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## LITERACY EDUCATION AND GENDER: WHICH BOYS? WHICH GIRLS?

### INTRODUCTION

When I began researching material in literacy and gender several years ago (Booth, 2002), I was intrigued with the dozens of books and research articles documenting issues in male culture and in raising and schooling boys. Government reports, education journals, and books by authors with differing viewpoints have continued to appear on page and online; some emphasize biological differences in males and females; others take a socio-constructivist approach; others want to create boy-friendly environments; still others struggle to promote the literary canon (Elliott-Johns & Booth, 2009). As teacher educators, we will need to consider these concerns, and to develop programs and resources for teachers who will be helping boys and girls take control of their literacy lives.

We will want to help student teachers uncover many of the assumptions and stereotypes about how boys and girls cope. If we believe that all students should have access to literacy proficiency, we need to ensure that both boys and girls see themselves as readers and writers who can handle the requirements with the variety of literacy texts, on page and on screen of interpreting and constructing a variety of text forms and modes.

As teacher educators responding to new studies and initiatives promoting programs for supporting boys' literacy proficiency, we don't want to generate or fuel new problems for girls. The education of boys is closely connected to the education of girls, and education philosophies and policies on gender will directly influence both (Elliott-Johns & Booth, 2009). As well, there are diverse opinions about the origin and even the nature of the problems that we find inside such a discussion. We will need to move our student teachers forward into understanding the dynamics of how boys and girls construct their gendered literacy lives so that educational change benefits all students.

We know that no single category includes all boys or all girls. We don't want to compress all boys' literacy behaviors, tastes and attitudes into one single frame, but rather recognize the diversity among groups of boys. But as we look at studies and reports that examine boys and girls and their learning styles and special interests, their growth patterns and their stages of intellectual development, we do notice differences, not in all boys or in all girls, but enough of them to cause us to reflect about our demands on their young lives (Brozo, 2010).

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There are definite issues with the ways in which many boys view themselves as literate beings, with how they approach the acts of reading and writing, and with how they respond to assessments of their skills (Rowe & Rowe, 2006). Teachers who work in classrooms with many more boys than girls, or who teach single-gender classes, often express their concerns about differences in interests, abilities and learning styles, and the faltering boys' test scores internationally have opened useful discussions on these issues of literacy and gender that can inform our professional interactions.

#### RESEARCH IN GENDER AND LITERACY ATTAINMENT

Formal assessment results are most often used as the reason for implementing strategic changes in classroom pedagogy, as schools, districts, provinces, and states attempt to create initiatives for increasing achievement results. Previously, research conducted on gender and education focused on the issues of females (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Studies had shown that females were disadvantaged relative to males as part of the hidden curriculum implicitly taught to students, and often overlooked by educators (Benevides, 2010). Traditionally, males have outperformed females in science and mathematics but this gap is gradually narrowing, and more women than men are attending university.

During the past ten years, there has been a great deal of assessment, research, and critical examination of the issue of boys' literacy attainment in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, and there is growing awareness in the United States. Much documentation has been carried out by government departments/ministries, universities, researchers, educators and authors specializing in the field of gender and literacy (Booth, Elliot-Johns & Bruce, 2010). In actuality, this concern with the boys' lagging literacy attainment has been going on for over thirty-five years (National Assessment of Literacy Progress NAEP, 2012), also revealing that the literacy gap grows as boys continue through school.

Today, educators are faced with the challenge of teaching an extremely complex curriculum and preparing students to be life-long learners who will become engaged, literate, members of society. As in other jurisdictions, the Ministry of Education for Ontario has implemented a system of standards-based education and province-wide testing in an effort to increase student achievement, and differences in literacy scores between boys and girls from these standardized tests have caused school districts to focus on ways to implement change.

The international research agency, PISA (PISA, 2009) confirmed a significant gender gap in reading and writing in all participating countries, with girls performing significantly better than boys on reading and writing tests (*PISA Executive Summary*). The 2010 *State of Learning in Canada: No Time for Complacency* report found that for 2000, 2003 and 2006, girls score on average 32 points higher than boys in reading, and that boys have more difficulties in language and learning, and 11% more female students than males met the expected level in writing. In Ontario over the last

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decade, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO 2011) Literacy Test Scores for grade 3 revealed that boys scored lower (for reading and writing respectively) than girls. For grade 6, scores were better, but boys still scored lower.

