried to smile without exposing my less than lustrous dental work.
"No, Mr. K. They are really yellow. You should look into that."
3. Boys are not men and boys do not have the same access to power as men. The access to power changes as time passes. Time, also, may have changed the hierarchy and relationships to power for teachers, parents, and children within the school system. It would be interesting to discuss how the members of each group currently perceive the tiering of this pyramid, assuming it is a pyramid, and how this structure was perceived in the past.
4. This internal facet of class is difficult to analyze and leads me to this rambling and very personally important note:
I have heard, loudly announced by both teachers and students, in classrooms and school corridors statements like: "That's racist!" or "That's sexist!" Clear definition and explanation of the transgressions by offended parties are given. I have rarely heard, though: "That's class-ist!", and then only in hushed whispers muffled by awkward political correctness. What socio-economic values and expectations are being taught in the public schools?

Education has become a more prominent topic in the public discourse of social promise. The expectations of education have been ratcheted up in the rhetoric of the right as much as the that of the left. More than ever before, our political leaders are saying that education is pivotal to social and economic progress. They express this in the rhetoric of the "new economy" and "knowledge society". (Cope and Kalantzis 2009: 168)

What is the purpose of the public education system? (And what exactly does "education" mean?) As a teacher, it is a question that has plagued me for years. I now learn and teach in a system where "schooling" and its academic association has been supplanted with "education" and its much greater domain, and where "reading" is being superseded by the multimodal concept of "multiliteracies". Definitions become broader; categories more encompassing. Is it the discourse

of inclusion? The definition of inclusion within education, by my teaching experience, can vary from individual to individual and from school to school, both resounding of promise for society's future and echoing of its impending failure. And as Cope and Kalantzis imply, the only thing in common between these opposing views is a deafening volume.

As an administrator once commented, "Schools are the only public forums in which everyone can now meet." But for everyone to meet, great co-ordination and great resources are required. And if the adage you can't make everyone happy all the time is valid, great unhappiness may result from inclusion.

Schools were once middle-class institutions. With the implementation of such policies as no grades, no failures, full-time kindergarten and increasing the time of mandatory public education for those who do not "succeed", inclusion is being implemented. These policies allow entry and residence within the public school system for many marginalized groups who were previously excluded or quickly ushered from the classrooms and school corridors. We live in a capitalist society where "social" and "knowledge" are always accompanied by economics; again, just look at the quote above. In a capitalist society, this inclusion particularly impacts schools by increasing the numbers of children from the working class. With this inclusion are schools now becoming lower-class institutions? I do not say this with judgment. And I find it woefully inadequate to claim a non-classist society and hence a non-class-ist education system. What is the point of public education? What would the middle class answer? What would the working class answer? Again pairing economics with the social, what then is the effect on the performance of gender as middle-class and working-class "meet" in this one place?

Chapter Two:

5. Structuralism looks at "not how people categorize the world, but the underlying patterns of human thought that produce those categories" (McGee and Warms 2004:345). It is the interpretation of a circumstance, how it is classified and categorized by a culture, not the circumstance itself, which affects the culture (Sahlins 1981). In his work, Sahlins', using the first English contact with the Hawaiian culture. Hawaiians demonstrated both the reproduction and transition of structures which defined Hawaiian culture.
6. I remember, early in my teaching career, a mother of a boy in my class came to visit me. At the end of the conversation, the mother commented that her son had started bundling his hair with an elastic band in an attempt to create a ponytail like mine. She said her husband was hurt. He felt he should be the role model for his son.. Many teachers can relate such episodes and this illustrates the importance of the teacher in regards to gender performance of students.

Chapter Three:

7. Though I am very aware of ethnic issues, I am very wary of them also. The deep intertextual nature of masculinities in terms of such elements as ethnicity and socio-economic class are impossible to deny and likely as impossible to separate. In the Winnipeg Free Press (Friday, November 26, 2010) an article entitled: "Child-Poverty Capital: 68% of aboriginal kids poor, report card states" claimed "Almost three-quarters of aboriginal children aged six and under live in poverty in Manitoba." This data may illustrate a correlation but not necessarily cause and effect of such aspects as ethnicity and class. Aboriginal children are a focus in the school region of this research but by focusing on this group in order to engage it within the system, is the system 'othering' it by attention? Separation by inclusion? This perspective brings to mind multiculturalism's ghettoization of marginalized groups as expressed by Michealle Jean in the Ottawa Citizen (Jame 2005). In this speech, Jean comments not on the diversity created by multiculturalism but its isolating factor on certain ethnic groups. "Token-ism" also could enter into this discussion but it is an issue deserving of much more than a note.
8. This makes me recall a particular incident during the individual interviews, when I commented to one of the classroom teachers how often the girls were dressed in pink with hearts and other attire

often associated with the feminine. “When was the last time I went shopping in the children's department at WalMart?” the teacher responded. A gender-norm was being reinforced within working and middle class parents by purchases and thus reinforced within their children. The incident highlighted my middle class childless ignorance of the matter enhancing my awareness of my subjectivities.

Chapter Four:

9. Amon is a quiet student who has recently emigrated from south-east Europe with his family. He has a speech impediment and easily becomes embarrassed if he is not understood. This made the interview difficult at times, though Amon did participate willingly. This also places him in multiple identity positions. According to his teacher, he is reading just below grade level. He appears to be very easy-going, associating with anyone in the room. Amon though appears always to take the back seat; I never witnessed him in the driver's seat in any situation. Of all the students interviewed, he was chosen second last. Mohammed was the last chosen. Amon has a 'fascination' with Frank, Ted, and Abraham. The teacher says Amon becomes exceptionally remorseful if he does get drawn into some inappropriateness.
10. As I spent more time in the room, I learned that Kevin had difficulty interacting with his peers and appeared to have no close bonds. I remember him having problems with Scott. It appeared that Kevin wanted Scott's attention and was not going about it in a very constructive manner. Scott was not being particularly co-operative either. The times I have interacted with Kevin, he has been very close to Ali. They would put their arms around each other. The teacher was surprised and said this was not typical behaviour. All of these boys, Kevin, Scott, and Ali, exhibited many forms of alternative masculinities, and all, by much of their daily behaviour, would resist the label of heteronormative.
11. It was the day after St. Patrick's Day. The students were finishing colouring their leprechauns as the final part of a language arts assignment. As I walked around admiring the students' efforts, Sudana commented that her leprechaun was a girl. I then asked, “Whose leprechaun is a boy?” The majority of hands went up. “Whose leprechaun is a girl?” Only girls put their hands up. Some students, both boys and girls, commented that their leprechaun was neither a boy nor a girl. Some students mentioned there was intent to engender their drawings. Some said they had planned to make a boy leprechaun but after they had finished colouring, it turned out to be a girl; some commented the reverse happened to them. “What makes your leprechaun a boy or a girl?” I asked. The responses included the eyes and the colours used. Pink and pastel colours made a girl; black, blue, and red created a boy. The beard the leprechaun wore never entered the discussion.

* * * * *

It was the one hundredth day of school and thus was appropriately labeled “One Hundred Day”. One hundred was the theme for the day and One Hundred Day activities dominated the agenda that morning in the room. One of these activities was making a necklace from one hundred fruit loops. Antonia made an interesting comment about the cereal pieces. She said she had a twin, pointing to two pieces of cereal, one pink, one yellow, which were attached to each other. This fascinated Travis. Antonia commented that it was a boy and a girl because of the colours. When questioned about her observations, Antonia answered that girls could like yellow or pink but boys couldn't like pink because it was a girl's colour exclusively.

