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Social discourse of literature circles with a focus on gender

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Social discourse of literature circles with a focus on gender

Abstract

This research study examined the social discourse of literature circles with a focus on gender within a fifth-grade regular education classroom. The researcher examined the nature of social discourse that was held by students and examined whether gender appeared to influence social discourse. The results from this study showed that gender did have an impact on how students responded to literature within discussion groups. Two main gender-related characteristics of the discussions were noted. The first characteristic was that males and females did hold beliefs that paralleled culturally-determined gender roles. These beliefs had an impact on how students responded to literature. The second characteristic was a clear pattern of acts of male dominance and female submission.

SOCIAL DISCOURSE OF LITERATURE CIRCLES WITH A FOCUS ON GENDER

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Abstract

This research study examined the social discourse of literature circles with a focus on gender within a fifth-grade regular education classroom. The researcher examined the nature of social discourse that was held by students and examined whether gender appeared to influence social discourse. The results from this study showed that gender did have an impact on how students responded to literature within discussion groups. Two main gender-related characteristics of the discussions were noted. The first characteristic was that males and females did hold beliefs that paralleled culturally-determined gender roles. These beliefs had an impact on how students responded to literature. The second characteristic was a clear pattern of acts of male dominance and female submission.

Introduction

“Everyone knows that girls can’t do what boys can,” Jacob shouted above the others during a discussion of the novel, *Where the Red Fern Grows*. “Girls wouldn’t care for dogs like a man...you know, dogs are a ‘man’s best friend.’

“They also wouldn’t go hunting and aren’t strong enough to cut down a tree,” Sam added.

“Yeah, she’d probably break her nail and start whining,” Jacob said.

Amy, clearly agitated, chimed in, “A girl probably could have done the same things as Billy but maybe a little differently. All Billy did was watch his dogs hunt. Girls can stand around and watch just as good as guys. It probably would have taken girls a little longer to cut the tree, but they sure could’ve done it. It’s funny how Old Dan and Little Ann follow my theory. Old Dan is strong and Little Ann is smart.”

This excerpt from a discussion in my fifth-grade classroom exemplifies the kind of gender-influenced talk that often occurred during our literature circles. After reading a study by Karen S. Evans (1997) in *Peer Talk in the Classroom* entitled, “Exploring the Complexities of Peer-Led Literature Discussions: The Influence of Gender,” I became intrigued by the role that gender played in these conversations. Although these discussions were lively personal responses to what was being read, they often proved to cause conflict among circle members. Research has suggested that students’ response to literature may be related to gender in several ways. These include males’ and females’ possible predispositions while engaging in talk about texts, the ways gender roles are presented within texts, and group dynamics. Investigating social discourse in discussion groups and thinking about how gender may impact discourse can provide teachers with

important information that could prevent conflicts as students engage in peer-led discussions due to gender influence.

This study investigated the following question. Did gender appear to influence the nature of social discourse in the literature circle discussions in my 5th grade language arts classroom, and if so, how?

Literature Review

The professional literature includes research on the social influences on learning and discussions in school settings, including but not limited to the influence of gender. This literature review begins by examining the broad topic of social influences and then focuses more specifically on gender.

Classroom Culture

Classroom contexts are created through rituals promoted by classroom teachers and performed by all members of the class. Meaning is often made and valued according to a students' social position within the classroom. Lewis (1997) described social conditions that position students as more or less successful in relation to others within the classroom culture. Interactions among students can become complicated as they participate in discussions. Power shifts tend to take place that influence their nature. Social expectations such as beliefs, values, and norms for interaction, along with interpretive expectations for reading, understanding, and discussion of literature shape the way students participate (Lewis).

Vygotsky, one of many sociocultural theorists cited by Evans (2002) and Maloch (2002), holds the perspective that learning during discussions is a culturally sensitive interactive process. How students perform is dependent not only upon the shifts that

occur during interactions with others, but also upon the relationships between students in and out of the classroom.

Evans's 2002 study investigated fifth-grade students' perceptions of their experiences while participating in discussion groups. The students identified five conditions that were influential in determining the effectiveness of their discussions. The first condition, considered the basic requirement, consisted of the need to read the chosen book, write in literature journals, and participate in group discussions. The next condition consisted of respect issues, including listening to one another, cooperating, and treating others fairly. The third condition related to people with whom they could work. The fourth condition included having a specific task given to the group before they started their discussion. The final condition was the text being read.

