A Classroom Study of Artistics Characteristics of Boys and Girls

Winters, Leah

https://hdl.handle.net/2144/3729
Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Final Research Project

A CLASSROOM STUDY OF ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BOYS AND GIRLS

By

Leah Winters

Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Visual Arts
University of Washington, 2006

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
MA in Art Education
Abstract

Finding equality for both boys and girls in the art classroom can be challenging, especially when external factors such as societal and media influence come into play. The art classroom is a place where student interest, skill level, student-driven content choice, exploration of materials, and expression all come into play. This research paper strives to uncover specific artistic and behavioral traits in middle school boys and girls at The Evergreen School in Shoreline, Washington (a suburb of Seattle) and determines how, in this particular setting, these traits compare and contrast in terms of gender. The researcher strives to come to a better understanding of how boys and girls experience art class, and takes several strategic steps to uncover stereotypes and truths about the behavior of young males and females in an art educational setting. Detailed information about the participants within this study, as well as documented feedback from parents and education professionals, are included in the analysis of the specific gender traits within this small study. Additionally, participants commented on gender issues as a general topic. Finally, literature published on the topic of gender studies is used to support the findings, and in supporting the researching in making applicable recommendations and alterations in the classroom in regards to gender issues. The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the artistic and behavioral characteristics of middle school boys and girls, and to create awareness in the classroom that celebrates and honors those skill-sets, interests, and needs.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**CHAPTER ONE**

  - Background to the Study
  - Research Goals
  - Research Questions
  - Conceptual Framework
  - Theoretical Framework
  - Significance of the Study
  - Limitations of the Study
  - Conclusion

**CHAPTER TWO**

  - Research Questions
  - Conceptual Framework
  - Figure 2.1
  - Review of the Literature
    - Gender and Teaching Art in the Early Years
    - Children’s Drawings as a Sociocultural Practice:
      - Remaking Gender and Popular Culture
      - A Pedagogy to Expose and Critique Gendered Cultural Stereotypes
    - Embedded in Art Interpretations
Analysis of Gender Identity through Doll and Action Figure Politics in Art Education Pg. 21

Students’ Gendered Experiences of High School Portfolio Art Assessment in Canada, The Netherlands, and England Pg. 22

Sex Differences and Gender-Role Differences in Children’s Drawings Pg. 24

Conceptual Content and Spatial Characteristics in Boys’ and Girls’ Drawing of Fighting and Helping Pg. 25

Gender Style as Form and Content: An Examination of Gender Stereotypes in the Subject Preference of Children’s Drawing Pg. 27

Gender Socialization: A Brother and Sister Draw About War Pg. 28

Gendered Childhoods Pg. 29

Conclusion Pg. 30

CHAPTER THREE Pg. 32

Design of the Study Pg. 32

Research Methods Pg. 33

Data Collection Pg. 35

Figure 3.1 Pg. 37

Data Analysis Pg. 38

Figure 3.2 Pg. 39

CHAPTER FOUR Pg. 41

Significance of the Study Pg. 41

Bias and Validity Pg. 42
Analysis of the Data

Analysis Procedure

Classroom Study

Figure 4.1

Parents Surveys

Teacher Surveys

Results

Breakdown of Female Participants

Analysis of Female Participants

Design Elements

Materials

Content

Themes and Patterns

Breakdown of Male Participants

Analysis of Male Participants

Design Elements

Materials

Content

Themes and Patterns

Conclusion

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Personal Impact of the Study
Impact on Practice  Pg. 70
Recommendations  Pg. 71
Implications for Further Research  Pg. 71
Conclusion  Pg. 72
Advice to Art Teachers  Pg. 72
Advice to the Field of Art Education  Pg. 72
REFERENCES  Pg. 75
APPENDIXES  Pg. 78
A. Unit Plan: Evergreen Community Mural: An Urban Art Project  Pg. 78
B. Parent & Teacher Surveys  Pg. 83
CHAPTER ONE

Background to the Study

Gender bias and issues such as varied expectations for students, ability in certain subject areas, and behavioral characteristics based on gender have intrigued and concerned educators for decades. The research within this study involves gender studies within two particular subjects of art education – painting and sculpture – at The Evergreen School in Shoreline, Washington. The purpose of this research was to look at gender differences within the context of painting and sculpture classrooms, and to examine differences between middle school aged boys and girls when it comes to their art making in these art subjects. Artistic characteristics including skill level, choice of materials, and content choices were investigated. Behavioral characteristics that support the study include the students’ ability to follow directions and meet requirements, ability to work independently and/or as a team member, and other participatory characteristics. These behavioral qualities, which are difficult to measure, are not relied on as heavily as observations of artistic characteristics within student art work, and support the study as additional commentary on the subject of gender studies.
Research Goals

By taking a closer look at boy and girl interests, ability, and behavior in the art room, the goal of the researcher was to expand her understanding of what might constitute a balanced art curriculum that is both beneficial and interesting for all genders equally. Because gender bias does exist within some (likely all) classrooms, it is important to understand where that bias comes from and how it affects both teaching and learning. Particularly, this research will look at gender bias in an art educational setting because it is ground that has not been as thoroughly covered as gender studies within core subjects such as math and reading. A primary goal of this research includes gaining a better understanding of both male and female students, and to make changes in the art curriculum to accommodate new findings.

Research Questions

The main question that is addressed in this study is: What artistic and behavioral characteristics do sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls demonstrate in painting and sculpture classes? Supporting questions address issues such as: Are there any visible gender differences while creating a work of art, specifically, a painting? Are there any visible gender differences while creating a work of art, specifically, a sculpture? What is gender bias? How does gender bias effect student performance? How and when is gender bias present in the arts? What kind of implications does this type of study have on art educators working in middle school art classrooms?

The questions which address visible characteristics in children’s artwork are best answered by directly observing the work of a study group of students, which were selected prior to the research beginning. Student work was examined for artistic characteristics such as use of design elements, color and material choices, and content or subject matter. Additional questions
were supported by published research on the topic of gender bias, as well as interviews with members of the community (students, parents, teachers, and counselors) who are involved in the lives of the participating middle school students within this study.

**Conceptual Framework**

The researcher’s prior knowledge of the subject of gender bias in education is limited. The researcher has taken on this topic for personal reasons, in order to better the practice of teaching with a further understanding of gender bias in the arts. It can be argued that there is a stereotype about boys, in that they are considered rough, dirty, and harder to control, while girls are stereotyped as well-behaved, sensitive, and gentle. “Girls are often reinforced for looking pretty and being nice, kind or neat. Boys are told that they are smart, clever, or agile” (Colbert, 2000, p. 12). This type of generalization is one that was examined within this particular study group.

Areas of research that the course of study takes include student characteristics of boys vs. girls, child psychology, how development and success in school may be effected by gender bias and stereotypes, as well as teacher and other adult expectations for boys and girls in art education. These areas lead to many connections between the subject of gender bias and other related topics such as a therapeutic approach to art education, the concept of nature vs. nurture, cultural rites of passage and their relationship to gender, and student self-expression and various communication styles.

The methods for this study are both varied and interconnected. This is a classroom-based study in which the researcher taught two groups of middle school students in two different visual arts subjects: painting and sculpture. Both boys and girls were observed while they partook in individual art making, teamwork and group planning, design and construction skills and
techniques, and classroom behavior, among other noticeable characteristics. Elements recorded included the time it takes for boys and girls to complete given tasks, how much clarification and/or direction is needed from the teacher in order for the student to succeed, as well as the amount of and type of communication that takes place between students. Primarily, the researcher looked at design characteristics within the artwork of boys and girls, and determined whether there were consistent differences that were dependent upon gender. These observations were supported by interviews with parents, students, teachers, and school counselors, as well as literature addressing gender bias in the arts.

**Theoretical Framework**

Maxwell (2005) states that there is a need “to explain the kinds of flexibility that [the] study requires, and indicate . . . how [the researcher] will go about making future design decisions” (p. 117). Artistic and behavioral characteristics among boys and girls are difficult to determine, and therefore additional information was needed in order to support the findings, such as literature on the subject of gender bias and characteristics, as well as interviews within the Evergreen School community.

Included in the research is literature and data found from previous studies on gender bias, which will also be used to clarify concepts including nature vs. nurture and rites of passage. “It is worth keeping in mind that you can lay out a tentative plan for some aspects of your study in considerable detail, but leave open the possibility of substantially revising this if necessary” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 81). It is important to create a detailed plan. However, due to the nature of an arguably subjective topic, the end result remained quite open-ended and yet to be discovered at the early stages of this research. The study and all of its components were carried out in an “optimistic, thoughtful, and focused” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 98) manner.
Various studies on gender bias within core subjects such as reading and math have been conducted in the past. Briefly, the topic of gender bias in children’s literature is addressed, specifically children’s choice of reading materials. Judith Haymore Sandholtz (2010) describes the account of her daughter, Sarah, and her classroom experience in that “the pool of children’s literature is dominated by books with males as main characters” (p. 122). Sandholtz, in her study, found that “the overall pattern of reading choices was striking: both male and female students read a majority of books with males, or a combination of males and females, as main characters” (p. 126). Perhaps there is a correlation between gender bias in children’s literature and that of student behavior in the classroom; specifically in the art classroom. Thomas Crisp and Brittany Hiller (2011) review Caldecott Medal-Winning Picturebooks from 1938-2011, and suggest that male and female gender roles present in children’s literature “reflect ideals sanctioned by ‘mainstream’ or ‘dominant’ American culture, values so pervasive they often remain unquestioned and are taken as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’” (p. 18). Perhaps this creates expectations for students as well as teachers about how boys and girls should behave and produce work. The latter idea also seems to connect with the concept of nature vs. nurture.

Anthony D. Pellegrini (2011) presents information about sex bias in terms of children’s aggression, claiming that “males, more often than females, engage in both physical aggression . . . and verbal aggression” (p. 282) and that “the pervasiveness of sex bias is related to the robustness of the sex difference in aggression and the fact that aggression is a male stereotypical behavior” (p. 282). Perhaps some level of gender bias comes from the stereotype that boys are more aggressive and harder to manage than girls, and this study can perhaps uncover more information about these stereotypical behaviors and their relationship to student artwork and behavior in the art classroom.
Gender studies in art education are harder to come by, but they do exist. Robert Dalton (2000) observes a brother and a sister when drawing about the subject of war, and suggests that “girls were more likely to represent conflict in interpersonal terms such as an argument within the home; boys tended to depersonalize the conflict, one example being warfare” (p. 5). He addresses the concept of nature vs. nurture and that “when a child is born we announce its sex and assign it a gender appropriate name. Boys and girls are dressed, handled, and even spoken to in different ways” (p. 4). Cynthia Colbert (2000) addresses developmental differences in the artwork of males and females, and observes that drawings of humans by young boys differ from drawing by girls in that boys more often include teeth and ears. Research studies have shown that girls are ahead of boys in the drawings of humans they produce during early childhood. (Willsdon 1977, Mortensen 1991, Koppitz 1965 in Colbert, 2000, p. 11).

A variety of researchers have conducted studies on the similarities and differences between male and female development in the art classroom. Various published studies on observations of children’s artwork as well as gender bias in the art educational setting are included in this research paper.

**Significance of the Study**

Gender issues in education are a huge topic for discussion. Gender bias in the art classroom is a fascinating phenomenon that can both confirm societal stereotypes about males and females, as well as help art educators to pay closer attention to the work that students produce and the behavior that they exhibit, in order to make the art classroom a more gender-neutral and balanced space for creativity. “Gender roles prescribe the range of activities considered appropriate for males and females in particular societies” (Dalton, 2000, p. 4) and
boys and girls are brought up to believe that certain behaviors and interests are exclusively appropriate for either boys or girls. “Through the first years of life, children learn they are male or female and they are rewarded for actions that support their gender identity” (Dalton, 2000, p. 5). This topic is important to art educational specifically, and to education in general, because it provides educators with an awareness of how boys and girls perceive the world so that we can address the issue in the classroom.

Colbert (2000) writes that “art teachers need to be aware of research findings that suggest that teachers teach the boys manipulative skills, but do the work for girls” (p. 12). It may be true that “girls get better grades than boys and receive fewer punishments than boys . . . [but] the result of girls’ good behavior is that they receive less time, help, fewer challenges, and are rewarded for passive behavior” (Sadker and Sadker, 1994, p. 44 in Colbert, 2000, p. 12). It may be thought by some that boys are harder-headed and more difficult to manage than girls, but this is a different matter altogether. Those who feel that girls are “the elementary school’s ideal students” (Colbert, 2000, p. 12), must consider how this skewed and biased perspective is impacting the self-esteem of our female learners. “For the child engaged in making a work of art, feedback is often crucial to the success of the work and the self-esteem of the student” (Colbert, 2000, p. 13). This topic weighs heavily on our students and must be present in the minds of our educators so that we can “[put] what [we] know about gender bias to work” (Colbert, 2000, p. 13) and make positive changes in the art classroom.

**Limitations of the Study**

The main problem that the researcher was able to foresee is that it was difficult to determine what these different characteristics in the work of boys and girls look like. How could the researcher categorize behavior in the classroom or characteristic within a drawing as male or
female? Where does that ability to determine and decipher come from? Research-based evidence is needed to support the findings, although the investigation has been conducted as a classroom-based study. Another problem was that of time constraints. Only one-and-a-half hours per week with each study group were available to the researcher for the duration of the thesis course. Literature, interviews, and personal experience were needed in order to supplement the classroom-based portion of the study.