Chapter Five:

12. After many of the teachers' evaluations and perspectives on certain students, I wrote in my fieldnotes that I was surprised. I was quite surprised about how many times I was surprised. I know that students who have difficulty reading printed text develop other skills and strategies to cope. It is another reminder of never to make assumptions whether one is a teacher or an anthropologist.

Chapter Six:

13. My first encounter with blurring the gender line in Mr. Zhao's classroom was on my first day in Mr. Zhao's classroom. It was 3:30 p.m., the end of the school day. We were about one-third of the way through February. I was still feeling like a guest and still learning the names of the students. The students had put up their chairs and were waiting to be dismissed. I stood at the back of the room and looked at the parka and scarf-bundled bodies filling the space. Suddenly a squeaky voice announced, "I'm pirouetting like a ballerina!" There was no reaction from anyone in the room as far as I could discern. Did no one else hear? Did no one care? Was this typical behaviour from this class? This student? This was my first encounter with Kevin.
14. We used the Scholastic book order while I was teaching in a 'Western' school in Bahrain, an Islamic kingdom in the Middle East. Most of the student population of the school was from the region. The introduction of the Scholastic material and the children's and families' reactions to it would make a fascinating study in cross-cultural exchanges with regard to gender, and global discourses mediated by local meanings.
15. Teachers are also type-casted. In a classroom supplies order catalogue, lying on a table in the staffroom at Marne School, eight teachers/adults were depicted. All were female. (Of the eight, seven were Caucasian; the other was Oriental.) The cover of the booklet had a girl sitting on the floor reading a book which was lying upon her knees. Behind her was a stand holding many books. The girl was wearing a light purple top with predominantly pink embroidered hearts and flowers on it. Inside there were many photographs of children but there were more girls than boys. Both boys and girls were shown as sedentary and active; however, if girls and boys were shown together, in many cases the boy would be the active being, either pointing at a book or standing to get an object. Beside this catalogue was a parent handbook on literacy and technology. The booklet was sponsored by the Manitoba government. The cover featured naïve drawings of a family. The 'daughter' was using a camera as the 'mother' sat with her 'son' on the computer. The 'father' was on a cell phone. The females were in pink and purple and the males in blue and green. Another interesting facet of this booklet was that when monitoring of the child was occurring, it was done by an adult female. One time the female was holding a baby while talking to her son.

Chapter 7

16. Recently, a homophobia awareness initiative was introduced in the school division where this research was done. The first meeting was held earlier this autumn after work hours. Approximately fifty educators attended. All those involved must be commended for their concern and effort. Of the attendees, the majority, by far and away, as far as I knew were heterosexual women; the second largest demographic group was gay males. I only knew two who may have been heterosexual males. It was a start where the marginalized supported the marginalized, but it was a start, nevertheless. And I would not know of any other place to begin such an effort.
17. This self-centredness reminds one of the warnings made by Cope and Kalantzis (2009:174) in their reflection on and defense of a pedagogy of multiliteracies:

In another reading, we might experience these same phenomena as fragmentations, egocentrism, randomness, ambiguity and anarchy. Or we might pronounce it a mere illusion in the context of the centralization of knowledge economy power in the hands of fewer people.

It is an interesting statement made by the initiators of multiliteracies. It is a statement of which we must remain aware.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Dear Parents,

Hi! My name is Martin Kashty and you may know me as a teacher in *****. Currently, I am a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba being advised by Dr. Susan Frohlick. I am just beginning my research project. My research involves studying the correlation between gender and literacy. I will be exploring how Grade 1 boys and girls relate to and identify with reading material, audiovisual resources, and computer software provided in the school. ***** has granted me a year's leave of absence and some funding to pursue this endeavour.

I will be visiting your child's classroom about once or twice a week from February to April of 2009. This is done with the consent and co-operation of *Teacher's Name*. I will tell the children why I am visiting. I will not only be observing but also assisting *Teacher's Name* in the classroom. I will not only be an observer but a participant in the room. As a voluntary teacher aide I will be helping the children with their work while asking them about their feelings about reading, the books they have read, movies they have seen in school, and school-based computer activities. Their conversations and interactions with each other is also an important aspect of this research especially when it relates to literacy and gender. My goal is to get the students' perspectives and feelings on literacy so I will be conducting interviews with the boys and girls within the classroom and school during March and April. This will be done on a voluntary basis only. These interviews, of which there will be only one or two for each student, will be approximately 15 minutes long and will be audiotaped. The topics to be discussed are similar to those mentioned above. None of the children's real names nor the real names of adults or specific places, like the school, will be used. These consent forms will be locked away in a safe location, as will all data collected and relating to this research. All this material will be shredded and destroyed one year after completion of this project. There are no anticipated risks to your child from this study and your child's input may greatly contribute to the knowledge of literacy and gender within our ***** community. The data collected will not only be used in reports and conferences for ***** and others interested in this field of study but for my Master's thesis as well.

A summary of the study will be available to you by the end of June. If you wish a summary, please check the appropriate place on the form that follows.

If you have any questions at any time about the research or this form, please contact me at 786-8504 or e-mail mkashty@hotmail.com or leave a message with your child's teacher and I will get back to you as soon as I am notified. You have been given two copies of this consent form so that you can keep one for your records and reference. This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project or me you may contact my advisor, Dr. Frohlick, at 474-7872 or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Please discuss this matter with your child so that she or he understands my role in her or his classroom. Even if you give your approval, your child may choose not to participate in this study. Even after the parental permission, I will have to ask each child if he or she is willing to participate in the participant-observation part of this study and before each interview. I will always respect your child's decision in these matters. Again, I want to emphasise that I need both your consent and your child's assent for your child to participate in this research. If you or your child do not wish to participate in this study, no data of any kind will be collected about your child regarding my research.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could return the completed form as soon as possible. Thank you for your support and co-operation.

Sincerely,

Martin Kashty

I understand the information provided by Martin Kashty and I give consent for my child,
_____, to participate in this

Child's Name

research project. I understand participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my child from the study at any time without consequence before the end of April 2009, when the collection of data will be completed. I may do this by sending a note or phoning my child's teacher or Mr. Kashty, informing the individual of my decision. If I choose to withdraw my child from the study, all information gathered regarding my child will be struck from the data collection. Similarly, my child may decide to withdraw without consequence from the study at any time before the end of April 2009 and all information gathered pertaining to my child will be struck from the data collection.

Please check and sign below to show agreement:

_____ Yes, I do give permission for my child to participate in this study.

_____ No, I do not give permission for my child to participate in this study.

_____ Yes, I give permission for my child's interviews to be audiotaped.

_____ No, I do not give permission for my child's interviews to be audiotaped.

_____ Yes, I want a summary of the study. When the summary is completed, I will be notified by letter and a copy of the study will be sent home with my child.

Parent's/Guardian's Name (Please Print)

Parent's/Guardian's Signature

Date: _____

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Dear *Principal's Name*,

My name is Martin Kashty and you may know me as a teacher in *****. Currently, I am a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba being advised by Dr. Susan Frohlick. I am just beginning my research project. My research involves studying the correlation of gender and literacy. I will be exploring how Grade 1 boys and girls relate to and identify with reading material, audiovisual resources, and computer software provided in the school. ***** has granted me a year's leave and some funding to pursue this endeavour.