Sociocultural Conditions that Shape Student Engagement with Literature.

Lewis (1997) and Evans (1996) have shown a correlation between social and interpretive expectations and the positions students take during discussions. Evans' observations described how factors like gender, cultural background, and status played a role in whose ideas were expressed and listened to. Evans' notion of positioning is based on the premise that people position themselves in relation to others through discourse, which influences how their contributions will be heard. Students in Evans's (2002) study revealed that the gender make-up of their group influenced how students participated in and experienced discussions. Their ability to engage in productive discussions was dependent upon their preference for same-gender discussion groups. Lobel, Bar-David, Gruber, Lau, & Bar-Tal (2000) found that factors such as age and gender affected the type of inferences and judgments made. Their results further suggested a difference

between cognitive and emotional judgments among genders. During peer-led discussions, whether one performed or was accepted had much to do with one's social and interpretive power (Lewis, 1997). The data in this study indicated that gender was at play during discussions, especially when the discussion itself was about gender. Achieving peer status in the classroom was also dependent upon friendships developed in and out of school (Lewis).

Gender Influence on Learning

Both in and out of school, young people take on the new behaviors of adolescence in order to position themselves as gendered among their peers (Blair, 2000). From the way they wear their clothes, stand, move, and even hold their school books, they are continually constructing who they are as gendered beings (Blair).

One of the ways we ask students to learn is through discussions. In a study conducted by Guzzetti, Young, Gritsavage, Fyfe, and Hardenbrooke (2002), five themes were revealed pertaining to gender and discussion. The first theme exposed patterns of gendered discursive practices which included calling out, interruptions, teasing and contradictions usually associated with males. These practices often impeded females' and sometimes males' ability to develop and express ideas. The second theme focused on gendered talk found in literature groups. Characteristics tended to be dependent upon social relations found among group members and influenced participation found among the two gendered groups. The third theme focused on the stability of gendered discursive practices across content areas. For example, in Holden's (1993) study, males spoke less often in language arts class than girls, but more than females in mathematics and technology classes. The fourth theme involved difficulties of interrupting gendered

discursive practices. A common finding was that those with the most power often spoke the most, determined who was allowed to speak, and whose comments were elaborated on. The final theme detected the problem of assigning fixed characteristics to a particular gender. It is assumed by many that females behave and talk in one way and males in another, leading some to assume that if we could understand the different genders, misunderstanding could be eliminated within classrooms.

Gender Influence on Types of Talk

“Similar to dialects, genderlects have their own set of sociolinguistic rules. These “ways with words” are a key component to a speaker’s identity construction” (Blair, 2000, p. 316). They indicate relations of power, and are implicit in all classroom communications. Blair found that social conditions affected the types of talk found among students, which can be broken into two parts, girl talk and boy talk. Girl talk tends to be about activities within the classroom and their personal lives. Boy talk establishes and reinforces power relations. “The relationship between verbal aggression and boy talk supports the idea that gendered interactions reinforce power and solidarity for boys” (Blair, 2000, p. 317).

Cherland (1992) believes that cultural restraints maintain boundaries between girls and boys, which encourage social inequalities. Her research focused on types of talk found among elementary children participating in literature groups and included discourse of feeling, discourse of action, and feeling, action, and gender. Discourse of feeling is a way for students to analyze characters and describe their emotions. It involves kindness and is attached to positive values such as caring. Discussants using a discourse of feeling may begin statements with “I liked...,” “I knew...,” “I wish...,” “I felt sorry

for...,” when describing their feelings about a character in the story. Discourse of action is concerned with logic and meaning. This discourse defines characters by what they do, rather than by what they feel. Discourse of action seeks a clear and logical understanding of the plot. It is characterized by the words “because,” “when...then,” and “either...or,” “what if ...”. Cherland found that females as well as males use both discourse of feeling and discourse of action. Females, though, were clearly more inclined to use the discourse of feeling, while males were more inclined to use the discourse of action.

My review of the literature helped me think about what was going on in my classroom as I set about studying my students’ discussions. I hoped that it would inform my analysis of the data I gathered, and I wondered whether I would, in fact, notice gender-influenced discussion trends.

The Study

I gathered data for this study over the course of a year in my 5th-grade classroom. As students discussed novels in literature circles, I acted as participant observer and gathered data related to the question of how gender may or may not be influencing those discussions.