### *Interpreting the Assessment Data*

Schools are implementing different strategies to improve the literacy performance of students, and while scores have improved for both girls and boys, girls continue to outperform boys on standardized assessment procedures. The gender gap remains but is stabilizing after widening for a short period. However, many boys achieve extremely well in all areas of literacy, while some girls underachieve, and in many schools. Teachers will need to interpret the data and explore reasons for differences in gender and achievement (Martino, 2008). For example, poverty still appears to be the biggest obstacle to literacy achievement (National Literacy Trust, 2011).

Fortunately, we can benefit from the educational reforms that grew from the changes associated with girls: we can apply those principles of gender equity to the educational needs of boys, even though in many ways, that very system of schooling may have formerly marginalized girls and privileged some boys. Teachers will need to recognize gender differences and know how to respond appropriately to diversities. Not all boys are failing reading tests, doing less well than girls, or ‘hate’ to read. “It is important to ask which boys in order to avoid a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to instruction” (Booth, Elliott-Johns, & Bruce, 2010, p. 7).

## WHICH BOYS, WHICH GIRLS?

How do individuals acquire gender? Very young children notice and respond to visible differences in boys and girls, and these gender differences will be fundamental to their lives and how they will interact in society (Dietze & Kasin, 2012). Nature and nurture have become catch words, but how the brain thinks, genes, hormones, how the unconscious works, the affective and emotional factors, linguistics, the social, economic and cultural structures surrounding the child—all of these factors will contribute to the child’s perception of identity and gender. Authors such as Michael Gurian (2006), Michael Reist (2011), Steve Biddulph (2004) and Leonard Sax (2009) have written widely on boy-girl differences, and are advocates for supporting school success for boys by creating *boy-friendly* environments. However, in the nature versus nurture debate, William Saletan (2011) comments that:

the word *hardwired* is a misleading metaphor for explaining the brain. Brains, unlike computers, are constantly altered by experience. So while scans may show differences between men’s and women’s brains, that doesn’t prove the differences are innate. So, yes, hormones influence how we think. But we, in turn, can influence our hormones. ([http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/human\\_nature/2011/11/](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/human_nature/2011/11/))

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Susan Gilbert (2000) says, “Biological differences may endow boys and girls with different strengths and weaknesses to start with, but experience shows they don’t close doors. Boys and girls achieve the same overall scores on several different intelligence tests. It is estimated that a child’s general IQ is 30 percent to 40 percent inherited genetics. “The remainder is shaped by the quality of life experiences” (p. 112). And Eliot (2010) claims that there is plenty of plasticity in every child’s brain to nudge them in either the empathetic or assertive direction” (p. 294).

At school entry, most girls are ahead of boys in their verbal skills, and in phonological development, so their transition to reading and writing, supported by the development of their fine motor skills, gives them an advantage over many boys. Boys appear more frequently in special education classes, or drop out more often, and are less likely to become university students. Males are more likely to have a reading disability, and are twice as likely to have a learning disability (Bainbridge & Heydon, 2013). Eighty percent of autistic children are male; there are two boys diagnosed as dyslexic for each girl; boys are twice as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD as girls, and 5 to 1 are prescribed Ritalin. Boys are more likely than girls to attend special schools, and boys are four times as likely as girls to be identified as having a behavioral, emotional, or social difficulty (Rutter et al., 2004). Interestingly, females are often asked fewer complex questions, and may receive less constructive feedback. Girls may be better at writing tests, or at understanding how tests work. More girls are selected for enrichment programs in elementary schools, but fewer remain in those programs in secondary schools. There are problems for boys related to motivation, lack of engagement, or frustration with extended reading or rewriting. Enjoyment of reading tends to have lessened, especially among boys, signaling the challenge for schools to engage students in reading activities that they find relevant and interesting (OECD, PISA 2011). On average across the participating countries, the percentage of students who said they read for enjoyment every day fell from 69% in 2000 to 64% in 2009. However, the term “reading” may centre mainly on fictional narratives, omitting the variety of other texts that many boys are actually reading.