With your and *Teacher's Name's* permission, along with that of the parents and children in the class, both consent of the parents and assent of the child are required for a student to participate, I will be visiting *Teacher's Name* classroom about once or twice a week from February to April 2009. I will tell the children, with the children's teacher, if he/she wishes, why I am visiting. I will not only be an observer but a participant in the room. My goal is to get the students' perspectives and feelings on literacy so I will be conducting interviews with the boys and girls within the classroom and school during March and April. This will be done on a voluntary basis only. These interviews will be audiotaped. None of the children's or staff's real names will be used. These consent forms will be locked away in a safe location, as will all data collected and relating to this research. All this material will be shredded and destroyed one year after completion of this project. There are no anticipated risks to the children from this study and this study may greatly contribute to the knowledge of literacy and gender within the ***** community.

A summary of the study will be available to you by the end of June. If you wish a summary, please check the appropriate place on the form that follows.

If you have any questions at any time about the research or this form, please contact me at 786-8504 or e-mail me at mkashty@hotmail.com. You have been given two copies of this consent form so that you can keep one for your records and reference. Attached, you will also find copies of the parent and teacher consent forms. This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project or me, you may contact my advisor, Dr. Frohlick, at 474-7872 or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you for your support and co-operation.

Sincerely,

Martin Kashty

I understand the information provided by Martin Kashty and I give consent for this study to take place in my school. I understand participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent from this study at any time before the end of April 2009 when the data collecting will have been completed. If I choose to withdraw my consent, all information regarding data gathered in this school will be struck from the data collection.

Please check and sign below to show agreement.

_____ Yes, I give permission for classrooms in my school to be used in this study.

_____ No, I do not give permission for classrooms in my school to be used in this study.

_____ Yes, I want a summary of the study. When the summary is completed, I will be notified and informed on the choices regarding how I can receive it.

Name of School: _____

Principal's Name (Please Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Dear *Teacher's Name*,

My name is Martin Kashty and you may know me as a teacher in *****. Currently, I am a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba being advised by Dr. Susan Frohlick. I am just beginning my research project. My research involves studying the correlation between gender and literacy. I will be exploring how Grade 1 boys and girls relate to and identify with reading material, audiovisual, resources, and computer software provided in the school. ***** has granted me a year's leave and some funding to pursue this endeavour.

Given both the permission of the parents and the assent of the children in your classroom, both consent of parents and the assent of the child are required for a student to participate, I will be visiting your classroom about once or twice a week from February to April of 2009. I, with your assistance, if you wish, will tell the children why I am visiting. I will not only be an observer but also a participant in your room. My goal is to get the children's perspectives and feelings on literacy so I will be conducting interviews with the boys and girls within the classroom and school during March and April. This will be done on a voluntary basis only and at times you would consider acceptable. The interviews will be audiotaped. None of the children's, teacher's or associated staff's real names will be used. All consent forms will be locked away in a safe location, as will all data collected and relating to this research. All this material will be shredded and destroyed one year after completion of this project. There are no anticipated risks to the children from this study and this project may greatly contribute to the knowledge of literacy and gender within the ***** community.

A summary of the study will be available to you by the end of June. If you wish a summary, please check the appropriate place on the form that follows.

If you have any questions at any time about the research or this form, please call me at 786-8504 or e-mail me at mkashty@hotmail.com. You have been given two copies of this consent form so that you can keep one for your records and reference. You have also been given a copy of the parent consent form. This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project or me, you may contact my advisor, Dr. Frohlick, at 474-7872 or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you for your support and co-operation.

Sincerely,

Martin Kashty

I understand the above as provided by Martin Kashty and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand participation is voluntary and I can withdraw my students and myself from the study any time before the end of April 2009, when the collection of data will be completed. If I choose to withdraw myself and my class from the study, all information gathered regarding my classroom will be struck from the research data collection.

Please check and sign below to show agreement.

_____ Yes, I give permission for my students to participate in this study.

_____ No, I do not give permission for my students to participate in this study.

_____ Yes, I give permission for my students to be interviewed on audiotape.

_____ No, I do not give permission for my students to be interviewed on audiotape.

_____ Yes, I want a summary of the study. When the summary is completed, I will be notified and informed of the choices regarding how I can receive it.

Name (Please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Class Introduction Script and Assent

Hi. As your teacher just said, my name is Mr. Kashty. How is everyone today? Please let me know if I am talking too fast, too quietly, or if I am using words you don't know. Just put up your hand to let me know. I will be coming to your class for the next three months. That means I will be here in January, February, and . . . Does anyone know the month after February? Yes, it is March. So I will be here those three months, and I will be visiting your class about two days a week. Sometimes it will be only one day; sometimes it may be three – but most times it will be two days.

I will be helping your teacher in and out of the classroom and, hopefully, I will be sometimes helping you, but the main reason I am here is to do research. Does anyone know what 'research' means? Research means I watch and listen to what happens in the classroom and try to understand why it is happening. I may not understand or get answers but I try. Do you sometimes watch and listen to what happens in the classroom? To help me understand I will sometimes ask you questions about what you think or about what you are doing. If you are not comfortable, you don't have to answer me. My research is about Grade 1 boys and girls and how they feel about books, films, and computers at school. So while I am helping you, I may ask you what books you like, what books you don't like, what things you enjoy on the computer and how you talk about this stuff and how you act with these things. I have a favour to ask: please don't use the names of other students when talking to me. It's really not polite to talk about people who aren't there. Have you heard this before? Sometimes I will listen to what you say about these things to other people, both kids and adults. ***** has given me a year off of teaching and some money to find information about this stuff.

Now only the boys and girls that returned the forms I sent out and that your moms and dads said it was okay will be part of my research. I will still help everyone, though, so don't worry if you didn't hand in the form or if your mom or dad didn't want you to be part of the research. Is everyone okay with that? Now if your mom and dad said you could be part of the research and you decide you don't want to be, please let your parents and your teacher or me know. You can decide to stop being part of the research at any time and there will be no problems at all. You can decide to stop until school ends in March because that's when I will be finished. Is everyone okay with that? Do you have any questions for me so far?

After my research is done, I will be writing a book about it. Some of your moms and dads said they wanted to see part of the book and I will give them a part of it when I am done writing. How many would want to see that? When I write, I will not use any of your real names so no one will know it was us doing the research. That's going to be a secret.

Now if your mom or dad said it was okay for you to be part of my research, I might be interviewing you. Do you know what 'interview' means? Interview means I ask you questions and ask you to talk about things and you can answer and tell me what you think, if you want. You don't have to answer anything if you don't want to. You don't even have to be part of the interview if you don't want to. Are you okay with that? Any questions? The things I'll be asking you about in the interviews is the same stuff as before: what books and

movies you like and don't like and how you feel about computer time. Sometimes you will be interviewed in small groups, sometimes with your friends, and sometimes by yourself. And to help me remember what everyone said in the interviews, I will be taping them – sound only, no video. Are you okay with that? Any questions? Now, the interviews won't start until February so I'll repeat all this interview stuff when we do them. I am hoping to interview all the people who are part of the research at least once and maybe even two times.

That's all I have to say right now. Does anyone have any questions for me? If you think of some questions later on, you can always ask me then. Thank you for listening to me and thank you to your teacher for letting me talk to you.

Appendix E: Interview Introduction Script and Assent

Hi. As you know, my name is Martin Kashty. How are you today? As I told the class before, I am doing research. Do you remember what 'research' means?