In terms of instrumentalist and realist questions, Maxwell suggests that the personal connection and passion which drives the research outweighs the “observable and measurable data” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 72). The focus of this study was to remain true to the goal of learning more about why some teachers have tendencies toward certain subject matter or expectations for students when it comes to gender. In doing that, the researcher worked to “use realist questions, and to address as systematically and rigorously as possible the validity threats that this approach involves” (p. 73). The validity within this study is of substantial concern because much of the occurrences that were observed are subjective and personal to the individual, and therefore difficult to define. Maxwell (2005) states that in that “the risk of trivializing your study by researching your questions to what can be directly observed is usually more serious than the risk of drawing invalid conclusions” (p. 73).

Conclusion

There are indeed limitations within this study, particularly those of defining the behavior of boys and girls in the art room and the causes of those behaviors, but research shows that gender bias is present in the art classroom and therefore this research is valid in the art classroom. The goal of this study has been to achieve further understanding of the topic of gender issues, and to increase awareness about gender bias in the art education so that a higher level of equality for
boys and girls in the art classroom can be achieved. Chapter Two will include a literature review, examining similar studies that have addressed the issue of gender bias in the art classroom and further demonstrating the importance of the issue of gender issues in art education.
CHAPTER TWO

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to address the question: *What artistic and behavioral characteristics do sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls demonstrate in painting and sculpture classes?* In order to effectively analyze artistic characteristics within children’s artwork, existing research on the topic must be included in this study. Literature and research covered within the topic of gender issues in art education provide a context for which the artistic characteristics in this particular study are examined. Artistic characteristics are observed in student artwork, including (but not limited to) design elements, choice of materials, and choice of content. Behavioral characteristics including ability to work within a group or independently, ability to follow directions in class and implement them into work, as well as general classroom behavior are looked at, but this is not the focus of the study. Behavioral characteristics within boys and girls are noted throughout the study, but not compared as thoroughly with existing literature as artistic characteristics.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study includes the researcher’s prior knowledge of gender bias, and her experience with sex and gender differences in the art classroom, as well as her reasoning for examining gender issues as a research topic. This topic closely relates to several connecting ideas such as nature vs. nurture, student motivation, and adult expectations in the art classroom. Additionally, goals as well as methods for conducting the study are briefly addressed in the chart below.
Figure 2.1

**Research Question**

What artistic and behavioral characteristics do sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls demonstrate in painting and sculpture classes?

**Prior Knowledge**
- Gender bias exists and has been studied in core subject areas
- Stereotype: Boys = Snails and puppy dog tails; Girls = Sugar and spice

**Experiences**
- Pregnant with first baby, a boy, and feel that my art classes are fairly girl-focused
- Favoritism toward girl students in terms of behaviors (because I am a woman?)

**Research Strategy/Methods**
- Classroom-based study
- Interviews with parents, students, teachers, and counselors
- Literature addressing gender stereotypes in art education and the arts
- Observations of boys and girls during painting and sculpture classes and projects

**Areas of Research**
- Student characteristics including development, tendencies, and behavior
- Child psychology in art education in terms of gender
- Gender bias impact on student learning
- Teacher (& other adult) expectations and assumptions for and about boys and girls in art education

**Goals**
- Creating balance for boy and girl interest, engagement, expression, self-confidence and achievement in each class and project
- Further understanding of gender bias in ART

**Connections**
- Student self-expression and communication styles
- Therapeutic approach to teaching art
- Nature vs. nurture
- Cultural rites of passage
Review of the Literature

Gender and Teaching Art in the Early Years

The literature that supports the subject of gender issues provides a solid context for why an understanding of gender differences in the art room is important. In the article entitled Gender and Teaching Art in the Early Years, Cynthia Colbert brings attention to various philosophies of researchers within the subject of gender issues, and discusses gender differences in the art classroom as well as accommodations for those differences. Aspects of Colbert’s own research act as a solid model for comparison in completing the study regarding artistic characteristics in this study. Colbert (2000) states that “drawings of humans by young boys differ from drawings by girls in that boys more often include teeth and ears. Research studies have shown that girls are ahead of boys in the drawings of humans they produce during early childhood” (p. 11). Koppitz, a major theorist of gender issues in art education, “describes the girls as putting forth special effort to show off their drawing skills in a way of seeking approval” (Koppitz in Colbert, 2000, p. 11) which connects to ideas about female students falling under teachers’ radar because of their ability to behave well and earn good grades in school. “The result of girls’ good behavior is that they receive less time, help, fewer challenges, and are rewarded for passive behavior. Girls’ independence and self-esteem suffer” (Sadker and Sadker, 1994, p. 44 in Colbert, 2000, p. 12).

The focus of this research paper compares these ideas about male and female behavior in the art classroom with the behavior of the students within this particular study, and seeks methods for improving gender equality in the art classroom. “Art teachers need to be aware of research findings that suggest that teachers teach the boys manipulative skills, but do the work for the girls” (Colbert, 2000, p. 12). Colbert (2000) argues that “holding all children, male and female,
to the same standards of behavior is an important step in achieving education equity for all” (p. 13).

**Children’s Drawings as a Sociocultural Practice: Remaking Gender and Popular Culture**

Theorist Olga Ivashkevich of the University of South Carolina seeks connections between the art making of boys and girls and society’s and popular culture’s influence on those content choices in her article *Children’s Drawings as a Sociocultural Practice: Remaking Gender and Popular Culture*. “This article re-conceptualizes children’s self-initiated image making as a sociocultural practice interwoven with social and cultural discourses of childhood and gender, and embedded in children’s peer interactions, daily activities, and participation in popular culture” (Ivashkevich, 2009, p. 51). The information presented within this piece of literature helps to reinforce the researcher’s hypotheses about the concept of nature vs. nurture playing a role in the artistic and behavioral characteristics of children in the art room. This study aims to examine the work of approximately eight student (four boys and four girls), and consider that “the graphic images produced by children [can] be understood as interwoven with the children’s other daily activities and embedded in interactions with peers and adults” (Ivashkevich, 2009, p. 52). In other words, children are influenced by the world around them and the expectations placed upon them, and results of such phenomena show up in their artwork. In this study, the artwork of two adolescent girls is examined and interpreted to show connections between society’s portrayal of females and the artwork that young girls produce. The end result “emerged as a battle ground of meaning making on which the girls negotiated their gendered identities and actively reworked the discourses of gender implicit in the popular culture imagery that imposes limits on their female selves” (Ivashkevich, 2009, p. 60). This is a concept that comes up within the context of the research within this paper. In examining the artwork of males
and females within this study, it is important to “grasp the complex array of sociocultural factors that influence the meaning construction manifested through graphic activity” (Ivashkevich, 2009, p. 52). When looking at gender issues in art education, “we enter an arena of vast complexity in which image production, children’s gendered culture and peer interactions, sociocultural discourses of childhood and gender, and popular culture artifacts all create an entangled web of interrelated ideas” (Ivashkevich, 2009, p. 59) and this study strives to make some sense of those ideas.

A Pedagogy to Expose and Critique Gendered Cultural Stereotypes Embedded in Art Interpretations

Karen Keifer-Boyd (2003) unravels issues of gender bias and “how gender-constructed social practices impact interpretations of art” (p. 317) in her article A Pedagogy to Expose and Critique Gendered Cultural Stereotypes Embedded in Art Interpretations, helping to connect ideas about how humans see art with how we construct art. Keifer-Boyd (2003) explains her intent in that the study

investigate[s] how viewers process meaning of specific artworks from their beliefs about gender. When students consciously assign a gender to a work of art and explain their rationales for doing so, patterns emerge. These patterns show that the value and interpretations of an artwork are connected to gender issues. (p. 317)

Using other researchers’ strategies in interpreting content analysis, Keifer-Boyd (2003) observed in this study “how viewers describe the visual qualities of the same work differently depending on which gender the viewer considered the artist to be, and on how men and women describe related themes in different ways” (p. 318). The difference between Keifer-Boyd’s research and the study at hand is that she is not examining the artwork itself, but the way that it is
interpreted by both men and women, based on whether the artist is male or female. This is yet another valid means of confirming ideas about how males and females connect certain artistic content to one gender or another, therefore connecting to the content choices of males and females when making art. It is important to recognize and “differentiate between concepts of sex and gender since sex, an ascribed status, refers to the biological aspects of a person, while gender, an achieved status, refers to psychological, social, and cultural characteristics” (Collins & Sandell, 1984, p. 144 in Keifer-Boyd, 2003, p. 321). This idea supports the implied theory that societal influence on gender plays a huge role in how people think that they should create or interpret art. In Keifer-Boyd’s study, both male and female viewers generally identified stereotypical themes within the historical artwork presented. Male themes included violence, the outdoors, exploitation, and sensual nudes. Female themes included family, women’s issues, compassion, joy, sentimentality, women’s rights, dress, and body parts (Keifer-Boyd, 2003, p. 328). This information is consistent with the findings of other researchers and theorists, and will help to support this study of gender bias in artistic characteristics of young boys and girls.

Keifer-Boyd’s (2003) study shows “how stereotypical gendered interpretations of visual qualities, symbols, and techniques influence perception” (Keifer-Boyd, 2003, p. 329) as well as the content choices and art making of boys and girls.

**Analysis of Gender Identity through Doll and Action Figure Politics in Art Education**

Researcher Anna Wagner-Ott’s *Analysis of Gender Identity through Doll and Action Figure Politics in Art Education* examines the characteristics of children’s toys and their effect on gender identity. Media influence plays a large role in gender identity, especially as children grow up, and this article aims to show how media influence is involved in children’s playthings, particularly girls’ dolls. Wagner-Ott (2002) “looks at how advertisements of the ideal woman
perpetuate the social structural cycle of feminine desires in young girls” (p. 246) which is a strong aspect of the social-emotional curriculum at The Evergreen School, the facility in which the study within this research paper was completed. The middle school boys and girls (seventh grade and up) that are studied in this research paper are familiar with media influence on gender roles, and the idea that dolls influence “young girls to become caring, maternal, and passive . . . . [while] boys mirror the father and are pushed into the world (de Beauvoir, 1957 in Wagner-Ott, 2002, p. 251). Media influence, popular culture, and gender identity are juxtaposed and intertwined in this study of gender issues in middle school painting and sculpture classes, and support the analysis of student artwork and behavior. “The social constructions of masculine and feminine, the distinctions between sex and gender, and the differences between the social roles of girls and boys” (Wagner-Ott, 2002, p. 252) became topics that support the framework of this study.

**Students’ Gendered Experiences of High School Portfolio Art Assessment in Canada, The Netherlands, and England**

Blaikie, Schonau, and Steers look at *Students’ Gendered Experiences of High School Portfolio Art Assessment in Canada, The Netherlands, and England* in their research, pointing out the relationships males and females tend to have with their teachers as well as the importance that male vs. female students place on discussion and critique of personal artwork. According to this study,

Males are less likely than females to know and understand the qualities a teacher is looking for in their work; males consider it less important than females do to know and understand the criteria for assessment; it is less important to males than females to
discuss their art with their teacher; and males find group critique less valuable than females do. (Blaikie, Schonau, & Steers, 2003, p. 335)

This information shows that males prefer a more independent approach to their art making, finding guidance, direction, and suggestions from other to be of less importance than females do. Females, on the other hand, seek guidance and assurance from their teachers, perhaps indicating that they do not trust their own instincts and independence to the same extent that males do. Knowledge of this data has been instrumental in conducting the gender bias study at The Evergreen School, and guided the researcher in implementing a curriculum structure that considers both the male and female learning tendencies that occur here.

Also suggested by Blaikie, Schonau, & Steers (2003) is “the idea that gender is biologically and socially constructed,” (p. 336) and compares this overarching theme to a 1913 study in which “subject matter choices in artwork were that girls drew flowers, butterflies, and ballerinas; boys drew machines, warships, and battle scenes” (Duncum, 1997 in Blaikie, Schonau, & Steers, 2003, p. 336). These genres of content choices in terms of boys vs. girls is consistent with previously discussed theories about gender issues in art education, and will be considered in the study at hand. In terms of materials choices, Blaikie, Schonau, & Steers’ (2003) study shows that “girls prefer drawing and painting; boys prefer working on computers to make imagery” (p. 339). For one aspect of the Evergreen School study, the researcher placed an emphasis on materials choices by boys and girls in conjunction with content choices.

This article’s primary focus is to show the differences between male and female students in terms of value placed on teacher guidance, critique, and approval. The study shows that “social and biological differences between males and females as well as maturity levels point to female students following rules, valuing compliance, and communication via conversations with
their teachers and with one another more than males” (Blaikie, Schonau, & Steers, 2003, p. 344). These occurrences act as an interesting connection to this research paper’s intent, which has been to identify patterns of artistic and behavioral characteristics within middle school boys and girls. Blaikie, Schonau, & Steers (2003) suggest reasons for such phenomena, including the idea that the art classroom is designed for females in its “positive, nurturing, warm, and inviting” (p. 345) space, and that “the nurturing maternalized and feminized high school art classroom dominated by female teachers and students may be threatening and alien for adolescent males” (p. 345). The previous concept relates significantly to the researcher of this study in that gender bias experienced by students in her own classroom could manifest within these described elements. The ultimate goal of this study has been to find ways to achieve balance, comfort, and confidence for both males and females in the art classroom at the Evergreen School.