To help us consider students’ behaviors and attitudes, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) have summarized the differences educators have noted concerning boys and girls:

- Boys take longer to learn to read than girls;
- Boys read less than girls, and the larger the gap in reading time, the larger the gap on reading test-scores in high school;
- Girls tend to comprehend narrative texts and most expository texts significantly better than boys do;
- Boys tend to be better at information retrieval and work-related literacy task than many girls;
- Boys generally provide lower estimations of their reading abilities than girls do;
- Boys value reading as an activity less than girls;
- Boys have much less interest in leisure reading and are far more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls;

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- Boys spend less time reading and express less enthusiasm for reading than girls, defining reading as solitary, nonsocial behaviour;
- Boys increasingly consider themselves to be ‘non-readers’ as they get older; very few designate themselves as such early in their schooling, but nearly 50 percent make that designation by high school.

(p.10–11)

Most likely, boys start out with slightly less mature circuits for processing words, and language experience widens this gap as boys and girls start paying attention to different features of their environment. This is all the more reason to talk, read and sing a lot to them, to perhaps lengthen those dendrites and stimulate their left hemispheres in a way that girls’ brains may seek out more on their own (Eliot, 2010, p. 189).

There also may be stereotypical expectations held by many parents, teachers, and society at large, that boys are stronger in mathematics and sciences and girls in the arts and humanities. However, in *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*, neuroscientist Lise Eliot (2010) argues against stereotypes, claiming that boys are not better at math, but excel at certain types of spatial reasoning, and that girls, rather than being normally empathetic, are allowed to express their feelings more than boys.

#### SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL STRUCTURES

What it means to be a boy or a girl in school can depend to a large degree upon the school’s culture or the classroom’s subculture. Schools can and do influence gender differences in academic achievement. The literacy curriculum may more closely align with the reading attitudes and interests of girls than boys, and many boys feel their reading preferences are not valued in the school-defined literacy environment (Tompkins et al., 2011). Even though programs incorporate masculine texts that may reinforce traditional gender patterns, many boys become alienated from these resources, and see literacy endeavours as valuing female knowledge and behaviors over their interests (Elliott-Johns & Booth, 2009).

If schools encourage a narrow understanding of what masculine behavior should resemble, then that will have an impact on how boys see themselves and how they are seen by others of both sexes. So much of what boys read, how they respond in public, how they capture their thoughts and feelings in writing, is determined by the unwritten but real expectations of school life (Newkirk, 2002).

Many boys and girls have different types of school experiences, such as teachers requiring and rewarding different kinds of behavior from girls and from boys, and, of course, from different boys. For example, some boys may receive more teacher attention than girls, much of it negative, and boys are often disciplined more harshly for the same misbehaviors.

Some researchers feel that the present focus on the boys’ agenda is short term and essentialist (Martino & Kehler, 2007), perpetuating conventional masculine

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stereotypes rather than working toward a diversity and multiplicity of gender constructions' (Younger, 2007). They want schools to lead a movement to alter the dominant versions of masculinity in our society, to open up different and multiple forms of behaviors for boys to consider.

However, in the research report *Raising Boys' Achievements* (Younger & Warrington, 2005), the authors point out that

there are typical patterns of behaviour to which many boys conform, and that although boys are not an undifferentiated group, there are broad similarities within subgroups which allow valid generalizations to be made, and if similar groups of boys are compared with similar groups of girls, there is evidence of lower levels of attainment by boys (p. 19).

The boys and girls student teachers will meet in their classrooms come with different life experiences, knowledge, and sets of skills. They may also be at different developmental stages. We do note, however, patterns common to many boys' and girls' behaviors. Not surprising, the students themselves share clear definitions of what a boy or a girl is at very early ages. As well, many girls and boys have grown to prefer different subject areas and different learning strategies. In literacy teaching, these factors may cause us to re-evaluate our programs so that more boys will view language arts activities as useful or worthwhile. We will need to develop literacy programs that provide for different interests and include strategies that appeal to a variety of learners.

What are the factors that appear to influence literacy achievement in boys and how will classroom teachers address them? As educators, we do want teachers to work toward equity in our classrooms: acquire resources that are bias-free, use inclusive or gender-neutral language, and organize activities that welcome the strengths of different individuals (Hammett and Sanford, 2008). Boys and girls need to develop literacy behaviors and skills, but they also need to understand the relationship between gender and how they will read, write and respond. We will need to help teachers to identify the diversity within groups of girls and boys, to highlight multiple forms of literacy and literate practice, and to value different gendered behaviors.