Research means I watch and listen to what happens in the classroom and try to understand why it is happening. I may not understand or get answers but I try. As I said in January, my research is about Grade 1 boys and girls and how they feel about books, films, and computers at school. Seven Oaks has given me a year off of teaching and some money to find out about this stuff. Do you have any questions for me so far?

After my research is done I will be writing a book about it. Your mom or dad said they wanted to see part of the book and I will give them a part of it when I am done writing. Would you want to see that?

Your mom or dad said it was okay for you to be part of my research. Are you okay with that? And to help me understand I want to interview you? Do you remember what 'interview' means? Interview means I ask you questions and ask you to talk about things and you can answer and tell me what you think, if you want. I'll be asking you about reading, books, movies, computers and stuff like that. Please don't use the names of other students who are not here. That wouldn't be right. Also, I am not going to use your name anywhere so no one will know it's you who is talking to me. After I am finished with the tape I am going to break it so no one else can listen to it. Do you understand? You don't have to answer anything if you don't want to. Are you okay with that? Any questions? If you are uncomfortable sitting here and want to go back into the classroom at any time just let me know and that's totally okay. We could do it later or not at all if you like. Just let me know. Like I told you before, you can stop being part of the research at any time without any problems. I am hoping to interview you two times but at least we have this time. To help me remember what you said I am going to tape our interview – sound only, no video. Are you okay with that? Any questions before we start?

Appendix F: Questions for Student Interviews

PLEASE NOTE: The following questions are just a guideline. Questions and prompts for the students will depend on the conditions leading up to and during the interview. It is a constant concern not to lead the students' discussions and remarks about gender; hence, there are limited questions focused directly on the issue.

READING/BOOK QUESTIONS:

Do you like to read? Tell me why you like/dislike reading.

Are you a good reader? Tell me why you are a good/poor reader.

Are you getting better or worse at reading? Tell me why you say that.

Tell me about what makes a good/poor reader.

Without using names, who are better readers: boys or girls? Tell me why they are better.

Tell me why they aren't as good.

Is reading important to you? Tell me why it is/isn't important to you.

Is reading important in school? Tell me why it is/isn't important.

Is reading important at home? Tell me why it is/isn't important.

Tell me about what you like to read/look at? Why?

Tell me about what you do not like to read/look at? Why not?

What is your favourite book? Why? Tell me about the book.

What is your favourite book the teacher/librarian read to you? Why?

Tell me about the book.

What book did you not like that the teacher/librarian read to you? Why not?

Tell me about the book.

Tell me how you behave when the teacher/librarian is reading to you?

Tell me how you behave when you should be silently reading?

COMPUTER-RELATED QUESTIONS:

Tell me about your favourite things to do on the computer at school.

Tell me about things you don't like doing on the computer.

Are you good with the computer? What makes you good?

Without using names, are boys or girls better at computers? Tell me why you say that.

Tell me how you behave when you are on the computer?

Tell me how you behave with other students when they are on the computer?

AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIAL RELATED QUESTIONS:

Tell me about your favourite movies/videos shown to you at school.

Tell me about the movies/videos you didn't like.

Who likes movies at school more: boys or girls? Tell me why you say that.

Which movies do boys/girls like? Tell me why you say that.

Tell me how you behave when the television is on?

GENDER QUESTIONS:

Tell me what it means to be a boy.

Tell me what it means to be a girl.

Tell me what it means to be a man.

Tell me what it means to be a woman.

Appendix G: Letter Informing Participants of Delay in Summary

Monday, June 22, 2009

Dear Parents,

I hope you are enjoying this beautiful and much anticipated summer weather.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing your child to participate in my research study involving literacy. In the permission letter you signed earlier this year, I stated I would send you a summary of my findings when I completed my analysis. I was hoping this synopsis would be ready by the end of this month; however, due to the volume of information collected and other events, I will now be sending out the synopsis in the 2010-2011 academic year.

If your child is remaining in the same school for Grade 2, there will be no difficulty in delivering this information to you. If you are moving, please make sure that I have the name of your child's new school so I can forward the information to you next year.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at mkashty@hotmail.com. Thank you for your support and patience. Have a wonderful summer!

Sincerely,

Martin Kashty

Appendix H: Concluding Note to Parents and Educators of Participants

Please Note: The following is the letter which will be sent to the parents of the children who participated in this study. The letter will be sent in the autumn of 2011 pending the school division's permission.

A very belated hello to everyone,

First, I want to thank you all for your co-operation (and patience) in this endeavour. Without your help, this project would never have been possible. I am truly grateful.

Now, given the delay, a reminder to what this research entailed. I was exploring how Grade 1 boys and girls relate to and identify with reading material. This work was initiated because there is a current concern about boys not doing well in school subjects, especially language arts, compared to girls. Whether this concern can be justified is arguable. When doing my research, I worked under the premise that much of what we do as boys or as girls is taught to us. We are socialized to behave in a certain gendered way: a certain type of boy or a certain type of girl. This affects who we are, who we become, and what choices we make, including what we read or even if we choose to read. Gender is that important in our lives.

In terms of reading, in particular, there are certain patterns that arose in my research. All students said reading was important at school; personally and at home, though, reading's importance varied from student to student. In many cases, but not all, reading at home was associated with the mother. By far and away, most children felt they were getting better at reading. The number of children who felt otherwise was very small but they were all boys from visible minorities. Many children, especially boys, answered that practicing was the way to get better; listening was occasionally given as a response, by girls mostly.

At this point, I need to address a point that is implied in the paragraph above: boys are not one huge group; similarly, girls are not one huge group. We do, though, tend to think of them that way. Each person is a unique individual but many times we assume certain traits for boys and certain characteristics for girls. We generalize. Almost everyone in our society does. It's what helps construct our society. It's understood and done without thought. Yet, these understandings are the cause of many of the challenges we are facing including reading (and bullying, another big issue). In fact, a comment about certain texts being boys' books was what started me thinking in these terms. There are no boys' books as there are no girls' books. We label and define those books as such and, in a similar fashion, define and therefore limit our children. In attempting to avoid this, we open a world of opportunities for all our children - for all of us.

It is from this perspective that I am going to make some suggestions about reading. They are suggestions which can be done at any point and at any time. In fact, the times may make themselves apparent when certain obvious situations concerning gender arise. These are the 'perfect teaching moments'. The following might sound more like a gender questionnaire but this is definitely related to reading.

First, reflect on how you see yourself in regards to gender. This is in terms of every aspect of your life: family, job, hobbies, friends. It is not an easy question. Spend some time with it and see how detailed your answer can be. Do you find you have labeled yourself because of gender? In what ways? Why?

Secondly, look at your reading habits (or lack of them). At home, who is doing the reading and what are they reading? Is everyone reading? Is there a wide selection of reading material or do you read only certain things? This may have a huge impact on your child.

Next, look carefully at how gender is shown in your reading material. Examine this carefully. Are there stereotypes being portrayed. Most studies show that most children's books still maintain traditional sexist portrayals even if these books attempt to avoid them.

Next, do all the above with your child. A child's ability to critique his or her actions and what they read is vital.

Finally, have your child attempt this critique by themselves with anything they read or have read to them.

These reflections should be done at home and at school. It is interesting to see how the others in our lives respond. Awareness is the first step in dealing with any challenge.

I do not guarantee any results in terms of becoming a “good” reader but this may increase the opportunities to become a more open-minded one. And an open-mind is what learning may be all about – no matter how young or old.

If you want to know more about this study, have questions, concerns, or thoughts about this subject, please write to me at mkashty@hotmail.com. I do want to hear from you. I still want to learn – and I'm pretty old!