**Sex Differences and Gender-Role Differences in Children’s Drawings**

Theorists Kathleen A. Flannery and Malcolm W. Watson examine *Sex Differences and Gender-Role Differences in Children’s Drawings* through their research, which poses the question “Do sex differences exist for some aspects of children’s drawings (violence depicted in the drawings) but not for others (aesthetic appeal of the drawings)?” (Flannery & Watson, 1995, p. 114). This piece of literature falls directly under the scope of examining boys’ and girls’ drawings for artistic characteristics, and therefore relates closely to the objective of this research paper. Flannery and Watson’s (1995) study assesses student drawings under the categories of theme realism (“the likelihood that the theme in the drawing could occur in the everyday life of the children” (p. 117)), aggression, expressiveness, and artistic skill (Flannery & Watson, 1995, p. 115) which produced results based on gender role types rather than simply making stereotypes about the sex of the child.
Children who produce more unrealistic or aggressive drawings may be more accurately described as male-typed, irrespective of their actual sex. Conversely, children who produce drawings with higher levels of expressiveness may be more likely to be female-typed, irrespective of their actual sex. (Flannery & Watson, 1995, p. 116)

The results of this study prove that it is important to consider gender role types rather than making assumptions about “male art” or “female art.” Instead, it is vital to look at the content within children’s artwork with an open mind, regardless of gender stereotypes about art making. Flannery and Watson (1995) concluded, surprisingly, that “there are no sex differences in terms of expressiveness levels or the aesthetic appeal of their drawings” (p. 120) and that several of the researchers’ hypotheses were disproved. Overall, art educators must pay close attention to materials and content that students are exposed to, and make great efforts to avoid placing emphasis on “female” or “male” content choices.

**Conceptual Content and Spatial Characteristics in Boys’ and Girls’ Drawing of Fighting and Helping**

Sylvia G. Feinburg conducts a study that, like previous articles discussed, analyzes the content within children’s drawings and how gender plays a role in those decisions. “Subject matter can be thought of as becoming thematic when it becomes focused in a very decisive way and is the locus for repeated examination” (Feinburg, 1977, p. 63). This study was conducted in 1977, and provides data that is consistent with more current studies. Findings within the drawings of boys and girls in terms of content tend to show similar results, and have for many years. Feinburg (1977) suggests that boys gravitate toward themes that include monsters, dinosaurs, vehicles, and space ships, while girls tend to be inspired by images of kings, queens, princes, princesses, and horses (p. 63). In turn, “boys rarely examine horses and royalty; girls
rarely select monsters or vehicles for major exploration” (Feinburg, 1977, p. 63). Feinburg’s study focused on the themes of fighting and helping, and observed students’ responses to those prompts. The researcher guiding this thesis paper conducted the study by including a prompt within each lesson, so that all students were in a similar mind frame with specific instructions to guide their thinking, to help in the collection of valid data.

When reflecting upon the data, Feinburg (1977) concludes that “small boys’ images of conflict are linked to the adult male’s preoccupations with competing and succeeding and subordinating one’s own personal feelings and concerns on behalf of the task at hand” (p. 64). The researcher’s observations of males in her own life completely correspond with such a conclusion, and the idea that most (if not all) young boys try to emulate adult men supports these findings as well. “Subject matter for females is more apt to be associated with beauty, nurturance, and tranquility,” and girls tend to avoid to subjects of encounter and aggression (Feinburg, 1977, p. 64). Again, such notions make sense when aligned with concepts of how children are raised, and how gender stereotypes and nature vs. nurture come into play in regards to social cues that children encounter growing up. After reflecting upon the entirety of her study, Feinberg concludes:

Girls have much to learn about the benefits of goal oriented, group directed behavior as it is manifest in a more depersonalized context, and the cultivation of this competence is critical if women are to succeed in the highly competitive game-like society which is male dominated. But the male, too, needs to cultivate his capacities to function more sensitively on the interpersonal level, to understand the smaller unit, and to behave humanely towards individuals. (Feinburg, 1977, p. 71).
It is fascinating that such character-descriptive conclusions can be made based on a study in which the artwork of children is observed. The researcher behind the study at hand sought to find similar connections to the learning and expressive behaviors within boys and girls in modern middle school painting and sculpture classes.

**Gender Style as Form and Content: An Examination of Gender Stereotypes in the Subject Preference of Children’s Drawing**

Donna M. Tuman of Long Island University guides a similar study to the one depicted in this research paper. She examines students’ choice of content, their use of formal elements, and their gender in order to observe communications exhibited within the drawings of boys and girls. Before conducting the study, Tuman (1999) hypothesized that “the majority of boys and girls (ages 6 through 12) choose subject matter appropriate to their gender” (p. 42). This theory connects closely to many previous studies involving artistic traits in terms of gender, and the results of the study prove to be consistent with previous readings. Also assessed were formal artistic characteristics, which is an aspect of children’s artwork that the researcher analyzed in depth in her thesis paper. “Because these formal characteristics of children’s drawings have rarely been assessed as gender preferred traits, a score sheet was designed to identify gender preferred formal characteristics of drawing” (Tuman, 1999, p. 44), which is a process that was repeated for the study at hand.

Some interesting results included the following:

Boys’ drawings had more action than girls’ drawings. Girls tended to choose ‘feminine’ content of social experience, care and concern, domestic life, physical appearance, nature, and animals, while boys tended to choose traditional ‘masculine’ content such as danger,
power, aggression, violence, heroism, sports, mechanical objects, and humor. (Tuman, 1999, p. 46)

All in all, “the data results document that when presented with masculine and feminine content themes, boys and girls rarely incorporate subject matter choices outside predicted gendered content domains in their drawing” (Tuman, 1999, p. 52). This is a consistent theme in all of the literature presented in this review. The researcher attempted to consider this theory when conducting her research, which analyzed artistic characteristics within the artwork of boys and girls, as well as student behavior that relates to the art classroom.

**Gender Socialization: A Brother and Sister Draw About War**

Researcher Robert Dalton examines the impact that gender roles, placed upon us by society, have on the development of children. He states that “gender roles prescribe the range of activities considered appropriate for males and females in particular societies” (Dalton, 2000, p. 4). This article supports the common theory that gender roles are developed by societal influence, and seem to counter-act individuality that might otherwise occur in humans or children when we are born. “When a child is born we announce its sex and assign it a gender appropriate name. Boys and girls are dressed, handled, and even spoken to in different ways,” (Dalton, 2000, p. 4) and this is a primary reason for the researcher’s (pregnant with her first child at the time of writing this thesis paper) decision in investigating the topic of gender studies.

“Through the first years of life, children learn they are male or female and they are rewarded for actions that support their gender identity” (Dalton, 2000, p. 5) and this concept is one that drove the curiosity and passion behind this research topic. The topic of gender issues in the classroom is one that has been considered and analyzed many times in the past, and taking a similar inquisitive approach in regards to gender in the art classroom is a more specific venue for
this type of study. Art therapy is an analytical approach to child psychology that has been used to inform adults about the way children cope and handle various difficult situations in their lives, using a child’s drawn images instead of their words as clues to his or her emotional or mental state. Dalton’s (2000) study prompts children in their drawing by asking them to produce images of war, and the results were that “girls were more likely to represent conflict in interpersonal terms such as an argument within the home; boys tended to depersonalize the conflict, one example being warfare” (p. 5). Dalton (2000) points out that “the opportunity to study two children within the same family, both of whom created war drawings, invites comparisons about one obvious way in which they differ – gender” (p. 8). Many of the results found in these art and gender studies (Dalton’s included) show that children’s artwork not only speaks to the different ways that boys and girls are raised, but also touches on the social-emotional tendencies of young boys and girls, and the ways in which they interpret their surroundings.

Gendered Childhoods

Wendy Stainton Rogers’ chapter “Gendered Childhoods” in Woodhead & Montgomery’s Understanding Childhood: An Interdisciplinary Approach discusses various interesting topics which connect to the content of this research paper, such as nature vs. nurture, sex differences in mental functioning, and social understanding and gender identity. This chapter does an excellent job of providing terminology and definitions that will support the research within this study. Rogers (2003) explains that

the term ‘sex’ is usually reserved for those features that arise from biological differences.

The term ‘gender’ has been adopted in order to acknowledge the extent to which femininity and masculinity are also molded by historical, social, cultural, economic, political and psychological influences. (p. 181)
This reading describes the idea that there is a tension between social and biological factors that play into the development of children, and “that a child’s development is a product of the interplay between ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’” (Rogers, 2003, p. 183). Understanding the foundations of gender issues and the reasons behind sex and gender differences is an imperative aspect of crafting a specific study of gender bias in the art classroom. Rogers (2003) informs us that “biological theories view sex differences as mainly the product of nature . . . [while] socio-cultural theories view gender as mainly a product of nurture” (pp. 210-1). The term “nature vs. nurture” has been a fundamental concept in investigating why boys and girls behave in certain ways and are interested in certain subjects.

Based on their gender, children are raised to behave in specific masculine and feminine ways, and this type of behavior is reinforced if correct and discouraged if incorrect, according to the gender of the child. Children place a great deal of emphasis on the encouragement or discouragement of the adults around them, and “behavior that is rewarded tends to be repeated, whereas behavior that is punished or ignored tends not to be” (Rogers, 2003, p. 193). These human instincts are what reinforce “correct” and “incorrect” behavior of boys and girls, including their tendencies, interests, choices, and characteristics of their personalities. Subconsciously, “gender is something all of us – adults and children – have to constantly ‘work on,’” (Rogers, 2003, p. 211) and this phenomenon most definitely plays a role in the way we live, interact with one another, and express ourselves in various ways, including art making.

Conclusion

The literature included in this research paper addresses the subject of gender issues with regards to several different subcategories. Issues such as artistic content and materials choices within student artwork, boys’ vs. girls’ levels of achievement in the art classroom, and student
reliance on teacher direction and approval all act as support to the research within this particular gender study at The Evergreen School. This study begs the question: What artistic and behavioral characteristics do sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls demonstrate in painting and sculpture classes? Literary analysis will be imperative in the researcher’s ability to categorize content choices of boys and girls in painting and sculpture classes, as well as behavioral tendencies such as engagement in assignments and ability to meet project requirements. The literature within this chapter will serve to support evidence, findings, and theories that arise throughout the methods and analysis aspects of this research.
CHAPTER THREE

Design of the Study

As Maxwell (2005) writes, “you are the research instrument in a qualitative study, and your eyes and ears are the tools you use to make sense of what is going on” (p. 79). The researcher conducted the study by observing students in a classroom-based research project. The Evergreen School (the location of the study) middle school department provides fine arts elective classes that are offered each semester. The researcher offered a painting class and a sculpture class, each providing opportunities to observe artistic characteristics including use of design elements, material choices, and content choices in student artwork. Additionally, behavioral characteristics including, but not limited to, group and individual productivity were commented on. The focus of the research is artistic characteristics within the artwork of boys and girls, and the goal has been to find similarities and differences that are consistent within the artwork of each gender. The objective of this research has been to find a gender balance in the art classroom in terms of curriculum taught, and the way in which the teacher/researcher views her students.
Research Methods

The observations that were made in this study, in order to address artistic and behavioral characteristics of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls, was conducted by selecting two girls and two boys at random from painting and sculpture class (eight students total) to study. These students were surveyed, asking them what they expected from the classes based on the description offered on the elective sign-up sheet, what they hoped to learn in terms of skills and concepts from the class, and what types of design and/or content they were interested in pursuing through their art. The researcher observed characteristics within their artwork, as well as behavior exhibited in class.

Literature and data found from previous studies on gender bias was used to support the content of this research, as well as to clarify concepts including nature vs. nurture and rites of passage. “[I]t is worth keeping in mind that you can lay out a tentative plan for some aspects of your study in considerable detail, but leave open the possibility of substantially revising this if necessary” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 81). In some ways, the results of this study connected closely with documented research on gender studies, but contrasting results have occurred as well, and such unpredicted conclusions to this study were welcome.

Interviews with parents, teachers, and counselors regarding expectations for boys and girls, as well as experiences they’ve had with gender bias were conducted via email. Questions related to student interests according to teachers and guardians, student responses to certain assignments, and adult beliefs about student maturity and learning styles. Written surveys were regularly presented to students in class in order to get a better idea about how they perceive expectations that adults place on them, as well as societal influence on how they should act or what they should be interested in (specifically within the arts). Written interviews with students, teachers,
counselors, and parents of students addressed issues of experience with gender bias within the arts, stereotypes about boys and girls within a creative or artistic setting, behavioral assumptions about boys and girls, and adult expectations of boys and girls within an academic setting. These surveys, as well as literature on the topic of gender studies, were compared with classroom-based observations of this small study. The data was supported and analyzed by comparing it and contrasting it with existing research on the topic of gender bias.

Artistic or visual characteristics observed include line quality, use of color, understanding of the elements, expression of content, etc. Behavioral characteristics observed include the planning depth and process, ability to work individually, ability to work in a team setting, and ability to follow directions. Comparisons and contrasts between the artwork and behavior of boys and girls were documented. The researcher examined the work of the eight selected students; each of the projects produced in the two semester-long classes. Trends within the artwork of the boys and girls were then documented, focusing on artistic content, choice of material, level of completion, requirements met, and ability demonstrated. The researcher referred to published literature on gender studies to determine any significance.