#### READING INSTRUCTION AND GENDER

The noted educator James Moffett (1975) said nearly forty years ago that we need to make the solitary acts of reading and writing socially constructed events if we want to promote literacy development in young people, and I now add, especially for boys. The "peer group imperative" demonstrated every day may be our greatest classroom asset. While many boys prefer to read information books and girls read more fiction, classroom programs can alter these behaviors when teachers incorporate literature circles and inquiry projects using different themes and resources, on page and online, that can support appropriate choices by girls and boys.

*Redefining Literacy*

Today, as educators, we have come to understand that there are multiple literacies: we recognize the variety of ways to make shared meaning in our lives- language, of course, (both oral and written), music, art, dance, and all the symbol systems (Baker, 2010). For young people today, learning will require opportunities to explore meaning-making with many of these forms, and in new combinations of them, such as the visual text literacies found in their electronic, computer-filled worlds. There is not one definition of *literacy* since literacy practices are multiple and shift, based on the context, speaker, text, and the function of the literacy event. (e.g., doing a Google search).

Even our definition of the term *text* has gone beyond the traditional acts of reading and writing using an alphabetic code or symbol system, to include digital technology, images, sounds, and oral discourse. Now we refer to a text as a medium with which we make meaning (an audio book, a speech, a magazine, a painting, a film, a computer screen, narratives, information, lists, opinions, persuasive editorials, poetry, songs, scripts, instructions and procedures, graphic texts, etc.).

Our definitions of reading and reading instruction are changing rapidly. A multitude of literacy forms and formats fill the lives of our students. Now we have youngsters at all levels working with word processors, chat lines, blogs, emails, text messages, web searches, Photoshop, and so on. And all of these activities are literacy events. Boys and girls are reading, and especially writing, more than ever. But we need to consider the quality of the literacy events they are engaging in, the kinds of learning processes they are exploring, and what language options they may be minimizing, or even missing. We can be plugged-in at times, and still gather together and sit in a circle, to listen to a tale 2,000 years old.

Martino (2001) suggests that boys may be engaging in literate practices outside school that are not reflected in their poor literacy test results, and that “the boys may be advantaged with electronic forms of literate practice useful in the changing post-industrial labour market” (p. 23). Tapscott, in *Grown up Digital* (2009), strengthens this argument.

Current research supporting the use of computers in the classroom has been overwhelmingly optimistic. Many students find that the computer and hand-held devices offer support for reading, writing and researching, and boys often develop a more positive approach to literacy activities. One of technology’s great appeals is that it is intrinsically motivating, and students have a great deal of autonomy in their investigations. We need to be aware that computer use may affect development in areas that boys should and need to cultivate, such as collaborative learning and creating a meta-awareness of texts they read.

It is important to note that girls and boys may come to technology in different ways. Although girls have narrowed the gender gaps in math and science, technology remains largely dominated by boys. Girls consistently rate themselves lower than boys on computer ability, while boys exhibit higher self-confidence and a more positive attitude about computers than girls do. Boys use computers outside of

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school more often than girls (Hammett & Sandford, 2008). Just as many boys prefer resources (e.g., books, magazines, websites, and so on.) that favor facts over fiction, they respond to the factual and multimodal (written, image, sound, animation) nature of the Internet.

It is evident that boys can read, but are selective in what they read; they use reading strategies that they have adopted in school and have morphed them to help make sense of new literacies that appeal to them. (Sanford, 2002 p. 25)

Schools need to recognize and value the types of reading that many boys are engaged in and provide links between school and ‘socially oriented’ reading, such as including graphic novels and technologically-based texts in their literacy programs. Conversely, teachers need to include more technical and factual reading for girls to prepare them for their future lives. If educators incorporate popular and contemporary texts that interest young people through the content and style, and if they develop their literacy strategies, students may approach and participate in the reading of a wider variety and complexity of texts, online and on screen.

#### GENDER AND WRITING PROFICIENCY

Understanding the gendered nature of some writing behaviors offers new hope for more effective teaching and learning, but only if we better understand what literacy looks like for many boys and girls and how our classroom practices relate to what they are (or are not) learning. Spence (2008) wants preservice and in-service teachers to learn about creating classroom environments for writing, with effective instructional frameworks and authentic pedagogy with diversity as a focus.