Again, thank you.

Most sincerely,

Martin Kashty

Appendix I: A Sampling of School Library Books Withdrawn

Please Note: Not all books had page numbers and therefore some of these are my counts.

Amazing Spot What!

By Nick Bryant and Rowan Summers

2002 New York: Lemon Drop Press 32 pp.

The reader tries to find items within cluttered pages. The page themes include: flight, food, space, tools, arena, blue, nature, numbers, purse, tv's, games, bedroom. Interestingly of the over thirty tv's shown, only two appear to have females as the major image. The purse and bedroom pages' dominant colours are pink; the only time this colour appears forefront.

Baby Bear, Baby Bear What do you See?

By Bill Martin Jr.

Illustrated by Eric Carle

2007 New York: Henry Holt and Company 21 pp.

A mother brown bear stands over her cub on the cover. In simple rhyme, the book names and illustrates various North American animals beginning with the cub and ending with the mother. The illustrations appear to be cut out assemblages.

The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey

by Stan and Jan Berenstain

1987 New York: Random House 30 pp.

The book is part of a series. On the cover, a shocked Papa is holding an empty jar of honey as his cubs dressed in Sherlock Holmes caps and with a magnifying glass look scared. A leashed Snuff, the hounddog, reaches for Papa. Papa and Snuff lead the hunt for a missing jar of honey. Papa doesn't take anyone's advice. It is finally realized that Papa ate the honey while sleep walking.

The Big Bug Search

by Caroline Young

Illustrated by Ian Jackson

1996 New York: Scholastic Inc. 32 pp.

The reader finds the various insects, shown along the edge of the page, within a large congested scene contained in a rectangle in the middle of the page. Many of the insects have brief descriptors. The cover has a similar format and features a large yellow ant and blue butterfly.

Can You Say Peace?

by Karen Katz

2006 New York: Henry Holt and Company 30 pp.

A variety of girls and boys from various ethnic backgrounds are drawn on the cover.

Written to commemorate Peace Day, boys and girls, fairly evenly divided, say peace in their language. All inhabited continents are represented.

Classic Star Wars: Luke's Fate

A Step 3 Book

By Jim Thomas

based on the screenplay by George Lucas

Illustrated by Isidre Mones

1996 New York: Random House 48 pp.

Luke is holding a lightsaber as Obi Wan, C-3P0 and R2-D2 watch from the background. The book re-tells the beginning of the original Star Wars movie where Luke first meets Obi Wan. This encounter helps Luke realize his dreams of leaving the farm and having an exciting life. The introduction is different from the movie as it has Luke and his best friend, Windy, the only major female in the book, winning a race which proves Luke's skill in flying. Windy's role is that of the doubter and panicker.

Dear Children of the Earth: A Letter from Home

by Schim Schimmel

1994 Minnetonka: NorthWord Press 32 pp.

On the cover of this ecology-minded book two snow leopards look out at the reader. A giant moon and small earth enveloped in a starry night appear in the background. The book is written as a letter from Mother Earth. She is asking assistance from the reader. She explains that even one person can do great things, especially if we work together, in order to save the planet. Each page is filled with naturally drawn animals often in fantastic settings.

Disney Fairies: The Great Fairy Race

Step Into Reading Step 3

by Tennant Redbank

Illustrated by the Disney Storybook Artists

2008 New York: Random House 45 pp.

Tinkerbell, of Peter Pan fame, riding a go-cart and Lily, the fairy riding a snail, are featured on the cover. The fairies, all female, have a race, each having a different mode of transport. None of the fairies complete the race save Lily riding the snail. At the beginning of the story she commented she did not care to win the race and stops to help others during the race.

Disney Princess Enchanted Tales: Follow Your Dreams

Adapted by Andrea Posner-Sanchez

2007 New York: Random House, Inc. 24 pp.

The cover features the Princess Aurora from Sleeping Beauty on top, along with some other characters from the Disney movie, and the Princess Jasmine from Aladdin on the bottom, along with some of the characters from that Disney movie. There are two stories in the book. In the first, Aurora is left in charge of the kingdom and is overwhelmed so she uses a magic wand given to her by one of the fairy godmothers. This gets her into trouble but she is able to solve it without assistance. In the second story, Jasmine tries to expand her boundaries by attempting new experiences. After a setback, she proves

herself by helping retrieve her father's horse. The drawings are similar to that in the Disney movies.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast

Based on the movie which is based on the folktale

1993 Danbury: Grolier Enterprises, Inc. 41 pp.

Illustrations from the Disney movie are used throughout the book as is the story line based on the fairy tale. On the cover Beauty and the Beast waltz with the full moon behind them and with animated household objects in front. Pink roses and lettering accent the cover. Relative to other texts in this list, there is a fair amount of writing.

Disney's The Lion King

Adapted from the movie

1994 Danbury: Grolier Enterprises Ltd. 40 pp.

The young Simba is shown on the back of Mufasa, his father, on the cover of this book which retells the Disney movie. The plot follows the formula of the fall of the proud protagonist, his growth, and eventual attainment of full potential. All major characters are male except for Nala, the romantic interest.

Disney's The Little Mermaid: Treasures of Old (Volume 7)

by Lisa Ann Marsoli

Illustrated by Adam Devaney and Niall Harding

1998 Advance Publishers 46 pp.

Ariel, the mermaid, of movie fame, is featured on the cover. King Mariner is handing her a necklace. The plot deals with Sebastian, the crab, trying to teach Ariel and her sisters proper etiquette for a great banquet. Ariel balks at these efforts and dreads going to the banquet which she feels are for the old who are boring. Ariel though finds the guest, Mariner, interesting since he discusses humans, a topic Ariel likes. Ariel and her sisters are given necklaces from a shipwreck as a gift by Mariner. Ariel suffers no consequence because of her disobedience. The message emphasized at the end of the book is that both the old and young have important and interesting things to say.

Disney's Toy Story

Adapted by Cathy East Dubowski

1997 New York: Scholastic Inc. 104 pp.

Buzz, the space-age action figure, takes off while Woody, the cowboy, is holding onto Buzz. This is a re-telling of the Disney movie. All major characters are male in this story of enemies becoming allies and friends. It should be noted that this book is well beyond the research group's reading level. It is questionable if the print was read.

Dreams to Grow On

by Christine Hurley Deriso

Illustrated by Matthew Archambault

2002 Bellevue: Illumination Arts Publishing Company, Inc. 28 pp.

A girl is tying her runners while she is sitting on a bed. She is dressed in blue overalls and the bed has yellow and purple covers. The walls are green and a doll dressed in blue and white stands against the pillow. A swath of lighted stars nearly encircles the girl. A

girl playing with her doll dreams about the different things she may become. The possibilities include: mother, architect, baker, scientist, trapeze circus performer, farmer, pilot, doctor, sea captain, actress, artist, teacher, and a writer. The message the book carries is dreaming is a step in realizing your goals.

The Dumb Bunnies go to the Zoo

by **Sue Denim**

Illustrated by Dav Pilkey

1997 New York: Scholastic Inc. 30 pp.

A naively drawn family, mother, son, and father, of pink rabbits run hand in hand through a zoo where all the cages are empty and the doors are open. The Dumb Bunny family goes to the zoo and has one misadventure after another. The silliness of the bunnies is constant from the first page where they pick things in the garden with an ice pick while junior picks his nose - and Dad is proud of him - to the final page where they are all sleeping in a bed with a sprinkler on - their version of a water bed. The drawings in the book are brilliantly coloured. Some of the humour, though, requires some insight.

Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z

by **Lois Ehlert**

San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers. 32 pp.

A variety of naively painted fruit and vegetables along with their names are illustrated on the cover. The author paints and labels, both in upper and lower case, fruits and vegetables in alphabetical order. At the end of the book is a brief glossary explaining some facts about each fruit and vegetable.

The Elders are Watching

by **David Bouchard**

Illustrated by Roy Henry Vickers

1997 Vancouver: Raincoast Books 50 pp.

A stylized sunset over water dominates the cover. A silhouette of an adult and child are in the foreground and a silhouette of an island is in the midground. A variety of Aboriginal people appear blended into the sunset. Written as a poem, this book warns the abusers of the Earth be careful for the Elders are watching. The illustrations are heavily influenced by Aboriginal art especially that of the West Coast. All the figures, both overt and covert, shown in this book appear to be male.

Eleanor, Ellatony, Ellencake, and Me

by **C. M. Rubin**

Illustrated by Christopher Fowler

2003 Columbus: McGraw Hill Children's Publishing 30 pp.

On the cover a girl with curly auburn hair is wearing an oversized yellow hat with a purple sash and a grape cluster adorning it. She is wearing a blue dress with a white t-shirt underneath. She is also wearing large earrings and a pearl necklace. In this story a young girl asserts her independence by not accepting the names and identities thrust upon her by her family members. The book is written in rhyme.

The Errant Knight**by Ann Tompert****Illustrated by Doug Keith****2003 Bellevue: Illumination Arts Publishing Company, Inc. 31 pp.**

The cover features a knight fighting a multi-coloured winged fire-breathing dragon. The book re-tells a parable from the Bible. A knight is side-tracked on his trip to serve his king. During this adventure the knight assists various needy individuals. In his old age, the knight finally makes it to the king's castle and is told that by serving these needy people he has already served the king and will be rewarded. The drawings throughout the book are simplistic but bold.

Eyewitness Books: Dance**by Dr. Andree Grau****1998 London: DK Publishing, Inc. 72 pp.**

Part of the Eyewitness series with its format of many pictures on each page with information describing each illustration. Photographs of dancers (all female) and dance-related items are shown on the cover. The history, significance, and variety of dances are discussed in this book with many photographs. Interestingly, there is a chapter on gender role reversal in dance.

Finding Robin Redbreast**by Harriet Ziefert****Illustrated by Mavis Smith****1988 New York: The Penguin Group 16 pp.**

On the cover, a girl dressed in a yellow sweater and jeans is looking through binoculars into a tree as a squirrel climbs a fence. A father and daughter are looking for a robin in this lift-the-flap book. The father and daughter take turns spotting different birds, hidden under flaps on the page, until the girl finally finds the robin.

Franklin and Harriet**by Paulette Bourgeois****Illustrated by Brenda Clark****2001 Toronto: Kids Can Press 26 pp.**

Part of the Franklin series, this cover shows Franklin, the turtle, dressed in red sneakers and a red baseball cap, happily pushing his baby sister, Harriet, wearing a purple coat and hair bow, on the swing. As Harriet smiles and waves to her brother, Sam, Franklin's stuffed blue dog toy, stands on the ground between them. Franklin loves spending time with his baby sister and does a variety of activities with her. Harriet becomes upset and having Sam soothes her. Franklin does not want to share Sam and difficulties arise. Eventually, Franklin is told by his mother that Harriet is too young to know how to share but that she loves her big brother. Franklin is happy but only lets Harriet borrow Sam during the day. Franklin keeps Sam at night.

Franklin's Blanket**by Paulette Bourgeois****Illustrated by Brenda Clark****1995 Toronto: Kids Can Press 25 pp.**

Again, part of a series, Franklin stands and looks out the window while holding his blue blanket. In this story Franklin misplaces his comfort blanket. Both the father and mother are supportive of Franklin. His mother helps him look for it and his father gives his old blanket to Franklin. Franklin discusses his need for the blanket and how vulnerable he feels to family and friends, who all appear to be male; all are empathetic and try to be helpful. He eventually finds his cherished transitional object which he forgot under a chair.

George and the Dragon**by Chris Wormell****2003 London: Random House Children's Books 26 pp.**

A fierce-looking winged red dragon occupies most of the cover of this book. A description of the ferocity of the dragon is given at the beginning of the book. The reader is then told the dragon is afraid of mice. George, a mouse, happens to move next door to the dragon and, when visiting to borrow some sugar for tea, accidentally scares the dragon away thus freeing a captured princess who rewards George.

Gingerbread Friends**by Jann Brett****2008 New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons 30 pp.**

On the cover a gingerbread boy does a cartwheel in the snow. He is surrounded by lollipops and a gingerbread house. A gingerbread boy feels sad when his friend, a human boy, leaves him in the house alone. The gingerbread boy sneaks into town to look for more friends and discovers a bakery shop where the other cookies are inanimate. He is almost captured by a host of enemies but makes it home where the human boy has made him gingerbread cookie friends like himself. The recipe steps for gingerbread appears on side panels through the book. The last page is a pop-up.

Gus and Button**by Saxton Freyman****2001 New York: Scholastic Press 32 pp.**

This book written in rhyme features scenes made from vegetables and fruits. On the cover, Gus and his dog, Button, stand near houses; all are made of mushrooms. Red and yellow flowers fall from the sky and a forest surrounds them; all are made from vegetables. Gus finds a green pea which was accidentally blown into his town. Gus along with his dog travel into the woods that surround his town and meet some friends. They travel to another colourful city where he becomes a hero, returning the lost pea to its mother. Gus is celebrated again when he returns to his hometown.

How Do They Grow? From Chick to Chicken**by Jillian Powell****2001 Austin: Raintree Steck-Vaughn Publishers 32 pp.**

A chick and rooster are shown on the cover. A boy is feeding chickens on the opening

page. The book follows the life cycle of a chicken from egg to chick. Three humans are shown inside the book: a man in a white lab coat, a male farmer and a female worker putting eggs into trays.

Hush: A Thai Lullaby

by Mingfong Ho

Illustrations by Holly Meade

1996 New York: Scholastic Inc. 30 pp.

A kneeling mother is holding her finger to her lips as if to quiet someone. She is holding her child in one arm on this cover dominated by earth tones. A mother quiets everything from a mouse to an elephant in this lullaby so her baby, who appears to be male, can sleep. At the end, the mother is successful and falls asleep just as her baby awakes.

I like Myself

by Karen Beaumont

Illustrated by David Catrow

2004 New York: Scholastic Inc. 30 pp.

A black girl dances happily by herself on the shocking pink cover of this book which is filled with brilliant colours and whimsical cartoon drawings. The book is written in rhyming couplets in large print. The book extols the belief that no matter what we look like or what we do, we should like ourselves just the way we are. The girl's pet dog accompanies her throughout the book.

I Love My Dad

by Caroline Bell

1988 Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside 16 pp.

A father fox is sitting at a desk and reading a book to his attentive kit on the cover. In this book, a child explains why he loves his father. Reasons include snacking on junk food together, playing together, having the same interests (here climbing a tree), and being able to fix things (in this case a bicycle). The illustrations show the father and son being represented as different animals until the end when the child is shown to be a human boy. On the last page, the father is kissing the boy on the cheek. They both wear matching baseball caps.