Participants

My study took place in a small rural town located in the Midwest. Students were predominately white and came from mostly middle to lower income families. Out of the 20 students in this class, three discussion groups were developed. One group consisted of six females, another of six males, and the third of six mixed-gender students. The two remaining students were not included due to their special needs. The eighteen students were grouped in this manner in hopes of gaining insight as to how a same sex gender

group compared to a mixed-gender group in relation to types of discussion and the positioning of the members within the group.

Although 18 students were involved in the groups, five were selected for special study because of the nature of their contributions to the literature circles. A short description of each student's peer status is included. Pseudonyms are used for all students.

- Tammy has several friends, is a leader on the playground and enjoys sports. In the classroom, Tammy struggles. She doesn't comprehend well and isn't a fluent reader. She rarely participates, speaks in a soft voice and is unsure of herself. If students try to include her, she removes herself from the group. Her parents are divorced;
- Jacob is a high achiever who comes from an average income family. He is a social leader and has several friends who "follow" him. He likes to be in charge and makes his opinions known, often without regard for other people's feelings;
- Sam is an average student. He sees himself as a leader but is more of a follower. He often makes comments that put girls down or makes them feel as though they aren't smart;
- Claudia is an average student. She starts discussions and states her opinion but backs down when challenged. Her parents are divorced;
- Amy is an intelligent girl who isn't afraid to participate. Her high status in the classroom was evident. Her parents are divorced. She lives with her mom and stepfather.

Context

The first semester was used to model and teach the students how to perform discussion groups. I introduced book clubs using *Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade* (1990), by Barthe DeClements. Mini-lessons were taught explaining how to conduct literature circles. At first, mini-lessons focused on role sheets in order for the students to become aware of different types of thinking. Role sheets allowed students to complete different jobs such as Discussion Director (asks questions), Connector (makes connections to other texts or experiences), Illustrator (visualizes important parts of the text), Vocabulary Enricher (picks out important words), and Literary Luminary (summarizes important events). As the semester progressed, students used role sheets as a discussion tool along with journals, post-it notes, and drawings to make connections to their lives, keep track of questions, elaborate about favorite parts, and learn important words.

Lessons were divided into three parts: mini-lessons, reading time and meeting time. During the 30-minute reading time, students read the predetermined pages, worked on role sheets, or wrote in journals. Groups gathered in a meeting spot – their desks, tables, or reading center – with their role sheets or journals while I circulated among the groups observing and helping with problems. This sharing period lasted about 20 minutes. Literature circles lasted two to four weeks depending upon the length of the books.

I began the second semester by selecting books of various genres. I gave a book talk on each. Students then looked through the books and selected their top choice. Once the groups were created, students read predetermined pages from their book at scheduled

times. They used journals to reflect on their book and prepare for discussions. Each group met daily for about 20 minutes.

Although a variety of novels were read and evaluated throughout the year, the majority of this study came from the results of three books. Included is a short synopsis of each:

- *Bridge to Terabithia (Paterson, 1997)*. Paterson's novel is about friendship between a boy and a girl. It deals with family, life, and death, allowing the reader an opportunity to look at both intellectual and emotional experiences. It portrays a believable relationship at an age when same-sex friendships are not the norm;
- *Hatchet (Paulsen, 1987)*. Paulsen's novel is about survival after a plane crash, living in the wilderness, and divorce. The main character lives with anger, loneliness and despair, and conquers his fears;
- *Where the Red Fern Grows (Rawls, 1961)*. Rawls' novel takes place in the Ozark Mountains during the late 1920's. Daily life was difficult and families had little contact with outsiders. The protagonist's biggest desire was to hunt raccoons. He earned fifty dollars over a two-year period and purchased two hound pups. His ability as a successful hunter caused him to become involved in a bet that took the life of another boy.

Data Collection:

Data collection was ongoing throughout the year. Task sheets, response journals, and teacher notes on student discussions were used as data sources (Hoyt, 1999).

Task sheets for a variety of written activities guided the students in learning how to process information about the novels. This type of writing was much more powerful than answering teacher-directed questions.

Response journals were used as evidence of how students conveyed their understanding of the text, the complexity of their thinking, and their personal reflections. Journals allowed students to express thoughts about character's actions, make predictions, share connections, and ask questions.