The site and participants that served as the foundation of this study are located within the school at which the researcher is currently employed as a part-time art teacher. The Evergreen School in Shoreline, Washington, and a small group of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students who attend the school served as the site and participants within this study. The Evergreen School is a private academy for gifted learners, meaning students must meet a certain IQ requirement prior to being accepted into the school. Expectations for students by teachers, parents and adults in the community are already higher than the norm as a result of these standards, and perhaps the high level of expectations includes the quality of student artwork produced. The fact that this
gender study took place in this type of institution must be considered when observing the students and analyzing the data.

**Data Collection**

“To act morally – to treat the students with compassion, to provide them with experiences that are of value – is at the core of what teaching is” (Wong, 1995, p. 24). The purpose of this research has been to find better ways for the researcher to serve her students with equal treatment and understanding. The data collection within this study happened over a period of three weeks, within the painting and sculpture classes of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders at The Evergreen School. Each class takes place for one-and-a-half hours per week, once a week. This study took place within the boundaries and constraints of The Evergreen School, and published studies which have taken place in other environments were used to support the findings.

The first week provided an opportunity to observe the use and understanding of design elements in the artwork of boys and girls. Painting class included a lesson on design elements and color theory, and students were asked to bring in and paint an object or possession, showing various color palettes, positioning of objects, and design elements in their work. Sculpture class focused on small group work in which students were asked to work together amongst assigned group members and create a storyboard using sculptures. “Learning is seen as a worthwhile struggle to be engaged in by individuals and groups,” (Wong, 1995, p. 26) and the study within the sculpture class examines these contrasting means of student productivity in the art classroom setting. Both painting and sculpture students were surveyed and evaluated on their use and knowledge of the design elements, as well as individual and group work.

The second week focused primarily on material choices of boys and girls. Materials could include color, media, tools, or other building blocks within a given project. Students in each class
were given the opportunity to work with a material that they have never used before, or used rarely. In painting class, cityscape paintings were introduced as a new lesson. At the time, students were finishing their object/still life paintings, and those pieces were included in observations as well. The cityscapes focused on (again) color theory and design elements, and a grid-transfer method was demonstrated for the students to practice as well. Observations of the boys’ and girls’ paintings will focus on color choice. In sculpture class, students learned about kinetic sculpture in the form of mobiles (looking at examples from artists such as Alexander Calder) and execute hanging or standing, balancing sculptures. Observations of student sculptures focused on media chosen by boys and girls in producing their individual pieces. A survey about materials choice was given at the end of each unit.

During the third week of data collection, content was the focus of observation in student artwork. Painting class offered an opportunity for the researcher to re-examine the still life and the object paintings, and refer to memos collected in the researcher’s journal, in order to collect data regarding students’ choice of content in their work. Sculpture class allowed for the researcher to refer to student group work (storyboarded sculpture) and the kinetic sculptures, and refer to memos collected in the researcher’s journal and review them for data on content choice of boys and girls. It was helpful in both classes to include a narrative aspect of the art-making (in painting class, students wrote narratives to describe artistic choices made in their drawings of personal objects; in sculpture class, students used sketchbooks to document their planning processes), in which students are asked to explain the content, themes, and ideas behind the artwork. Throughout the three weeks of data collection, memos from the researcher’s journal (concerning artistic or behavioral characteristics of boys and girls) were considered. Time did not
allow for all projects to be completed, so the researcher resorted to evaluating aspects of incomplete pieces of artwork.

**Figure 3.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 (3/5/12)</th>
<th>Aspect of data being collected</th>
<th>Painting class lesson plan / project being examined</th>
<th>Sculpture class lesson plan / project being examined</th>
<th>Additional research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of design elements- line, space, shape, form, value, texture, color</td>
<td>Bring in a personal object or possession – paint using still-life techniques</td>
<td>Small group work (groups of 3, mixed gender) creating a series of 3-5 sculptures that tell a short story</td>
<td>-Class surveys regarding design elements and group work  -Photograph class work  -Record memos during class  -Write parent/teacher/counselor surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2 (3/12/12)</td>
<td>Material choice- color, media, tools, or other building blocks</td>
<td>Cityscape paintings – students will find a photograph of a cityscape of their choice and recreate it using the grid-transfer method with their choice of paint colors</td>
<td>Kinetic sculpture – students will learn about mobiles and create a hanging, balancing mobile with their choice of materials</td>
<td>-Class surveys regarding material choice  -Photograph class work  -Record memos during class  -Send out parent/teacher/counselor surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3 (3/19/12)</td>
<td>Content choice – students will write narratives of their artwork for clarity</td>
<td>Free paint or doodle using one or more concepts learned in class (color theory, design elements, and/or grid-transfer)*</td>
<td>Free sculpt using air-dry clay*</td>
<td>*The researcher will also use all previous class projects to analyze for content  -In place of surveys, ask students to write narrative explanations of their element, material, and content choices in their work (if not already done)  -Photograph class work  -Record memos during class  -Collect parent/teacher/counselor surveys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

As Wong (1995) states, “the primary goal of research is to understand; the primary goal of teaching is to help students learn” (p. 23) and the force behind this study has been to maintain the highest level of teaching practices while gaining information about how to make the art classroom a more balanced and productive space for boys and girls. Research and teaching have several elements in common; one of the most important being that “good research and good teaching are both characterized by inquiry and reflection” (Wong, 1995, p. 23). In this case, data collection acted as the inquiry portion of this study, and data analysis caused the researcher to reflect on her findings and support her inquiries with solid interpretations of the data.

The information provided by this study was interpreted in a variety of ways. First, the researcher offered surveys to students in the painting and sculpture classes, and identified their interests, strengths, weaknesses, and other ideas in order to guide the structure of the study. Second, the researcher examined the work of four boys and four girls, using literature included in the literature analysis section of this thesis paper (see Chapter Two) in order to support findings regarding artistic characteristics within the artwork of boys and girls. Third, the researcher kept record of artistic, behavioral, and other characteristics and happenings in the classrooms via memos in her research journal, regularly making connections between student voices in the
surveys, observations made from the artwork, and notes taken by the researcher. “One of the most common problems in qualitative studies is letting your unanalyzed field notes and transcripts pile up, making the task of final analysis much more difficult and discouraging” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 95). The researcher used the method of constant comparison to make sense of the data collected in this study. Finally, an important aspect of this research was to ask the students to create narratives that explain their artwork, as “students often confuse description with explanation” (Wong, 1995, p. 23) and it was very important that the students’ design choices were clear to the researcher.

Although data was collected by the researcher in a mostly narrative format (meaning the researcher recorded detailed notes to reference her observations, rather than simply making marks on a checklist) it was helpful to document the data within a spreadsheet in order to keep the information highly organized. As Maxwell (2005) suggests, the data was rearranged “into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p. 96). The data spreadsheet is organized as follows:

**Figure 3.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of design elements- line, space, shape, form, value, texture, color</th>
<th>Material choice- color, media, tools, or other building blocks</th>
<th>Content choice – students will write narratives of their artwork for clarity</th>
<th>Other observations including behavioral characteristics in the classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Painting Girl A (PGA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting Girl B (PGB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting Boy A (PBA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting Boy B (PBB)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher intended to use data collected from student surveys to find meaning within the art classroom structure at the Evergreen School in terms of gender issues. Additionally, while conducting these classes, a primary concern for the teacher/researcher was to fully engage each student in the learning process, and to make these painting and sculpture classes as highly satisfying as possible for the students within the classes with the help and support of their feedback. Regular class surveys provided for such feedback to be implemented in class, and the fact that they occurred throughout the courses, instead of exclusively at the end of the semester, allowed for change to be enforced along the way, hopefully resulting in a more rapid understanding by the teacher/researcher of student needs. “In some cases, the norms for classroom interaction and learning can be renegotiated by teacher and students in such a way that the goals and activities of research and teaching might productively coexist” (Wong, 1995, p. 27). These methods allowed for the teacher/researcher to maintain and improve upon her role as a creative and inspirational leader to her students, and simultaneously collect and analyze data that encouraged and created stronger experiences for the boys and girls in her art classes.
CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter addresses the data collected in the study, the analysis conducted, comments made by various participants, and the results concluded from the study. This is a small, classroom-based study that includes eight student participants – four girls and four boys. The study addresses the question: *What artistic and behavioral characteristics do sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls demonstrate in painting and sculpture classes?* The data collected took place in two weekly classes at The Evergreen School, a painting class and a sculpture class at the middle school (sixth through eighth grade) level, taught and observed by the researcher.

**Significance of the Study**

Gender issues in education are a huge topic for discussion. Gender bias in the art classroom is a fascinating phenomenon that can both confirm societal stereotypes about males and females, as well as help art educators to pay closer attention to the work that students produce and the behavior that they exhibit, in order to make the art classroom a more gender-neutral and balanced space for creativity. “Gender roles prescribe the range of activities considered appropriate for males and females in particular societies” (Dalton, 2000, p. 4) and boys and girls are brought up to believe that certain behaviors and interests are exclusively appropriate for either boys or girls. “Through the first years of life, children learn they are male or female and they are rewarded for actions that support their gender identity” (Dalton, 2000, p. 5). This topic is important to art educational specifically, and to education in general, because it provides educators with an awareness of how boys and girls perceive the world so that we can address the issue in the classroom.
Colbert (2000) writes that “art teachers need to be aware of research findings that suggest that teachers teach the boys manipulative skills, but do the work for girls” (p. 12). It may be true that “girls get better grades than boys and receive fewer punishments than boys . . . [but] the result of girls’ good behavior is that they receive less time, help, fewer challenges, and are rewarded for passive behavior” (Sadker and Sadker, 1994, p. 44 in Colbert, 2000, p. 12). It may be thought by some that boys are harder-headed and more difficult to manage than girls, but this is a different perspective altogether. Those who feel that girls are “the elementary school’s ideal students” (Colbert, 2000, p. 12), must consider how this skewed and biased perspective is impacting the self-esteem of our female learners. “For the child engaged in making a work of art, feedback is often crucial to the success of the work and the self-esteem of the student” (Colbert, 2000, p. 13). This topic weighs heavily on our students and must be present in the minds of our educators so that we can “[put] what [we] know about gender bias to work” (Colbert, 2000, p. 13) and make positive changes in the art classroom.

Conclusions drawn from this study have been supported by survey results from parents, teachers, and counselors, and analyzed in comparison with published literature on gender issues in art education. The purpose of the results of this study is to better understand material and content preference by, as well as behavior of, middle school boys and girls in the art classroom. With a better understanding of gender differences (as well as similarities), stronger curriculum can be designed in order to address the learning styles, interests, and needs of both boys and girls.

**Bias and Validity**

Looking at and observing gender bias is a subjective process, but in this case does not allow for much bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher, in analyzing the data, kept the
names and genders of the student subjects disclosed while documenting observations about the artwork. It was, however, also important to notice and record patterns in terms of materials, content, and behavior that was present within the work of either boys or girls. If there were not patterns present, the researcher did not hesitate to make note of that.

Validity will certainly be lacking in the way that there are not many student participants being studied, and it is impossible to make general statements about males or females as a whole gender without a significant number of students being studied. Instead, conclusions about the results of this study will be based on and indicated only as gender issues within the researcher’s two middle school art classes at The Evergreen School.

The researcher remained objective by focusing on the goal – which was to learn more about why she has tendencies toward certain subject matter in her teaching or expectations for her students when it comes to gender. In her research, including the surveys, she “use[d] realist questions, and [addressed] as systematically and rigorously as possible the validity threats that this approach involve[d]” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 73). Validity is a concern in this study because much of the phenomena that are being observed are that which is personal to the individual, and difficult to define. Maxwell (2005) reminds us that “the risk of trivializing your study by researching your questions to what can be directly observed is usually more serious than the risk of drawing invalid conclusions” (p. 73). The researcher stayed true and objective toward the initial goals by remembering the purpose, focusing on the original research questions, and by concentrating on how further understanding of this topic will benefit teachers and students alike. The researcher will also focus on the primary goal of having an equal understanding for the needs and learning styles of boys and girls, both in teaching her students and raising her own children.
Analysis of the Data

Analysis Procedure

Data was collected over several weeks, during two different weekly classes – painting and sculpture – at The Evergreen School middle school level. Two boys and two girls were chosen from each class to be observed, for a total of eight students. These students will remain nameless for the sake of anonymity and will be referred to specifically through the use of the data chart (Figure 4.1). The data was recorded in the form of the teacher/researcher analyzing each child’s artwork for elements, materials, and content. Next, she recorded her observations of the artwork of the boys and girls, making notes about behaviors along the way. The small study was supplemented by surveys on gender issues done by parents, teachers, and the school counselor. It should be noted that the sculpture class (because of unexpected assemblies and field trips) did not acquire as much data as the painting class, and was therefore focused on less than the painting class data.