The Incredible Hulk's Book of Strength

DK Readers Proficient 4 Readers

by Jim Buckley

2003 New York: DK Publishing, Inc. 48 pp.

The cover shows the Incredible Hulk flexing. This book, written well above grade level and using Marvel superheroes throughout, uses the Hulk to introduce topics such as muscular system, nature, machines, physical and mental health and strength's relevance to each. In my search, females are not mentioned in the text but appear in three small photos (a basketball player, shotputter, and an individual doing yoga) and one large drawing of the Hulk saving a woman.

Jack and the Beanstalk**Folktale****Illustrated by Matt Faulkner****1965 New York: Scholastic Books, Inc. 48 pp.**

On the cover Jack is holding onto the beanstalk, dangling far above his house. The story follows the traditional folktale. Males dominate the plot. The pictures are detailed but muted in colour.

Just Me and My Mom**by Mercer Mayer****1990 New York: Golden Books Publishing Company, Inc. 23 pp.**

Part of the series, this cover features Mom dressed in a purple gown and hat with flowers holding the hand of her son. He is in overalls and is holding the hand of a frog. The three are walking in the downtown area of a city. The story deals with a day trip to the city with Mom and the boy. The misadventures of the boy include losing the train tickets, taking clothes from a museum display, and taking a frog from the aquarium. Mom never loses her temper though others do. The boy perceives himself as innocent and the other adults as overreacting.

Just Me and My Puppy**by Mercer Mayer****1985 New York: Golden Books Publishing Company, Inc. 23 pp.**

On the cover the Lil Critter main character, wearing blue overalls, is wrapped up in his puppy's leash as the dog tries to go forward. The book is written in first person. The main character trades his baseball glove to get a puppy. His parents say he can keep the dog if he takes care of it. Though the script describes him training the dog, the pictures show him getting into a great deal of trouble. All ends happily, though, and the parents are always smiling. A grasshopper and spider are shown throughout the book in a non-threatening manner.

Just My Friend and Me**by Mercer Mayer****1988 New York: Golden Books Publishing Company, Inc. 24 pp.**

This is another of the series of Lil Critter books. The main character, wearing blue overalls, is holding a baseball bat. Standing beside him is his friend, a bear, in green pants and a striped top. They are looking at each other. The main character's friend visits him and they do a variety of activities. The main character resents his friend surpassing him in some activities and not assisting in others. The main character makes excuses for both himself and his friend. He is relieved when his friend leaves. The only female characters are the two mothers, one who drives and the other mowing the lawn. At the end of the book, his sister is going to ambush him with a water pistol.

Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler**by Margery Cuyler****Illustrated by Sachiko Yoshikawa****2007 New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers 40 pp.**

Mrs. Ruler, a teacher, and five children, three girls and two boys, appear on the cover. In

this story the five children on the cover get into trouble and have to perform acts of kindness as retribution. Two girls immediately do so by doing domestic chores at home. One boy remains indifferent and performs no acts of assistance. The last girl assists the second boy in his effort. Finally, the resistant boy saves the day and cages all the gerbils that escaped. His act was the best one according to the teacher.

Kippy Koala

by Maurice Pledger

2003 Dorking: Silver Dolphin Books 15 pp.

A large drawing of Kippy holding on to a eucalyptus tree is shown on the cover of this movable flaps book. Kippy, a male koala, with the help of friends, all animals of Australia, goes on a treasure hunt looking for jewel beetles. Some of the friends are female.

The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza)

Retold by Philemon Sturges

Illustrated by Amy Walrod

1999 New York: Dutton Children's Books 26 pp.

The little red hen stirs a bowl of dough while looking out the window at friends playing on the street. The illustrations are brilliantly coloured cutouts. The hen, in the process of making a pizza, asks for assistance but all of her friends consistently decline. She, without disappointment, does it all by herself and then asks her unco-operative friends to share the pizza with her. They all do and then do the dishes to thank her.

Look and Find Tasmanian Devil

Scripts by Tom DeMichael

Illustrated by Rod Vass

1995 Lincolnwood: Publications International, Ltd. 21 pp.

Looney Toons' Tasmanian Devil points to a page in a Look and Find book on the cover. The reader tries to find various Looney Toons' and associated figures on pages congested with drawings. Short write-ups introduce each of the searches which occur in such places as the Tasmanian Forest, North Pole, Africa, Mars, the Wild West, New York, Paris and an airport. It is interesting to note that even in this book's format women are rarely depicted in the Wild West and African scenes. When shown, they are doing such jobs as cleaning. Male characters appear on every page.

Luck of the Irish

by Brendan Patrick Paulsen

Illustrations by Gwen Connelly

1989 Milwaukee: Raintree Publishers 28 pp.

A boy finding a leprechaun at the base of a tree is the illustration on the cover of this book. A young boy helps his sick mother by assisting leprechauns with their problem. Female characters rarely appear. The mother is shown sewing and another woman is helping put out a fire.

Madagascar: Born to be Wild

by Erica David

2005 New York: Scholastic Inc. 30 pp.

Alex the Lion and Marty the Zebra are shown on the cover of this book which is a brief synopsis of the Disney movie. Marty is bored with his existence and fulfills his dream of a more exciting life with the help of friends. The only female character is Gloria the Hippo.

The Magic of Music: An Adventure in Spain

Disney's Small World Library Book

1991 Danbury: Grolier Enterprises Inc. 34 pp.

Mickey and Minnie Mouse dressed in traditional flamenco outfits dance on the cover of this book. Mickey and Minnie visit Granada where they are doing a magazine story. They travel around Granada and meet and help many locals enter the big music festival being held in the city. Mickey stars at the end of the book, dancing the flamenco on stage. After the story, the book gives facts about Spain. The type is small and dense relative to the other texts on this list.

Men of Iron

by Harold Pyle

Retold by Earle Hitchner

Illustrated by Wayne Geehan

1990 Mahwah: Troll Associates 32 pp.

Two knights have a sword fight on the cover of this book which tells a story of good versus evil set in Medieval England. The only female is the romantic interest, the maiden in distress. Violent and illustrating killing, the content and the reading level are well beyond the reading level of the students of this study.

Old Turtle: A Gift of Wisdom and Hope

by Douglas Wood

Illustrated by Cheng-Khee Chee

1992 Singapore: Scholastic Press 47 pp.

A watercolour painting of a tortoise appears on the bottom half of this metallic gold cover. The inanimate objects and animals of nature, which are never engendered, argue over the definition of God. God is referred to as both 'he' and 'she'. Old Turtle mediates the argument by saying all the interpretations of God are correct. Old Turtle then foretells the appearance of mankind who will forget what is learned from the animals' argument and must be relearned.

On the Farm

A Sparkle Board Book

No Date China: Robert Frederick Ltd. 10 pp.

A newborn lamb is surrounded by his parents and the other animals of the farm on the cover of this book which has inlaid colourful metallic additions throughout. A newborn male lamb is announced to the farm population by his father. The animals visit the lamb and his mother. The hens and geese, the only stated or implied females, are the first visitors. All other visitors are implied or stated to be male.

One Zillion Valentines**by Frank Model****1981 New York: Mulberry Books 28 pp.**

Milton and Marvin stand with boxes and a wagon full of valentines on the cover of this book. Milton and Marvin create valentines to give to everyone in the neighbourhood. They have many left over and sell them making enough money to buy the chocolates they were looking at in the beginning of the story. Though the story deals with sharing and thinking of others, it ends with the boys becoming entrepreneurs and being materially rewarded for their efforts.