I also observed and took notes of students' conversations as I moved from group to group. I acted as participant observer, facilitating discussion and occasionally contributing my own thoughts, but mostly I stood back and noted the content and process of discussions.

Data Analysis:

Anecdotal notes and student artifacts were reviewed to identify patterns in the data related to possible connections between gender, response to literature, and discussions. As I analyzed the data, I noted the gender of the speaker/writer and looked for gender-related differences in the nature of talk or writing, as well as any gender-related positioning within the groups that may have existed. In particular, I looked for talk and writing that fit Cherland's categories of discourse of feeling or discourse of action (1992).

Findings: Two Gender-Related Differences

After reviewing the data, it was apparent that gender did have an impact on how students responded to literature. The first finding was that males and females did act and hold beliefs according to culturally influenced views on gender roles. These actions and beliefs impacted how students responded to literature. The second finding focused on how students acted in terms of dominance and submission during the discussion, which may have been related to gender.

Gender Influence on Literature Response

I found that student's responses to literature were often influenced by their culture's gender expectations. According to Lewis, (1997), the cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations one brings with them to a discussion factor into how one responds and whether one is accepted during discussion. These beliefs play a part in who participates and whose opinion is given consideration. Influential factors such as the school students attend, neighborhood they live in, friends, peers, instructional materials, magazines and other forms of media are all conditions that create cultural stereotypes. One of the most important of these factors is gender. The following examples of gender-influenced responses are similar to those found by Cherland (1992) and Blair (2000).

During a pre-reading activity for *Bridge to Terabithia*, students responded to topics covered in the novel by ranking them from 1 (strongly disagreed) to 6 (strongly agreed). Answers were often clearly related to traditional cultural beliefs about gender roles. Items that illustrated marked gender differences included the following (scores are averages).

1. Boys should have only male friends and girls should have only female friends.
Females: 1 Males: 4
2. Girls and boys shouldn't play together at recess.
Females: 1 Males: 4
3. We should be watchful of people who are different from us.
Females: 1 Males: 4
4. Friends should have a lot in common.
Females: 2 Males: 4

5. Boys are more adventurous than girls.

Females: 1 Males: 4

Students were also asked open-ended questions about *Bridge to Terabithia*. When asked if they felt it was alright for boys and girls to be best friends, the females all responded yes, while the males responded with a resounding no. Female responses included the following:

- It doesn't matter what you are;
- You can be friends with whoever you want to be friends with;
- You don't need to be friends with just girls;
- Just because they are different genders doesn't mean they can't be friends.

Male responses included:

- No, because it always ends up as one wants to ask one out and it doesn't work out;
- No, because then the boys make fun of you;
- No, it just doesn't work;
- No, because boys can't help girls with girl problems and girls can't help boys with boy problems.

These responses indicate that social and cultural factors may make it more difficult for males to accept or engage females in daily interactions. Students kept boundaries to keep the opposite sex from joining.

Other questions included, "Do you think it is important for boys to be in athletics? If they aren't in sports is it alright for them to be interested in drawing, or music?" The majority of all students responded that it was important for boys to be involved in athletics. Female responses included:

- Because if he isn't in sports, he is kind of a wimp;
- They can meet other people and be in shape;
- They can get some exercise;
- It would be weird if they didn't and liked to draw;
- Because boys are suppose to be strong and athletic and good at sports.

Male responses included:

- They need to be in sports to stay healthy and active;
- Boys shouldn't be afraid of water like Jess;
- Boys need to be active;
- There is something wrong with someone who wants to draw all the time. They are weird if they draw. If he draws, he might be picked on;
- Boys need to be more involved with their friends.

A final question in this activity was, "Should boys and girls compete against each other in athletic events?" The females believed it was alright because "girls can do what boys do, and it doesn't matter as long as you try your best." The males said no because they felt the two aren't equal in ability, and stated "girls aren't as good as boys and would just get them in trouble."

More examples of gender-based response occurred during our study of *Bridge to Terabithia*. The main character wanted to be the fastest boy in fifth grade. Students were asked what they'd like to be the best at and why. Both females and males overwhelmingly chose activities considered normal in our society for their gender. Females mentioned playing the piano, reading, dancing, and writing, while males stuck to sports such as football, rollerblading, and basketball. What seemed to be happening

during the reading of this novel was that gender and cultural norms were being blended and the responses given were culturally driven.