Classroom study

A large part of this study took place in the classroom. It turned out that sculpture class missed a few class periods due to scheduling conflicts and a field trip, so painting class became the main focus of this particular study of artistic characteristics based on gender. The results (interpreted by the researcher) are recorded via a chart, which is organized by lesson and student being observed. The comments within this section are written in narrative form (observations by the teacher/researcher) and focus primarily on the artwork itself. Comments on artistic characteristics are categorized by each of the eight students being observed (two girls and two boys in each of the two classes). Commentary in terms of behavior is presented throughout the report.
### Figure 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of design elements - line, space, shape, form, value, texture, color</th>
<th>Material choice - color, media, tools, or other building blocks</th>
<th>Content choice – students will write narratives of their artwork for clarity</th>
<th>Other observations including behavioral characteristics in the classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Painting Girl A</strong> (PGA)</td>
<td>Still life: Minimal use of line – uses shape to build up the structure of the objects on the page. In grayscale painting, she uses layers of thin rectangles to build value using her 5 shades of gray. For the monochromatic, she uses yellow, and layers the color to create feathery texture throughout the shapes in the painting. Both paintings lack form, and action in the negative space.</td>
<td>Color mixing: She created 13 colors during the class period and titled some “Silent Purple,” “Cooked Spinach Green,” and “India Orange.” Written response: She has used green, brown, and silver in class; is drawn to fabrics for collage, spray paint, and acrylic on canvas; enjoys “abstract doodling.”</td>
<td>Regularly chose to sit with other 7th grade girls (and sometimes boys) – 7th seems to be the year that boys and girls mix (see survey by P. Gross, p. 12). Conscientious student who regularly asks teacher for advice and approval. Had trouble with measurement for cityscape and laughed with assistant teacher about it before fixing it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Painting Girl B</strong> (PGB)</td>
<td>Still life: Grayscale is unfinished; she uses a drastic value scale that shows bright tints and deep shades rather than many of the middle 3 shades of her palette. She uses shape to build up her piece, rather than painting with outlines. Her monochromatic (in red) blends together, filling the space with rich color (lacking in tints here). Form and depth are present but have not been mastered. Texture is lacking.</td>
<td>Color mixing: She created 10 colors and named some “Cherry,” “Overcast,” and “Beet.” Written response: She has used red, yellow, white, and black; is drawn to paint, pencils, clay, acrylic, and tempera; enjoys drawing people, musical instruments, and using “grayscale with a bit of color.”</td>
<td>Normally sits with the two other 8th grade girls in the class, plus 6th grade girls. She (along with the two other 8th girls) seems to be much quieter during class and focused on her work than the 7th grade girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Painting Boy A</strong> (PBA)</td>
<td>Still life: Grayscale is simplistic, and colors blend from tints on the left side of the page to shades on the right. Similar style is shown in the monochromatic (green). Value/contrast is strong. He does not use distinct shapes to build his painting, but instead the shapes blend together, indicating a shiny texture. An attempt at background is shown in the negative space (flowers in the grayscale and a tabletop in the monochromatic). Line and form are not as clearly present.</td>
<td>Color mixing: He created 11 colors and named some “Mango Juice Orange,” “Blood pink,” and “Old Lady Color.” His colors appear much more earthy and brown than those of the girls’. Written response: He has used yellow, red, and green in class; is drawn to color, spray paint, and abstract art; enjoys incorporating “real world situations” into his art.</td>
<td>Often takes breaks during class (for water or bathroom), and occasionally needed to be reminded about instructions. Seems focused on his work throughout entire class periods, although researcher has noticed different behavior in other class settings (such as language arts). Also sits with 7th grade girls and boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Painting Boy B</strong></td>
<td>Still life: Grayscale uses shape to connect objects</td>
<td>Color mixing: He created 14 colors and named</td>
<td>Object painting - Student chose a 3-hole</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sculpture Boy A (SBA)

Group project: Student’s group created animal sculptures to tell a story. Much of their pieces used neutral colors, except for colorful feathers that acted as their consistent element. Animals created included a bird, snake, and elephant. He explains; “The main character was a bird and our theme was animals.” In terms of his group work, he reflects; “It was fun to have all our ideas turn out into one

The student deliberately used colors red and blue in sculpture class. He is drawn to wood, “flying or floating things,” and glass.

He claims that when doodling in class, his drawings “usually depend on what my friends draw.” In terms of group vs. individual work, he prefers “group work, because it splits up the work and there are more ideas.”

Sits with the boys (7th and 8th grade boys) and is usually on task in class. He seems very interested in sculpture and has very creative ideas, so once a project is explained, he takes off and builds amazing pieces, staying mostly to himself while working (which differs from his occasional behavior in other classes).

### Sculpture Girl A (SGA)

Group project: Student’s group created animal sculptures to tell a story. Much of their pieces used neutral colors, except for colorful feathers that acted as their consistent element. Animals created included a bird, snake, and elephant. The student explains; “I prefer individual art when painting, but I like groups when using clay or wood.”

The student deliberately used colors pink and green in sculpture class. She is drawn to paint, woodworking, and mobiles, and “I love to use color.”

She claims that when doodling in class, she draws heads/faces and animals. For the group piece, she explains; “A bird is flying south for winter and he meets a bunch of animals that want the coat that he is wearing.”

Sits with other 6th grade girls and one boy. Reminds the teacher regularly (but politely) that she enjoys working with certain friends when doing group work. Is eager and always on task in art class.

### Sculpture Girl B (SGB)

Group project: Student’s group created a story of sculptures about birds (owl, raven, peacock, etc.) that were in a contest to be the prettiest bird. They used scissors for eyes and beak, straws, wire, and paperclips for legs and feet, and feathers. She explains; “I like working with a group because it is social.”

The student did not specify which colors she has deliberately used in sculpture class. She is drawn to materials such as found objects, paper mache, and cardboard.

She did not specify what kind of doodling she does in class. In terms of group work vs. individual work, she explains; “I really like the group work, but it would be nice to be able to choose our groups” and that in group work, “having everyone participate makes everything easier.” For individual work, she states that “staying on task and paying attention to the deadline helps a lot.”

Sits with two other 7th grade girls and two 8th grade boys. These girls are more likely to sit with the 8th grade boys than the 7th grade boys. She follows directions well, participates during discussion, and produces excellent work.

### Sculpture Boy B (PBB)

in the painting, although the shapes’ edges do not touch. He uses mostly the middle 3 shades of gray, rather than white and black. In the monochromatic (orange), tints and shades do not make imply light or darkness and therefore value and form lack. Perspective is straight on, which might not be representational. Object forms and texture are attempted, but unclear.

Some “Mud,” “Evil Night Sky,” and “Ugly Vomit Green.” His colors also tend to be muted. Written response: He listed that he has used all colors in class; is drawn to computers and graphic design, and watercolor; enjoys doodling abstract designs.

He claims that when doodling in class, his puncher as his object “because I couldn’t figure out what to paint, it was lying on my desk, and it didn’t look too tough,” focusing on space, shape, and line and using grayscale “because I didn’t want the colors to draw attention.” He placed a lot of emphasis on the placement of the object on his canvas, and “also cut off most of the object to make it simpler and because I didn’t want it to look like a hole-punch much.”

Sits with the boys (7th and 8th grade boys) and is usually on task in class. He seems very interested in sculpture and has very creative ideas, so once a project is explained, he takes off and builds amazing pieces, staying mostly to himself while working (which differs from his occasional behavior in other classes).
nice piece.”

**Sculture Boy B (SBB)**

| Group project: Student’s group created animal sculptures to tell a story. Much of their pieces used neutral colors, except for colorful feathers that acted as their consistent element. Animals created included a bird, snake, and elephant. He explains; “Our theme was about a bird that was migrating south...Our group worked well, and we are very productive.” | The student deliberately used colors black and white in sculpture class. He is drawn to clay, wood, and wire materials. He wished to work with “clay, paper, paper, paper, paper (origami)” in class. | He claims that when doodling in class, he likes to draw “random, geometric objects.” In terms of group vs. individual work, he does not prefer one or the other. For group work, he states that it is important to “divide work equally, make sure people are doing what they are good at.” For individual work, he completes work successfully by “staying focused and aware of progress.” | Sits with one other 6th grade boy, and sometimes the 6th grade girls. He is usually quiet, but occasionally speaks up to volunteer his knowledge about a given subject. He seemed fairly uninterested in sculpture when the class began, but seemed more engaged as we progressed through the semester. |

**Parent surveys**

A secondary aspect of this study was made up of parent, teacher, and counselor perspective of gender issues in the art classroom, and these participants will be quoted directly in the findings portion of the study. Parent comments are addressed first. The reader should note that parents who provided feedback for the gender study are not necessarily (but may be) parents of study participants. The questions within the survey addressed the nature of group vs. independent work, their child(ren)’s choice of subject matter in artwork, patterns in arts electives chosen by their child(ren), as well as lessons and/or artwork that has inspired their children.

The first parent participant, Patty Noonan, is the mother of a male seventh grade student, aged 13. She notes that her son “mostly prefers working independently, but sometimes finds it useful to brainstorm with a group on the beginning stages of a project. Once the work begins, he usually likes to work independently,” and she believes that “he likes the focus and ability to get immersed in the project that comes from working independently” (Noonan, 2012, personal communication). She describes her son’s choice of style and subject matter as “very modern, and he spends a lot of time carefully crafting it. Sometimes there are themes which reflect a questioning of the status quo” (Noonan, 2012, personal communication). She did not notice a
pattern in her son’s fine arts electives choices, but instead noticed that he has taken a wide variety of visual arts classes. She describes one of her son’s favorite lessons or pieces as follows: He created a “duct tape painting of a shark fin slicing through a stylized water pattern made from blue, silver, and turquoise duct tape on a wood panel . . . He really enjoyed taking the time to create the project he envisioned, and was proud of the finished product” (Noonan, 2012, personal communication).

The second parent participant, Johanna Surla, is the mother of a female seventh grade student, aged 13. In response to the question regarding independent versus group work, Surla suggests that her daughter “would enjoy working better on her own [for] more control over the process and final product. That said, if she could work with others who share her vision or with whom she feels can really add something fun to her process and end product, then I think she’d enjoy working with others” (Surla, 2012, personal communication). Speaking more specifically on group work, Surla comments that “If you are assigned to a group, and someone isn’t holding up their end of the project in the way that it needs to be in order to get a project done, then kids can have a harder time talking with this person with whom they might not have such a close relationship. That said, it’s an important skill to learn to work with all sorts of people” (Surla, 2012, personal communication). This response was similar to the former, and does not reflect a difference of opinion when gender is considered. Surla believes that her daughter is attracted to subject matter including “things related to the natural world – Even when doing collages, mosaics, mobiles, etc., there are things such as trees, suns, etc. that often are featured” (Surla, 2012, personal communication). Surla’s daughter signs up for art classes in which she is interested in learning more about the content, and “is also influenced by the teacher in her choice of class” (Surla, 2012, personal communication). When asked to comment on general gender
bias, Surla suggests that she has not noticed this at Evergreen, but that her daughter “occasionally feels that boys are reprimanded more harshly than girls by some teachers in the classroom” (Surla, 2012, personal communication).

The third parent participant, Marianne Zollman, is the mother of a female sixth grade student, aged 11. She believes that her daughter is able to work well in either a group or an independent work setting. In terms of students being assigned to groups or choosing their group members, she explains, “I think it tends to be more successful if the students pick their own group. However, if assigned correctly and the students are held accountable, then learning to work with others in a team setting is a huge learning opportunity and relates more to the real world” (Zollman, 2012, personal communication). It seems as though the parent participants in this study believe that both independent and group work can be beneficial to boys and girls. Zollman refers to the main pattern in her daughter’s artwork as “her attention to detail and the need to be perfect with her work,” as well as a pattern in terms of her art class elective choices as “more graphic art options and definitely likes to choose certain teachers” (Zollman, 2012, personal communication).

One pattern shown in this small group of parent participants is that the girls are drawn to certain fine arts teachers, perhaps more so than the boys. The first participant’s son seems to enjoy the variety of teachers that Evergreen’s fine arts program provides, while the second and third participants’ daughters tend to select classes (at least somewhat) based on the instructor for that class. As stated previously, the group vs. independent dynamic in art class varies and within this study there is no pattern between opinions of parents of boys vs. parents of girls.
Teacher surveys

Teacher surveys, like parent surveys, act as support to the findings within the classroom study. If there are additional patterns in terms of gender issues that have been noticed in the art classroom, the hope was that these three Evergreen teachers will have noticed and were willing to comment on their observations. Teachers were asked to describe typical behavior patterns that they notice among male and females, classes or lessons that have engaged all students or one particular gender or the other, as well as design elements, materials, content, themes, or other concepts that seem to be patterns within the artwork of boys or girls. The teachers surveyed include the upper division art teacher and art program director at Evergreen, an English teacher who also teaches full time in the middle school fine arts program, and the upper division school counselor.

The first teacher participant, Peter Gross, is the upper division (fourth through eighth grade) art teacher and art program director at The Evergreen School. He has taught professionally for twenty-five years, and his classroom content includes drawing, painting, alternative art, printmaking, ceramics, and much more. When speaking on behavior within specific genders, Gross states, “I notice that boys are ebullient, competitive, excited, hands-on, [and] need to be stimulated intellectually and visually and physically. Socially, sometimes [they are] easily distracted, distractible, and vocal” (Gross, 2012, personal communication). In terms of female students, Gross explains, “I notice that girls exhibit the same behaviors as [boys] but can often exhibit more self-control at a younger age, [however] less self-control or self-management during the middle school years. I have noticed the ‘pleaser’ personality in young girl students which is not often in boys of the same age” (Gross, 2012, personal communication). In a group or classroom setting, Gross observes “self-regulation in terms of social groups. Boys
sit and work with boys up until middle school [or] grade seven and girls will sit and work with girls” (Gross, 2012, personal communication). Gross notes that he does not notice gender bias in terms of practice, or behavior in the art room in terms of gender, that falls outside of what was previously described.