Oscar's Starry Night**by Joan Stimson****Illustrated by Meg Rutherford****1999 New York: Scholastic Inc. 28 pp.**

Oscar the bear cub is shown smiling and staring at the moon on the cover. Oscar and Ollie, two energetic male bear cubs, spend a day and night together playing and having fun. The only females mentioned are their mothers.

The Paper Bag Princess**by Robert Munsch****Art by Michael Martchenko****1980 Annick Press, Ltd. 24 pp.**

In this modern classic, Princess Elizabeth rescues her fiance, Prince Ronald, from a dragon who attacked the castle and abducted the prince. Wearing a paper bag, the only thing left after the dragon's assault, Elizabeth outsmarts the dragon but is then insulted by Ronald who tells her to dress like a princess. Elizabeth dumps Ronald and merrily heads into the sunset on the last page.

The Parrot Tico Tango**by Anna White****2004 Cambridge: Barefoot Books Inc. 24 pp.**

The brilliantly coloured cover shows the parrot Tico Tango flying with fruit in his mouth and other fruits falling below him. In the dense forest, a variety of animals peer at him. This book is written in rhyming couplets and describes how Tico Tango greedily steals fruit from friends. Eventually, he is overloaded and spills his entire cache. Tico Tango then feels remorse. His friends forgive him and Tico Tango shows them how to tango in compensation. The parrot follows the traditional role of a male character displaying socially inappropriate behaviour but then comes out ahead and is forgiven by all.

Pokemon: Night in the Haunted Tower**Adapted by Tracey West****1995 New York: Scholastic Inc. 70 pp.**

On the cover of this book, Ash appears with Pikachu surrounded by purple ghost pokemons. This chapter book appears to be beyond the reading level of the students in this study. Limited illustrations are in black and white. The plot deals with Ash defeating powerful female adversaries with the help of the father of Sabrina, one of the adversaries. After her loss, the antagonist, Sabrina, becomes the loving daughter she once was.

Stanley at Sea**by Linda Bailey****Illustrated by Bill Slavin****2008 Toronto: Kids Can Press Ltd. 31 pp.**

On the cover of this book, Stanley, the dog, and three canine friends are in a small boat at sea as gulls circle above. Stanley looks excited. Stanley is sent away for begging for food at a picnic. He and his three friends, including one female, land up in a boat and get washed out to sea. They are rescued and fed well and then returned home.

Stanley's Party**by Linda Bailey****Illustrated by Bill Slavin****2003 Toronto: Kids Can Press Ltd. 26 pp.**

Stanley the dog is seen dancing with other dogs at his party on the cover of this book. Stanley is bored when his owners leave him and he takes advantage of the situation by doing things he is forbidden to do by the owners. As the owners remain unaware of Stanley's activities, Stanley performs more forbidden acts. He eventually has a neighborhood house party and is caught by his owners. Stanley has to help clean up and his owners take Stanley everywhere they go now. Stanley loves this. Stanley's party is then immortalized by all dogs around the world. Both female and male dogs are invited to the party.

Star Wars Return of the Jedi: The Ewoks Join the Fight**by Bonnie Bogart****Illustrated by Diane de Groat****1983 New York: Random House 31 pp.**

The dark cover of this book features the droids with the Ewoks in a hut. The drawings throughout the book resemble the characters from the movie. All drawings are somewhat dark with brown tones dominating the pages. The story line is an abbreviated version of the movie. Princess Leia is the only female character. Relative to many of the other texts on this list, the writing is small and dense.

Teddy's Friend**by Ljiljana Rylands****1989 Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., Ltd. 20 pp.**

A father bear sits on a chair reading a newspaper while around him over a dozen cubs play and do other activities. The pages of this text are cut into irregular shapes. In this book, Teddy encounters a bear cubs doing various activities while he is looking for his friend. Most bears are dressed as males with females only outnumbering males on a balloon-themed page. Those bears reading also appear to be male. Interestingly, on the last page, a male bear serves the desserts as female bears attend to the cubs.

This is the House that Jack Built**Traditional rhyme****Illustrated by Pam Adams****1977 China: Child's Play (International) Ltd. 15 pp.**

This very colourful glossy oversized book features a large pink house with green shutters

and some of the characters from the traditional nursery rhyme on the cover. The book illustrates the rhyme. Every page has a cutout. When the cutout is flipped over, a character is exposed and the question “Who or what is this?” is asked.

Thomas' Snowsuit

by R. Munsch

Illustrated by M. Martchenko

1985 Toronto: Annick Press Ltd. 20 pp.

On the cover of this book, Thomas frowns in his brown snowsuit as his mother, looking exhausted, wipes her brow. The room around them is in complete disarray. Thomas hates the new snowsuit that his mother has bought him. She successfully puts it on him. Thomas' female teacher and male principal are less successful with the same ordeal. The two characters accidentally switch clothes in the mayhem. Thomas when called by his classmates goes outside to play, willingly dressing himself in the snowsuit. When Thomas returns, he switches the clothes of the two adults. The principal quits his job.

The Valentine Bears

by Eve Bunting

pictures by Jan Brett

1983 New York: Clarion Books 28 pp.

Mr. and Mrs. Bear share a valentine heart on the cover. Mrs. Bear wakes up early from hibernation to surprise her husband for Valentine's Day. She makes a sign, prepares honey and insects for a snack, creates two poetry valentines, and grooms herself for her husband. Her husband pretends to be asleep then surprises her with chocolate ants.

Vampire Bats and Other Creatures of the Night

by Philip Steele

1995 New York: Scholastic Inc. 40 pp.

Vampire bats, with teeth bared, fly across the moon on the cover of this non-fiction book. Like the cover, most of the pages use white print against a black background. The pages are filled with colourful life-like drawings and facts about these nocturnal animals. Large print is used throughout the text. Each of the three chapters about these organisms and their traits are followed by a quiz. These quizzes use black print against a white background.

We Share Everything!

by Robert Munsch

Illustrated by Michael Martchenko

1999 Toronto: Scholastic Canada Ltd. 32 pp.

The cover of this book features Amanda, a white girl, and Jeremiah, a black boy, smiling as they both tug at a book. The female teacher and other children fearfully hide behind the desk. The cartoon drawings are simple and colourful. On their first day of kindergarten Jeremiah and Amanda fight over books, blocks, and who goes first. Both children use the techniques they use at home with their male siblings: Jeremiah screams and Amanda kicks. The teacher, appearing in a cloud of butterflies and flowers, preaches that in kindergarten we share everything. Eventually, the children share their clothing.

Jeremiah is thrilled to be a boy wearing all pink. The teacher, of course, becomes upset as the rest of the children exchange and cross-dress.

Wings of Change

by Franklin Hill

Illustrated by Aries Cheung

2001 Bellevue: Illumination Arts Publishing Company, Inc. 29 pp.

Anew, the butterfly with large purple and yellow wings, flies over a meadow filled with flowers and water. Faith, the snail, watches him on the cover of this book. Anew, the caterpillar, has a series of bad dreams as he waits to become a butterfly. Faith, the snail, playing a maternal figure, comforts him and gives him words of wisdom that are realized when Anew becomes a butterfly.

Wonderful World of Animals: Fish

by Beatrice MacLeod

Illustrated by Matteo Chesi

1997 Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing 30 pp.

This non-fiction book features a drawing of a large shark on the cover. Large print and colourful drawings appear on every page. Fish are discussed in terms of size, appearance, hunting and migration habits along with other topics.

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