Students often displayed gendered responses in their artifacts. The males often focused on action while the girls focused on emotions. This was most evident in their Word Theater activity (Hoyt, 1999, p. 169). For this activity, students selected three or four key words they found interesting while reading *Hatchet*. Then they dramatized their words and had other students guess their word (Appendix A). The influence of gender in this activity was similar to findings in previous studies (Blair, 2004; Cherland, 1992; and Guzzetti, et.al; 2002) which suggest that boys respond to action while girls respond to feelings. Males chose words such as “heart attack”, “fights”, “plane crash”, and “screamed”. The actions they used to dramatize their words included “falling down,” “slow motion punching,” “being in a plane” and “scaring people.” Females on the other hand chose words like “grimacing”, “pain”, “frightened”, “weeping tears”, and “alone”. They chose to act out having horrible pain that caused them to fall, freaking out and screaming, having two people be parents that were sad and crying, and sitting all alone hugging their knees. These choices clearly showed males focusing on action, while females related to feelings.

During our study of *Where the Red Fern Grows*, students drew and wrote to communicate important events in the story (Appendix B). Students completed task sheets called Story Reflections (Hoyt, 1999, p. 82) where they drew pictures and wrote poems relating to the story. In the first example, Sam focused on action, choosing to illustrate the mountain lion fighting the dog. He also used specific action words including “sprang”, “attacked”, “slashed”, “hit”, “cut”, “bit”, and “scratched”. Claudia focused on

feelings and the main character cutting down the tree with the coon. She illustrated sore hands and wanting a sign from God. She chose words such as “ouch”, “losing hope”, “giving up”, “God”, and “healing”.

The findings from these discussions, journal activities, and task sheets correlate with those of Lewis, (1997). Students responded in a manner similar to the expectations that culture mandates for each gender.

Gender-Related Dominant and Submissive Roles during Discussion

The second finding focused on how gender related to students’ dominance and submission during discussions. During this study, instances of dominance and submission were most evident while reading *Hatchet*. Some students in the mixed-gender group were able to relate to and accept the main character’s confused feelings toward his parents because they came from similar backgrounds where their parents were separated, divorced, or living in blended families. Others, who came from two-parent traditional families, judged Brian’s feelings more harshly. The following discussion displays various power issues:

Claudia: A quote I found came at the beginning of the book in Chapter 1. Brian described divorce as an ugly, tearing word. It included fights, lawyers, yelling, breaking, and shattering of all the solid things in his home life. I can totally relate to Brian when he says this. My parents are divorced and it does tear you apart.

Sam: Well, does your mom have a “secret” and did you keep it from your dad?

Claudia: I don’t know. They divorced when I was little. It is still hard because

sometimes I want to be with my mom and other times I want to be with my dad.

Sam: Yeah, but your life isn't shattered...he acts like his life ended or something.

Amy: What do you know about it...your parents aren't divorced. I found a quote similar to that one on page 32.

Jacob: Can we talk about something else?

Sam: Let's just finish this up and go on.

Amy: Anyway...my quote was, "It was like a knife cutting into him deep with hate." I can relate to Brian there because my parents divorced and my mom remarried. I don't hate my step-dad, but I hate that he is around and I can't always see my real dad.

Sam: Why would you hate him?

Amy: I don't really hate him, but I do feel angry at times. It is hard for me and my sister to deal with.

Jacob: Maybe if his mom wouldn't have been kissing the man, they wouldn't have gotten a divorce. I think that Brian should have told his mom.

Sam: So do I. I think it is important for them to know stuff, especially something like that.

Amy: I feel bad for his dad. He doesn't even know why they got a divorce but Brian does. That would be hard being Brian.

Sam: O.K. let's go on to the next one.

In this conversation, Sam positioned himself as the more powerful or dominant student by leading the discussion and downplaying other students' voices, particularly the

girls. In addition to issues of dominance and submission, one can also see the aforementioned female preferences for feeling-related topics and the male aversion to such topics.

Gender-related social power and submission were often displayed through the manner in which the students talked and what they talked about during their discussions. The all-male group tended to speak in loud voices, was not on task, and laughed often and loud. They focused on action and how the characters could solve problems they encountered. They often tried to get other group members to laugh and to get the attention of other groups. They worked especially hard to gain control over their own group.