When asked about lessons that have created a strong response from students, Gross describes a printmaking unit “in which students make intaglio prints inspired by an issue they feel strongly or passionate about” (Gross, 2012, personal communication). He does not remember a lesson in which he noticed that boys or girls were interested in the curriculum, one more dominantly than the other. In terms of materials, colors, or design elements, Gross describes the artwork of boys as follows; “A certain type of young boys loves images (design elements) of tanks, battle, monsters, heroes, conflict, destruction, as well as creation and mythology, [while girls are drawn to] animals” (Gross, 2012, personal communication).

The second teacher participant, Janice Rapp, has worked in the field of education for thirty-one years, and currently works as a sixth grade advisor, sixth and eighth grade English teacher, and art teacher at The Evergreen School. She provides this study with a great deal of detailed explanation of her observations as a veteran teacher. She implies that girls are more verbal while boys are more talkative, and that “boys tend to call out and not raise their hands. They have a tendency to think out loud, and feel freer to use put down and judgmental language” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). She adds that “boys will argue over rules in a game on the playground, but do not want to follow rules in the classroom; girls typically are the rule-followers” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). Speaking about girls, Rapp states that girls “want approval from the teacher, and are . . . careful not to do anything wrong,” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication) and therefore listen well to instructions, wait until others start a
discussion before adding their input, and work well in small group activities, taking the lead and getting people organized (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). In art class, Rapp notices another difference between male and female students. She feels that “girls are more into the creative process and the boys are more distracted . . . Both boys and girls chat during art class, but it takes the boys away from their focus, whereas the girls can chat and create” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). Rapp recalls that her graphic novel unit (*Maus* and *Persepolis*) engages all students, and involves analyzing the graphics, art, and film techniques used by the authors and producers. She believes that “the graphic novel unit is a ‘leveler’ or something no one has done before,” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication) and therefore engages all students.

When commenting upon materials, colors, and design elements that tend to be used often in the artwork of boys, Rapp’s responses are interesting and insightful. She describes one lesson as follows: “For the personality as landscape pastel, over the years both boys and girls depict their personality as an island, but only boys add in a volcano” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). The researcher cannot confirm whether the volcanoes were placed in every single landscape pastel, or just some, but the volcano can be viewed as a symbol of strength, fire, disaster, or power – all of which might be considered to be typical male characteristics. In terms of content choice, Rapp states that “boys probably have more silliness or humor in their art work” and boys include knives in their artwork (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). She feels that if girls were to include the cook or kitchen theme in their artwork, it would focus on baking rather than “a Benihana chef with knives” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). Rapp adds that for her Jacob Lawrence art project in which students view Lawrence’s paintings of carpenters in a workshop, and then create a collage that depicts ‘a worker and his/her tools,’ “boys will come up with computers, even though both boys and girls know that most people’s
jobs nowadays deal with computers. When asked to think beyond a desk job and a computer, boys still return to computers” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). Rapp also notices that boys include skulls and crossbones, as well as X’s in the place of a dead figure’s eyes, and “those images do not show up in girls’ art” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). As a general comment about boys vs. girls in the art classroom, Rapp states:

I think boys are held back in their ability to produce the art they see in their heads due to lack of development of fine motor skills. I don’t know how fine motor skills can actually be taught or strengthened. You see this in their handwriting, in the fact that more boys cannot tie their shoe laces in the older grades than girls, and in their inability to do fine details in their drawings or art work. Teaching calligraphy, which is different than handwriting, helps . . . . A way around this for me in my art class is to have them do paper collage like the Matisse or the Jacob Lawrence, to do surreal dream collage either with cutting up magazines or using a computer. (Rapp, 2012, personal communication)

Rapp reflects upon her classes and students with specific observations about materials and content choices in artwork, as well as behavior in the classroom. Additionally, she describes successful methods for working around strengths or weaknesses within one gender or the other, in order to create gender balance and equal opportunity for student pride in their work and success in the art classroom.

The third Evergreen participant, Mara Garcia, currently works as the upper division (fourth through eighth grade) counselor, and has worked in the field of education for six years. Garcia’s responses to the survey questions do not speak specifically to art education, but instead to the typical behaviors of boys and girls and her beliefs about where those behaviors might stem from. When commenting on the behavior of adolescent boys, she states:
It is difficult to comment on typical behaviors. I see some trends in male student behaviors but there can also be such a huge range. I think that society gives strong messages to boys around being aggressive, active, reactive in behavior but logical in thoughts, etc. I’ve seen some students act on these messages but when in a private setting I see a larger range in their behaviors. I don’t necessarily think that these behaviors would be typical of males, if society gave boys different messages or permission to act in different ways in social settings. (Garcia, 2012, personal communication)

Garcia acknowledges that society plays a large role in how students are perceived, as well as how they act in order to be perceived a certain way. This idea speaks to the nature vs. nurture concept, which argues that the personality of a child when he or she is born into the world might vary from how they are raised or influenced by society to partake in certain gender-specific behaviors. When commented upon typical behaviors of adolescent girls, Garcia states:

Some of society’s messages that I see played out are that the female students are supposed to be more calm and controlled in the classroom, more emotional in their behaviors and thoughts and more manipulative in their attempts to get their needs met. To clarify I don’t feel that neither the male or female messages are helpful for individuals. I find them limiting and at times hurtful in an individual’s identity development. (Garcia, 2012, personal communication)

Garcia’s role as a school counselor supports the need for students to be seen as individuals, rather than as one part of a larger, more generalized group. She comments, “I tend to believe that education in general needs to focus more on learning about each student as an individual. [It] is only in this level of connection between a teacher and student that a teacher can truly reach each of their students’ learning needs” (Garcia, 2012, personal communication). She
acknowledges that Evergreen is a private school and has the luxury of small class sizes, and that public schools with larger populations within classrooms may not be provided with such an opportunity for teachers to understand their students on a more individual basis. She believes that without a connection between teacher and individual student, “lies the space for bias, and in some cases, prejudice and discrimination” (Garcia, 2012, personal communication).

Garcia makes several suggestions for avoiding gender bias in (general) education, which can of course apply to gender bias in the art classroom. She feels that teachers need to be trained in professional development to self-reflect on their practices, which would allow for them to “gain insight into their bias and truly work on changing their perceptions,” as well as have dialogue and reflection with their students, as individuals and as a classroom community (Garcia, 2012, personal communication). “Does gender bias exist? Unfortunately I say yes, but our classrooms are only a reflection of our larger society. Until adults start pausing for reflection and are open to seeing our bias, I don’t see how this will change. It is a system issue that starts with each individual” (Garcia, 2012, personal communication). Garcia makes strong points in regards to gender bias in education as a larger problem that starts with society and becomes a cycle that is repeated with each generation. She suggests that we as adults are responsible for changing our own perceptions and expectations, and for encouraging individual expression, however that may look and regardless of gender, to be more widely accepted.

The three Evergreen faculty participants gave abundant insight into the gender issues in the art classroom, the general classroom, and the perceptions of gender issues by adults working in the field of education. Typical behaviors of boys and girls, as well as materials and content choices typically made by students in their artwork were commented upon. These survey responses will be further discussed in the Results section of this research paper.
Results

The results of this study were collected and noted on a chart (Figure 4.1), organized by materials, content, design elements, and behavior exhibited in student work and participation in the classroom. The following paragraphs consist of analyses of these observations.

Breakdown of Female Participants

Artwork of PGA

First, the researcher looked at the girls in painting class. For their grayscale paintings, both girls used shape rather than line to construct their still life paintings. PGA (Painting Girl A) used yellow for her monochromatic still life painting, while PGB (Painting Girl B) used red (which became pink) in her monochromatic piece – both primary colors. It was noted that texture was apparent in the artwork of PGA, while lacking in the painting of PGB. For color mixing, PGA created and named colors such as “Silent Purple,” “Cooked Spinach Green,” and “India Orange” and claimed to use brown, silver, and green in her artwork in class. PGB created and named colors including “Cherry Overcast” and “Beet,” and has used colors red, yellow, white, and black in her artwork in class. PGA claims that she is drawn to fabrics, collage, spray paint, and acrylic materials and enjoys “abstract doodling,” while PGB is drawn to materials including paint, pencils, clay, acrylics, and tempera, and enjoys drawing people and musical instruments. In her object painting, PGA chose an organic, leafy earring (a very small piece) to paint, focusing on elements texture, value, and space and using colors black, green, brown, and white. PGB chose a female rubber duck with an exotic hair style as her object, focusing on line, value,
and shape and using a grayscale palette “with a burst of color.” Similarities in the work of the two girls include the building up of shapes, rather than the use of line, to construct still life paintings. Also, both girls chose primary colors to create their monochromatic still life paintings, although not the same colors. Both objects chosen by the girls (which were recorded under content choice) could be considered feminine – one an earring and one clearly a female version of a toy rubber duck. Researcher Feinburg (1977) states that “subject matter for females is more apt to be associated with beauty, nurturance, and tranquility . . . [and] devoid of the notions of encounter and aggression” (p. 64). Differences include use of texture and color palettes deliberately chosen by the girls for various projects in class. Also differing was the girls’ choice of subject matter in their doodling, although materials they were each drawn to can be considered to have some overlap.

Artwork of PBB

Next, the researcher examined the work of the two female subjects in sculpture class. The research for this segment of the paper ended up focusing on group work vs. independent work as a result of the conditions of the time frame and structure of the class. Three of the student participants who were randomly selected for this study ended up being from the same group for the first class project. Sculpture Girl A (SGA) worked with both Sculpture Boy A and B for the first group project, which involved creating a storyboard using various built sculptures to tell a simple story. SGA’s group used mostly neutral colors, except for bright and colorful feathers that acted as the consistent element (a requirement of the project) throughout their piece. Animals
that they chose to depict included a bird, snake, and elephant. The student explains; “I prefer individual art when painting, but I like groups when using clay or wood” \(\textit{(See Figure 4.1)}\).

Sculpture Girl B (SGB) participated in the only differing group of the sculpture participants. Her group created a sculpture about birds (animals again appears as the theme) including an owl, raven, peacock, and more who were in a contest to be the prettiest bird. Materials used included scissors for the eyes and beak of one of the birds, straws, wire, and paperclips for legs and feet, and feathers. SGB explains; “I like working with a group because it is social.” In sculpture class up to this point in the semester, SGA has used colors pink and green in her work. She is drawn to paint, woodworking, and mobiles, and enjoys incorporating color into her pieces. SGB did not specify which colors she has used in class, and is drawn to materials such as found objects, paper mache, and cardboard. SGA claims that when she doodles in class, she creates heads, faces, and animals. SGB did not specify what she enjoys doodling in class. When speaking in regards to group work, she states that “having everyone participate makes everything easier.” Similarities in the female participants’ work included the choice of subject matter for the group project – animals. However, male participants were involved in the production of those pieces as well, so it cannot be determined that this is a female artistic characteristic. Differences were the ways in which the girls’ described their experiences with group vs. individual work. SGA wrote that her experience depended on the materials that were being used in the group project, whereas for SGB, the most important factors were her group members and the means for which they participated.
Analysis of Female Participants

**Design Elements** - Similarities between uses of design elements were rather vague when both painting and sculpture classes were compared. In painting class, both girls used primary colors and were successful in incorporating texture into their paintings. Differences were apparent between the works and surveys of each of the females analyzed in the study.

**Materials** – Similarities include the fact that three out of the four girls claimed that they are drawn to the medium of paint in art class, specifically acrylics. In observing their work, the researcher finds that they all used bright colors, and some specified their enjoyment in exploring color, in their work. Differences include choices of materials, which range from pencils to clay to found objects, and do not seem to have a pattern other than the popular reference to paint.

**Content** – PGB and both sculpture females chose animals to incorporate into their works analyzed (see P. Gross’ survey in Teacher Surveys for more information on female students’ content choice), which can be considered to be a female artistic characteristic or tendency. It should be noted that SGA’s three-person group (who chose the theme of animals) included one girl (herself) and two boys. All four girls thoroughly addressed the teacher’s request to write a narrative describing their work. PGA mentioned a criticism of her own piece (self-criticism being a typical form of response from females), and then described how she improved upon it. “Some girls tend to be overly concerned with neatness and order in their work” (Colbert, 2000, p. 11). Differences included the fact that PGA used an organically shaped earring as her object...
while others used animals as their content choices. The three girls who responded to the question about the content of their doodling all referred to different types of doodling – abstract, people/instruments, and animals.

**Themes and Patterns** – It can be concluded that color and animals are of interest to many female student in the researcher’s painting and sculpture classes at The Evergreen School. Dalton (2000) states that “when children draw for pleasure rather than recover, gender differences are more apparent in the choice of subject matter and the ways in which the subject is developed” (p. 5). In terms of content or subject matter that showed up in the artwork of the females within this study, animals showed a dominant presence. In a 1913 gender study, theorist Duncum (1997) noted that “subject matter choices in artwork were that girls drew flowers, butterflies, and ballerinas; boys drew machines, warships, and battle scenes” (Blaikie et al, 2003, p. 336). Teacher Peter Gross also suggests that girls are drawn to the subject matter of animals, as he has observed during his years as an art teacher *(see Teacher Surveys, p. 13).*

![Art work of PBA](image)

**Art work of PBA**

In terms of the color mixing lesson, girls tended to create color names that might be considered more appropriate to teachers, whereas boys tended to come up with names that evoked a slight amount of fear or grotesquity ("Evil Night Sky" or "Ugly Vomit Green"). “Koppitz describes the girls as putting forth special effort to show off their drawing skills in a way of seeking approval,” (Koppitz 1968 in Colbert, 2000, p. 11) and the manner in which colors were named is an example of this phenomenon. Additionally, the colors created by females in
the class were found to be brighter than those of the males, which were clearly more subdued or muted.