In a special issue of the *Journal of Writing Research* (Stagg Peterson and Parr, 2012) devoted to gender and writing, several issues were synthesized from decades of research on gender patterns in what and how students write. While the impetus for much of the research was generated by gender disparities in large-scale assessments of writing, the researchers focused on the multiple ways that gender can be negotiated in the writing classroom. The insights from the articles can help us understand the issues affecting the writing behaviors of girls and boys, and support changes in our practice. The authors explore the socio-cultural factors that can influence gender differences in student writing, the degree of anxiety associated with the process of writing, the relationship between self-worth and writing, how girls are learning at an earlier stage than boys to develop their transcription skills, and how boys tended to adopt a *report talk* style while girls tended to adopt a *rappport talk* style, speaking at length of human actions, intentions and feelings.

As well, we will need to recognize that the writing content for many boys and girls often differs, as Elliot and Woloshyn (2013) report:

In general, boys prefer to write about adventures and events beyond their immediate experiences. They tend to produce action-based compositions



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(with or without violence) with main characters who often act alone. Their writings usually contain few female characters ... who assume passive roles (Anderson, 2003, Newkirk, 2000). Girls prefer writing about events within their experiences, including interactions with friends and family. Their work is more likely to be social in nature, with characters who work collaboratively (Anderson 2003 p. 260).

Since many boys need help and motivation in planning, revising, and editing their written work, we can employ other types of texts besides personal narrative for them to explore, opening up their familiarity with the whole world of written forms (Jones, 2012). We will need to help them to develop writing topics that matter, and to find authentic reasons for having boys engage in written activities. We can include technological support, such as composing on computers, using voice-recognition software, as well as visual templates- diagrams such as story boards, graphic organizers and mind mapping tools for organizing, drafting and revision.

We can also make better connections between writing and the curriculum we teach: science and social studies offer opportunities for representing students' knowledge and questions about the issues they are exploring. Many boys can derive respect as writers from their peers as they work with forms and formats often ignored in the traditional writers' workshop.

## SUPPORTING DIFFERENTIATED LITERACY INSTRUCTION AS TEACHER EDUCATORS

As teacher educators, we can establish a set of criteria drawn from research and practice that promotes equity in classrooms, recognizes diversities among boys and among girls, and works toward an awareness of the implications of gender in literacy education.

### *Encourage the Development of School Communities*

With our student teachers, we can promote the importance of establishing a learning community, where both boys and girls can participate in the on-going literacy life of the classroom, where they come to value reading and writing in all its forms and formats, where they begin to support one another in developing the attitudes and strategies required as lifelong learners, and where teachers model and demonstrate significant types of literacy activities.

Many school districts are implementing pilot projects in organizing single-gender schools, classrooms or subjects, and many teachers, parents, and students support this attempt at structuring these environments for increasing achievement (Demaske, 2010). Some critics call these attempts *band-aid* solutions (Eliot, 2010), but for some boys and girls, and their parents and teachers, this approach appears to support learning: "Boys and girls may benefit by engaging, but not exclusively,

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in some single-sex learning and recreational activities” (Demers and Bennett, 2007, p. 7). However, as Eliot states, “co-ed schools need to remove their neutral blinders and accept that gender is an important basis of children’s individual needs” (2010, p. 213). Therefore we will want to discover with our new teachers ways of ensuring that boys have male literacy models in their lives, so that they will associate reading and writing activities with other boys and male adults (Spence, 2008).

*Recognize that Every Child Matters as a Learner*

We will want to promote an understanding of and an appreciation for the developing characteristics and behaviors of individual boys and girls in a variety of literacy situations, and assist student teachers in how to recognize the effect of gender and social issues on literacy lives of their students. Each child’s response to a text will be unique for a variety of reasons: social experience, gender, cultural connections, peer group, and teacher expectations, personal interpretations of words and expressions, knowledge of strategies, relationships with others, and a critical understanding of the author’s message. ELL students will require continual support, building on and incorporating their first-language literacy backgrounds (Reichert, Hawley & Tyre, 2011).

We can feature and promote strategies that will help our student teachers provide organizational support for boys in difficulty with their schoolwork, such as daily planners or electronic organizers, and share methods for helping them in breaking down large tasks and projects into smaller components with micro deadlines, as well as offering opportunities for supportive feedback during conferences.

*Provide an Enriched Environment*

We will need to discuss and offer resources for helping student teachers in creating classroom climates that support both boys and girls. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) suggest we look carefully at the “...individual differences, variety, and plurality that make diversity a strength of our classrooms” (p. 184), rather than identifying achievements and needs only through test scores and statistical averages in which those differences quickly become lost. We can help student teachers locate resources, both in print and online, for all types of readers, from beginning readers to gifted, mature readers, and for readers with different language and cultural backgrounds and interests. For example, the support document *Me Read? And How!* (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009) draws from the broad range of learning on boys’ literacy development, and promotes user-friendly specific strategies.

*Include a Repertoire of Reading Strategies*

Student teachers will need to understand how a reader is constructed, what factors affect literacy development, and especially how boys could see themselves as

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literate members of society (Cleveland, 2012). We will need to provide methods and strategies for literacy instruction that can help boys and girls who are non-readers or limited readers enter the literacy world as proficient readers and writers (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013, Parr & Campbell, 2012).

### *Recognize Speaking and Listening as Integral to Literacy Development*

We will need to include speaking and listening as significant components of literacy, and explore strategies with student teachers that promote authentic language experiences where students engage in authentic conversations, formulate their own questions about the topics and issues being investigated, helping them to “own” the discussion, to find their “voices,” and to act as agents of their own learning. Where boys are most successful as learners and in literacy, they have had consistent opportunities for different kinds of talk from very early in their schooling (Elliott-Johns, Booth, Rowsell, Puig & Paterson, 2012).

### *Incorporate a Variety of Flexible Groupings*

We will need to explore with the student teachers the many reasons and strategies for having students work in different types of groups, from partners to literature circles to whole class meetings, in order to achieve different goals and outcomes. Student teachers can acquire methods for creating fluid groupings and regroupings of students for different reading and writing events, sometimes by student choice, by need or ability, and by gender, so that students can experience a variety of teaching/learning situations.

### *Integrate Reading and Writing across the Curriculum Through Inquiries*

We can assist student teachers in discovering opportunities for boys and girls to engage in active inquiries on themes and issues that interest them, sometimes curriculum connected, and incorporating multimodalities (Internet, books, articles, interviews, and so on). The students can see themselves as the experts in their classrooms through their personal choices for research, and the subsequent reading, writing and discussion events can lead to presentations, demonstrations and sharing of their inquiries.

### *Include the Arts as Literacy*

Student teachers can discover the power that the arts can bring to students' literacy learning as they develop activities that encourage students to express and communicate their ideas and feelings, both in constructing and creative processes, and in interpretive responses to texts (Booth & Masayuki, 2004). By teacher educators highlighting for student teachers how incorporating the arts in

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the classroom literacy program can open up new possibilities for meaning-making in a variety of modes and forms, they may in their own classrooms motivate their students into representing and interpreting their thoughts and emotions. As well, technology can inform different types of literacy activities, and can engage many boys in responding to and composing a variety of text forms.

*Incorporate Ongoing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*

We need to offer new teachers strategies for monitoring, tracking, assessing, and reflecting upon each student's literacy progress, to enable both boys and girls to recognize their strengths and uncover their problems. They will then be able to design effective instruction for supporting each student's literacy growth.

SUMMARY

We will want to provide our student teachers with research-based strategies and methods that will support both boys and girls in their literacy development.

While boys' achievement is improving, the problems of gender difference are connected to a range of factors situated in the society and culture in which boys and girls live, the complex interactions of the variables in their lives, the nature of the individual, the family, the culture of the peer group, the relationship of home and school, the philosophy of the school, the availability of resources, the strategies the teacher incorporates in the classroom program, and the changing nature of literacy. (Elliott-Johns & Booth, 2010 p. 61)

The current and future research and practice in gender behaviors have the potential to inform curriculum development for teacher education programs in literacy instruction. Understanding the relationship among societal factors, literacy achievement and gender can benefit those involved in curriculum design. We would hope that all educators would support best literacy practices for all classrooms while recognizing and appreciating the range of gender diversity (Watson, Kehler & Martino, 2012). Our goals should be to expand the teaching repertoires of our student teachers so that they do not prioritize the learning of one gender over the other. By building and maintaining a classroom culture of literacy that accepts the range and interests of each of the students, both girls and boys, yet expands and enriches their experiences, future teachers will offer their students an equitable and fair learning environment, filled with possibilities.

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