Males in the mixed-gender group also used loud, attention getting behaviors. They ignored the female's opinions, tried to embarrass them, and wouldn't listen when they responded. In response to the males' attention getting behaviors, females would move off to the side, sit quietly or whisper to others, or would sit unresponsive in their chairs. Females did not display behavior similar to males and did not challenge them.

A discourse of feeling (Cherland, 1992) was evident in the all-female and mixed gender discussion groups. In *Bridge to Terabithia*, the author went against the grain by having the female rather than the male in this story as the more powerful figure. During our reading of this novel, males found it difficult relating to Jesse. They didn't like this character and made comments such as, "even Jesse's dad doesn't like him". Males made fun of Jesse because he was "in love" with his teacher. Females on the other hand seemed to respect the friendship Jesse had with Leslie. They seemed to form a bond with Jesse because he went out of his way to make Leslie happy by getting her a puppy. The

following discussion took place between members of the mixed-gender group while reading *Bridge to Terabithia*:

Claudia: I feel sorry for Jesse.

Jacob: Why would you feel sorry for Jess? His only friend is a girl and he spends all of his time running or drawing.

Sam: I got other things to do than play with a girl or run.

Claudia: That is why I feel sorry for him. He has to do all the work, his dad doesn't give him any attention, he can't even draw or he gets in trouble. It isn't fair!

Jacob: What are you talking about? You must like Jesse yourself. He's even in love with his teacher!

Sam: How stupid is that!

It was evident the males dominated Claudia and belittled her feelings about Jesse.

In this study, gender seemed to be very important in determining position of power among students. Although females constructed their identity through talk, it was the talk among the males that established the course of the discussions and determined who held the power.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Literature discussions are complex social, cultural and intellectual contexts, of which gender is an integral part. Gender influences students' responses to literature discussions in a variety of ways including boys' and girls' predispositions while engaging in different types of talk about texts, the text that is being read, and the ways in which

gender roles are presented within the text, as well as the group dynamics within literature discussion groups (Cherland, 1992).

Participation within peer-led literature discussion groups as well as how students experience discussions is highly influenced by the gender makeup of the group (Evans, 2002). In my research, females used their own emotional responses to the text in their discussions and stressed human relationships among the characters. They often felt sorry for the main character. In addition, they expressed personal connections with the characters, and conversations illustrated how they put themselves in the character's place. In contrast, the male group rarely relied on emotional responses and followed Cherland's model of discourse of action. They seldom analyzed characters and focused on what characters did, not how they felt.

Gender also has the potential to affect students' interpretation of and response to literature through its impact on how students interact with one another in their literature discussion groups. During the course of reading *Hatchet*, it was apparent that males related to and liked this novel. They talked in loud voices, tried to be heard over the others, were out of their seats, used hand gestures and vivid examples from the book. They compared it to the survivor shows seen on television and to their Boy Scout experiences. Females on the other hand were disgusted when Brian was eating maggots in order to survive. They felt sorry for him because he was all alone on an island and his parents were divorced. The females made faces and shrunk back in their seats when talking about maggots, and were very quiet when they discussed Brian being alone on the island. How people position themselves or are positioned by others influences how their contribution will be received. If a person is positioned as an authority on a topic, his or

her opinion is more likely to be listened to and valued than someone who is positioned as unknowledgeable about a topic. Sharing personal experiences with other group members involves taking risks. In order to feel comfortable enough to share these experiences one must feel comfortable with the members involved (Evans, 1996). Females in this study didn't feel comfortable sharing their feelings with the males because the males interrupted them, talked more loudly so their voices would be heard over the females and made fun of the females when discussing the foods Brian found to eat.

Existing research and my own study both indicate that students do in fact use gendered talk in peer-led literature discussions. This talk may take on the form of feelings most typically found to be used by females, or it may take on the form of action typically used by males. The gender make-up of the group has an impact on how students relate to one another during discussions. The text being read also was shown to influence the talk found in discussion groups. While reading these books during my study, it is likely that students interpreted and responded to the content in ways that reinforced gender stereotypes. "Literature discussions have the potential to open, as well as close, spaces for dialogue to occur, and gender is one of the factors that may influence the type of space that is created" (Evans, 1996, p. 194).

Other social factors may operate during literature discussion groups in addition to gender. Social status, ethnicity, economic standing, and linguistic differences may all influence how students respond to books and to each other (Beers, 1998). However, the major finding of this study is that gender is certainly one of the important items on the list of cultural factors that influence classroom discussions. Although peer led literature discussion groups have shown benefits in relation to student learning, teachers need to

understand the influence that social and cultural factors such as gender have on discussions. As educators, we must constantly look at classroom discussions in an effort to see what makes them work, what makes them fail, and how, as teachers, we might make them better.