Breakdown of Male Participants

First, the researcher looked at the boys in painting class. PBA (Painting Boy A) used green for his monochromatic still life piece, while PBB used orange. PBA’s shows a strong use of value and contrast, and shape is mentioned in the analysis of his use of elements, although they blend together to create texture, rather than build upon each other (as with the girls’ paintings) to fill the space. Shape is again mentioned in PBB’s still life painting, although the shapes’ edges do not touch. In PBA’s painting, elements line and form are lacking, while in PBB’s painting, value and form are in the beginning stages. In color mixing, the researcher noticed distinct differences in the titles of colors created for the color mixing lesson in the class. Boys created names for their colors such as, “Blood Pink,” “Old Lady Color,” “Mud,” “Evil Night Sky,” and “Ugly Vomit Green,” while the girls’ titles for their colors included names such as “Silent Purple,” “India Orange,” and “Cherry Overcast.” One might observe that the boys’ titles have a certain rebellion to them in that they compare colors to violent (“Blood”), scary (“Evil”) or degrading (“Old Lady”) concepts, while the girls’ titles are much more subdued, and are more likely to seek approval from the teacher who is observing their work. To support this idea, Blaikie et al (2003) states:
Males are less likely than females to know and understand the qualities a teacher is looking for in their work; males consider it less important than females do to know and understand the criteria for assessment; it is less important to males than females to discuss their art with their teacher; and males find group critique less valuable than females do. (p. 335)

It is also noted in Figure 4.1 that both boys’ color palettes for the color mixing project were more earthy, brown, and muted than those of the girls’. In terms of materials, PBA claimed to be drawn to color, spray paint, and abstract art, and in terms of content, enjoys including “real world situations” into his artwork. PBB is drawn to computers and graphic design (modern media that none of the girls mentioned in their responses, in either painting or sculpture classes) and watercolor, and claims to enjoy doodling abstract designs, which PGA listed in her survey as well. PBA chose a black, sleek figurine of a bear as his object (also an animal, but more masculine than the animals mentioned previously), and did not mention which elements his painting depicted. He used stark primary colors and black to portray his piece, and the contrast between the positive and negative space is high. PBB chose a three-hole punch as his object and he explained in his survey that this choice was made out of convenience. He chose a grayscale palette for his piece, and the placement of the object within the space of the canvas, along with the painting techniques that he used, created a very graphic-like representation of the object, which corresponds with his claimed artistic interests.

Similarities in the work of the two boys include the use of earthy and muted colors (browns and blacks added to colors) which contrast with the girls’ bright palettes. Also noted is the way that both boys used adjectives to describe their created colors that might be considered gory or demeaning, and might not achieve the approval of teachers reviewing their work. In
terms of materials that the boys are drawn to, PBA mentioned including “real world situations” into his art, while PBB stated that he is drawn to computer and graphic art. Both could imply that, to boys, art should be practical and applicable to their lives and the world around them. It could be argued that many females see art as expressive and fun, rather than practical. Finally, the boys’ choices of objects were both black, smooth, and simplistic, while the girls’ choices could be considered pretty to look at or aesthetically pleasing, and both boys used a simple color palette of black and white (PBA included primaries in his palette as well). Differences include the boys’ interests in materials – PBA wrote that he is drawn to color, spray paint, and abstract art, while PBB enjoys computer art, graphic art, and watercolor. Also, in their grayscale and monochromatic still life paintings, each boy excelled with varying design elements. PBA’s value and contrast appeared to be strong, while line and form were not clearly defined, and PBB’s use of shape is strong while form and texture are unclear.

Next, the researcher examined the work of the two male subjects in sculpture class. Please note that the research for this segment of the paper ended up focusing on group work vs. independent work as a result of the conditions of the time frame and structure of the class. Three of the student participants who were randomly selected for this study ended up being from the same group for the first class project. Sculpture Girl A (SGA) worked with both Sculpture Boy A and B for the first group project, which involved creating a storyboard using various built sculptures to tell a simple story. Therefore, the two boys’ group used mostly neutral colors, except for bright and colorful feathers that acted as the consistent element (a requirement of the project) throughout their piece. Animals that they chose to depict included a bird, snake, and elephant. SBA explains, in regards to group work, “It was fun to have all our ideas turn out into one nice piece.” SBB writes; “Our theme was about a bird that was migrating south . . . Our
group worked well, and we are very productive” (See Figure 4.1). In terms of materials, SBA used colors red and blue in sculpture class, and claimed that he is drawn to wood, “flying or floating things,” and glass, while SBB used colors black and white and prefers materials clay, wood, and wire. SBB emphasized that he wanted to work with paper or origami in sculpture class. In terms of content, SBA admitted that his doodles in class “usually depend on what my friends draw,” and SBB wrote that he doodles “random, geometric objects.” SBA prefers group work to individual work because “it splits up the work and there are more ideas,” while SBB does not have a preference. SBB also mentioned that group work is efficient in dividing work equally and giving people a chance to let their skills shine in a collaborative effort.

Similarities in the male participants’ work included the choice of subject matter for the group project – animals. However, female participants were involved in the production of those pieces as well, and it is often argued that animal content in children’s artwork is a female characteristic. The boys also both chose very basic, primary or black and white colors to use in their work in sculpture class, and both mentioned being interested in using wood materials in sculpture class. Also similar were the ways in which the boys described their experiences in group work – they both enjoy group work for the reasons that it divides work equally and allows for each student’s skill set to shine in a cooperative and productive manner. Differences included use of colors, which, although all are considered primary or basic, contrasted from red and blue (SBA) to black and white (SBB). Materials choices varied slightly, but there was some overlap. SBA provided one of the more interesting answers to the survey question regarding doodling in class, to which he responded that he follows the lead of his friends when drawing in class. SBB more specifically indicated that he enjoys drawing geometric or abstract doodles.
Analysis of Male Participants

**Design Elements** – Analysis of design elements in sculpture class was difficult because of the fact that the class only had time for one main project – the group sculpture piece – and it was difficult to use the group work to analyze student skills and choices. The male participants in painting class both chose secondary colors (green and orange) for their monochromatic still life paintings, while the sculpture male participants used primary (red and blue) or black and white in their work.

**Materials** – Like in the analysis of the female participants in this study, there was little correlation between materials chosen by boys in both classes. PBA mentioned enjoying spray paint, which, in the researcher’s experience, is a common choice for middle school boys (but also girls). The boys in painting class implied that they would like their work in art class to focus on supplies and content that are applicable to the real world, be it by incorporating “real world situations” (PBA) into artwork or learning graphic design in art class. SBA mentioned his enjoyment in working with “flying or floating things,” which can be described as art that has a purpose or action, and SBB described paper and origami as materials he is interested in, which can be considered as a construction process in art class. All other materials choices among boys varied.
Content – PGA used a black animal figurine as his object to paint, while PGB used a three-hole puncher. Both SBA and SBB included animals in their group work, and were rather unspecific about content they incorporate into their doodling. Content choices among boys were much more difficult to determine in sculpture class than painting class.

Themes and Patterns – The major conclusion that the researcher would like to make about male students in her painting and sculpture classes at The Evergreen School is that all four boys mentioned being drawn to utilitarian, real-world applicable materials such as computer art, “flying or floating things” (SBA), and paper construction in the form of origami. A Swedish study presented by Lindstrom, Ulriksson and Elsner (2001) showed that “girls prefer drawing and painting; boys prefer working on computers to make imagery” (Blaikie et al, 2003, p. 339). Teacher Janice Rapp mentions this phenomenon in her survey responses as well (refer to Teacher Surveys, p. 14-15). This information supports the researcher’s theory that these particular middle school students at The Evergreen School are drawn to specific materials – females tend to enjoy working with paint and more traditional media, while males lean toward means for art making that can be considered utilitarian, electronic/technological, or contemporary (such as computers).
Conclusion

A conclusion that can perhaps be made about the female and male participants in this study is that girls are indeed drawn to animals and bright colors in their artwork, and boys choose industrial or utilitarian art forms such as computer art, art that must be built (rather than simply painted), and art that can be useful. Also, in painting class, it was clear that there was a difference between the way in which girls and boys chose to name their mixed colors; boys were more provocative than girls in their color naming. One theory behind this phenomenon is that girls tend to seek approval from teachers and other adults more frequently than boys do, and are less likely to follow rules (also see Rapp’s survey in the Teacher Surveys section, p. 13).

“As parents and art teachers, should we attempt to influence our children’s emerging gender identities about wider beliefs about morality through encouraging or discouraging particular themes?” (Dalton, 2000, p. 8). Dalton acknowledges the idea of nature vs. nurture, in that some of the patterns that have emerged in this small study as well as other gender studies conducted in art education are likely influenced by society’s expectations for and influence upon boys and girls. An important aspect of teaching art education that the researcher learned throughout the process of this study is that “holding all children, male and female, to the same standards of behavior is an important step in achieving education equity for all” (Colbert, 2000, p. 13). Regardless of certain patterns in the work of boys vs. the work of girls in the middle school art classroom (which are still important to be aware of), the conscious effort to hold the same standards for all children is the way to achieve balance and equity in art education, and in all areas of education.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Personal Impact of the Study

When considering the researcher’s original intent in conducting this study, the impact of learning the results has been significant. The researcher’s goals stemmed not only from her position and drive to learn more as an art educator, but also as a result of the fact that during the composition of this research paper, she was pregnant with her first child. This study in gender issues in the art classroom has brought several understandings to the surface, and in turn has created an opportunity for art educators (particularly those teaching at the middle school level or, more specifically, those teaching at The Evergreen School) to re-evaluate their awareness of gender bias, and take on a more diverse approach in designing curriculum and responding to student behavior.

The culmination of this project inspired a re-thinking and re-organizing of the last few weeks of the researcher’s painting class, which involved a whole-class, on-campus mural project. Discoveries made during the data collection and analysis of this research include the idea that female middle school students tend to be drawn toward subject matter including animals and the majority of the female participants in the study claimed to enjoy paint as a medium. In Chapter Four, teacher Peter Gross states that “a certain type of young boys loves images (design elements) of tanks, battle, monsters, heroes, conflict, destruction, as well as creation and mythology, [while girls are drawn to] animals” (P. Gross, 2012, personal communication). Responses from girls within the study proved this observation to be true, at least in this case. Also found was that male middle school students are interested in using computer graphics as a
means for brainstorming and art making. Teacher Janice Rapp suggests in Chapter Four that “boys will come up with computers, even though both boys and girls know that most people’s jobs nowadays deal with computers. When asked to think beyond a desk job and a computer, boys still return to computers” (Rapp, 2012, personal communication). A 2001 study conducted by Lindstrom, Ulriksson and Elsner proved that “girls prefer drawing and painting; boys prefer working on computers to make imagery,” (Lindstrom et al, 2001, in Blaikie et al, 2003, p. 339) which supports this argument. Additionally, some boys prefer creating art that can be considered utilitarian. For example, one boy in the study wrote that he is drawn to art materials such as “wood, flying or floating things, and glass” (See Figure 4.1, Chapter Four).

This research paper initially posed the question: What artistic and behavioral characteristics do sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls demonstrate in painting and sculpture classes? This question was answered in several ways, as described above, which shows how this particular group of Evergreen middle school boys and girls choose their materials and content in art class. Additional questions that came up along the way included issues of art classroom behavior, such as: How does student behavior in the art classroom differ in terms of gender? How do those differences show up in student artwork? The major observation that was made in terms of male behavior is that boys had a very different and specific way of naming their mixed colors in painting class. Both of the boys in the study chose to name their colors using a certain rebellious form of language, applying adjectives such as “Ugly,” “Old,” “Evil,” and “Bloody,” to their titles. Girls were much more subtle and arguably “appropriate” in their title choices, which perhaps appeals to teachers more so than the former approach when it comes to assessment. Gender researchers Willingham and Cole assert that “females tend to have stronger academic work habits and more positive indicators of attitude and effort. Compared to males,

**Impact on Practice**

As stated, the research collected and conclusions made as a result of this study caused the researcher to adapt her teaching style and curriculum design in order to better meet the needs of her students. A specific teaching practice that was adopted by the researcher after conducting the gender study is the inclusion of a wider variety of options within each unit of study, so that boys and girls are free to make choices that they are inclined toward, as well as encouraged to make choices in which their limits are pushed.

The unit, designed to reflect new findings in gender studies, was to be a part of the researcher’s painting class early in the semester, but has evolved greatly as a result of understandings about gender interests that have been uncovered through this study. This unit was designed to invoke group collaboration as guided by student feedback, as well as stimulate interests of both boys and girls while asking that they stretch the boundaries of their comfort zones.

This gender study within the arena of art education stemmed from the researcher’s experience with making assumptions about or leaning in favor toward one gender or the other. Because of this personal tendency, she wanted to discover more about the interests and behaviors within each gender group, and make more informed decisions about curriculum based on new knowledge. In “the world in which we live . . . gender not only matters, but matters enormously” (Rogers, 2003, p. 186). For this mural project, the written unit has been adapted to reflect the recognized interest of both boys and girls (and various learning types in general), reflecting
shared focus on group work vs. independent work, class-selected content, and use of materials (from computer-based research to messy spray paint and splatter paint).