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Appendix A

B

Word Theater

Actors _____

The Book

Aatchet

Focus word

Selected from page

Plan for dramatizing

1. heart attack

11

(Jacob) walking
and having a
heart attack / falling
down

2. fights

6

Slow motion
punching, or
punching and inch away

3. plane crash

24

pretend in a
plane

4. screamed

32

() 1 scream
() scared her

action word

Appendix B

Word Theater

B cutting

Actors _____

The Book

Hatchet

Focus word

Selected from page

Plan for dramatizing

1. vomiting chems 67

in the class room
at school in your
desk. thoughting up
on a girl.

2. crawled 67

He got shot
and he crawled ing
for help.

3. cutting like 67
a knife.

carking like
a pumpkin.

4. smashed 40

that car got
smashed by
the mother.

Appendix C

Word Theater

G

Actors



The Book

Hatchet

Focus word

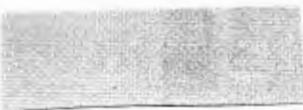
Selected
from page

Plan for dramatizing

1. grimacing 10 Fall on the ground
Pain (pilot) having heart attack
-Horrible pain
2. The secret 3 Nobody knows where
pilot and the frigid
girl are!
3. frightened 69 the actor is
scared in the woods
freeking out and screaming
4. Seeping tears 3 The parents are
very sad! So they
got the police!

Appendix E

Story Reflections



Draw a picture about the story.



slave

One word about the main character

dark, cool

Two words describing the setting

field, woods, not a cool

Three words telling the problem

spring, attacked, slashed, hurt

Four words about an event

hit, cut, bit, scolded, hurt

Five words about the solution

Figure 2a

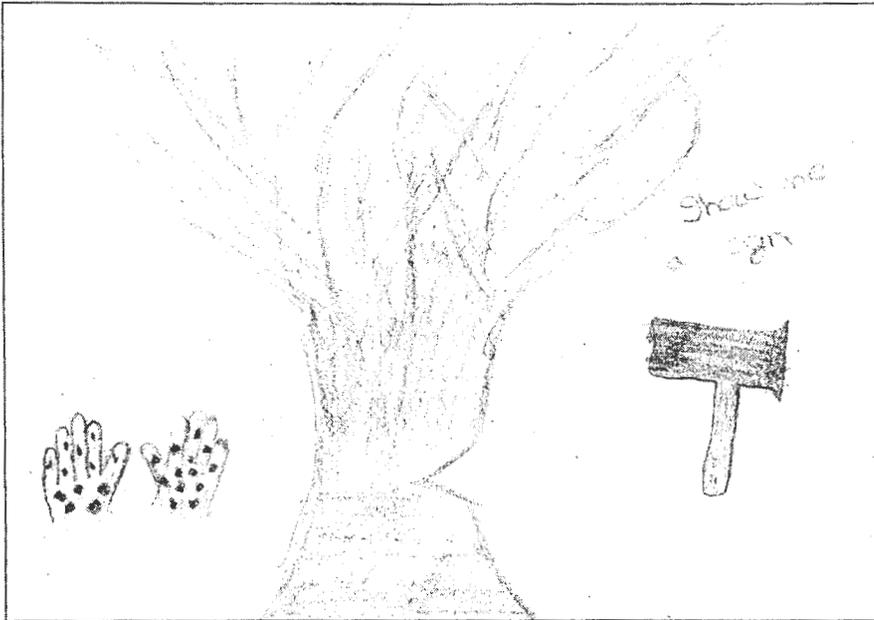
Appendix F

Em

E

Story Reflections

Draw a picture about the story.



determined

One word about the main character

silent , day time

Two words describing the setting

ouch , losing hope , give up

Three words telling the problem

can , tree , ax , log

Four words about an event

God , wind , healing , crunching , can

Five words about the solution

Pause and Ponder Sidebar

1. Do you notice similar gender-influenced responses to literature in your classroom?
2. Do boys tend to use aggressive behaviors to dominate discussions in your classroom?

Do girls tend to be more passive?

3. If you notice such gender-influenced behaviors and beliefs in your classroom, what are some appropriate actions you might take?