This small study, conducted at The Evergreen School in Shoreline, Washington, has allowed for a unit on public art to be transformed and adapted to students’ self-proclaimed and observed learning styles, interests, and needs. An emphasis on balance and equality between the interests and needs of both males and females has been placed upon the design of this unit.

**Recommendations**

**Implications for Further Research**

This study would have been much easier to conduct had there been more of an opportunity to observe the student participants. If there was an opportunity to replicate the study, a longer time-frame and additional participants would produce more accurate results. One of the disadvantages of this study was that not all of the planned lessons were able to be carried out in the two classes, and therefore there was less student artwork to observe. Several of the sculpture classes were missed due to field trips and assemblies, and the only work that the researcher was able to observe were the group projects. Perhaps it would have improved conditions to observe a class that took place for more than once a week, or conduct the study over a longer period of time, or observe more than eight students.

Other questions that came up during the course of this study revolved around the teacher/researcher furthering her understanding of the artistic interests of both boys and girls, particularly boys. One of the reasons for conducting the study came from a realization that her art classes attracted a large number of girls, and not as many boys, and she wanted to learn more about why girls seem to be drawn to certain subject matter, as well as what might increase boy interest.
Other teachers might use this research in their practice simply because awareness and a deeper interest in the how’s and why’s of educating our young learners are the aspects that create stronger educators. Some of the results in this study may not pertain to everyday academia, but the knowledge that gender differences exist in the art classroom can help guide the art teacher in his or her presentation of information, offerings of materials to students, understanding of certain behaviors, and assessment of student work.

Conclusion

Advice to Art Teachers

“Uncovering the hidden, untapped meanings of artistic intentions might help children to break out of the gendered stereotypes that currently inform their drawings” (Tuman, 1999, p. 57). Gender bias is something that we as educators strive to avoid. Creating a further understanding of the minds of our students – both boys and girls – provides a learning opportunity for teachers and students alike. Not only should we break down the barriers of gender bias – tendencies that either boys or girls exhibit in an art educational setting – but we as teachers should also inform our students of these understandings and encourage them to seek means for visual expression that challenge the status quo.

Advice to the Field of Art Education

One researcher suggests that “when presented with masculine and feminine content themes, boys and girls rarely incorporate subject matter choices outside predicted gendered content domains in their drawing” (Tuman, 1999, p. 52). This is a widespread phenomenon – one that was clearly present in this research study – and the field of art education must consider this as a whole, as well as individual art instructors. “We need to recognize that children’s expressive repertoires may become restricted if their artistic choices for both form and content are
constrained” (Tuman, 1999, p. 55). It is clear that gender roles are developed more than partially as a result of media and societal influence on young children. In other words, students display certain gender biased artwork and behavior because of their surroundings, and not necessarily because of their own personal interest or intent. As art educators, our job is to encourage students to express their individuality and explore their creative opportunities, without limitations or biased expectations. The Evergreen School counselor, Mara Garcia, states that “neither the male of female messages [projected by society] are helpful for individuals. I find them limiting and at times hurtful in an individual’s identity development” (Garcia, 2012, personal communication).

“These issues raise important questions regarding the need to effectively design art curriculum which takes into account how children’s artistic processes rely heavily on sociocultural factors” (Tuman, 1999, p. 55). If we consider this, as well as the fact that gender differences are present, and that the interest and engagement of our students is vital to their own success, perhaps it is possible to find a balance between gender bias and opportunities for both males and females in the art classroom. One way of achieving this is to provide choices for our students, and to empower them to experience artistic processes, media, and content that, again, challenges the status quo. Garcia suggests that “education in general needs to focus more on learning about each student as an individual. [It] is only in this level of connection between a teacher and student that a teacher can truly reach each of their students’ learning needs” (Garcia, 2012, personal communication).

Art educators play a vital role in developing the creative problem solving skills, visual understanding, and self-awareness and expression in young students. Fully understanding each student on an individual level is a daunting and nearly impossible task, but each step that is taken in such a direction brings us closer to a powerfully engaging, balanced, and differentiated
curriculum that meets the needs and goals of each and every one of our students. A greater understanding of genders and all that they encompass in the art classroom is one step toward equality in the art classroom, as well as compassion for each individual student, boy or girl.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

UNIT PLAN:

*Evergreen Community Mural: An Urban Art Project*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Rationale:</th>
<th>This unit was decided upon to be a part of the researcher’s painting class early in the semester, but has evolved greatly as a result of understandings about gender interests that have been gained through this study. This unit was designed to invoke group collaboration as guided by student feedback, as well as stimulate interests of both boys and girls while asking that they stretch the boundaries of their comfort zones. This gender study within the arena of art education stemmed from the researcher’s experience with making assumptions about or leaning in favor toward one gender or the other. Because of this personal tendency, she wanted to discover more about the interests and behaviors within each gender group, and make more informed decisions about curriculum based on new knowledge. In “the world in which we live . . . gender not only matters, but matters enormously” (Rogers, 2003, p. 186). For this mural project, the written unit has been adapted to reflect the recognized interest of both boys and girls (and various learning types in general), reflecting shared focus on group work vs. independent work, class-selected content, and use of materials (from computer-based research to messy spray paint and splatter paint). This small study, conducted at The Evergreen School in Shoreline, Washington, has allowed for a unit on public art to be transformed and adapted to students’ self-proclaimed and observed learning styles, interests, and needs. An emphasis on balance and equality between the interests and needs of both males and females has been placed upon the design of this unit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Unit Title: | *Evergreen Community Mural: An Urban Art Project* The art program is an important aspect of each Evergreen student’s learning journey, and this mural unit is designed so that middle school boys and girls who sign up for the class have a chance to demonstrate their visual expression while making a mark on the school’s community. As a class, students will delegate roles and responsibilities, come up with a theme and a proposed location for constructing a mural on the school campus, propose the concept to
a panel of administrators, and put their plan into action. By working as a team while considering individual talents and insights, the class will construct a mural that demonstrates collaboration and craftsmanship within the final product.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals:</th>
<th>Students should…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understand:</strong></td>
<td>- The design elements of visual arts (EALR 1.1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Repetition/pattern, contrast, variety, balance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>movement/rhythm, proportion, emphasis/dominance, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>harmony/unity in a work of art (EALR 1.1.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Know:</strong></td>
<td>- The conventions and responsibilities of the audience and applies the conventions that are appropriate to the setting and culture (EALR 1.4.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How visual arts impact political, environmental, and community choices in the classroom, at school, and as part of activities in the community (EALR 4.3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be able to:</strong></td>
<td>- Differentiate between, select, and produce a variety of textures in various environments to portray visual IMPLIED texture (EALR 1.1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use a variety of techniques and art media to create specific artworks (EALR 1.2.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explore and gather information from diverse sources to create visual artworks (EALR 2.1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Work alone or in collaboration with others (and with the teacher’s support and direction) to plan and create visual artworks in a variety of media to communicate for a specific purpose (EALR 3.2.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructional Concepts:**

“Through the first years of life, children learn they are male or female and they are rewarded for actions that support their gender identity” (Dalton, 2000, p. 5). It has been shown that, in the teacher/researcher’s middle school painting and sculpture classes at The Evergreen School, certain artistic characteristics and behavior are apparent in male and female students. Girls within this study were drawn to animals and bright colors in their artwork, while boys claimed to be drawn to computer art and industrial/utilitarian art. This mural unit allows for various artistic outlets and means for expression, and also provides a space where multiple roles are required to complete the project.

The hope is that each child finds their niche within the project (be it
through contributing to or leading the decision of the mural’s theme, researching logistics, using artistic talent toward the painting, or another valuable contribution) and discovers their own interests and skills within the project. “We [as a society] embrace the idea that gender is biologically and socially constructed,” (Blaikie et al, 2003, p. 336) and therefore the data that was observed within this study may not (and likely does not) give us access to the core of each child. Perhaps the boys and girls within this class would like to step outside of their typical choices in art class, and try something new. This unit provides a variety of avenues for working independently or as a team, trying out various media, telling stories and making statements through artwork, and depicting a limitless choice of content in the work at hand. The class mural project asks that these middle school students, boys and girls alike, begin to make these choices for themselves and begin to discover who they are as artists.

**Lessons:**

**Lesson One: Planning a Mural:** Brief discussion of public/urban/street art and how it impacts a given community, looking at local examples via a PowerPoint slideshow. Students look at materials and environment available to them in constructing their own mural on the Evergreen campus. As a warm up to class discussion, each student individually sketches a mural idea on scratch paper, specifying location and theme (and how the two relate) in their drawing. The class period will be spent brainstorming (as a whole class) locations on campus, and themes or concepts that are relevant to those particular locations and that would be strong choices for a school mural. Ideally, the location for the mural and theme for the painting is narrowed down during this class (or perhaps top three choices). Roles and responsibilities for each student (draft illustration of mural, list and research of cost and materials, proposal panel members, etc.) are decided by the class. Students and teacher will also schedule a time to present the proposal to a small panel of faculty (maintenance, head of division, etc.).

**Lesson Two: Introduction to Mural Painting: Guest Speaker:** For the majority of this class period, students will be an audience to a local artist, Natalie Niblack. Natalie will share with students a progression of her work, including techniques and materials, and discuss large-scale mural art and public art (if applicable to her own experience). Students will begin to think about their mural project in professional terms, gaining an understanding of both the artistic process as well as the logistical process (in terms of finding and requesting a site, and obtaining approval to create the mural). They
may use this time to ask Natalie questions about the artistic and professional process of creating a mural on campus, or any other questions related to the painting process or public art in general.

**Lesson Three: Creating the Mural: Putting the Plan into Action!:**
During this class (provided that the project has been approved), students will set their plan into action. Roles have been assigned, materials have been listed (and perhaps already collected), and the theme and overall design concept have been mapped by the students. The first step in this class will be to create the background for the piece. In this class, Urban Painting, students are excited about incorporating street art and using materials such as spray and splatter paint in their work (this will offer an opportunity for the teacher/researcher to incorporate what she learned about male interests into the curriculum). Students, as a group, will spray and/or splatter paint on a large piece of plywood to act as the background for the mural. This needs to dry until the following week, so the rest of the class will be spent drafting individual images that will be painted onto the mural and (most importantly) relate to the theme decided upon by the class.

**Lesson Four: Completing the Mural:** The plywood (the background now fully painted and dry) will have been cut into enough pieces for each class member to have their own canvas to work with (this addresses student feedback in that both group and individual work have their advantages and disadvantages). Students are each assigned to one aspect of the chosen theme. For example, if the mural is to be hung on the playground, perhaps community plants became the theme and each student is responsible for painting one local species of plant on their plywood canvas. The research team will have printed photographs or images of each plant species during the planning of the mural (Lesson One), and students may refer to those as they paint their individual panels. Once these are dry (perhaps next class period), the class will hang the mural in its decided location, and celebrate the process and final product!

**Materials:**
- PowerPoint slideshow of Seattle public art work examples
- Newsprint or basic art paper for drafts
- Pencils
- Acrylic paint
- Paint brushes
- Water containers
- Palettes
- Paper towels
- Newspaper or large canvas to prevent messes
- Plywood; approximately 6’ x 10’ – eventually cut into 15 pieces for a 15 student class (shapes can vary for interest):

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Spray paint
- Latex gloves
- Paper/disposable surgical masks
- Computers or laptops for content research, materials lists, and proposal write-up
- Access to a printer for the above

**Assessment:**
Attendance; Behavior; Respect and attentiveness during guest speaker and other presentations; Participation within given roles and responsibilities; Discussion and project proposal participation; Collaboration within group work; Focus and on-task behavior during independent work; Contribution to group planning; Effort during individual work time; Positive attitude; Respect for materials; Daily clean up.

**References:**


APPENDIX B

SURVEYS

Parent survey questions. : Gender bias in visual arts education

1. Please list the gender(s), age(s), and number of your children who attend the Evergreen School:

2. In a visual arts setting, do you believe that your child works better independently or with a group? Explain.

3. Do you believe that group work is more successful when students choose their group members, or when group members are assigned? Explain.

4. Have you noticed a pattern in your child(ren)’s choice of subject matter or content in their artwork? Please list all that apply.

5. Have you noticed a pattern in the types of visual arts classes that your child(ren) signs up for each semester during fine arts class selection (medium, teacher, etc.)?

6. Describe a lesson or piece of artwork that your child(ren) enjoyed or was proud of:

7. Please add any examples or other comments that you have noticed in relation to your child’s experience with gender bias in the art (or other) classroom:

Teacher survey questions. : Gender bias in visual arts education

1. For how many years have you worked in the field of education?

2. Describe any typical behaviors that you notice among male students:

3. Describe any typical behaviors that you notice among female students:

4. Describe a lesson (or class) that you taught which seemed to engage all students:

5. Describe a lesson (or class) that you taught which seemed to dominantly interest boys or girls (one or the other):

6. Are there any materials, colors, or design elements that tend to be used often in the artwork of boys?

7. Are there any materials, colors, or design elements that tend to be used often in the artwork of girls?
8. In terms of content choice, is there a particular theme that stands out in the artwork of boys?

9. In terms of content choice, is there a particular theme that stands out in the artwork of girls?

10. Please add any examples or other comments that relate to your perspective of gender bias in the art classroom: